

THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

by

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DECLARATION

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SUMMARY

The present work, *The Origins and Evolution of Christian Baptism*, is a research study that explores the origins of baptism, its formation, and its development, focusing on the earliest period in the first and second centuries. It analyses the Jewish origins of baptism, which includes the understanding of the purity issue, the role of ritual purification practices, and the emergence of Jewish baptismal movements. It emphasizes the development of purity concerns regarding Jewish ritual practices in the context of the Greco-Roman influence.

This study reveals that baptism within Christian communities formed gradually through several stages, ultimately becoming a distinct ritual with a shared symbolic meaning and ritual order. It demonstrates that, in the early stages of baptismal practice, different Christian communities lacked a unified view of its practice and interpretation. This development was closely connected to the construction of Christian identity, and changes in baptismal practice and interpretation largely reflected this broader process.

Through a chronological examination of textual sources, this study demonstrates that the New Testament contains diverse views on baptism, reflecting a variety of approaches within early Christian communities. The study also reflects the gradual shift in understanding and practice toward a more unified vision. The study uses historical-critical and comparative cross-cultural methods to analyze primary written sources, traces the origins and evolution of Christian baptism, and explains the key factors driving this development.

Key Terms: Baptism, Early Christianity, Ritual, Ritual Purification, Initiation, Jewish Baptismal Movements, Greco-Roman influence, Jewish Eschatology, New Testament, Christian Identity.

OPSOMMING

Die huidige werk, *Die oorsprong en evolusie van die Christelike doop*, is 'n navorsingsstudie wat die oorsprong van die doop, sy vorming en sy ontwikkeling ondersoek, met die fokus op die vroegste tydperk in die eerste en tweede eeue. Dit ontleed die Joodse oorspronge van die doop, wat die begrip van die reinheidskwessie, die rol van rituele suiweringspraktyke en die ontstaan van Joodse doopbewegings insluit. Dit beklemtoon die ontwikkeling van reinheidskwessies rakende Joodse rituele praktyke in die konteks van die Grieks-Romeinse invloed.

Hierdie studie openbaar dat doop binne Christelike gemeenskappe geleidelik deur verskeie stadiums gevorm is, en uiteindelik 'n onderskeibare ritueel met 'n gedeelde simboliese betekenis en rituele orde geword het. Dit toon aan dat verskillende Christelike gemeenskappe in die vroeë stadiums van die dooppraktyk nie oor 'n verenigde siening van die praktyk en interpretasie daarvan beskik het nie. Hierdie ontwikkeling was nou gekoppel aan die konstruksie van Christelike identiteit, en veranderinge in die dooppraktyk en -interpretasie het grootliks hierdie breër proses weerspieël.

Deur 'n kronologiese ondersoek van tekstuele bronne toon hierdie studie dat die Nuwe Testament uiteenlopende sienings oor doop bevat, wat 'n verskeidenheid benaderings binne vroeë Christelike gemeenskappe weerspieël. Die studie weerspieël ook die geleidelike verskuiwing in begrip en praktyk na 'n meer verenigde visie. Die studie gebruik histories-kritiese en vergelykende transkulturele metodes om primêre geskrewe bronne te ontleed, spoor die oorsprong en evolusie van die Christelike doop op, en verduidelik die sleutel-faktore wat hierdie ontwikkeling aandryf.

ISIFINYEZO

Umsebenzi wamanje, *Imvelaphi Nokuthuthuka Kokubhaphathizwa KwamaKristu*, uyisifundo socwaningo esihlola imvelaphi yokubhaphathizwa, ukwakheka kwayo, nokuthuthuka kwayo, sigxile esikhathini sokuqala eminyakeni eyikhulu yokuqala neyokwesibili. Ihlaziya imvelaphi yobuJuda yokubhaphathizwa, okuhlanganisa ukuqonda udaba lobumsulwa, indima yezinkambiso zokuhlanza ngokomkhuba, kanye nokuvela kwemikhankaso yokubhaphathizwa yobuJuda. Igcizelela ukuthuthukiswa kwezinkathazo zobumsulwa maqondana nemikhuba yobuJuda ngaphansi kwethonya lamaGreki namaRoma.

Lolu cwaningo lwembula ukuthi ubhaphathizo phakathi kwemiphakathi yobuKristu lwakhiwa kancane kancane ngezigaba eziningana, ekugcineni lwaba umkhuba ohlukile onezincazelo ezihlanganyelwe nohlelo lomkhuba. Kubonisa ukuthi ezigabeni zokuqala zokwenza ubhaphathizo, imiphakathi ehlukeneyo yobuKristu yayingenalo umbono owodwa ngokwenza nokuchaza ubhaphathizo. Loluthuthuko lwaluxhumene kakhulu nokwakhiwa kobunikazi bobuKristu, futhi izinguquko ekwenzeni nasekuchazeni ubhaphathizo zaziveza kakhulu le nqubo ebanzi.

Ngokuhlaziywa ngokulandelana kwesikhathi kwemithombo yombhalo, lolu cwaningo lubonisa ukuthi iTestamente Elisha liqukethe imibono ehlukehlukene ngobhaphathizo, okubonisa izindlela ezahlukeneyo phakathi kwemiphakathi yokuqala yamaKristu. Lolucwaningo luphinde lubonise ukuguquka kancane kancane kokuqonda nokwenza ngenhloso yokubona umbono ohlangene kakhulu. Lolucwaningo lusebenzisa izindlela zokuhlaziya ngokomlando nangokwezifundo zokuthekelisa kanye nezindlela zokuthekelisa phakathi kwamasiko ahlukeneyo ukuhlaziya imithombo yokuqala ebhaliwe, lulandela imvelaphi nokuthuthuka kobhaphathizo lwamaKristu, futhi luchaza izici ezisemqoka eziqhuba le nqubekela phambili.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The present research will examine the origins and evolution of Christian baptism in the first century from a historical-critical perspective. The aim of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the problem of the origins and formation of baptism. My goal is to look at the origins of baptism in the context of ritual purity, a cross-cultural phenomenon that took an important place in Judaism during the Second Temple period and show how it was transformed into a separate and unique ritual. The formation of baptism was a gradual process that came through different stages and finally was formed as a separate ritual with its own symbolic meaning and its own ritual order. This process can be observed historically. In order to make a comprehensive analysis of the problem, I will use classical research tools such as research of the existing literature sources, analysis of Greco-Roman history, and practical contemporary achievements disciplines such as Cultural Anthropology, Sociology, and History of Religion that can help us to look at the problem from the cross-cultural perspective and understand more deeply the causes of changes which occurred during the formation of the ritual.

1.2 Structure

The present dissertation consists of five chapters: Chapter 1 – Introduction; Chapter 2 – The Impurity and Ritual Purification in Judaism; Chapter 3 – Jewish Baptismal Movements and

Practice of John the Baptist; Chapter 4 – The Diversity of Views on Baptism in the New Testament; and Chapter 5 – Conclusion: The Evolution of Baptism Through a Contemporary Perspective.

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter that covers my research statement, methodology, terminology, literature review, and introduces the problem of ritual purity and ritual washings as cross-cultural phenomena with specific attention to parallels within Mediterranean religious traditions.

Chapter 2 focuses on ritual purity and ritual washings in Judaism. I specifically pay attention to the evolution of these practices during the Second Temple period, when different types of purification rituals started to play an important role in the life of many Jews. The life of an ordinary Jew was tied to binary categories as clean and unclean, and many parts of everyday life were bound with different cleansing rituals. This chapter will show the matrix from which baptism originated and evolved.

Chapter 3 is specifically devoted to the Jewish baptismal movements and practice of John the Baptist. Judaism during the Second Temple period was known for the existence of so-called baptismal movements. Such movements were both religious and political movements within Judaism and were characterized by eschatological expectations. In this chapter, I will analyze the significance of purification rituals within these movements, investigate the factors contributing to the growth of Jewish baptismal movements, and examine the role of John the Baptist, who was the leader of one of these movements and influenced the further formation of Christian baptismal practice.

Chapter 4 will explore the formation and evolution of Christian baptism as a ritual in early Christian communities during the first decades of the Common Era. The aim of this chapter is to

demonstrate how this practice underwent changes and the factors that influenced these changes during the first century. Available written sources reveal that baptism did not appear as a uniform practice with a consistent perspective, even within the New Testament. In Paul's writings, the language of purity remains evident (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:11), and simultaneously, a new language of incorporation into Christ appears (e.g., Gal. 3:27). Other New Testament texts represent various viewpoints and reflect diverse approaches within Early Christian communities. However, it is possible to see some evolutionary processes with the tendency of further unification of the ritual. In this chapter, I will show that New Testament texts can be seen as a reflection of a historical progression of views on baptism.

Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the current thesis results and demonstrate how contemporary research fields, including Religious Studies, Identity Studies, and Ritual Studies, can offer valuable insights into understanding the origins of Christian baptism through an interdisciplinary scholarly lens. These contemporary scholarly achievements can serve as additional supporting arguments regarding the origins and causes of the evolution of baptism during the first century.

1.3 Problem Statement and the Significance of the Research

This research is going to study the origins of baptism and its formation as a specific ritual in the early Christian communities. The history of baptism has traditionally been studied primarily in the fields of Theology and the History of Early Christianity. Some of the previous scholarly works made an important impact on the development of the topic. However, the common problem within research works that were conducted by theologians is a restricted view of the problem. In theological works, baptism is often considered a Christian innovation with some antecedents in

Judaism and John the Baptist's practice. The influence of other religious traditions, which could play an important role in the formation of baptism, theologians usually do not take into account.

On the other hand, the scholars who use the historical-critical method often limit their research to written historical sources and do not use a broad perspective that can provide a study of comparative religion and contemporary achievements from cross-cultural research. In the last decades, the situation has changed, and there are more books and articles by scholars who apply a broad perspective to the fields of church history and biblical studies using cross-cultural data, including contributions from sociology and anthropology.

Despite such a positive tendency, the topic that I will study in my research still has unstudied problems that need to be solved. The question of the origins and development of baptism is a problem that touches on several issues. The problem of the origins of baptism obliges us to study the similar practices that took place not only in Judaism and in the neighboring religions but also in the broader Greco-Roman religious world. The impact of Greco-Roman culture was so influential on early Christianity that the denial of it today is no longer possible due to the presence of pieces of evidence that confirm a significant degree of Hellenization of Judaism in the period of the Second Temple.

Part of my claim in this research is that the origins of baptism are related to the ritual washing practices that took place across the Mediterranean religious world, and Judaism was a part of it. The development of such practices went through several phases, which had their own causes and can be examined historically. The formation of baptism in the early Christian community is the crucial phase of the development of such practices, which was connected with the construction of Christian identity. The primary goal of my work is to show this process of evolution and unveil the basic causes that produced such development. To understand that process

in this research, I will apply the contemporary achievements of such disciplines as history, comparative study of religion, biblical studies, and cross-cultural data, which can help understand the problems of the formation of baptism and the causes that produced it from a broader perspective. In the last decades, we have seen the increasing popularity and development of such interdisciplinary subfields as Ritual Studies, Identity Studies, and Memory Studies. The achievements of these fields are useful for this research topic, since baptism is a ritual transmitted by people. Its performance, as well as the understanding of its meaning, underwent changes due to shifts in the social situation. The formation of Christian baptism is closely related to the formation of Christian identity itself, which is an important and relevant topic in contemporary scholarship.

I also believe that this research can be useful for the practical needs of modern churches, even though the main intention of this research is to make a neutral analysis of the topic without providing a religious or confessional point of view. However, the achievements of this research could be helpful for practical reasons as well. This research can help us understand baptism's original meaning, which is important for many Christian denominations. Knowledge about the varieties of interpretations and practices in early Christian communities could be beneficial for those Christian denominations that want to apply new knowledge for educational purposes or the practical needs of communities.

1.4 Methodological Frameworks

The current research will cover the origins of baptism prior to the Common Era, and its subsequent formation and development within early Christian communities from the first century up to the early second century CE.

While I will sometimes refer to earlier times, my primary focus will be on the late Second Temple period, mostly the frontier between the time Before the Common Era and the beginning of the 2nd century CE. Such a time frame allows for an examination of the process of development of water-based rituals within Judaism, and the appearance of so-called baptismal movements, including the movement of John the Baptist. The direct origins of Christian baptism go back to the John the Baptist movement, which emerged during the early 1st century. I will examine the transition from the John the Baptist movement to the formation and development of Christian baptism up to the 2nd century CE. The period represents a crucial phase in the evolution of Christian baptismal practice, and the New Testament reflects such changes. The New Testament provides a range of texts covering the period from around 50 CE, represented in the authentic Pauline letters, to the later New Testament writings dating to the end of the 1st century and even the early 2nd century. This timeframe enables the observation of the initial formation of baptism as a Christian ritual, traces its subsequent development, and explores the factors influencing its evolution.

In this way, the chosen timeframe enables an examination of fundamental questions regarding the origins, formation, and development of Christian baptism within the early Christian communities. While the development of Christian baptism was an ongoing process beyond the timeframe of this work, the primary patterns of this evolution had already taken shape during the chosen time.

This research will adopt a synthesis of contemporary research methods, specifically integrating historical and cross-cultural data, an approach that is often associated with historical anthropology. By relying on historical achievements, conducting comparative studies of religion, and applying sociocultural anthropology, I am going to use a holistic approach that enhances

understanding of the current topic on a broader scale. Unlike cultural anthropologists, I do not have access to real people who can provide information about baptism within the chosen timeframes. However, my research relies on a diverse range of texts. The texts are the main sources that require careful examination by using critical tools developed within the historical discipline. My research is not intended to be an in-depth exegetical study of the texts; I use textual sources in their chronological sequence and consider them as artifacts from a specific time and place, which offer valuable insights into the cultural realities of their creation and can show the evolution of the baptismal ritual. In addition to texts, it is important to use all possible artifacts that can provide a correct understanding of the historical context, which should include knowledge of the environment, place, and time in which these texts were created. To make it possible, it is crucial to have an understanding of Greco-Roman history, the comparative history of religion, and sociological data. This integration enables a better understanding of the diverse influences on the formation and development of baptism, which, together with chronological analyses of the available texts, allow for the tracing of the development of baptism and a deeper understanding of the factors that influenced its changes.

1.5 Terminology

To avoid terminological ambiguity, I would like to clarify some key terms that I will use in this work.

1.5.1 Ritual.

In this work, I will use the technical term *ritual* to refer to baptism as a practice. The other terms, such as *rite* or *sacrament*, are good alternatives but less neutral in their connotations. Both

of these terms, especially the term *sacrament*, might presuppose a confessional perspective, which is not the aim of this historical research. In my work, I would like to hold the principle of historical neutrality and be free from any confessional presuppositions. The aforementioned words are not bad per se; the problem lies in how they can be perceived in the modern context due to theological connotations. For example, for Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians, baptism is an unquestionable sacrament, one of the seven sacraments. The majority of mainline Protestants also refer to baptism as a sacrament. At the same time, Baptists and different Evangelical churches deliberately refuse the use of the term *sacrament* due to theological reasons.

The term *sacrament* came into Christianity from the Roman military lexicon, which, since the time of Julius Caesar, described an oath that was taken by Roman soldiers when they entered the army (Streett 2018:2). The early Christians adopted the term *sacrament* but used it in contrast to Roman usage. Thus, they pledged allegiance not to the emperor but to Jesus. However, in post-Nicene theology, the word *sacrament* began to be defined differently, which eventually led to various terminological controversies that still exist today (Streett 2018:5). I acknowledge the importance of the initial meaning of the word *sacrament* but realize that its usage can create unnecessary confusion; this is why I want to stick to the neutral word *ritual*. I do not object to the occasional usage of the word *rite* in a neutral sense. However, the word *ritual* better fits the task of this research as a whole.

1.5.2 Palestine

In reference to the biblical land, I will use the term *Palestine* in a geographical sense. This geographical area goes beyond the administrative division of Judaea and includes the broad landscape from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. The contemporary historian of the

region, Masalha, argues that the name Palestine was “the conventional name used between 450 BC and 1948 AD to describe a geographic region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River and various adjoining lands.” (Masalha 2018:1). It is true, though, that the official name of this area – Syria Palestine – appeared only in 135 CE. However, by the 1st century, despite the different administrative divisions, this piece of land was already under Roman control, and the term Roman Palestine has been used in scholarship to refer to the broad geographical area under Roman rule. Although the name Palestine was not an official designation for this territory in the 1st century, this geographical area was already known by that name in the Greco-Roman world. The first historical record of the mention of this area as Palestine occurs in the 5th century BCE in the work of Greek historian Herodotus (Herodotus: Histories, Book 1:105):

Ἐνθεῦτεν δὲ ἦσαν ἐπ’ Αἴγυπτον· καὶ ἐπεῖτε ἐγένοντο ἐν τῇ Παλαιστίνῃ Συρίῃ, Ψαμμήτιχος σφέας Αἰγύπτου βασιλεὺς ἀντιάσας δώροισί τε καὶ λετήσι ἀποτράπει τὸ προσωτέρω μὴ πορεύεσθαι.

Thence they marched against Egypt: and when they were in the part of Syria called Palestine, Psammetichus king of Egypt met them and persuaded them with gifts and prayers to come no further. (Herodotus [5th century BCE] 1975:136-137).

The Greek philosopher Aristotle also used the name Palestine in his work *Meteorology* (Aristotle: Meteorology, Book 2: chapter 3):

Εἰ δ’ ἔστιν ὥσπερ μυθολογοῦσιν τινες ἐν Παλαιστίνῃ τοιαύτη λίμνη, εἰς ἣν ἐάν τις ἐμβάλῃ συνδήσας ἄνθρωπον ἢ ὑποζύγιον ἐπιπλεῖν καὶ οὐ καταδύεσθαι κατὰ τοῦ ὕδατος.

If there were any truth in the stories they tell about the lake in Palestine it would further bear out what I say. For they say if you bind a man or beast and throw him into it he floats and does not sink beneath the surface.

(Aristotle [4th century BCE] *Meteorologica* 1952:158–159)

These pieces of evidence indicate that already in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, Greek authors used the name Palestine to designate this territory. Thus, the name Palestine was known in the Greco-Roman world long before it acquired its legal name in 135 CE. In biblical scholarship, the term Palestine has a neutral designation. However, it is regrettable that the term has become politicized lately, which has created new debates among some scholars. However, the majority of biblical scholars today do not question the term because its usage in the past was well-documented. Professor of Jewish Studies at Princeton University, Peter Schäfer, explained that the term Palestine is less ambivalent than, for example, the term *Judaea*, which is not very precise and even problematic in terms of geography (Schäfer 2003:X).

The usage of the term Palestine in a geographical sense allows us to refer to this particular area without specifying the political condition of the concrete time. At the same time, since Rome occupied this land in 63 BCE, it is reasonable to designate this area as Roman Palestine, which means the geographical area of Palestine under Roman occupation. Thus, following the established tradition in biblical scholarship, I refer to this area as Palestine, not in a strict administrative sense, but in terms of geography, as a convenient and widely understandable name.

1.5.3 Judaism

In this work, I use the term *Judaism*. However, I need to acknowledge that the term has several issues. Daniel Boyarin argues that *Judaism* is not even a Jewish term but something that can be considered a recent invention (Boyarin 2019:10). In Religious Studies, the term commonly refers to a modern religious phenomenon, but its use in reference to the first century can be considered problematic. At that time, Jewish religious thought and practices were not united. Jewish people shared some common ground, such as a sense of common identity and recognition of the Torah. However, even the understanding of the Torah was so distinct among different groups that it is difficult to frame them using a unified name. In contemporary scholarship, the recognition of this issue has raised the question of possible alternatives for the term *Judaism*. Some scholars suggested not using the word in a singular form in favor of using the term *Judaisms* in a plural form. Other scholars went even further and proposed not to apply the term *Judaism* in academic discussion at all when it comes to the ancient period (Mason 2007:511). All these arguments are reasonable and help to focus on the complexity of the situation that took place before Jewish tradition became relatively unified. However, these suggestions do not offer a perfect solution to all terminological challenges. The new terms can lead to unnecessary confusion, and they also lack the convenience of usage that the term *Judaism* already has. The term *Judaism* is not perfect, but I will use it for general references due to its practical convenience under certain conditions, which I am going to explain now.

Firstly, when I refer to Judaism in my work, I do not equate it with the modern religious phenomenon that has developed over a long period of time.

Secondly, by this term, I do not mean a unified religious system but rather a variety of Jewish practices and their diverse interpretations among Jews.

In this work, I use the term *Judaism* in a singular form as a convenient name for general reference, and not because it perfectly captures the situation that took place in the first century. At the same time, I will elaborate on the complexity of the situation in the following chapters because the recognition of this complexity helps to understand the background from which baptism originated and developed.

1.5.4 Christianity

The other problematic term in the context of the first century is *Christianity*. It is quite clear that followers of Christ did not consider themselves a separate religious group. For this reason, I prefer to avoid using the term Christianity in favor of the name “followers of Christ.” However, a complete avoidance of the term Christianity would create new challenges.

For example, when I need to mention the practices of the early community, the standard and convenient way is to refer to “early Christian practices.” The repetition of the phrase “followers of Christ” in general references can sound awkward, even if it is more precise from a historical point of view.

On the one hand, I support the idea that the terms *Christianity* and *Judaism* are not precise when it comes to the first century. On the other hand, the complete avoidance of these words creates new terminological problems that are not helpful for my goal. This is the reason why I do not want to abandon the word Christianity completely. However, the usage of the term must be stipulated in advance to avoid creating any further confusion.

I occasionally use the terms *Christianity* and *Christians*, but in the context of the first century, I do not mean a separate religion. By this name, I mean the variety of groups that acknowledged Jesus as their Messiah. Applying the term Christianity to them may be considered

anachronistic from a sheer historical perspective, but it can be helpful for general references. This is why this term can be used under certain conditions for practical reasons, and this is how I am going to use it in this research.

1.6 Sources and Literature Review

My research is a historical investigation of the origins and evolution of baptism. In order to achieve this task, I will use textual documents and archaeological materials as primary sources. The secondary sources will include research monographs and articles that reflect current scholarly achievements and discussions. Tertiary sources will include supportive materials such as encyclopedias and dictionaries.

To understand the origins of baptism, it is necessary to use sources that can provide information about religion and similar practices in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world, Greco-Roman mystery cults, and Jewish ritual practices. Important information about Greco-Roman religion can be obtained from various available religious and non-religious texts. The information about Jewish ritual practices is available directly from the Hebrew Bible and some fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls. There are also essential pieces of evidence related to this topic from writers such as Philo of Alexandria, Flavius Josephus, and the church historian Eusebius, as well as other documents and historical artifacts. For the development of baptism in the Early Christian community, the primary sources are the canonical New Testament and the early Christian text called the Didache. New Testament writings represent a variety of texts that were created at different times. This allows tracking the evolution of baptism from the time of its formation up to the second century, when baptism became a more developed ritual. In this work, I will analyze New Testament texts as essential sources that can provide information about the

ritual of baptism in a particular cultural reality. This can help to understand my topic according to the task, which is to see the main trajectories of the shifting meaning of baptism and the causes that produced that process.

The New Testament texts related to baptism are crucial sources that illustrate the evolution of baptism in early Christian communities. While the later development of baptismal practice can also be found in subsequent sources, I am going to limit this research to a primary focus on the origins of the practice and its development in early Christian communities up to the end of the 1st century.

Secondary sources for this research will include scholarly books and articles related to the research topic. In this research, I am going to use a wide spectrum of literature, which can help clarify this topic through the lenses of contemporary scholarship. The complete list of used literature is accessible in the bibliography section. The following literature review focuses exclusively on the most relevant works and authors who are directly related to my topic and are worth individual mention. Some of their works remain relevant today, while others have become somewhat obsolete. However, these works cannot be disregarded, since their impact on this research topic continues to be valuable even today.

The problem of the origins of baptism cannot be totally separate from the problem of the origins of Christianity, and classical works on the fields of Christian origins and the historical Jesus more or less contributed to this topic as well. For this reason, I feel the need to pay tribute not only to scholars who directly researched the problem of baptism but also to make a short review of those scholars who made an important impact on the research of Christian origins and provided important information about the context and emergence of Christianity.

Since the period of the Age of Enlightenment, which was characterized by an emphasis on reason and science, the previous religious naïveté was shattered by the application of rational and critical thinking to religious questions. In the religious field, probably the most prominent figure was Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), who started to apply a rational and historical-critical approach to the Gospels (Reimarus 1970). His approach contributed to the development of the historical-critical method, which later evolved sufficiently. The most prominent of the scholars who continued the historical-critical approach was David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874). He made an important contribution to the study of the historical Jesus (Strauss 1913). The other influential figure is Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930). His contribution to the study of early Christianity includes his conclusion that during the course of history, Christianity was undergoing development from a simple form of belief toward a more sophisticated and developed form (Harnack 1908). The writings by Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) show an honest approach to the scholarly questions regarding the history of early Christianity and Jesus in particular. He is especially known as the author of the book *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Schweitzer 1910) and his critical work about Paul (Schweitzer 1912). In his research, he used a historical-critical approach and made an important impact on scholarship. He looked at Jesus as an eschatological prophet who preached the imminent end of the present world through God's intervention and the arrival of the kingdom of God, which eventually will bring peace and harmony into the world. Schweitzer's view was taken into account by many scholars, and many of his thoughts remain relevant today.

The other important scholar who showed us the possibility of making honest historical work using a variety of sources was Walter Bauer (1877–1960). He made a point that Christianity was not only under development but, in its earliest forms, represented a variety of expressions of Christianity that did not have any common agreement with each other (Bauer 1971). His

ideas made a great impact on our understanding of early Christian communities and their various forms.

Joachim Jeremias (1900–1979) was another German scholar who made important contributions to the study of Christian origins. Despite the fact that he did not focus on baptism as a separate topic, his research on Jewish ritual immersion and his book *The Origins of Infant Baptism: A Further Study in Reply to Kurt Aland* (Jeremias 1963) provide important background for understanding baptism. His book is a little problematic because it is not clearly scholarly research but rather a part of a polemic with Kurt Aland (1915–1994), who later made a response to Jeremias's critique in his *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Aland 1963). However, even if we judge that their polemic is not so relevant in our contemporary scholarship, we have to acknowledge that both Joachim Jeremias and Kurt Aland were important scholars in the middle of the twentieth century, and their dialogue is an important part of the scholarly contribution to the topic at that time. The problems they raise in their works go beyond the narrow problem of baptizing infants; they provide information about scholarly approaches to baptism in general during the scholarly activity of Jeremias and Aland, and they surely raised important questions for future research on the topic.

Géza Vermes (1924–2013) was the author of several significant books on Christian origins (Vermes 1981; 2013). He claims that Christian origins are deeply rooted in the Jewish religion, and the subsequent development of Christianity and its ritual practices is the result of separation from Judaism and inner development. While Géza Vermes did not specifically research the topic of baptism, he made a great contribution to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and was the editor of the essential book *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Vermes 2004). This book provides very valuable documents necessary for this study. Furthermore, his insights into the development

of Christian ideas and ritual practices, which are presented in his historical books, are also relevant to this study.

Ed Parish Sanders [E. P. Sanders] (1937–2022) is a very influential scholar who shows in his works the origins of Christianity, which go back to Judaism. He looked at Jesus as an eschatological prophet who operated in the system of Jewish values and preached a restoration of God's true order and the coming of God's kingdom. Three of his books, *Jesus and Judaism* (Sanders 1985), *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (Sanders 1993), and *Judaism Practice and Belief* (Sanders 1992), represent important research on the historical Jesus and John the Baptist, which are relevant for my work.

John Dominic Crossan (1934–) is widely known among scholars for his magnum opus, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Crossan 1991). This book made a great impact on the discipline of the historical Jesus and on the problems related to Christian origins and early Christianity in general. Crossan provided a clear description of his methodology, which helps clarify where his ideas came from. The method he uses can be applied not only to the problem of the historical Jesus but to a variety of related topics; his integration of cross-cultural data into the historical issues is the approach that opens new possibilities to the study of early Christianity. The other important book is his *The Birth of Christianity* (Crossan 1998), which is less popular but basically continues his earliest work. Both of these books are relevant because John Dominic Crossan researches the problem of Christian origins, including the mission of John the Baptist and the formation of early Christian communities. His relatively recent books, such as *God and Empire* (Crossan 2007) and *Render unto Caesar* (Crossan 2022) are popular books but also have scholarly importance. Crossan summarizes the results of his previous research and clearly emphasizes the anti-imperial essence of early Christianity. Crossan does not formally

identify himself as a postcolonial scholar, but his perspective contributed to the increasing popularity of postcolonial research on early Christianity.

However, there are also scholars whose contributions to Empire Studies engage more directly with postcolonial scholarship, and I found their work important in the context of my research. Among them are the works of an American scholar, Richard A. Horsley (1939–), such as *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Horsley 1987); *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Horsley 2003); *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Horsley 2010); *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine* (Horsley 2014), and the works of New Zealand scholar Warren Carter (1955–). Carter provides a fresh perspective on Judaism and early Christianity through postcolonial lenses. His books, such as *The Roman Empire and the New Testament* (Carter 2006) and his collaborative work with Leo G. Perdue, *Israel and Empire: A Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism* (Perdue and Carter 2015), edited by Coleman A. Baker, show the contemporary approaches to Jewish history and early Christianity using postcolonial interpretations, and such perspective can shed additional light on this topic as well.

Burton L. Mack (1931–2022) was an American scholar who made an important impact on the study of Christian origins. Similar to Crossan's approach, he saw the importance of the integration of social disciplines into historical research. At the same time, in comparison to Crossan's approach, he held a more skeptical position about the possibility of reconstructing the historical Jesus. His focus was not on Jesus, but on the formation and development of views within the early Christian movement. In his book *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy* (Mack 2003), he offers to look at Mark's Gospel as the first complete narrative that reflects the construction of a new identity among Christians. He calls the creation of this narrative a

mythmaking that becomes a turning point in the solidification of a shared Christian identity, in contrast to the previously dispersed Jesus movements, which had diverse forms of belief. His usage of such terms as “myth” and “mythmaking” might seem harsh. Still, he is not using them in a negative sense, but rather as a tool to explain the cultural significance of the power of storytelling in shaping Christian identity.

Martin Hengel (1926–2009) was the person who changed the direction of scholarship through the demonstration of the interconnection between Judaism and Hellenism. The previous scholarship viewed Judaism and Hellenism through dichotomic lenses; this approach affected the understanding of early Christianity, which was often described as the Hellenized form of Judaism. Hengel showed that this view came to research through the wrong perception of Judaism. His works, such as *Judaism and Hellenism* (Hengel 1981 [1974]), and *The “Hellenization” of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (Hengel 1989 [1988]), persuasively showed that Judaism during the centuries interacted with Hellenistic culture, and in the first century, in many respects, was already the product of Hellenism before the appearance of Christianity. Works of Martin Hengel are specifically relevant for my research, because baptism and its origins, which go back to Jewish ritual purifications, evolved during the time of strong Hellenistic influence; without a proper understanding of this process, it is impossible to get a sense of the origins and evolution of baptism.

James Dunn (1939–2020) was known as one of the key world specialists in the New Testament, specifically on Paul. His books, such as *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Dunn 1970) and *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Dunn 1990 [1977]), have practical relevance for this research. His approach, which suggests that New Testament texts reflect early Christian diversity, will be applied in the fourth chapter of my

work. Using his general approach, I will narrow my focus to baptism and show that New Testament texts allow us to see the diverse views on baptism in early Christian communities.

John Collins (1946–) is a contemporary historian of religion who focuses on Second Temple Judaism. Two of his books, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Collins 2000) and *Jewish Cult and Hellenistic Culture* (Collins 2005) are important for understanding the Hellenistic influence on Jewish culture. His classic work, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Collins 1988), is relevant for understanding Jewish eschatology and apocalypticism. Two of his concerns, Jewish eschatology and Hellenistic influence in Second Temple Judaism, provide a crucial background for understanding the origins of baptism.

Joseph Thomas was a French scholar who is unfortunately not widely known. His important contribution to the study of baptism and baptismal movements was his dissertation *Le Mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et en Syrie (150 av. J.C.-300 ap. J.C.)* (Thomas 2010 [1935]). It is a detailed study of baptismal movements that existed within Jewish society, where people practiced different types of ritual immersions or ablutions. The author persuasively shows that the traditional view that baptismal practices started only with the practice of John the Baptist is an oversimplified point of view. In reality, baptismal movements were part of the religious mosaic of Jewish society before John the Baptist, and some similar movements continued to exist and were developed later. The topic of this book is important for understanding the origins of baptism and its context, which, unfortunately, is an understudied topic even today. Even considering that this book was written before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it remains useful and sheds light on understanding the problem of baptism within a broader context.

Kurt Rudolph (1929–2020) was a German scholar who contributed to the study of Gnosticism and baptismal movements. In his research on baptismal movements, he followed

Joseph Thomas's argument but developed it further by placing these movements within a more systematic framework. His German work *Antike Baptisten: zu den Überlieferungen über frühjüdische und -christliche Taufsekten* (Rudolph 1981) and an article "The Baptist Sects" in the *Cambridge History of Judaism* (Rudolph 1999) reflect Thomas's influence and the development of his ideas in the context of contemporary scholarship.

George Raymond Beasley-Murray (1916–2000) was a British scholar and the author of *Baptism in the New Testament* (Beasley-Murray 1997 [1962]). In this book, the author examines the issue of baptism throughout the New Testament and also explores the topics of baptism's origins and its evolution. This is a comprehensive study of the topic, which was limited by the New Testament as the main source, but in reality, it often goes beyond it and covers a wide range of problems related to baptism origins. The book is a historical as well as a theological work, and this work is the result of deep scholarly research, which has been done by the author, making this book highly influential and important for further research on the topic. Although the first edition of this book was published in 1962, it has undergone several editions. For years, this book became a standard reference work for scholars studying baptism, and its influence continues to have an impact even today.

Oscar Cullmann's (1902–1999) book *Baptism in the New Testament* (Cullmann 1950) analyses the problem of the origins of baptism and the approach to baptism in the early Christian communities. Cullmann uses the New Testament's passages to claim that they may serve as a representation of early Christian views on baptism. He argues that early Christians acquired not only a new individual identification and personal transformation via baptism, but also a communal identification with the community of believers, which is the Church. Modern anthropologists probably could define this by the term kinship identity. On the one hand, individual baptism is the

act of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ; on the other hand, this individual participation and incorporation into the death and resurrection of Jesus is the act that ties together new members to the new family, which is the Church. This book is valuable for many interesting ideas and for careful work with the New Testament texts. At the same time, this work represents not so much a historical-critical approach to the problem of baptism but rather a theological analysis. In addition, it is important to notice that the book was part of his debate with Karl Barth about infant baptism. Cullmann's book was a reaction to Karl Barth's work *Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (Barth 1948). Consequently, this book was intended to be more theological and was written in the context of a particular polemic. Despite this, the author carefully analyzes the New Testament texts regarding baptism and provides his reasonable reflections about baptism's origins. When this book was published, it made an important impact, and even today, it cannot be ignored without consideration, but with recognition of the limitations that this book has.

Gerhard Barth's work (1927–2002), *Die Taufe in frühchristlicher Zeit* (Baptism in early Christian times) (Barth 2002), represents rigorous German historical-critical scholarship on baptism. The first edition of the book was published in 1981, and in 2002, the author published a revised and updated version that reflects contemporary studies, making it particularly relevant and useful for this study.

Everett Ferguson (1933–) is a contemporary scholar of Early Christian Studies and is known for his extensive research on baptism. His two most relevant books for this study are *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Ferguson 1993 [1987]), which provides useful information on the backgrounds of Christianity, including information about political history, social and cultural situations, and religious diversity, and his extensive book on baptism *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Ferguson 2009) which summarizes his

long-time research on baptism throughout the first five centuries. This book covers different problems related to baptism and provides general information about the most relevant sources. Until today, it is an indispensable book for any researcher in the area of baptism. At the same time, this work has some flaws, which are a result of its extensive nature. For example, several topics are described quite superficially and do not provide extensive information about the complexity and severity of contemporary scholarly discussions. In my case, when I read this book, I still felt the lack of material about the origins of baptism and different views on that issue. However, this is the result of scope and the author's goal to show baptism and its development in a broad time perspective, which, of course, has its limitations. None of these objections diminishes the significance of this work, which is a valuable introduction and reference material on the topic.

Joel Marcus (1951–) is the author of *John the Baptist in History and Theology* (Marcus 2018), which studies the problem of the historical John the Baptist and partly provides useful information about the origins of baptism in the context of John's mission. Joel Marcus's critical-historical analysis of the figure of John the Baptist shows the perspective of this movement, which was an apocalyptic baptismal movement that gave birth to Christianity and even exists in parallel with Christianity. Chapter four of the book separately considers the problem of baptism and its origins; the author stresses that the purpose of John's ritual was a cleansing of ritual impurity and human sins. The author claimed that despite the fact that cleansing rituals were the norms in the Jewish religion before John, and the origins of his practice go back to traditional ritual purification among Jews, the baptismal practice of John had some distinctive features that tell us about the significant evolution of views on his practice. First of all, John's practice was connected with the eschatological expectations of the Jewish people. Secondly, his practice was not only a cleansing ritual but also a sort of sacrament that removed not only ritual impurity but also human sins. A

third and probably most controversial claim is that John's practice was inclusive and could involve not only Jewish people but people of any background. Joel Marcus's claim could be controversial, but he works with different historical documents, including the Gospels, Josephus, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and applies a historical-critical approach. His hypothesis deserves consideration, since it can shed more light on the understanding of baptismal origins and their evolution within particular timeframes.

The research by Robin Margaret Jensen (1952–), *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (Jensen 2011), is a comprehensive study of baptism depicted in early Christian art. The author is a specialist in the field of early Christian art and archaeology and has studied depictions of baptismal scenes in a variety of accessible Christian artworks, such as catacomb paintings, mosaics, and ivory depictions, baptismal iconography on sarcophagi, and symbolic depictions on Christian baptisteries. Despite the fact that the main author's goal is the research of Christian art, the author also touched on the problem of baptismal origins and its development over the years, which can be seen through Christian art. The book is very interesting and useful; however, it is chronologically limited by the fact that the earliest art sources that the author presented came from the late 2nd century CE. Such time limitations do not exactly fit the chosen timeframes since the goal of my study is to understand the origins and formation of the baptismal ritual during the 1st century. Still, some authors' findings and accents on the tendency in the development of baptism could be useful for this study as well.

The work of R. Alan Streett, *Caesar and the Sacrament: Baptism: A Rite of Resistance* (Streett 2018), is an important contribution to the contemporary study of baptism. Streett appropriated some general ideas from scholars who researched early Christianity as a nonviolent

movement of resistance to imperial power. He focuses on baptismal ritual as a form of resistance against the status quo of the Roman Empire.

Another important book for this research is a collection of scholarly articles edited by David Hellholm called *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism* (Hellholm et al. 2011). This is an anthology that represents articles on baptism from different perspectives. These articles show the contemporary discussions on the topic of baptism. The book consists of three volumes, and since my focus is on the evolution of baptism in the earliest period, the most relevant volumes for my research are volume 1 and volume 2. The first volume opens with an important essay by Anders Klostergaard Petersen (Petersen 2011:3–40), which speaks directly to my thesis by raising the question of the connection between rituals of purification and initiation. Many of the authors deserve separate mentions, but this collection, in general, is a valuable resource for understanding the latest scholarly achievements on this topic. Admiring the contribution of this work to the study of baptism, I strongly believe that it is important to continue contemporary studies of this topic by paying attention to understudied themes, and I hope my contribution will be valuable in that regard.

The other important anthology is the book edited by Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan called *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism* (Frevel and Nihan 2013). This book represents articles from leading contemporary scholars who research the problem of purity and impurity in ancient Judaism and, more widely, in the Ancient Mediterranean world. This book is helpful for this research because the problem of purity and impurity and its rethinking in the Christian tradition represent the roots of the ritual of baptism, and understanding this topic helps us to understand the origins of baptism.

I also use the book by Marcus Borg (1942–2015) *Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written* (Borg 2013), which provides important material

on the dating of New Testament texts. Acknowledging the complexity of modern scholarly discussions on this issue, I will use this work not as the last word in scholarship, but rather as an illustration that largely reflects the consensus among contemporary scholars on New Testament dating. The reference to this book is especially relevant for the fourth chapter of my work, where I will analyze the references to baptism in New Testament texts.

There are also several important works on the purity issue that are impossible to ignore in this research. The first serious attention to the problem of ritual purity across different religious traditions was given by Mary Douglas (1921–2007) in her *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Douglas 2001 [1966]). Her book became a starting point for following scholarly works on the problem of ritual purity worldwide. The problem of ritual impurity in Ancient Judaism was widely studied in the works of Jacob Milgrom (1923–2010). His most important books on this topic are his commentaries on Leviticus (Milgrom 1991) and Numbers (Milgrom 2003). His attention to this problem gave birth to new scholarly trends in the deep research of this issue. The research on the topic done so far includes the works of different scholars around the world. Important contributions were made by three American scholars: Saul Olyan, in his book *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Olyan 2000), Jonathan Klawans *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Klawans 2000), and Christine Hayes *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities* (Hayes 2002). The Swedish scholar Thomas Kazen also extensively studied this topic in his different works, but the main ideas about the purity issue were presented in his book *Issues of Impurity in Early Judaism* (Kazen 2010). Canadian scholar Matthew Thiessen extensively studied the purity issue in his book *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism* (Thiessen 2020), and the

other important work was done by Israeli scholar Yair Furstenberg *Purity and Identity in Ancient Judaism: From the Temple to the Mishnah* (Furstenberg 2023).

Another essential block of literature is the books that provide important achievements in the field of ritual studies. There are several classical works that play an important role in the field, and they can be useful for this study. The first important book in the field was Arnold van Gennep's (1873–1957) book called *The Rites of Passage* (van Gennep 1960). He made an important impact on all subsequent scholars who developed and critiqued some of his ideas but always admired his impact on the study of ritual. Since van Gennep's time, the ritual study was developed by such scholars as Victor Turner (1920–1983) with his books *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Turner 1991 [1969]), and *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (Turner 1992 [1982]); Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Geertz 1973); Catherine Bell (1953–2008) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Bell 2009 [1992]); Roy Rappaport (1926–1997) *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Rappaport 1999); and Ronald Grimes *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Grimes 2014). I pointed out only the main works of these authors. While there are also other scholars working in the field, these particular books and authors are essential for this research, and that is why I separately mentioned each of them.

My literature review shows the main tendencies in the study of baptism and ritual, and it also reflects the problems in scholarly research on baptism. Despite the importance of baptism as a Christian ritual, it was often studied on the margins of Christian Studies, which is why a fresh perspective on this topic can make a meaningful contribution to the field. The scholarly results obtained over the last few decades are impressive and have determined the main trends of future research. Whereas in the 20th century scholars primarily studied baptism in the context of

theological polemics (Jeremias 1963; Aland 1963), and even historical research was often determined by theological goals, today, the context has shifted towards more independent historical research with a broad cross-cultural perspective (Hellholm et al. 2011). The development in fields such as New Testament Studies helps us see a historical progression in the biblical texts and, therefore, understand the evolution of different ideas, including the meaning of baptism. The proper knowledge of the history of early Christianity, which includes general knowledge of the history of the region, political and social circumstances, helps to understand the important background behind the ritual, and the inclusion of perspective from ritual studies allows for the inclusion of this research in the broad and important contemporary field of the study of rituals.

Thus, this study will include a wide range of literature that will help clarify this topic using important achievements from contemporary scholarship. My particular focus in this literature review was directed to the sources that relate to this topic, such as baptism itself, ritual purity, Christian origins, and ritual studies. This comprehensive approach improves understanding of the topic and offers a contemporary perspective on the study of baptism. I did not include all the current literature on the topic in this literature review, but I was trying to include the main works that reflect the main trajectories of my study. A complete list of the books and articles used will be included in the bibliography section.

1.7 The Concept of Ritual Purity and Ritual Purification

The concept of ritual purity is a cross-cultural phenomenon observed not only in Judaism but also in various religious traditions. Mary Douglas extensively researched this concept in her famous work *Purity and Danger* (Douglas 2001 [1966]). In my study, I aim to examine the significance of purity within the context of the origins of baptism. I state that the origins of baptism

lie in Jewish purification practices that were developed as a way to remove ritual impurity. However, Jewish purification rituals underwent internal evolution and adaptation over time. This feature is not unique to Judaism: as ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes states, rituals are inherently dynamic (Grimes 2014:294). Jewish rituals are not an exceptional case; the evolution of purification rituals, as well as the formation of Christian baptism, can be traced historically. In this study, I aim to shed light on the evolution of Christian baptism, which, despite its Jewish origins, became a separate ritual and was significantly changed along the way of its formation.

The purpose of Jewish purification rituals was to remove ritual impurity, which was believed to be the result of some type of pollution. Contemporary cultural anthropology studies show that in different societies, there are similar ideas of pollution, purity, and impurity. These ideas represent a specific social construct that is connected with the human concern about death. However, the state of impurity can be obtained not only through direct contact with corpses, which is cross-culturally observed as a source of high pollution, but also through ordinary life experiences such as birth, marriage, and other liminal stages that cause impurity and require purification that helps to maintain emotional stability and social order (Kazen 2019:220). Pollution is an inevitable part of daily life, but this issue can be managed through different types of purification rituals, which most commonly involve ritual washing or immersion into the water (Forth 2017:1-2).

In certain societies, the idea of impurity is connected with racial and caste prejudices. David Graeber emphasizes how the Indian hierarchical varna system is based on the concept of purity (Graeber 2007:25). In such cases, people take for granted that some groups of people are initially less pure than others. The higher the hierarchical status of people, the purer this group is considered by society. While ordinary people can manage their personal level of impurity, they cannot achieve

the same level of purity because they are generally considered less pure than those higher in the social hierarchy. In some societies, the transition from a less pure group to a purer one is possible but requires specific rituals and preparation, which takes a certain amount of time. For instance, the members of the Qumran Community not only kept the highest level of individual purity but also maintained a strict hierarchical structure that included varying degrees of purity for each group. There were four groups of members of the community, and people from the higher group were not even allowed to touch people from the lower group; otherwise, they became impure (Nodet 2023:111).

Contemporary scholarship examines the purity issue through various perspectives. The concept of purity is most commonly studied in disciplines such as Cultural Anthropology, Religious Studies, and Psychology. The psychological perspective gives additional insights into the issue and helps to develop our knowledge of the cognitive science of religion. Kelly Knowles, Borg, and Olatunji provided a very interesting psychological perspective on the purity issue and its connection with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). OCD patients tend to create their rituals allegedly to prevent contamination. The ritualistic behavior is a response to obsessions, which helps reduce anxiety (Knowles, Borg, and Olatunji 2016:107). There is some pattern in the human psyche that sometimes creates extreme forms of OCD, but in most cases, this pattern does not lead to psychological problems. Knowles, Borg, and Olatunji show the connection between religiosity and concerns about contamination/cleanliness and religious rituals that often include purification practices (Knowles et al. 2016:109). The concept of impurity cannot be empirically proven; it is a social construct that can be observed in different societies. This pattern exists in the depths of the human psyche, and this pattern is well instrumentalized by religion. On the one hand, religion creates certain rules that make people worry about observing their purity. On the other hand,

religious practices provide ritual systems that help people remove their impurity, reducing social and individual anxiety about contamination.

Words such as purification/cleansing, impurity, and contamination, which are used to describe the problem of ritual purity, can often be misunderstood as a reference to hygienic procedures. I would like to stress that in a religious context, contamination and purification have nothing to do with hygienic cleansing. Rather, we are dealing with invisible contamination, which can be removed through specific ritual practices. Ritual purification practices can vary; they could be situational when a person should purify themselves after direct contact with a certain defiled object, or regular, like washing hands before a meal, or initiatory practices, which often include a special ritual purification. Mary Douglas emphasizes that in regard to initiation, we have to understand the distinction between rites of passage and regular purificatory practices. The goal of regular purificatory practices is to restore a ritual purity of the person; the person goes back to the previous non-polluted state through observance of a known ritual procedure. The initiatory practices are different; they allow a person to enter into a new and different status. The initiation is not a restoration per se but an improvement. However, before its improvement, the period of transition from one state to another is considered dangerous and polluting (Douglas 1968:340). So, the final step of the initiation ritual often includes some sort of purification, which allows a person to move to a new, enhanced level. Despite the different types of purification rituals, there are shared features across cultures, which allow us to identify them as a cross-cultural phenomenon. They can have their own specifics in each culture, but they also have common patterns that can be observed cross-culturally. In this research, I do not intend to look at all possible cultural examples, but in the next paragraph, I would like to show some examples from the Mediterranean world. They are useful for this research because they allow us to look not only at common patterns

but also at the possible mutual influence of different Mediterranean cultures that could affect each other.

1.8 Ritual Purity and Ritual Washings across the Mediterranean World

In the next chapter, I will specifically discuss the concept of ritual purity and ritual washings in Judaism. Understanding this problem can help us see the genetic connection between Jewish ritual practice and the emergence of baptism. However, as I stated above, the concept of ritual impurity and the practice of washing purification rituals were not unique to Jewish society.

There are similar conceptions and practices in the Mediterranean world among neighboring cultures. One of the most fascinating questions of this matter is the mutual religious influences of the concept of purity and ritual purifications on Judaism. Different traditions influenced Judaism during its formation, and a comparative study of religion shows us that the concept of purity was widespread across the Mediterranean world. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan pointed out that in the Ancient Mediterranean regions, we can observe cultural and religious coherence, which is part of mutual exchange (Frevel and Nihan 2013:13). Historical religious research shows that in Ancient Mesopotamia, there were already concepts of impurity related to the dead bodies and bodily discharges, such as women's menstruation, and also the presence of rituals of purification by water, including ritual bathing before participation in the cult (Guichard and Marti 2013:74–77; 99).

In the ancient Anatolian religion of Hittite culture, there are examples of concepts of purity and pollution, as well as purification rituals related to cultic or personal restoration after critical life moments, which played an important social role by maintaining social balance (Hutter 2013:166). The concept of purity and the observance of purification rules played an important role

in Egyptian religion, where access to a sanctuary place required purification with water, and among the priestly class, purification rituals were a regular practice (Quack 2013:115-158). In Zoroastrianism, an ancient Persian religion, the notions of purity and pollution hold an important place and reveal parallels with Judaism. The necessity of following the purity rules was extremely important, and, as an example, it was the reason why, in Zoroastrianism, sexual intercourse with non-Zoroastrian women was forbidden because, in such cases, women did not observe menstrual purity regulations, and it was a serious sin (de Jong 2013:185). There are many parallels between Zoroastrianism and Judaism, and most likely, Jewish purity practices were influenced by Zoroastrianism. In both religions, bodily discharges were considered the sources of impurity. The same applies to corpses; in both Judaism and Zoroastrianism, they are considered to be the source of the most serious pollution (de Jong 2013:184).

In Phoenician religion, the concept of purity and purification rituals are attested by material evidence, such as water tanks for ritual purification. Hans-Peter Mathys stressed that Jews shared ideas and practices with the Phoenicians, which were variations of the same conception and, together with ritual practices, evolved over time (Mathys 2013:175, 181).

There are similar conceptions in the Greek and Roman religions. It is important to understand their approach to the issue because the influence of Greco-Roman religion became crucial for the formation of baptism. There are two Greek words for “pure”: *ἄγνός* and *καθαρός*. Their opposite, *ἀκάθαρτος*, means *impure*. Additionally, there is a more specific Greek term, *μίασμα*, which means pollution or defilement and indicates ritual impurity that can be removed through a purification process known as *κάθαρσις*. The conception of impurity and the necessity of purification evolved over time. Fabian Meinel pointed out that after Homer, in Greek culture, birth, death, and murder were obvious crises connected with pollution and required purification

rituals, and archaeological findings represent lustral basins that were used for purification (Meinel 2015:2; 9).

The first inscriptions on Greek purity rules appear in the 6th century BCE, and we also have stronger attestations in the Late Hellenistic period (Robertson 2013:196). Purification rituals were observed on various occasions of transitions, which required removing pollution, such as after a birth, miscarriage, or any contact with death. Sexual intercourse was also subject to purification rituals. In the context of cultic purity, Burkert emphasized the importance of Temple Priestesses observing chastity (Burkert 1987:78). The roots of this reverence for virginity, widely attested among the Greeks, are very likely connected with the idea of defilement through intercourse, and virginity is probably believed to be a way to maintain a high level of purity.

The rules of purity were not laws in the civic sense; people could not be punished for violations of purity rules, but people believed that the violation of the rules could lead to bad and unknown consequences. Parker applied the term “religious unease” (Parker 2018:28). This “religious unease” represents the undesirable state of being, which is connected with self-blaming and the fear of an unknown future as a result of the violation of rules.

Purification rituals played a role in life transition moments, but there were also preliminary purification rituals that were a necessary part of any sacrifice. In the cases of sacrifices, we cannot speak of an elaborate ritual system, but some form of ritual washings or at least sprinkling was required before any sacrifice (Parker 1996:20).

Similar concepts existed in the Ancient Roman religion; Greeks and Romans shared the same conceptions of purity, pollution, and the way to remove impurity through purification rituals (Linke 2013:303). The specific beliefs and practices could differ; however, over time, due to

Greco-Roman syncretism, the differences became less evident and depended mostly on regional and specific cult practices, because basic conceptions were the same.

1.9 Greco-Roman Mystery Cults

The emergence and popularity of Greco-Roman mystery cults represent important practices partly associated with purification rituals. In this context, purification is just one aspect of a broader initiation process. However, it is essential to consider these practices because the Hellenistic Period had a big impact on Jewish religious life. Martin Hengel, in his influential work *Judaism and Hellenism*, proposed designating Judaism from the middle of the 3rd century BCE as “Hellenistic Judaism” (Hengel 1981 [1974]:104). Hengel stresses that Hellenization is not a separate feature of Jewish Diaspora, but a natural part of Palestinian Judaism. Thus, by the first century, all spheres of life were already Hellenized. Hellenization significantly impacted social, cultural, and religious life. I prefer not to use the term syncretism for Judaism of that period because the monotheistic concept would not allow for direct borrowing of everything that people liked from surrounding religions, which was much easier for Greco-Roman cults. However, the border of possible borrowings from the Greco-Roman world into Jewish culture was shifting over time. This process is called “cultural hybridity.” Homi Bhabha called hybridity the “sign of the productivity of colonial power” (Bhabha 2004 [1994]:159).

Religious hybridity is part of cultural hybridity, which occurs as a consequence of cultural colonization. Although people can bring in some religious elements from outside, they may soon believe that these elements are part of their native religion. In Judaism, cultural hybridity reflects the significant influence of Hellenistic culture on the Jewish religion and ritual practices.

Understanding of this process is crucial because otherwise it will be difficult to track the origins and evolution of baptism, a practice that emerged during the late Second Temple period when Judaism was under powerful Hellenistic influence. The Hellenistic influence extended not only to Jews in the Diaspora, who used the Greek text of the Bible known as the Septuagint, but also to those who lived in Palestine. In this way, the original biblical text and the previous context of biblical ideas were often distorted. At the same time, Greek philosophical ideas increasingly penetrated Jewish religious thought and were accepted as part of the Jewish tradition. In a situation of religious hybridity, the majority of ordinary people usually do not have a clear sense of the division between the original inherited tradition and the tradition that was borrowed from outside and merged into the previous one. However, preserving the original theology, or at least declaring such preservation, was crucial for some religious groups. As an example, we can see the contrasting views on resurrection between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as attested by Flavius Josephus and the New Testament. The Sadducees held strict biblical rigorism and rejected ideas outside the Torah, so the emergence of ideas about the resurrection of the dead, which became common among Pharisees, was not accepted among Sadducees. Their views were based only on a strict interpretation of the Torah with no references to resurrection, and the idea itself was new for Judaism. However, this very idea was the central conception in Plato's philosophy, which, with the increasing Hellenistic influence, was accepted by part of Jewish society and started to seem like a natural part of Jewish religion.

As opposed to the Sadducees, the Pharisees considered their belief in the resurrection to be an organic part of the Jewish religion. It seems obvious that they could not accept the fact that the idea itself was borrowed from Plato's philosophy, so they developed a concept of the existence of the so-called Oral Torah, as a non-written Jewish tradition that allegedly was received directly by

Moses and existed in oral form for a long time. This is only one example that illustrates how external influences entered the Jewish environment and were embraced as an integral and inseparable part of their views.

Today, the recognition of significant Hellenistic influence on Judaism is not a new idea but rather a consensus of contemporary scholarship. The Hellenistic influence on Judaism was quite powerful and continued to grow over time. Understanding this situation is crucial for this research because baptism was shaped within the context of cultural hybridity. It is not accurate to describe baptism as a continuation and development belonging solely to either the Hellenistic or Jewish tradition. Instead, it emerged as a product of cultural hybridity, which is a characteristic of the 1st century. Therefore, it is essential to examine the formation of baptism from a broad cultural perspective, which will help us trace its roots and understand how it developed. In situations where one culture makes a profound impact on another, it becomes a complex task to distinguish the components of the original Jewish tradition from those that came from Greco-Roman cults. We accept tradition in the way we know it, but for historical investigation, it is important to understand the origins of these ideas. I would like to highlight several facts that are well established.

On the one hand, the concept of ritual purity was well established within Jewish tradition before Hellenistic influence, and similarities that we can observe in both traditions could be seen as analogical parallels rather than direct adoption of one tradition into another. On the other hand, the development of the concept of purification rituals occurred during the late Second Temple period, a time when Hellenistic influence was quite significant. It is essential to emphasize that Judaism during this period was under the influence of the emergence of a variety of Greco-Roman mystery cults, which had an impact on Judaism and eventually on the formation and development of baptism.

Mystery Cults were part of the Greco-Roman religious landscape; they were not separate religions per se. However, they represented a different religious experience, which was hidden from outsiders, and this mystical component was attractive to people (Alvar 2008:11). These cults were also appealing because they offered individual ritual practices to enhance communication with the gods through mystical connections achieved through special initiation practices, which included washings for purification.

Participation in mystery cults was an optional practice and was not considered a necessary part of Greco-Roman religion; it was always a matter of individual decision (Burkert 1987:10). The majority of people could limit their communication with gods through prayers and sacrifices without any specific initiation. However, mysteries offered something more than just good relationships with gods. Mystery initiations had to change the person radically through a special mystical connection with the chosen god or gods. This connection elevates a person to a new level of relationship with the selected deity, and it remains throughout their lifetime. The feature of mystical initiations was in their secrecy, and it also consisted of an intrigue that people wanted to unveil.

The mysteries were opened only to initiates who were required to maintain silence about them among the uninitiated. People believed that the mystery cults could improve their current status through better relationships with the gods. The initiated person believed in the force that would help them for the rest of their life, which had a positive psychological impact. There was also a social aspect; individuals who went through secret initiation in the same mystery cult got a common sense of belonging as the people of one communal brotherhood who were united with each other in a special mystical way. So, the initiated person was elevated in some way in comparison with other people.

I think it would be appropriate to provide a modern example from the religious tradition of Islam. One of the five pillars of Islam is the pilgrimage to Mecca, known as Hajj. While it is a religious obligation, not all Muslims can afford this journey, often due to financial or other issues. If they cannot make it, such non-participation is not considered a sin. However, any person who has completed the Hajj pilgrimage is granted the additional title of *Hajji*. This title can be added to their personal name and elevates their social status, in comparison to those believers who could not make it. Similarly, we can consider the initiation into mysteries, where the initiated person gained the opportunity to establish exclusive contact with the gods. This contact was not solely a matter of individual faith but was also recognized by society.

In mystery cults, before the initiation, the person had to go through the procedure of ritual purification. The purification rituals before the initiation were an important part of the process and often included physical immersion in water. In contrast to the Jewish tradition, the ritual purification in mystery cults was not separated from moral purification. However, some transgressions, such as murder, could not be purified through ritual purification; anyone who committed such sins could not be initiated into mystery cults. The purpose of initiation rituals was to transform a person into a new state with a deeper spiritual connection. This transformation was symbolically represented in the rituals. Initiation into mysteries was not just a formal ceremony; it was an important emotional experience that was intended to evoke a new and intense emotional response. The experience of initiation impacted the life of an initiated person due to the profound emotional impact. There is research that was produced by psychologists Roger Brown and James Kulik, who gave a name to the phenomenon of “flashbulb memories” (Brown and Kulik 1977).

Flashbulb memories are unforgettable things that are stuck in human memory due to powerful emotional experiences, such as the experience of murder or other significant events that

a person could experience on a high emotional level. Concerning our case, it is important to notice that the entire initiation process was constructed in a way that drove a person into deep emotional involvement, and the process of ritual order was constructed to create an emotional response like a flashbulb memory. Thus, the memory of the initiation ritual remains a unique, unforgettable experience.

The mysteries are also good examples of Greco-Roman syncretism, where we can observe the different cultural influences, borrowing and mixing ideas from different religious traditions. This inclusive approach expanded choices for individuals within the pagan belief system. Such cultural diversity in the Greco-Roman mystery cults can be well seen in the famous Apuleius book known as *Metamorphoses*, or another title, *The Golden Ass*. Even though this book is typically dated to the 2nd century CE, it reflects the earlier process that started many centuries ago. What is specifically important for the aim of this work is the author's description of the initiation ritual, including the preparatory purification practice.

In chapter 11, from verse 23 and the following, we read about Lucius' experience of initiation into the mysteries of Isis (Apuleius, translated by Adlington 1924:578–595). In this chapter, he describes his attending to baths as a necessary part of initiation, which was required to be performed for purification, and part of that is seeking pardon from the gods and washing of the body. Thus, we can recognize many commonalities with modern baptism, and what is particularly interesting is that asking forgiveness from gods and ritual ablution were necessary preliminary parts of the initiation. However, in comparison with Christian baptism, the initial purifications in mystery cults were not part of a secret ritual. They could be performed in public baths or in the sea, and could be watched by outsiders. The preliminary cleansing rite was not an initiation into the mystery cults but rather a preparatory ritual (Graf 2011:111). So, on the one hand, purification

before initiation was required. On the other hand, this rite was separated from the initiation itself. In baptism, we see that purification through water and initiation itself go together.

At the same time, some similarities are obvious. The formation of baptism happened to be under significant Hellenistic influence. The formation depended not only on the Jewish concept of ritual purity and Jewish ritual purifications but also on the influences of Greco-Roman mystery cults, and this influence includes even baptismal terminology. In its final form, Christian baptism includes both water purification and verbal formulations that work in tandem. These acts essentially represent an initiation process, marking the transition from one state of being to another. This stands in contrast to mystical cults, where we can see two essential but separate rites for purification and initiation. However, the earliest Christian writings we have testify that the baptismal terminology was borrowed from the language of mystery cults. For example, if we compare the words that Paul used, we see that he uses the words, including the word *mystery* (μυστήριον) itself, without any hesitation. The obvious parallels with mystery cults have raised scholarly debates about whether they directly influenced Paul. We do not have direct evidence for that, except the similarities, which are difficult to deny and certainly allow for that possibility. At the same time, Paul lived in the Hellenistic world, and the Judaism of his day was itself already Hellenized. Therefore, he could have used the language of mystery cults without realizing it, simply because it became a common way of thinking. This situation allows even scholars who are skeptical about direct borrowings from mystery cults to accept such a possibility. For example, Wedderburn denies that Paul or pre-Pauline Christianity consciously took over mystery ideas, but he accepts the possibility of indirect influence from a religious environment shaped by mysteries (Wedderburn 1987:162–163).

In regard to this topic, I think it is important to point out that in early Christian communities, during baptism, a person symbolically participated in the death and resurrection of Jesus through immersion into water. At the same time, it was not just a symbolic act; it was an act accompanied by a deep emotional experience. The person was so emotionally involved in this act that they could physically experience the sufferings of Jesus at the moment of immersion into the water, when breathing is stopped, and when the person gets out of the water, their breathing is restored. So, the baptismal ritual meant the death and resurrection of Jesus. For mystes, such symbolic loading was clearly understandable because stories about suffering gods often accompanied initiation practices in mystery cults, and it was assumed that the initiate had to participate in one form or another in the suffering of the gods and, in that way, enter into the mystical connection with the chosen god. While stories of suffering gods were widespread, it is important to note that not every god in mystery cults was associated with suffering. Burkert takes an example of the mysteries of Mithras, where the myths of the “suffering god” are not present (Burkert 1987:76). Thus, the presence of particular stories depended on a particular mystical cult, and people could have many different options to choose from.

Despite the diverse range of traditions within mystery cults, each has its unique mythology, but certain common characteristics persist. Pre-initiation purification was a necessary part of the initiation process. Initiation itself was viewed as a tool for an individual to establish a unique connection with the deity and become part of a new community. Once initiated, the person is recognized among fellow initiates, and this status remains for the rest of their life. I find it noteworthy that some parallels with baptism are quite obvious, and I consider it not a matter of coincidence but rather the profound influence of one tradition on another. To conclude, I would like to quote Helmut Koester, “Parallels with Christian statements abound in this narration of an

initiation into a mystery religion. One should not deny that the New Testament and the mysteries often speak the same language. When Paul says that those who have been baptized have died with Christ and should, therefore, walk in a new life, his words closely resemble those of the initiation into the Isis mysteries” (Koester 1982:191).

1.10 Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I showed the key points of the present study. After considering the problem statement, time limitations, terminology, and methodology of this research, I presented the main sources and a literature review. The second block of this chapter introduced the key issues that help understand the origins of baptism. I started with the concept of ritual purity and ritual purification and showed that this concept was widely observed across the Mediterranean world in general, and specifically among Greeks and Romans, with an emphasis on Greco-Roman mystery cults.

The methodology I have chosen is the historical-critical method, complemented by insights from sociocultural anthropology. The implication of the historical-anthropological approach in religious studies is suitable for studying rituals and helps enrich the research with important insights from related fields of knowledge.

I emphasized ritual purity because I want to demonstrate how the concept of ritual purity and the development of ritual washings in the Mediterranean influenced the formation of baptism. The next chapter will be specifically devoted to this problem in Judaism, but the broader perspective shows that the Jewish religion was not unique in its understanding of the concept of purity and was likely influenced by neighboring traditions during its formation and development. Across different cultures in the Mediterranean world, we encounter similar conceptions of

purity/impurity and the special ritual practices designed to eliminate impurity. The focus of this chapter was to introduce the problem and understand that purity was not an isolated issue in Judaism. On the contrary, Judaism evolved under different influences.

Judaism was historically influenced by different religions of the Mediterranean world, but the Second Temple period is known for significant Hellenistic influence. An understanding of this influence is crucial if we want to have proper knowledge about the origins of Christian baptism. I separately mentioned the Greco-Roman mystery cults, which highly affected Christian ritual practices in general and baptism in particular.

The proper understanding of the topics that we observed above can help us go further in our research and see the formation of baptism as a process that was affected by different cultural influences, and this understanding opens an important perspective on the origins of baptism.

Chapter 2

The Impurity and Ritual Purification in Judaism

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the concept of ritual purity and demonstrated examples of ritual purifications, which were a widespread phenomenon throughout the Mediterranean world. There were a variety of practices depending on religion and culture; however, despite the variety of cultural differences, such practices also shared common elements. The basis of the issue is the belief that something can defile a person and, in order to be restored after defilement, a person should go through a purification ritual that makes a person clean again (see sections 1.7 and 1.8).

Purification practices take various forms, but in most cases, they represent water-based rituals, such as sprinkling and different types of washings, including full immersion. These acts symbolize the purification of the person and the removal of ritual impurity.

In this chapter, we will observe how this concept operates within Jewish tradition. Jewish concepts of impurity and the associated purification rituals share common elements with other religions of the ancient Mediterranean world. Judaism was not an isolated religion but a religion that was influenced by other religious traditions and shaped by changes in society and politics. It is important to recognize how historical social and political changes profoundly impacted Judaism in general, and Jewish purification practices and understanding of ritual impurity in particular.

I would like to stress that in the ritual system of Judaism, the concept of ritual purity and the practices of ritual washings were significantly developed in the Second Temple Judaism period, the time when Jewish culture was highly influenced by Greco-Roman culture.

By tracing the development of Jewish purification rituals, we can get a deeper understanding of the origins of Christian baptism. Baptism is not an invention of the 1st century CE that came from nowhere, but rather a practice that developed and transformed from earlier traditions.

Therefore, I am going to highlight the significant factors that contribute to our understanding of the origins of baptism. First of all, I would like to show the origins of baptism that have their roots in the concept of ritual purity/impurity, which can be seen as a cultural construct but with very influential power. The presence of this concept required people to remove ritual defilement, and in different religious cultures, special ritual practices emerged that were intended to remove ritual impurity. Secondly, historical evidence shows that the role of ritual impurity and purification rituals increased in Judaism during the Second Temple period. This period can be characterized not only by the intensification of the old conception of ritual impurity but also by the mass construction of ritual pools and emerging new tendencies within Judaism, which propagated the necessity of observance of a high level of ritual purity. In this context, different Jewish baptismal movements and Christian baptismal practices emerged. So, without understanding the conception of ritual purity and the existence of different purification practices, we cannot understand the roots of Christian baptism. This is the reason why this chapter will specifically discuss the purity issue and the evolution of purification rituals in Judaism.

2.2 The Concept of Ritual Purity in Judaism

In the previous chapter, I generally observed the concept of ritual impurity. Thanks to the deep research by Mary Douglas in her seminal book *Purity and Danger* (Douglas 1966), we know that the concept of ritual impurity is a cultural construct that can be cross-culturally observed and

is not unique to Judaism. Research by Mary Douglas and anthropologists who followed her shows that the existence of the concept of impurity drives the creation of specific practices of purification that play not only an important psychological role but also have social importance. Purification rituals are able to give members of society a sense of safety and security, strengthen social boundaries, and contribute to a shared sense of identity. These social results can be observed cross-culturally, and they share the same patterns. However, different cultures have their own specific history of development and cultural language. For this discussion, it is necessary to understand how this concept operates in Judaism and what types of practices developed over time.

The concept of ritual impurity in Judaism and the necessity for purity restoration led to the emergence of ritual purification practices that involved ritual washing. A range of purification practices exists in Judaism, from simple ritual handwashing (נטילת ידיים – *netilat yadayim*) to more elaborate ones, such as full immersion in water (טבילה – *tevilah*). The goal of these practices was not hygiene but restoration of ritual purity. The concept of ritual purity, along with the associated purification rituals, gradually evolved. One of the significant developments in these practices occurred during the Second Temple period. For the Jewish priestly class, the issue of purity was always important as they traditionally observed the strictest purity regulations. However, in the Second Temple period, we see a growing observance of ritual purity, even among ordinary Jews. The growing emphasis on ritual purity eventually led to the emergence of Jewish movements and communities committed to the strict observance of ritual laws. The emergence of such communities was a result of many factors, one of which was the recognition that observing purity laws at a rigorous level was practically impossible within the context of ordinary society, where exposure to impurities was a natural part of daily life. In the next chapter, I will specifically discuss

such movements, but in this chapter, my main focus will be on the general concept of ritual purity and how it was described in Jewish sources and developed over time.

It is difficult to say the exact time when purity regulations became an important part of the Jewish religion; the attention to them definitely increased during the Second Temple period, but purity regulations themselves can be found in the Torah, mostly among the later texts that, according to scholarly consensus, represent the so-called Priestly Source.

Torah, especially the books of Leviticus and Numbers, gives a clear description of the concept of ritual purity and impurity. Within the Jewish worldview, the world is often perceived through binary categories of clean and unclean, holy (sacred) and profane. I am using the words *clean* and *pure* as interchangeable words, but in most cases, I prefer to use the words *pure/impure* because they carry a more precise meaning and help to avoid confusion with hygiene practices that have nothing to do with the concept of ritual purity.

In order to be more precise, it is also helpful to use the term *ritual impurity*. It indicates that this concept is tied to the understanding of access to the sacred because the unclean person cannot have access to the sacred sphere, such as the Jerusalem Temple.

The clean/pure (טהור – *tahor* in Hebrew; *καθαρός* or *ἄγνός* in Greek) and unclean/polluted (טמא – *tamei* in Hebrew and *ἀκάθαρτος* in Greek) are major oppositions that indicate the state of purity/impurity. In Judaism, people and animals can be unclean; for example, unclean animals were prohibited from being offered in the Temple, and impure individuals did not have access to the Jerusalem Temple. As noted by Saul Olyan, the key difference between animal impurity and human impurity lies in the fact that, in most cases, impure individuals are temporarily banned from the sanctuary sphere, but after a purification process, they can have access to the Temple. In contrast, unclean animals are entirely prohibited (Olyan 2000:38).

However, various degrees of pollution exist for people, along with different rituals and timeframes for purification. According to purity laws, a person cannot constantly be pure because impurity is created through natural processes and cannot be avoided. In this way, ritual impurity is inevitable and not considered a sin per se. However, people have a clear understanding of whether they are in a state of ritual impurity, and neglecting ritual purification in certain situations could be considered a sin. The book of Leviticus (Leviticus 5:2–6) gives us such rigorous examples:

אוּ נָפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּגְעַל בְּכָל־דָּבָר טָמֵא אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת חַיָּה טָמְאָה אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת בְּהֵמָה טָמְאָה אוֹ בְּנִבְלַת עֶרְוָה טָמֵא וְנִעְלָם מִמֶּנּוּ
וְהָיָא טָמֵא וְאָשָׁם:

אוּ כִּי יִגַּע בְּטִמְאַת אָדָם לְכָל טִמְאָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִטְמָא בָּהּ וְנִעְלָם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהָיָא יָדַע וְאָשָׁם:
אוּ נָפֶשׁ כִּי תִשָּׁבַע לְבָטָא בְּשִׁפְתָיִם לְהָרַע | אוֹ לְהִטִּיב לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִבְטָא הָאָדָם בְּשִׁבְעָה וְנִעְלָם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהָיָא־יָדַע וְאָשָׁם
לְאַתַּת מֵאֵלָה:

וְהָיָה כִּי־יִאָּשֵׁם לְאַתַּת מֵאֵלָה וְהִתְנַדָּה אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עָלֶיהָ:
וְהָבִיָא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ לִיהוָה עַל חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא נִקְבָּה מוֹ־הַצֹּאן כְּשִׁבְעָה אוֹ־שְׁעִירַת עִזִּים לְחַטָּאת וְכִפָּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן
מִחֲטָאתוֹ:

(Leviticus 5:2–6, BHS)

Or when any of you touch any unclean thing—whether the carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean livestock or the carcass of an unclean swarming thing—and are unaware of it, you have become unclean, and are guilty.

Or when you touch human uncleanness—any uncleanness by which one can become unclean—and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall be guilty.

Or when any of you utter aloud a rash oath for a bad or a good purpose, whatever people utter in an oath, and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall in any of these be guilty.

When you realize your guilt in any of these, you shall confess the sin that you have committed.

And you shall bring to the Lord, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, a female from the flock, a sheep or a goat, as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for your sin.

(Leviticus 5:2–6, NRSV)

The book of Leviticus is quite strict in its attitude towards purity regulations. However, many Jews did not follow them in a full-blown sense in their daily lives. The existing prohibitions did not make people sinful (Klawans 2000:25). At the same time, they considered purity regulations crucial when it came to visiting the Jerusalem Temple. In such a case, it was mandatory to go through specific cleansing rituals before entering the Temple because a person could not be in the Temple in a state of ritual impurity. If one neglected the prescribed cleansing rituals, in this case, their carelessness became sinful.

There is a common distinction between ritual and moral impurity: ritual impurity refers to temporary, physical impurity that requires purification rituals for purity restoration, while moral impurity means moral transgressions. In the Torah, impurity is primarily connected with physical–ritual impurity, while sin and moral transgression are other categories. However, there is a tendency in some Jewish literature of the Second Temple period to see a closer connection between ritual impurity and moral impurity. Such understanding has evolved further in later writings and in Rabbinic Judaism, where the interconnection between ritual and moral impurity is visibly presented. During the Second Temple Period, tendencies toward the connection between ritual and moral impurity (i.e., moral transgressions) can be observed, but there was no common agreement

on this connection. Jonathan Klawans points out that different views on the issue played an important role in Jewish sectarian diversity (Klawans 2000:161).

Thus, it seems that such a connection was gradually developed, and what we know from the emergence of baptismal movements of the 1st century is that they started to connect the concept of impurity with the concept of sin. However, it is not an initial biblical idea but something that began to emerge in the first century, primarily within eschatological movements. We will delve deeper into this development in the next chapter. For now, it is important to understand that the fundamental concept of impurity is not connected with sin; it is an inevitable impurity that, in most cases, can be restored through ritual purification.

The question of why something is considered impure while another is not is not clear enough. However, cross-culturally, we observe a connection between the fear of death and the concept of impurity. Jacob Milgrom's analysis of Jewish impurity laws sheds light on this connection, particularly in the context of blood discharges. Milgrom concludes that in the Israelite mindset, blood is the arch-symbol of life, so losing the blood is a sign of death (Milgrom 1991:767). Milgrom identified four basic bodily impurities that could be found in the Torah: death, blood, semen, and scale disease (Milgrom 1993:109). He argues that, eventually, all of these impurities represent death. The dead body represents death directly; scale disease is a condition that can lead to death; and the loss of vaginal blood and semen represents the loss of forces of life, which also lead to death (Milgrom 1993:109). Close to this understanding is the view of Matthew Thiessen, who pointed out the three major sources of ritual impurity: corpses, lepra, and genital discharges (Thiessen 2020:6). All of these sources of impurity extend to many different actions.

Jewish purity regulations are present in the Torah. The Torah describes a set of actions that can produce ritual impurity. They include touching unclean animals (Leviticus 11: 26–28), a

nocturnal emission (Leviticus 15:16), sexual intercourse (Leviticus 15:18), a menstruation period (Leviticus 15:19–30), childbirth (Leviticus 12:2–7), and touching the corpse of a deceased person (Numbers 19:11–13).

Unclean animals make a person unclean:

לְכֹל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר הוּא מִפְּרִסֹת פְּרִסָּה וְשֹׁסֵעַ | אֵינָנָה שֹׁסֵעַת וְגֵרָה אֵינָנָה מֵעֵלָה טְמֵאִים הֵם לָכֶם כָּל־הַנֹּגֵעַ בָּהֶם
טְמֵא:

וְכָל | הוֹלֵךְ עַל־כַּפָּיו בְּכֹל־הַחַיָּה הַהֹלֶכֶת עַל־אַרְבָּע טְמֵאִים הֵם לָכֶם כָּל־הַנֹּגֵעַ בְּנִבְלָתָם יִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:
וְהַנֹּשֵׂא אֶת־נִבְלָתָם יִכָּבֵס בַּגָּדָיו וְטִמָּא עַד־הָעֶרֶב טְמֵאִים הֵמָּה לָכֶם:
(Leviticus 11:26–28, BHS)

Every animal that has divided hoofs but is not cleft-footed or does not chew the cud is unclean for you; everyone who touches one of them shall be unclean.

All that walk on their paws, among the animals that walk on all fours, are unclean for you; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until the evening, and the one who carries the carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening; they are unclean for you.

(Leviticus 11:26–28, NRSV)

Nocturnal emission makes a person unclean:

וְאִישׁ כִּי־תִצָּא מִמֶּנּוּ שִׁכְבַּת־זָרַע וְרָתַץ בְּמִים אֶת־כָּל־בְּשָׁרוֹ וְטִמָּא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:
(Leviticus 15:16, BHS)

If a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water, and be unclean until the evening.

(Leviticus 15:16, NRSV)

Sexual intercourse makes a person unclean:

וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אִישׁ אִתָּהּ שִׁכְבַּת־זָרַע וְרָתַצוּ בְּמִים וְטִמְאוּ עַד־הָעֶרֶב:
(Leviticus 15:18, BHS)

If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening.

(Leviticus 15:18, NRSV)

The menstruation period and other blood discharges make a person unclean:

וְאִשָּׁה כִּי־תִהְיֶה זֹכָה גַם יְהִיגָה זֹכָה בְּבִשְׁלָה שְׁבַעַת יָמִים תִּהְיֶה בְּנִדְתָּהּ וְכָל־הַנִּגָּע בָּהּ יִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:
וְכָל־אִשָּׁר תִּשָּׁכַב עָלָיו בְּנִדְתָּהּ יִטְמָא וְכָל־אִשָּׁר־תִּשָּׁכַב עָלָיו יִטְמָא:
וְכָל־הַנִּגָּע בְּמִשְׁכָּבָהּ יִכָּבֵס בְּגָדָיו וְרִתּוֹץ בַּיָּמִים וְיִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:
וְכָל־הַנִּגָּע בְּכָל־כְּלִי אִשָּׁר־תִּשָּׁכַב עָלָיו יִכָּבֵס בְּגָדָיו וְרִתּוֹץ בַּיָּמִים וְיִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:
וְאִם עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּב הוּא אֹו עַל־הַכְּלִי אִשָּׁר־הוּא יִשָּׁכַת־עָלָיו בְּנִגְעוֹ־בּוֹ יִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:
וְאִם שָׁכַב יִשָּׁכַב אִישׁ אֹתָהּ וְתִהְיֶה נִדְתָּהּ עָלָיו וְיִטְמָא שְׁבַעַת יָמִים וְכָל־הַמִּשְׁכָּב אִשָּׁר־יִשָּׁכַב עָלָיו יִטְמָא:
וְאִשָּׁה כִּי־יִזְוֹב זֹב דָּמָה יָמִים רַבִּים בְּלֹא עֵת־נִדְתָּהּ אֹו כִּי־תִזְוֹב עַל־נִדְתָּהּ כָּל־יָמֶי נֹוֹב טַמְאָתָהּ כִּימִי נִדְתָּהּ תִּהְיֶה

טַמְאָה הוּא:

כָּל־הַמִּשְׁכָּב אִשָּׁר־תִּשָּׁכַב עָלָיו כָּל־יָמֶי זֹכָה כְּמִשְׁכָּב נִדְתָּהּ יְהִי־הִלָּה וְכָל־הַכְּלִי אִשָּׁר תִּשָּׁכַב עָלָיו טַמְא יְהִיָּה כְּטַמְאָת

נִדְתָּהּ:

וְכָל־הַנִּגָּע בָּם יִטְמָא וְיִכָּבֵס בְּגָדָיו וְרִתּוֹץ בַּיָּמִים וְיִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:
וְאִם־טָהֲרָה מִזֹּכָה וְסִפְרָה לָהּ שְׁבַעַת יָמִים וְאַתָּר תִּטְהַר:
וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי תִקַּח־לָהּ שְׁתֵּי תָרִים אֹו שְׁנֵי בָגִי יוֹגָה וְהִבִּיֵּאָה אוֹתָם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:
וַעֲשֶׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הָאֶחָד חֲטָאת וְאֶת־הָאֶחָד עֹלָה וְכָפַר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה מִזֹּב טַמְאָתָהּ:

(Leviticus 15:19–30, BHS)

When a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. Everything upon which she lies during her impurity shall be unclean; everything also upon which she sits shall be unclean.

Whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening.

Whoever touches anything upon which she sits shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening;

whether it is the bed or anything upon which she sits, when he touches it he shall be unclean until the evening.

If any man lies with her, and her impurity falls on him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean.

If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean.

Every bed on which she lies during all the days of her discharge shall be treated as the bed of her impurity; and everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her impurity. Whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening.

If she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count seven days, and after that she shall be clean. On the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest to the entrance of the tent of meeting.

The priest shall offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf before the Lord for her unclean discharge.

(Leviticus 15:19–30, NRSV)

Childbirth makes a person unclean:

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וְיָלְדָה זָכָר וּטְמֵאָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כִּי־מִי גֵזַת דּוֹתָהּ תִּטְמָא:
וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בָּשָׂר עָרְלָתָהּ:
וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים תִּשָּׁב בְּדָמֶי טִהָרָה בְּכָל־קֹדֶשׁ לֹא־תִגַּע וְאֶל־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא תָבֹא עַד־מָלֵאת יְמֵי טִהָרָה:
וְאִם־נִקְבְּהָ תֵלֵד וּטְמֵאָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כִּי־נִקְבְּתָהּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים תִּשָּׁב עַל־דָּמֶי טִהָרָה:
וּבַמָּלֵאת יְמֵי טִהָרָה לְבֶן־אִוֹ לְבַת־תִּבְיָא כָּכֶשׁ כּוֹנֵשְׁנָתוֹ לַעֲלֹה וּבְיִינוּגָה אוֹתָהּ לַחֲטָאת אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד אֶל־
הַפֶּקֶד:

(Leviticus 12:2–7, BHS)

Speak to the people of Israel, saying: If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days; she shall not touch any holy thing, or come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are completed. If she bears a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days.

When the days of her purification are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering.

He shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement on her behalf; then she shall be clean from her flow of blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, male or female.

(Leviticus 12:2–7, NRSV)

Touching the corpse makes a person unclean:

הַנִּגָּע בְּמֵת לְכָל־נֶפֶשׁ אָדָם וְטָמֵא שְׂבַעֲת יָמִים:
הוּא יִתְחַטֵּא־בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִטְהַר וְאִם־לֹא יִתְחַטֵּא בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לֹא יִטְהַר:
כָּל־הַנִּגָּע בְּמֵת בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־יָמוּת וְלֹא יִתְחַטֵּא אֶת־מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה טָמֵא וְנִכְרְתָה הַגִּפְשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל כִּי מִי נִדָּה
לֹא־זָרֵק עָלָיו טָמֵא יִהְיֶה עוֹד טָמֵאֲתוּ בּוֹ:

(Numbers 19:11–13, BHS)

Those who touch the dead body of any human being shall be unclean seven days.

They shall purify themselves with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean; but if they do not purify themselves on the third day and on the seventh day, they will not become clean.

All who touch a corpse, the body of a human being who has died, and do not purify themselves, defile the tabernacle of the Lord; such persons shall be cut off from Israel. Since water for cleansing was not dashed on them, they remain unclean; their uncleanness is still on them.
(Numbers 19:11–13, NRSV)

Thus, we see a variety of possibilities for becoming ritually unclean during the daily life of any person. Some diseases can also make a person unclean. For example, in Leviticus 13:2, we encounter the word (צִרְעָת) which is commonly known in Greek as (λέπρα – lepra):

אֵלֶם כִּי־יִהְיֶה בְּעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ שְׂאֵת אוֹ־סַפְחָת אוֹ בַּחֲרָת וְהָיָה בְּעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ לִנְגַע צִרְעָת וְהוּבֵא אֶל־אֹהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל־
אֶתֶד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים:

(Leviticus 13:2, BHS)

When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body, he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests.

(Leviticus 13:2, NRSV)

The word *lepra* can be found in many places across the Bible, and according to Jewish law, the presence of *lepra* is the reason to declare a person ritually impure. However, contrary to common opinion, *lepra* does not refer exclusively to leprosy. Thiessen points out that our common identification of *lepra* with leprosy partially came from the wrong Bible translation when the Greek word *lepra* was frequently translated into English as leprosy (Thiessen 2020:44). In fact, the name *lepra* could be applied to a variety of skin diseases. As a result, *lepra* was a more common problem than we think today. People who had a minor temporary skin condition could be considered impure. While some permanent skin diseases could result in exclusion from society, ritual purity could usually be restored through ritual purification. So, in most cases, the ritual impurity was not a critical condition.

The Torah provides instructions on how to remove ritual impurity, typically through immersion in what is known as (מים חיים – *mayyim hayyim*) – “living water,” as described in Leviticus 15:13:

וְכִי־יִטְהַר הַזֶּבֶב מִזֹּבָבוֹ וְסָפַר לוֹ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לְטַהֲרָתוֹ וְכָבַס בְּגָדָיו וְרִתֵּץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם הַחַיִּים וְטָהַר:

(Leviticus 15:13, BHS)

When the one with a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, he shall count seven days for his cleansing; he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in fresh water, and he shall be clean.

(Leviticus 15:13, NRSV)

For some reason, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible includes a translation of (מים חיים) as “fresh water” instead of “living water,” which does not exactly refer to its original meaning. The term “living water” refers to water from natural sources, such as rivers or rainfall. The person should be immersed in the water, and after a certain amount of time, they can be considered pure. Basically, purification is a necessary act that involves agents such as water and a specific period of time, which varies depending on the degree of defilement. The performance of the purification ritual, along with the required time, makes the transition of the person from a state of ritual impurity to a state of ritual purity. The need for specific agents and the proper performance of the ritual led to the elaborate practice of ritual immersion. While the concept of ritual immersion for purification is not new and can be traced back to the Hebrew Bible, it appears that during the Second Temple period, Jewish ritual and purity laws were further developed. To observe purification rituals according to Jewish law, people began to construct special ritual pools known as *mikveh* (מקווה) or *mikvah*, which allowed for purification through full immersion (טבילה – *tevilah*).

Joan Taylor suggested that the Temple Mount likely had numerous *mikva'ot* (מקואות). Even individuals who were technically ritually clean were expected to immerse themselves in a *mikveh* before entering the Temple (Taylor 1997:63).

In contemporary scholarship, the prevailing consensus suggests that, historically, the majority of Jews did not care about the observance of purity laws daily but observed them only when planning to visit the Jerusalem Temple. At the same time, the observation of documents and material artifacts closer to the 1st century CE shows that this period was characterized by a significant expansion of the role of ritual purity, even among the general population (Furstenberg 2023:20).

The question of why the issue of purity became so important is interesting in itself. Some scholars who prefer to integrate historical and anthropological approaches to the topic see that the distinction between pure and impure is also the way to distinguish between in-group and out-group in which social agency is constructed (Frevel and Nihan 2013:37). Christophe Nihan stressed that this tendency is most visible in the book of Leviticus, which was composed during the Persian period and was largely concerned with the problem of purity. In this context, the distinction between “clean” and “unclean” can be seen as an opposition between “in-group” and “out-group,” in which members of the ethnic group “Israel” separate themselves from other ethnic groups through the opposition clean/unclean (Nihan 2013:355). This perspective is important; however, in subsequent sections, I will show how this concept evolved within Jewish society during later periods. This development led to the division of the Jewish people into distinct groups, some of whom rigorously observed these rituals while others basically did not see the necessity of such observation in their everyday routine. The increase in purity concerns is one of the characteristics of the later period of the Second Temple, during which Jewish society experienced internal divisions arising from diverse perspectives on religious matters. However, the examples I presented above clearly show that the concept of ritual purity originated in the Torah but was significantly developed later.

2.3 The Increasing Role of Ritual Purity in Second Temple Judaism

The previous analysis showed that the concept of ritual purity was common in Judaism. The written texts of the Bible also testify that the concept of ritual purity/impurity was part of the Jewish religion. Detailed instructions on how people should observe the purity laws are presented in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. However, the key question

is how this conception evolved over time. It is quite noticeable that the ritual purity concern increased in Second Temple Judaism. It is natural, since the purity issue was directly related to eligibility to enter the Temple, and with the reconstruction of the Temple, the requirements for ritual purity became stricter.

The Second Temple period lasted from 516 BCE to 70 CE. It begins with the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and ends with its destruction (Stuckenbruck 2020:1). This period is extensive, but in this research, I want to pay particular attention to the late Second Temple period, which begins in the middle of the 2nd century BCE with the Hasmonean dynasty and ends with the destruction of the Temple. During this period, most Jews lived in the Diaspora, and the inhabitants of Judah became a minority among all Jews (Grabbe 2000:179). Up to the middle of the 20th century, many scholars held the view that Judaism in the Diaspora represented a Hellenized version of Judaism while Palestinian Judaism was “normative” or more “traditional” (Barclay 1996:6). However, Hellenization did not have geographical boundaries; Greek influence started to affect Palestine after Alexander the Great’s conquest, and it was an ongoing process that reached its peak during the Hasmonean dynasty and onward. This period is crucial for my research because, during this time, the concern about ritual purity became an important part of the daily life of ordinary people. There is no question that the fundamental concepts of purity regulations are established in the biblical texts. However, Yonatan Adler points out that, due to a lack of compelling evidence, it is uncertain whether purity laws were observed widely among Jewish people before the 2nd century BCE. Still, since the second half of the 2nd century BCE, there have been texts and material artifacts that show that Jews started to practice observational purity regulation through entire immersion in a pool of water (Adler 2023:160–161). The literature of the Hasmonean era, which is part of the late Second Temple period, demonstrates a concern for purity,

as evident in texts such as the Temple Scroll and Jubilees (Collins 2017:99). Thus, textual and archaeological evidence shows that during the late Second Temple period, the concept of purity and purification rituals became more developed and complex, and people started to observe purity rituals likely on a daily basis (Kazen 2019:225). The causes for that can be discussed from different angles, but I would like to propose four major causes of the increased focus on the problem of ritual purity:

The first cause is the growing influence of the priesthood. They not only maintained a high level of ritual purity for themselves, but they were also responsible for ensuring that all individuals followed purity regulations to enter the Temple.

The second cause is the emergence of Jewish sects that emphasized the problem of ritual purity. The observance and level of observance of purity laws became a part of internal debates within Jewish society, and for some groups, it was one of the most important questions. For example, Essenes were known as people who practiced a high level of purity regulations and regularly purified themselves. This was unusual because the level of purity maintained by the Essenes was traditionally expected only of the priestly class, but they extended these priestly practices more broadly among their community.

The third cause is the popularity of eschatological expectations. In the apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple period, such as *1 Enoch* and the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, there was an emphasis on moral impurity. Moral impurity is described through the language of ritual uncleanness (e.g., 1 Enoch 7:1; 9:8; 10:20-21ff.). Beate Ego emphasizes that concepts of purity are frequently articulated in non-biblical literature, particularly in Jewish texts from the Hellenistic period, notably in the Enochian tradition (Ego 2013:478–479).

Pseudepigraphical books from the Second Temple Period, such as the *First Book of Enoch* and the *Book of Jubilees*, provide additional insights into purity laws beyond what is found in the canonical Hebrew Bible. These written sources offer an additional glimpse into the development of these concepts. In these texts, the language of impurity goes beyond ritual uncleanness: sin makes people unclean, and it applies not only to individuals but also to society. An impure society equates to a sinful society, and such impurity could drive the world to catastrophic events. Understanding this view allows us to examine the origins of baptism in a different light. Why did the apocalyptic prophet John start his mass baptism? It was likely his way to save the world, or at least part of the world, because he knew that a defiled society would perish, and the way to save this society was to purify it.

The fourth cause is the increased influence of Hellenization on Jewish society. The level of Hellenization in Palestine was not much less than in the Diaspora. Hengel points out that Hellenization spread throughout the whole Jewish society, and it concerned practically all spheres of life, including religious (Hengel 1990:227). I do not mean that Jewish society just borrowed appealing rituals from the Greco-Roman world. It was likely an indirect and gradual process of cultural influence that first penetrated the Jewish mind and then influenced ritual practices to the point where people could barely distinguish the borrowing component from their original traditions. Collins points out that Hellenistic culture at that period was already an integral part of Jewish identity. It was like the sea in which they swam, yet they continued to maintain their distinct sense of Jewish identity (Collins 2000:261).

The desire to remain Jewish in the predominantly Hellenistic world was one of the reasons for shaping clear markers of identity. Paradoxically, Hellenization forced Jews to define and continually redefine their distinctness from others and reinforce their identity (Gruen 2016:41).

However, they constructed their identity in a situation where their minds and traditions were already Hellenized. Thus, even their construction of a distinct identity was possible only through a Hellenized perspective.

The evolution of the purity issue was part of a broader process that, on the one hand, included the Hellenization of Judaism, and on the other, the shaping of a specific Jewish identity.

The concept of ritual purity and purification rituals, like any other ritual practices, is inherently dynamic. Rituals are always in flux, and with the aid of written sources, we can observe the development of views on the conception of purity and purification rituals. Modern researchers in the field of Ritual Studies demonstrate that every ritual is in a state of progression and inner development (Grimes 2014:294). This is what happened with the conception of purity and purification rituals; it was developed over time, especially in the late Second Temple period.

Thomas Kazen highlights that the end of the Second Temple period was characterized by developed attention to purity issues in general life, with no regard for Temple visits (Kazen 2010:134). He uses the example of the practice of handwashing before eating regular food, which is one of many strategies that became common during this period among ordinary Jews who began to maintain a high degree of ritual purity in their everyday lives (Kazen 2010:134).

The developed regulations and explanations of purity laws appeared in written form only in the rabbinic period and were codified in different Talmudic tractates. There is a separate tractate in the Mishnah that is specifically devoted to the purity issue, called “Tohorot – Purities” (טהרות – *tohorot*). So, Jewish purity regulations were finally fixed only in the rabbinic period, while during the Second Temple period, there was a tendency to practice a higher level of purity regulations than before, but at the same time, there was room for different levels of observations and interpretations of purity laws. Ian Werrett emphasizes the increasing attention to purity laws within

Jewish society during the Second Temple period with the following analogy: Judaism was understood as a necessary ritual system that enabled the Jewish people to maintain their relationship with God, while purity is a state of being that made the relationship with God possible (Werrett 2013:493).

The issue of purity can be easily found in different places in the New Testament. However, modern readers often lack an understanding of the Jewish debates of the 1st century and are unaware of how critical the purity issue was during the life of Jesus. This unawareness makes people unable to see the real point of many New Testament stories. However, I would like to specifically emphasize that the New Testament reflects the increasing role of ritual purity in the late Second Temple period and shows the presence of actual debates about it. James Dunn states that New Testament passages testify that Jesus recognized the importance of purity concerns. Still, because he did not regard them as central, that predetermined the following development of Christianity (Dunn 2002:467). At the same time, the New Testament refers to purity regulations in so many places that, in some sense, it can be considered an exceptional source that provides us with a wealth of information and approaches to this problem. Let me illustrate some of them.

In the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:21–24), the author tells us about Jesus’s circumcision and the ritual purification for his parents according to the law of Moses, indirectly referring to Leviticus 12:2–8.

Καὶ ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν ἡμέραι ὀκτὼ τοῦ περιτεμεῖν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐκλήθη τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦς, τὸ κληθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγγέλου πρὸ τοῦ συλλημφοθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ.

Καὶ ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῶν κατὰ τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως, ἀνήγαγον αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα παραστῆσαι τῷ κυρίῳ,

καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν νόμῳ κυρίου ὅτι πᾶν ἄρσεν διανοῖγον μήτραν ἅγιον τῷ κυρίῳ κληθήσεται,

καὶ τοῦ δοῦναι θυσίαν κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον ἐν τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου, ζευγὸς τρυγόνων ἢ δύο νοσσοὺς περιστερῶν.

(Luke 2:21–24, NA28)

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

(Luke 2:21–24, NRSV)

This passage refers to the law described in the book of Leviticus 12:2–8, which I discussed above (see section 2.2). If we look at the passage from the Gospel of Luke and the text from Leviticus, it becomes obvious that the author of the Gospel of Luke put Jesus within typical Jewish frames, not only regarding circumcision but also following Jewish purity laws. Jesus’s family followed the same ritual rules as other Jewish individuals.

The impurity of the mother after labor was unquestionable, but the more complicated issue was whether the newborn child was also considered impure or not. Canadian scholar Matthew Thiessen argues that some Jews in the Second Temple period believed that infants were born in a state of ritual impurity (Thiessen 2020:34).

We see that the Gospels’ writers accept the concept of ritual impurity as not something exceptional but as a natural part of their religious life. At the same time, the Gospels portray Jesus as someone who frequently goes beyond the laws of purity. However, in these cases, it does not appear that Jesus intends to change the law; the context often presents a different perspective. It seems that the Gospel writers aim to demonstrate that when Jesus goes beyond the purity laws, it is not an attempt to alter the law but rather a manifestation of his ability to overcome it. For

example, corpses in the Jewish purity system were considered highly impure. According to Numbers, contact with a human corpse makes one unclean for seven days. During this period, on the third and seventh day, the person must undergo purification (Numbers 19:11–12):

הַנִּגָּע בַּמֵּת לְכָל־נֶפֶשׁ אָדָם וְטָמֵא שְׁבַע יָמִים:
הוּא יִתְחַטֵּא־בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִטְהַר וְאִם־לֹא יִתְחַטֵּא בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לֹא יִטְהַר:
(Numbers 19:11–12, BHS).

Those who touch the dead body of any human being shall be unclean seven days.

They shall purify themselves with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean; but if they do not purify themselves on the third day and on the seventh day, they will not become clean.

(Numbers 19:11–12, NRSV)

As we see, the impurity of corpses is clearly stated in the Torah. However, Jesus frequently encountered corpses (Mark 5:21–43; John 11:1–44; Luke 7:11–17). In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is taking the hand of a recently deceased girl:

καὶ κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ παιδίου λέγει αὐτῇ· ταλιθα κουμ, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον· τὸ κοράσιον, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε.

καὶ εὐθὺς ἀνέστη τὸ κοράσιον καὶ περιπατεῖ· ἦν γὰρ ἐτῶν δώδεκα. καὶ ἐξέστησαν [εὐθὺς] ἐκστάσει μεγάλῃ.

(Mark 5:41–42, NA28)

He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha kum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

(Mark 5:41–42, NRSV)

In the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus enters the tomb and orders the dead man to come out:

Ἰησοῦς οὖν πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον· ἦν δὲ σπήλαιον καὶ λίθος ἐπέκειτο ἐπ’ αὐτῷ.

λέγει ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἄρατε τὸν λίθον. λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τοῦ τετελευτηκότος Μάρθα· κύριε, ἤδη ὄζει, τεταρταῖος γάρ ἐστιν.

λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· οὐκ εἶπόν σοι ὅτι ἐὰν πιστεύσῃς ὅψῃ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ; ἦραν οὖν τὸν λίθον. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἦρεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἄνω καὶ εἶπεν· πάτερ, εὐχαριστῶ σοι ὅτι ἤκουσάς μου.

ἐγὼ δὲ ᾔδην ὅτι πάντοτέ μου ἀκούεις, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὄχλον τὸν περιεστῶτα εἶπον, ἵνα πιστεύσωσιν ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἐκραύγασεν· Λάζαρε, δεῦρο ἔξω.

ἐξηλθεν ὁ τεθνηκὼς δεδεμένος τοὺς πόδας καὶ τὰς χεῖρας κειρίαις καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ σουδαρίῳ περιεδέδετο. λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· λύσατε αὐτὸν καὶ ἄφετε αὐτὸν ὑπάγειν.

(John 11:38–44, NA28)

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

(John 11:38–44, NRSV)

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus touched the bier of a dead person:

καὶ προσελθὼν ἥψατο τῆς σοροῦ, οἱ δὲ βαστάζοντες ἔστησαν, καὶ εἶπεν· νεανίσκε, σοὶ λέγω, ἐγέρθητι.

(Luke 7:14, NA28)

Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, rise!”

(Luke 7:14, NRSV)

These passages show Jesus's interaction with corpses; his acts technically bring him into contact with the highest source of impurity. At the same time, it appears that he is overcoming it. A corpse was defiling a person due to its association with death. In Jesus's case, individuals who had died came back to life because of Jesus's actions. This is remarkable; the Gospel writers intentionally include such stories in a specific context to demonstrate that Jesus could change the natural approach to purity regulations. Not only does he bring deceased individuals back to life, but his actions also motivate people to reconsider ritual purity laws in a new light. It seems that the Gospel writers aimed not only to portray Jesus as a miracle worker but also to emphasize his capacity to change the paradigm. This shift in paradigm serves as testimony to his messianic work. Not merely the miraculous resurrection of people but the capacity to change the framework of the Jewish purity system. Thiessen emphasizes that even non-Jewish people were familiar with Jewish laws concerning corpses and were able to detect the deeper context of the New Testament texts. This context presents not only the miracle itself but also an understanding of the triumph over the forces of the dead: the ritual impurity (Thiessen 2020:122). In the Gospel of Mark, it becomes evident that every time Jesus encounters ritually impure people, they are cleansed of their impurity. Above, we already looked at the story from the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus touched the hand of a deceased girl (Mark 5:35–43). However, for the traditional understanding of purity laws, touching any source of impurity willingly or unwillingly makes a person ritually impure. Mark specifically points out that Jesus challenges the purity issue.

Jesus is touching a leper:

Καὶ ἔρχεται πρὸς αὐτὸν λεπρὸς παρακαλῶν αὐτὸν [καὶ γονυπετῶν] καὶ λέγων αὐτῷ ὅτι ἐὰν θέλῃς δύνασαί με καθαρίσαι.

καὶ σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἥψατο καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· θέλω, καθάρισθητι· καὶ εὐθὺς ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἡ λέπρα, καὶ ἐκαθαρίσθη.

(Mark 1:40–42, NA28)

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

(Mark 1:40–42, NRSV)

The healing of the hemorrhaging woman:

ἀκούσασα περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλθοῦσα ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ ὀπισθεν ἥψατο τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ·
ἔλεγεν γὰρ ὅτι ἐὰν ἅψωμαι κἂν τῶν ἱματίων αὐτοῦ σωθήσομαι.
καὶ εὐθὺς ἐξηράνθη ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς καὶ ἔγνω τῷ σώματι ὅτι ἵαται ἀπὸ τῆς
μάστιγος.

(Mark 5:27–29, NA28)

She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

(Mark 5:27–29, NRSV)

Thiessen argues that the inclusion of examples in the Gospel where Jesus faced purity regulations is not a coincidence but represents an intentional purpose of the author (Thiessen 2020:178).

Another recurring theme in the Gospels is the connection between ritual impurity and moral impurity. The idea that sins could make people impure and the violation of purity regulations could make them sinful was already present during the life of Jesus. However, this connection became a distinctive characteristic of Judaism of the Second Temple period and was previously unknown.

Understanding this context clarifies why the Gospel authors purposely emphasized Jesus’ ability to forgive sins alongside his ability to heal. At that time, sick people were considered impure, and their illnesses were frequently seen as punishments for sins. Therefore, in the Gospels, the forgiveness of sins is a step toward healing, and the final stage of healing involves purification.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tells a paralytic that his sins are forgiven, and then heals him. The statement appears quite bold, if not blasphemous, in a society that regarded forgiveness as the prerogative of God (Schnabel 2017:67). However, Jesus's words explicitly connect the forgiveness of sins with healing:

καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ· τέκνον, ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι.

(Mark 2:5, NA28)

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

(Mark 2:5, NRSV)

In the Gospel of John, Jesus heals the blind man and instructs him to wash in the pool of Siloam (John 9:6–7):

Ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἔπτυσεν χαμαὶ καὶ ἐποίησεν πηλὸν ἐκ τοῦ πτύσματος καὶ ἐπέχρισεν αὐτοῦ τὸν πηλὸν ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ὕπαγε νίψαι εἰς τὴν κολυμβήθραν τοῦ Σιλωάμ, ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται ἀπεσταλμένος. ἀπῆλθεν οὖν καὶ ἐνίψατο καὶ ἦλθεν βλέπων.

(John 9:6–7, NA28)

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

(John 9:6–7, NRSV)

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus healed ten lepers and sent them to the priest. Jesus did not tell them directly to go through ritual washings, but sending to a priest is a final part of the purificatory procedure:

Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ αὐτὸς διήρχετο διὰ μέσον Σαμαρείας καὶ Γαλιλαίας. Καὶ εἰσερχομένου αὐτοῦ εἷς τινα κόμην ἀπήντησαν [αὐτῷ] δέκα λεπροὶ ἄνδρες, οἱ ἔστησαν πόρρωθεν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἤραν φωνὴν λέγοντες· Ἰησοῦ ἐπιστάτα, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς.

καὶ ἰδὼν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πορευθέντες ἐπιδείξατε ἑαυτοὺς τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὑπάγειν αὐτοὺς ἐκαθαρίσθησαν.

(Luke 17:11–14, NA28)

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean.

(Luke 17:11–14, NRSV)

The mentions of purification in the New Testament correspond with the development of the conception of ritual purity, and there is also a quite evident tendency to connect ritual and moral impurity, which reflects the situation of the development of the theological thought of that time. Interestingly, the Apostle Paul, who was trying to open Jesus’ teaching to a broad public, released his Hellenistic audience from many traditional Jewish customs. However, he himself was quite consistent in following them. According to Acts of the Apostles (Acts 21:26), the apostle Paul and four other men with him follow the traditional purity regulations before entering the Temple:

Τότε ὁ Παῦλος παραλαβὼν τοὺς ἄνδρας τῇ ἐχομένῃ ἡμέρᾳ σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀγνισθεῖς, εἰσῆει εἰς τὸ ἱερόν διαγγέλλων τὴν ἐκπλήρωσιν τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ ἀγνισμοῦ ἕως οὗ προσηνέχθη ὑπὲρ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου αὐτῶν ἡ προσφορά.

(Acts 21:26, NA28)

Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made for each of them.

(Acts 21:26, NRSV)

Thus, the issue of purity can be easily found in various passages throughout the New Testament, reflecting the evolution of this concept during the Second Temple period. I do not examine the factual probability of these passages in this research because, for my purposes, it is not relevant. What is important is that the Gospel writers show the significance of ritual purity in Jewish society and emphasize Jesus’s role in overcoming the source of impurity. Thus, the New

Testament serves as additional evidence of the growing importance of ritual purity at that time. In addition to texts, archaeological findings indicate that practices directed at removing ritual impurity became more prevalent and standardized. People adopted more frequent ritual immersion and started to use specifically designed ritual pools to remove ritual impurity. In the following paragraph, I will discuss their significance.

2.4 Mikveh

As discussed above, the Torah provides instructions on how to remove ritual impurity through water purification (Leviticus 15:13). Consequently, according to Jewish purity laws, impurity is not a critical condition, and people are able to manage their impurity through special rituals that include water purification. However, for these ritual purposes, specific criteria must be met, and not just any available water can be used.

The term *mayyim hayyim* (מים חיים) translates to “living water,” which implies running water, such as a river or other natural water source. However, the natural water sources suitable for ritual immersion were not always accessible, but the necessity for purification led to the creation of Jewish ritual baths that could fulfill the basic requirements for Jewish ritual immersion. The lack of enough rivers and little or no rain during the dry season was one of the reasons for the creation of special ritual pools (Ricks 1996:279). These special constructions emerged as a phenomenon during the Late Second Temple period, no earlier than the time of the Hasmonean dynasty (Collins 2017:99). Before that time, people observed purity laws using natural sources of water. Historically speaking, there is no clear picture of how widespread immersion was before this period; however, it is quite evident that these practices evolved, and by the 1st century CE had become the primary, or even the exclusive, form of purification (Adler 2018:5).

There is no doubt that during the late Second Temple period, purification ritual practices became more formalized and developed. Specially designed pools were used for ritual bathing, a practice that held particular importance during this period (Lawrence 2006:183). The stepped pools called מקוואות – *mikva'ot* (sing. מקווה – *mikveh*) represent a practical solution for maintaining ritual purity. To follow Jewish law, these pools were connected with natural water sources via special channels. In the Late Second Temple Period, the widespread presence of *mikva'ot* can be observed, which testifies to the importance of the observance of purity laws among different sectors of the Jewish population (Magness 2011:16).

The design and construction of a *mikveh* met the basic requirements of Jewish law, involving the collection of water from natural sources such as rainwater or a river, the use of specific construction materials, and an appropriate size that is suitable for purification. The oldest *mikveh* dates back to the 2nd century BCE (Hoss 2005:4). During the following two centuries, the importance of immersion pools increased, and ritual immersion evolved from a rare practice to a commonplace ritual (McGrath 2024:38). By the 1st century BCE, ritual baths spread beyond Israel and were present in some communities in the Diaspora (Hayes 2020:642). It is important because by this time, most Jews lived in the Diaspora, but they continued to maintain their Jewish identity. The mass construction of *mikva'ot* became possible not only due to increased attention to Jewish purity laws but also because new advanced technologies made such construction possible. Jürgen Zangenberg highlights that the standardization and systematization of the practice of purification resulted from the development of technologies that were not available in the ancient period. Clear regulations on the practice of purification were finally established only during the Rabbinic period after a prolonged debate. Simultaneously, it appears likely that certain later Rabbinic regulations trace back to the period before 70 CE (Zangenberg 2013:543).

There is also a question about the influence of Greco-Roman bathing culture on Jewish ritual culture. Bathing culture, in general, was widespread across the Greco-Roman world, and Palestine was no exception to this pattern (Sperber 1998:58). The leaders of Palestine used recreational swimming pools, and technological achievements allowed for their expansion. The first Hellenistic baths appeared in Palestine in the 2nd century BCE among Hellenistic settlements (Hoss 2005:44). Cecilia Wassén states that the widespread presence of *mikva'ot* among Jews was likelier the result of the influence of Greco-Roman bathing culture than the actual desire to follow strict purity regulations (Wassén 2019:52–58). Yonatan Adler also suggests the influence of Hellenistic bathing practices (Adler 2018:20). I support the idea that Greco-Roman culture significantly influenced Jewish life and that people borrowed things they believed could meet their needs. Still, I would rather say that the new advanced technologies fell on the right ground. Attention to purity increased during the Greco-Roman period, and new technologies allowed the organization of proper purification practices. By the 1st century, baths appeared among some wealthy people, and there are even several examples of home baths combined with *mikva'ot* (Hoss 2005:44; Darby 2020:99). So, despite the widespread popularity of bath culture in Greco-Roman society, Jewish people had a clear distinction between hygienic and pleasurable bath activities and ritual cleansing, which was not directly related to physical cleanliness. Jewish *mikva'ot*, in most cases, were unsuitable for hygiene purposes because the water was unclean in a sanitary sense (Sanders 1992:225). So, ritual purification included specific requirements for the water, but these were not related to hygiene. I would like to emphasize it because some authors attempt to interpret Jewish purity laws as a form of traditional, pre-scientific knowledge derived from natural experiences and integrated into the religious system. However, as discussed earlier, we should not project our modern understanding of constructing artificial pools or ritual *mikva'ot*, as practiced

in the modern Jewish tradition, into situations that took place a long time ago. In fact, artificial pools, especially with water collected after rainfall, could be unclean in a hygienic sense and potentially produce diseases. At the same time, new technological achievements impacted the Jewish religion by providing alternatives to limited natural water sources. People began to use new technologies for religious purposes, which drove the appearance of a variety of *mikva'ot* during this period.

In the late Second Temple period, the concept of ritual purity gradually evolved, and new approaches to it emerged. The clear codification of purity laws within Judaism occurred only in the rabbinic period, specifically in the order *Tohorot*, which is part of the Mishnah composed around 200 CE. At this time, Judaism and Christianity went in separate ways. Although codification only occurred in the 3rd century, the existence of Jewish law codes in regard to purity dates back much earlier (Neusner 2006:167). Still, it is important to consider that Judaism was varied, and the process of understanding purity regulations and how to work with them took a long time. Before the final codification, we can observe various approaches to the same problem, but with a tendency toward further unification. Even by the 1st century CE, when people had already observed the complex purity regulations, Jewish commentators still actively debated how to apply biblical purity laws more correctly in daily life (Adler 2022:52).

Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that during the late Second Temple period people began to take the problem of ritual purity more seriously, and the approach to ritual purity became more instrumental. The building of artificial pools for ritual purposes and the increased attention to the observance of ritual purity regulations became an important part of life, even among ordinary people (Miller 2020:503). Thus, the evolution of views regarding the concept of purity went together with the development of ritual practices. By understanding the evolution of the tradition

of purification, we can see the bridge between the issue of ritual purity and the special attention to purification practices, and the subsequent emergence of baptismal movements, and then the formation of baptism in the early Christian community.

2.5 Proselyte Baptism

The practice of ritual immersion specifically for converts into Judaism, known as *proselyte baptism*, is another important question that I should discuss in order to understand the origins of Christian baptism.

Technically, proselyte baptism is a practice of full immersion into the water (טבילה – *tevilah*). *Tevilah* is a general term for any immersion, and regular Jewish ritual purification through immersion in a *mikveh* is also *tevilah*. In the case of proselyte baptism, the *tevilah* is not conversion per se, but it is a final part of the process of conversion into Judaism. The researchers who have studied baptism quite often refer to this practice as a historical precursor of the baptism from which Christian baptism originated. Joachim Jeremias concluded that it is possible not only to talk about analogies between Christian baptism and proselyte baptism but also about liturgical inheritance from one tradition to another (Jeremias 1963:27). This line of understanding proselyte baptism as a model for early Christian baptism, followed by Jeremias, was quite popular and supported by other scholars who study baptism (Green 1987:68). However, such a connection was questioned much earlier due to debates between Torrance and Taylor. Torrance stated that proselyte baptism was practiced before the time of the New Testament (Torrance 1954:154). However, Taylor, in his article, started to question Torrance's sources and argued that his claims lack sufficient evidence. Taylor concluded that proselyte baptism became a distinctive rite after its separation from ritual baths, approximately at the end of the 1st century or early 2nd century (Taylor 1956:198).

In contemporary scholarship, some controversies on this matter are still present, but the modern consensus does not support the view that the formation of Christian baptism was dependent on proselyte baptism. I do not want to leave this question completely aside, because the answer is important for this research and the arguments deserve consideration. Using a historical approach in this research, I prefer to rely on historical evidence. Historically speaking, the suggestion that the origins of Christian baptism can be traced in some way to proselyte baptism is problematic simply because the texts describing proselyte baptism come to us from quite late sources. There is no evidence that this practice for converts existed in Jewish tradition before the period of late Second Temple Judaism. Moreover, the ritual cannot be traced with certainty even to the 1st century (Taylor 1997:65).

Beasley-Murray was skeptical about the significant influence of proselyte baptism on the formation of Christian baptism but recognized the time priority of proselyte baptism versus Christian baptism and accepted the probability of the influence of Jewish theology of conversion on Christian theology of initiation (Beasley-Murray 1997:31).

Everett Ferguson does not see proselyte baptism as necessarily preceding Christian baptism, but in his opinion, the practice of proselyte baptism itself was developed from purification rituals (Ferguson 2009:79). An interesting alternative was proposed by Joel Marcus, who suggested that even if proselyte baptism was not universally practiced, it was already known among Jews of early-first-century Palestine, and it is plausible that this practice influenced John's practice (Marcus 2018:80). There is also no doubt that later, in Talmudic times, for converts to Judaism, immersion in a ritual bath was not optional but became a mandatory practice, as was circumcision for males (Marcus 2018:78). However, the acceptance of this ritual in later times does not confirm that it existed or was widespread in the 1st century.

The original purpose of proselyte baptism remains unclear. Previous scholarly consensus suggested that in the Jewish view, Gentiles bear intrinsic and permanent impurity, and proselyte baptism could be seen as a way to remove such impurity. However, Christine Hayes, in her book *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities* (Hayes 2002), claimed that we lack confirmation of this suggestion. According to her, such an assumption cannot be supported by our knowledge of biblical texts, Second Temple Judaism, and even rabbinic sources (Hayes 2002:352).

So, as we can see, there are still some controversies, but I would like to conclude the discussion on proselyte baptism with two key points.

Firstly, it seems that the formation of proselyte baptism may not have been intended as a way to remove permanent Gentile impurity. At the same time, proselyte baptism was the development of Jewish purification practices, which were expanded for proselytes as a separate rite. While the practice of proselyte baptism may not share a direct genetic connection with Christian baptism, they both originate from the same source – the Jewish purification practice.

Secondly, I do not think we should regard the priority of proselyte baptism as a fact without clear historical evidence; there is simply not enough evidence to support that claim.

Ferguson's view on this problem seems credible to me because it corresponds to the situation of increasing attention to purification during the late Second Temple Judaism. It is logical that the development of the conversion process into Judaism occurred within the context of specific attention to the issue of ritual purity.

Thus, while we cannot be certain about the direct influence of proselyte baptism on Christian baptism, we can observe that the roots of Christian baptism originated from the concept of ritual purity. The contemporary consensus is a view I prefer to hold, suggesting that despite some similarities between Christian baptism and proselyte baptism, it is not necessary to conclude

that the origins of Christian baptism came directly from the Jewish practice of proselyte conversion. Instead, both practices originated from a common source, namely the purification practices that, over time, evolved into distinct ritual practices.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated the important role of ritual purity in Judaism. However, as we know from the previous chapter, Judaism was not a religion that invented this concept. Across different cultures in the Mediterranean world, we encounter similar conceptions of purity/impurity and the special ritual practices designed to eliminate impurity. At the same time, we see the increasing attention to this issue during the Second Temple period, when Judaism was under the powerful cultural influence of the Greco-Roman world. Consequently, it seems likely that Judaism, as a coherent religious system, was shaped not only by other Mediterranean religions in its past but also specifically by Greco-Roman ritual traditions that penetrated Jewish culture during the Second Temple period. The increasing attention to the purity issue led to the creation of more elaborate and standardized purification rituals that played an important role in unifying Jewish society. At the same time, the theological understanding of purity became more complex, and we see a new tendency to connect moral impurity and ritual impurity. We did not encounter such an idea in the Torah, where purity regulations were initially described. However, in the Second Temple period, the understanding of such a connection was becoming more common, though it was still a matter of internal debate.

The increasing interest in the purity issue, along with new technological developments and a high degree of Hellenization within Judaism, is crucial for understanding the current topic because these tendencies represent the matrix from which later Christian baptismal ritual emerged.

The evolution of views in Judaism during this period cannot be separated from the interreligious influences of the dominant power – the Roman Empire, and the popularity of Greco-Roman culture and religious practices.

I devoted the last two paragraphs to the practical consequences of the high concern for purity in late Second Temple Judaism, which included the widespread dissemination of *mikva'ot* and then the practice of proselyte baptism. The widespread adoption of this practice is connected with the concept of ritual purity and illustrates the evolution of this concept within Jewish society. Even with the conclusion that proselyte baptism probably did not play an important role in the formation of Christian baptism, it is important to look at this practice in the broader context of the development of the concept of purity and ritual bathing practices.

To sum up, I would like to stress that it is impossible to understand the origins of Christian baptism without understanding the concept of ritual purity and its development during the late Second Temple period. Equally essential is viewing this concept and its associated ritual practices within the broader context of the Hellenization of Jewish society during the same period. This basic matrix can help us understand the development of ritual washing practices and, eventually, the formation of Christian baptism.

Chapter 3

Jewish Baptismal Movements and the Practice of John the Baptist

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the concept of purity and the evolution of purification practices. In this chapter, I would like to show the emergence and views of *Jewish baptismal movements* or *Baptist sects*. Such movements were a part of the landscape of Palestine in the late Second Temple period. The emergence of such movements is a result of the continuation and development of the concept of ritual purity in a new socio-political context. As a result of social changes, eschatological views gained more popularity at that time, which brought the emergence of new streams within Judaism. These movements were characterized by a strong emphasis on eschatology, and their ritual practices became a reflection of such views on a practical level.

The term *Jewish baptismal movements* was not widely accepted until it was introduced by Joseph Thomas in his book *Le Mouvement Baptiste: en Palestine et Syrie (150 av. J.-C. - 300 ap. J.-C.)* (Thomas 2010 [1935]). This book is the first and most comprehensive work on this subject. He describes different Jewish movements that share a common understanding of the necessity of water-based rituals, often as an alternative to Temple worship. The other main feature of these movements was their eschatological expectations. His book is a fair scholarly work with analyses of documents accessible to him. However, it is important to stress that his book was written before the Qumran discoveries. Nonetheless, his insights are so fascinating, and his classification of such movements can help us understand the Qumran community better. It allows us to look at the

Qumran community in the context of the Jewish baptismal movements described by Joseph Thomas prior to the Qumran discoveries.

In our contemporary scholarship, it is impossible to ignore the Qumran discoveries, and they are helpful for this work as well. However, the Qumran discoveries also created some problems for past scholarship. After the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many scholars focused their attention exclusively on the Qumran community and paid less attention to other Jewish movements. It is understandable that the Qumran discoveries provided much more information about Judaism at that time than we knew before. For scholars, it is often easier to confirm hypotheses using textual or material artifacts from Qumran than to reconstruct the views and practices of other movements for which we have only limited mentions in some writings. However, even today, we still cannot say that we have an undisputable picture of the Qumran community. One of the main controversies still persists about whether or not the inhabitants of Qumran should be equated with the Essenes. It is fair to say that the contemporary consensus shares this view, and the majority of scholars do not have any doubts that the Qumran community is likely to represent a community of Essenes. At the same time, this view is not something that is accepted by default by all scholars; some of them have doubts about equating the Essenes with the Qumran community. This situation obliges us to consider different opinions on this matter, and it is not necessarily a bad thing. If the consensus is correct, it means that we have a lot of information about this particular group. Still, for other groups, we have only some pieces of evidence, usually from secondary sources, and because of this, our knowledge is quite limited. Despite that, we should not ignore what we have now; even small pieces of evidence can help us better understand this topic.

The activity of Jewish baptismal movements is crucial for understanding the origins of baptism. Gerhard van den Heever suggests looking at Jewish baptismal movements as a

perspective from which we can see the context of the origins of the Jesus movement in its Jewish environment in general (van den Heever 2017:44). If our assumption is correct, it is a good starting point that can provide us with a better understanding of the emergence of Christianity that came to be from the Jewish tradition in general and from the Jewish baptismal movements in particular. The practices and views of Jewish baptismal movements were shaped under a specific social context, and understanding this context is very important because it helps us to see the roots and evolution of their views and practices, and eventually to have a better understanding of the origins of baptism.

In this chapter, I will observe the common characteristics of Jewish baptismal movements, including the movement of the Essenes. I decided to separate the sections about the Essenes and the Qumran Community. The section about the Essenes will introduce the topic and the current issues that we still have in our scholarship today. The section on the Qumran community will be mostly devoted to the question of how the discoveries at Qumran can help us understand this research topic.

At the end of this chapter, I am going to describe the movement of John the Baptist, who was one of the prominent leaders of the Jewish baptismal movements. His life and activity help us understand the evolution of Jewish purification practices and the subsequent formation of baptism among the disciples of Jesus. All of these themes should be studied in the context of the sociocultural and political realities of that time. The goal of this chapter is to show a new stage in the Jewish purification practices, the development of which is impossible to understand without knowing the sociocultural landscape of Palestine at that time. This is an important matrix from which baptismal movements originated within Judaism and developed later in the emerging Christian communities.

3.2 The Jewish Baptismal Movements

I use the term *Jewish baptismal movements* in the plural to indicate that we are not dealing with a single, unified movement but with a variety of groups and sects. The term *baptismal movement* was introduced by Joseph Thomas to point out the phenomenon that took place in Palestine and Syria from the 2nd century BCE up to the 3rd century CE. He applies this terminology to the variety of Jewish and Judeo-Christian sects in which ritual baths played an essential role (Thomas 2010:435).

While Thomas was the first scholar to grasp an important tendency in Judaism of the late Second Temple period and gave it the name *baptismal movement*, I suggest that, for clarity, it is better to use the plural *movements* instead of *movement*. He describes the phenomenon, which included many movements, but the use of a singular form may create ambiguity. This ambiguity was likely what made one of the authors of *The Cambridge History of Judaism* set aside Thomas's term and use *Baptist Sects* instead. Kurt Rudolph found Thomas's approach to be useful, and he generally followed Thomas's framework in describing the same movements, but he chose to refer to these movements as *sects*. I am not certain that Rudolph's alternative completely aligns with Thomas's view; the term *sect* in modern usage implies separation, whereas *movement* is more neutral.

Rudolph claims that the emergence of Jewish baptismal sects (movements) was the result of a more rigorous approach prescribed in Leviticus 15, and that this new approach also had the tendency to spiritualize ritual concepts of ablutions; such views were likely developed under Hellenistic influence (Rudolph 1999:499–500). Joseph Thomas recognized that movements were diverse and not totally united in their practices. Still, they had some common features, such as the

refusal of sacrificial and Temple rituals. Instead, they practiced frequent ritual baths, which replaced bloody sacrifices (Thomas 2010:60).

Thomas insisted that the abandonment of sacrifices and the recourse to ritual washing practices in such movements was not just a matter of coincidence but rather an important observed correlation (Thomas 2010:281). The separation from Temple worship likely happened in the context of political situations that affected religious life. Temple worship was inseparable from the priestly elite who served in the Temple. These priests were loyal to Roman governance, accepted collaboration with Rome, and obeyed Roman rule. Some Jews did not tolerate such a situation, and this is what we see among the Jewish baptismal movements. As a result, we can observe the absence of Temple worship and the presence of eschatological sentiments. Therefore, it is likely that such movements viewed the priestly class in the Jerusalem Temple as apostates. Consequently, the followers of such movements no longer saw the necessity of participating in Temple worship. Instead, they emphasized ritual bathing practices over Temple sacrifices. There are indications that certain Jewish communities did not consider Temple worship crucial. Thus, the development of individual worship practices independent of the Temple began decades before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, and this trend is particularly evident among Jewish baptismal movements.

Certain common features of the Jewish baptismal movements can be observed, but the problem is that, unfortunately, we have a limited number of sources that do not allow us to see a clear picture of practices and views within these movements. Thanks to discoveries in Qumran, we have the clearest picture of the views and practices of the Essenes. With some limitations, we can reconstruct the practices and views of the John the Baptist community using available texts and knowledge about the political and sociocultural situation of that time. This type of knowledge,

of course, should be applied to other movements as well, but for some of them, we only have little snippets of texts, and it is more difficult for us to see the full picture of their practices and views.

Joseph Thomas, in his research, studied different movements. Some of them emerged before the Common Era and developed later, and some emerged in the Common Era. For our task, which is the origins of Christian baptism, I would like to pay attention only to those who were known in Jewish society before the emergence of Christianity and, more likely, can shed light on the origins of baptism.

We cannot be sure about the precise number of such movements, but historical evidence shows that there was not only one particular movement but a variety of similar movements in Jewish society at that time. The most well-known among them are the Essenes, who were described by Flavius Josephus. The documents and material artifacts discovered at Qumran in 1947 likely represent the possessions of an Essene community.

The other movement was the movement of John the Baptist, which was described in the New Testament and the writings of Flavius Josephus. Fortunately, we have enough historical data about this movement, which can help us reconstruct its practices and views relatively clearly. We have much less information about other movements, and available information mostly comes from external sources, often from heresiological accounts (Rudolph 1981:6). It means that for us, our reconstruction of their practices and views is quite limited. For this reason, I am going to pay my main attention to those movements about which we have more information and can reconstruct their views and practices in a more comprehensive way.

In *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Kurt Rudolph makes a distinction between two main baptismal groups (Rudolph 1999). He names one group “Jewish ‘Baptists’,” while he names the other “Christian ‘Baptists’.” According to his distinction, the category of Jewish Baptists includes

the Essenes, the Baptists, the Hemerobaptists, the Masbotheans, the movement of John the Baptist, the Elkesaites, the Mandaeans, and some others that may be considered disputable. The Christian Baptist category, on the other hand, includes the movements of Jesus of Nazareth and the Ebionites. His distinction is useful, but the information we have about some of the movements he assigns to the category of Jewish Baptists comes from late sources, such as early Christian writings. This requires us to be cautious and understand our research limitations. For example, in the case of certain movements such as the Baptists and the Masbotheans, it is uncertain if they are truly distinct or if they are the same movement referred to using different terms (Rudolph 1999:475). The presence of such ambiguity should not scare us; it is possible that one day, we can get more information about such movements from new discoveries. Even now, we can still identify similarities and common features among these movements that emerged during the late Second Temple period.

In this way, we can consider that even if we do not know the exact number of such movements or all of their names, we can still be confident that we are dealing with different movements that share some common features. These features include the emphasis on ritual purification practices, the partial or total refusal of Temple sacrifices, and the presence of eschatological expectations.

At the time, the Temple was a significant marker of Jewish identity, so the rejection of the Temple placed such groups on the margins of the Jewish world (van den Heever 2014:149). At the same time, the existence of various groups that opposed the Temple and their growing popularity show that their ideas were in demand within Jewish society. The eschatological expectations that were integral to the views of Jewish baptismal movements were not coincidental. The people who joined these movements were disappointed in the local religious elites and longed for the

restoration of justice; therefore, the presence of eschatological overtones in Jewish baptismal movements should not be surprising. The research of all known baptismal movements reveals that they held eschatological views, and it seems correct to view them as Jewish eschatological movements. Why they were eschatological is a reasonable question, and in the next section, I would like to show this correlation and the causes of why they began to hold such views.

3.3 Jewish Eschatology in the Late Second Temple Period

In the previous section, I emphasized that eschatological views are a notable part of the vision among Jewish baptismal movements. However, it is important to acknowledge that the term *eschatology* may carry different interpretations and could potentially lead to confusion. While the term is often associated with apocalyptic themes, it is crucial to clarify that the term eschatology does not necessarily refer to the final destruction of the world. However, even the word apocalypse in Greek ἀποκάλυψις simply means *unveiling* or *disclosure*. The English word *revelation* for *apocalypse* is close to the word *revealing*, which also grasps the meaning of the Greek word and does not necessarily imply the idea of destruction. The same situation applies to the word eschatology. Eschaton (ἔσχατον) is a Greek term that means *the end*. According to the perspective of some Palestinian Jews, it represents their anticipation of imminent Divine intervention in the world and the end (ἔσχατον) of the current unjust state of affairs, which is expected to be profoundly transformed by God.

Eschatology, apocalypticism, and millennialism are related concepts, and the meaning of each term often depends on its designation by scholars. Some debates on this topic are still present.

The best way to understand *eschatology* in terms of people who held such views is to look at surviving texts of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. If we look at them, we can find the idea of

the destruction of the world in some Jewish apocalyptic texts, yet they do not represent complete unity in their viewpoints. John Collins has pointed out that apocalyptic literature can include various forms of eschatology, but the common equation of apocalyptic with an end-of-history scenario cannot characterize all apocalypses (Collins 1998:11). In this way, we see that eschatological views, as depicted in apocalyptic literature, present various scenarios of the future. Nonetheless, they represent the view about the end of the current state due to the imminent intervention of God, who will fundamentally alter the present situation. The gradual development of these views can be traced historically. Some shared ideas were already present in the Jewish prophetic tradition and then evolved in the apocalyptic literature.

Books such as *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, and *Ezekiel* already raised fundamental questions about justice, judgment, and restoration. All these themes are also present in apocalyptic writings. It would be correct to look at prophetic tradition as a predecessor to the apocalyptic tradition, and apocalypticism represents an evolution of previously existing theological thought. So, apocalyptic literature shares common themes with prophetic literature, but it also has distinct characteristics. One of its primary features is a dualistic worldview. In apocalyptic literature, the world is depicted as a place of struggle where forces of good and evil engage in conflict. However, despite the temporary struggle, apocalyptic literature gives hope for a better future. Eventually, the good side will win, suffering and injustice will be over, and the evil forces will be punished.

Most apocalyptic literature is found outside of the Hebrew Bible, with the exception of *The Book of Daniel*. Other apocalyptic texts, such as *The First Book of Enoch*, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, *The Apocalypse of Baruch*, *The Apocalypse of Ezra*, and *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, were well-known in certain periods but did not become part of the Biblical canon. Apocalyptic literature emerged in the context of Jewish anti-Hellenism. However, it is not difficult

to notice that this literature was itself deeply Hellenized, which demonstrates the profound level of penetration of Hellenistic thought into Jewish society (Collins 2005:43).

The eschatological views that can be observed among Jewish baptismal movements can be specifically classified as millennialism. James Tabor describes millennialism as a subset of apocalyptic eschatology, wherein people anticipate that, at some point, God will intervene in the world and usher in a new era of peace, justice, and righteousness (Tabor 2011:252). The emergence of this form of theological development was a reaction to injustice and an aspiration for justice. Tabor correlates the development of such theology with a historical crisis brought about by the challenges posed by Hellenization (Tabor 2011:254). Millennialism covers ancient Jewish and early Christian groups from about 200 BCE to 200 CE (Tabor 2011:252). Van den Heever classified Jewish baptismal movements as millennialist movements: “The pervasiveness of such millennial baptist groups in the Graeco-Roman world is attested to in such widely divergent sources as the Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hammadi and other gnostic literature, apocalyptic literature, Jewish-Christian material, and Apostolic Fathers, that is, apart from canonical New Testament texts” (van den Heever 2014:149).

There are some focal points in Jewish history when millennialism was a highly demanded view. One such event occurred in 167 BCE when King Antiochus IV desecrated the Jerusalem Temple by entering the sacred space and erecting a statue of the Greek god Zeus, along with sacrificing unclean animals. It is hard to imagine what happened to Jewish people when they saw the humiliation of their sacred space. God did not stop Antiochus and did not protect the Jewish people. The degree of intervention of Hellenization in Jewish life became a threat to their culture and religion. However, it is not necessary to describe such blatant events in order to understand that the Jewish people, throughout a long time of their history, were under one or another form of

colonial domination and experienced oppression. By the 1st century BCE, Roman influence had exercised control over all areas of life. It controlled Judea/Israel politically, militarily, economically, culturally, and religiously, and subjected the people to humiliation and terror (Perdue and Carter 2015:291). Of course, such oppressive domination could not be tolerated by Jewish people, but what could they do? One approach was through physical resistance, while another involved maintaining faith in God and hoping for divine intervention, which could finally bring justice and peace on earth.

So, eschatological views imply an understanding of global change, but such changes do not necessarily include the total end of the world or global cosmic catastrophe. Such ideas can be present in some apocalyptic literature, but apocalyptic tradition does not require such a vision. However, the presence of such views in apocalyptic literature created a misconception that all eschatological texts are some sort of prophecy of future cosmic destruction. Unfortunately, this misconception has been held by many theologians in the past. This happened partly due to the tendency to interpret apocalyptic texts more literally. Some apocalyptic texts, particularly those from the 1st century BCE, can look like prophecies about the end of the world. However, these texts circulated as literature about God's Revelation rather than descriptions of God's plans for world destruction. Richard Horsley suggests that the literal approach to apocalyptic literature is a mistake because apocalyptic literature cannot be taken literally. Such a genre of literature is full of metaphors and hyperbole (Horsley 2010:1). Thus, apocalypticism is more appropriately understood as a symbolic interpretation of the future rather than a literal prediction of cosmic catastrophe, even though it may initially appear as such.

As a literary genre, apocalypticism emerged in response to the Hellenization and Romanization of Jewish society. Jews felt unable to resist the imperial rule. The contemporary

scholar Sarah Emanuel emphasizes that the emergence of apocalyptic literature can be understood as a response to the trauma experienced by the Jewish community under the Empire (Emanuel 2020:37). Because of this trauma, the oppressed Jews turned to apocalyptic literature as a tool to articulate their views, asserting the enduring sovereignty of God over history (Horsley 2010:4). This form of literature attempts to comfort the audience that the end of the current oppressive and unjust situation is possible. Even though injustice may appear prevalent at present, apocalyptic literature maintains that such conditions do not align with the divine order and will end one day by the will of God. God is understood as a final hope that will liberate his people. It was a good explanation that helped to deal with current oppression and injustice, which gave hope for a better future. That is why this idea was so powerful that it was started in Judaism and continued its existence in Christian communities. This idea was especially in demand during the persecution of Christians. I am emphasizing the importance of the existence of such literature before Christianity, because the Christian narratives emerged as a specific continuation of previously existing views. Burton Mack points out that the Gospel of Mark represents Jesus as a person who delivers an apocalyptic message of the “imminent appearance of a new social order called ‘the kingdom of God’” (Mack 2003:42). Thus, although the Gospel of Mark does not belong to the genre of apocalyptic literature, it continues to include Jewish apocalyptic motifs that shaped early Christian thought.

It is important to understand that the appearance of this kind of thought occurred at approximately the same time as Jewish baptismal movements emerged in Jewish society, and similar visions existed among early Christian communities. The presence of eschatological ideas among baptismal movements does not mean that they invented them. The emergence of such ideas is a natural process of the desire to find a fair answer in an unfair world. At the same time, we can

observe that eschatological views within Jewish baptismal movements are presented quite abundantly. In this way, I would like to say that there is a noticeable connection between baptismal movements and eschatological views. Eschatological views were part of the views of people who belonged to Jewish baptismal movements. These movements might seem politicized because they represented some kind of inner emigration with the hope of a future transformation of society and the world. The reality is that the division between political and religious views did not exist at that time, and this is true for both Judaism and Early Christianity.

Martin Hengel specifically insists that groups that were formed in the 1st century CE were always political and religious simultaneously (Hengel 1989:82). So, in our case, the ritual practice was a reflection of political aspirations, like the desire for independence and justice, but their aspiration had a practical level, which was represented in their preparation for the eschatological end of unfair time and transformation to a just and peaceful time, which will be ruled by God. This eschatological hope did not require acts of resistance because God would intervene sooner or later, but required preparation and purification. This passive alternative might seem more beneficial for Rome than violent Jewish uprisings, which, from time to time, took place in Palestine. John Dominic Crossan, however, claims that between violent revolts from 4 BCE to 66 CE, part of Jewish society was involved in nonviolent resistance to Romanization (Crossan 2022:217). He describes it as an eschatologically based form of activism that is distinctive from the violent uprisings but also not passive and includes forms of action with readiness for martyrdom (Crossan 2022:217, 220). In order to prove his claim, Crossan critically analyzes passages from Josephus's *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities* (Crossan 2022:229–237).

In this way, we see that Jewish people under Roman occupation had limited but different choices. They could decide to collaborate with the Romans or rise against the Romans. Or they

could participate in nonviolent actions or find hope in the passive eschatological expectation of God's intervention, which could radically change the situation.

The violent uprisings against Rome were concrete actions that represented the desire for independence. In this case, independence was believed to be achieved through their own efforts and did not imply an eschatological vision. At the same time, the alternative of nonviolent resistance implies an eschatological vision, not in its passive form but in its collaborative form. In Crossan's terms, it is so-called *collaborative eschatology*. It was a distinct eschatological vision that required actions, but not violent actions. In his earlier book, Crossan argues that the distinction of views between John the Baptist and Jesus is based partly on such a vision. He is using the Gospel's dichotomy of Fasting and Wedding (Crossan 1991:259). John fasted because he was still waiting for God's intervention, while Jesus was feasting because God was already present among us and required actions from us. Jesus, in his view, was not the inventor of such a tradition but the successor of the existing Jewish nonviolent stream.

In this way, we see that eschatological views have a common basis, but at the same time, they can have different approaches to present reality and how to act now. What is important for this research is to emphasize that the Jewish baptismal movements were eschatological movements. The reasonable question is whether they called for some form of nonviolent resistance or were passive. The lack of sources does not allow us to give a definite answer about all of the movements. The water-based rituals that they observed were acts of personal and communal purification in the eschatological context, and it does not necessarily mean that they required any resistance, even if it was a nonviolent activity.

However, the eschatological view of the world by itself implies that people were anticipating changes, and their acts of preparation for the coming intervention can be considered

as acts of resistance, if not in a direct sense, then at least in terms of inner opposition to the current situation. Even non-public individual acts of purification in the context of believing in God's coming intervention are not only religious acts; they are religious as well as political.

The mass baptisms which were performed by John the Baptist were also demonstrative acts; baptism was an act of repentance and purification in the context of the expectation of the coming kingdom of God. In this context, mass baptism was also a visible action that could trouble the Roman elite, who might consider such practices as a possible source of resistance.

Thus, eschatological views on the world were not only one vision among others in the late Second Temple period; they shaped the development of Judaism and are especially important for our understanding of Jewish baptismal movements.

3.4 The Essenes as a Part of the Jewish Religious Landscape

The Essenes are probably the best-known Jewish sect that paid special attention to ritual purity and regularly practiced ritual baths. Even prior to the discoveries of Qumran, we had information about Essenes from different sources. Despite their limitations, Joseph Thomas used them and built quite a persuasive picture of the practices of the Essene community as people who practiced daily ritual ablutions, initiation ablutions, and purificatory ablutions (Thomas 2010:11, 19). Thomas considered the Essenes as Jewish, but he claims that their views evolved over time and were partly shaped by foreign influence (Thomas 2010:23). Despite the specifics of their views, it is not correct to separate them from Judaism; they were a part of the Jewish religious landscape, and in this way, they were seen by all authors who described them.

The main sources for us about the Essenes are the works of Flavius Josephus, who described the Essenes in both of his classical works *Jewish War* (JW 2:8) and *Jewish Antiquities*

(Ant. 18). The other sources are writings of Philo of Alexandria in *Every Good Man is Free* (*Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, 75–91), and from Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (Nat. Hist. 5:15). All authors mentioned the Essenes in a positive way as a celibate brotherhood.

The Essenes were not mentioned in the New Testament. Joan E. Taylor suggested that *Herodians* mentioned in the Gospel of Mark and Matthew can be identified as Essenes (Taylor 2012:130), but it is not obvious and is only an assumption about which we cannot be sure.

The first direct mention of them came to us from the treatise of Philo of Alexandria called *Every Good Man is Free* (*Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, 75–91). In this work, Philo refers to a group of Jews numbering more than four thousand, who are devoted to God but do not sacrifice animals (*Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, 75). I mentioned above that one of the distinctive features of Jewish baptismal movements was their abolishment of Temple sacrifices, and we see the testimony about that in Philo's work. Philo is arguing that they got their name from their piety. He did not clarify the connection, but in the original Greek, the term Essenes is called Εσσηνοί. The sound of this word is close to the Greek words εὐσεβής and ὅσιος. Both of them can be used as designations for piety. Géza Vermes argues that the various terminologies used by writers to describe the Essenes represent a transcription of the unknown word for the Hellenistic audience (Vermes 1960:427). It is very likely that the term Essenes is a Greek adaptation of the Hebrew word (חסידים) - (hasidim) meaning the pious ones. Whatever it might be, he claims that their name comes from their piety, and his appreciation of them is quite positive.

Philo describes them as people who live in villages in total peace and devotion. They can work, but he emphasizes that they do not engage in any activities related to war or violence; they do not manufacture swords or even helmets (*Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, 78). He admires them and looks at them as free and happy people. Philo also talks about the Essenes in his *The*

Hypothetica. Unfortunately, we know about this mention only from Eusebius' quotations because the work itself was lost.

However, the most extensive information came to us from Flavius Josephus's works *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Jewish War*. His description is similar to Philo's. However, these works are independent, and his account is more extensive. In *The Antiquities of the Jews* (Ant. 13:5:9), he mentions three sects among the Jews: Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Essenes. In chapter 18 of the same work, he provides more extensive information about their views and lifestyles. Josephus admires the lifestyle of the Essenes, describing them as an unmarried brotherhood who minister to one another and engage in husbandry for their living. According to his description, they believe in the immortality of souls, and he points out that they do not offer sacrifices because "they have more pure lustrations of their own" (Ant. 18:1:5).

In the *Jewish War*, Josephus once again categorizes them within the framework of three schools of philosophy: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes (JW 2:8:2). He is repeating his description of Essenes as Jews by birth who prefer an ascetic lifestyle and live in communal and peaceful brotherhood. However, his description in the book *Jewish War* has some inconsistencies. On the one hand, he says that they are ascetics who reject pleasures. On the other hand, he says that they do not absolutely deny marriage, but they are against the lascivious behavior (JW 2:8:2). Additionally, Josephus notes that in certain Essene orders, marriage is considered acceptable, but only for the purpose of procreation (JW 2:8:13).

It seems that among the Essenes, there were different groups; some practiced celibacy, while others were permitted to marry. However, it is also possible to suppose that Josephus aimed to portray the Essenes within the framework of traditional Greco-Roman ideals of an ascetic philosophical community where celibacy was the norm. Even if some Essenes were married,

Josephus may have chosen to emphasize their ascetic lifestyle, which was more understandable to his readers.

Josephus also describes the importance of regular practice of purification through washings, which was a common practice among the Essenes (JW 2:8:5). Another important characteristic he attributed to the Essenes is their readiness for martyrdom. Josephus provides an important example: during the war with the Romans, they endured torture, burning, and various forms of torment without succumbing to their tormentors (JW 2:8:10). This willingness to face martyrdom can be seen as a form of nonviolent resistance demonstrating their readiness to resist even unto death. Josephus gives us an idea of who the Essenes were, and his description is close to what we had from the earlier description of Philo.

The other important source is Pliny the Elder, who, in Book 5, Chapter 15 of his *Natural History*, describes the Essenes as “a wonderful piece of superstition” and notes that they live without women on the Western side of the Dead Sea (Nat. Hist. 5:15). It is interesting that the Qumran Community was also situated at the side of the Dead Sea, and such texts may be considered as evidence that the Qumran Community was actually an Essene Community.

It is evident that the Essenes were respected among the authors who described them and likely honored by many ordinary Jews. John Dominic Crossan does not use the term Jewish baptismal movements as I do. He frames such movements as “communities of resistance.” Particularly, the Essene communities he characterizes as “radical attempts to live faithfully and fully the Law of God, in justice and righteousness, in purity and holiness, when everyone around them, from their own high priests to their own people, was failing to do so” (Crossan 1998:462). As a result of their devotion and piety, such communities were likely respected by ordinary Jews

who were not the Essenes. I would like to emphasize that Judaism of that time was quite colorful in terms of a variety of views and movements.

Jewish sectarianism was not considered to be apart from Judaism. The Second Temple Judaism did not represent a united view on all religious issues. The situation in Judaism at that time was very close to the situation among early Christians. Some historians prefer to talk about early Christianity as early *Christianities*, emphasizing the diversity of beliefs and approaches without one particular orthodox view. So, following the same example, the Judaism of that time might be called *Judaisms* because there was no such thing as a normative Judaism at that time (Barclay 1996:4; Grabbe 2000:316). Such a situation lasted until the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. Before this time, the Essenes and the early followers of Jesus had their own features, but they were a part of Jewish tradition. After 70 CE, we see another tendency of attempts to centralize Judaism, mostly due to rabbinic influence, when the opinion of the majority was considered a norm, and Jews who were on the margin were not considered Jews anymore (Magness 2012:73). However, at that time, the Essenes, among other groups, were just different streams within Judaism, which were under different influences and internal evolution of their views.

3.5 The Qumran Community and the Importance of Ritual Baths

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 and the following discoveries of the infrastructure of the Qumran settlement had a great impact on scholarship. The dominant hypothesis to this day is the Qumran-Essene hypothesis. It interprets the material artifacts that were found in Qumran as possessions of the Essene community.

I discussed the Essenes separately, based on the information available in ancient sources. One may wonder why I divided it into two sections and decided to talk separately about the

Qumran community when the majority of scholars hold the view that the Qumran community represents an Essene community. I did it for two reasons. First of all, it is important to look at the given sources independently. Secondly, the contemporary consensus is still not universally accepted, and some scholars believe that the consensus has not been proven well enough. For example, a biblical scholar and renowned specialist on the works of Josephus, Steve Mason, does not think that the Essene hypothesis, which is applied to the Qumran Scrolls, can be demonstrated by reference to Josephus (Mason 2008:61–65). He is not alone in his opinion, but it is not the popular view; the majority of scholars still accept the consensus. However, in the whole corpus of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the word Essene never occurs. We can suggest that the consensus is correct, but we cannot be one hundred percent certain. At the same time, it seems to me that this uncertainty could be useful. If the consensus is incorrect, we still have material artifacts from Qumran that provide additional evidence of the widespread practice of ritual bathing among various Jewish groups. If the consensus is correct, it means that we have additional insights into the Essene community, including their beliefs and ritual practices. In this case, the findings support the idea that the Essenes placed special emphasis on the practice of ritual bathing.

In any event, all written evidence and material artifacts that we got from discoveries at Qumran allow us to consider the Qumran Community as a Jewish baptismal movement. Using Joseph Thomas's defining characteristics, the Qumran Community perfectly corresponds with his description of such movements. Firstly, the inhabitants of the Qumran community created their liturgical life apart from the Jerusalem Temple (Vermes 2004:27). Secondly, they paid special attention to the practice of ritual purification by using water as the main agent for purification. Thirdly, the community members had eschatological expectations: they believed in the imminent arrival of a day of judgment and restoration (Evans and Flint 1997:5).

The inhabitants of the Qumran community emphasized the importance of ritual bathing. They were strict in their observance of Jewish purity laws, their ritual system was much more complex, and they engaged in these rituals more frequently than other Jews. In most cases, ordinary Jews did not prioritize strict observance of purity laws, except for some obvious situations, like after contact with corpses, menstruation, childbirth, and before entering the Jerusalem Temple. Therefore, the observance of purity laws among ordinary Jews was occasional rather than regular.

In the Qumran community, the situation was different. The inhabitants of Qumran practiced daily purifications, and they emphasized their importance to such an extent that it went beyond the traditional Jewish understanding of purity. Archaeological discoveries at Qumran show the presence of many pools, which can be identified as *mikva'ot* (Magneess 2021:147). Frevel and Nihan suggested that in the Qumran community, the stress on purity regulation was a way to demarcate the ingroup as a pure community from outsiders (Frevel and Nihan 2013:19).

Not only material artifacts but also sectarian texts show us that ritual purity was a very important issue for the inhabitants of Qumran. There is a group of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q274, 4Q276–277, and 4Q278) that scholars specifically designate as *Tohorot*, or *Purities* (Amihay 2020:536). Other Qumran texts, such as the Damascus Document and the Community Rule, also address the problem of purity.

The texts on the purity issue clearly show Hellenistic influence. Sometimes this influence is so evident that it allows us to establish parallels with Hellenistic literature (Hengel 1989:47). However, it is important to be cautious with these texts. Ian Werrett noticed certain issues with interpreting the Qumran texts. He proposes that we should not look at these texts as a comprehensive representation of the unified views of the inhabitants of Qumran. Instead, Werrett

suggests that they were written at different times and by different individuals and, from time to time, disagree with one another (Werrett 2007:288).

The texts from Qumran were part of a large library of the Qumran community; however, there is no scholarly timeline that shows how this library grew and what factors influenced the inclusion of one group of texts and the exclusion of another. The views of the inhabitants of Qumran may have changed and evolved. My particular interest is the evolution of views on the purity issue. I suggest that within the community, such views could evolve, but there is no clear answer to how and when. It is only clear that at some point, the purity issue became the main concern of the inhabitants of Qumran, as both archaeological artifacts and a variety of sectarian texts clearly demonstrate (Harrington 2004:45).

Purification practices at Qumran were water-based and were directed to remove ritual impurity. Ritual bathing was not only required after defilement but also a part of everyday life in the community. Ritual bath purification even preceded each communal meal (Vermes 2004:32; Sanders 1992:359–360). Access to the community itself was highly ritualized and involved different stages, each accompanied by baptismal rituals (Nodet 2023:111). All contacts with outsiders, including Jews, or even with junior members of the community, required purification (Hayes 2020:644).

The presence of many ritual baths (mikva'ot) is evidence that the concern for ritual purity is one of the main features of the community. As I mentioned above, the high level of observance of purity laws was expected only from the Jewish priestly class due to their direct service in the Temple. However, in the Qumran community, the situation was unique; people who did not belong to the priestly class endeavored to maintain the highest level of purity regulations. In fact, they adopted priestly practices of regular purification within their community. At the same time, there

is no question about their negative attitude towards the Jerusalem Temple; they were known as *rejectionists* of the Temple, and they boycotted its practices (Klawans 2006:147). It seems likely that they saw themselves as an alternative to the Temple priestly class. They likely believed God was present within their community and that all members were considered priests, which led them to adopt a priestly lifestyle for every member.

The eschatological worldview among Qumran inhabitants is another important feature described in the document called *Community Rule*. This text is characterized by a dualistic view of the world, which is a common feature among eschatological movements in general. The Qumran texts, such as the *Community Rule* and the *War Rule* (*The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*), talk about two conflicting powers of the world and make a dualistic distinction between the righteous “Sons of Light” and the wicked “Sons of Darkness.” Horsley emphasizes that this text was produced in the Qumran community as a part of “an elaborate scenario of holy war against the Romans” (Horsley 2003:40). It clearly shows the anti-imperial essence of the community, whose members were regarded as righteous and pure, while the wicked *Kittim* (the Romans) were considered dirty.

The *Community Rule* also contains the idea that one cannot be pure unless one also repents of one’s sins. David Flusser first noticed the association of moral impurity with ritual impurity in Qumran (Flusser 1958:215–266). Ian Werrett appreciated Flusser’s impact and continues to stress the critical importance of connecting ritual and moral impurity among Qumran inhabitants, a tendency that was not evident in Judaism before (Werrett 2013:497). So, such a connection was developed, and we see the new theological tendency of the necessity of repentance together with the ritual of purification. According to this new vision, physical purification without moral repentance is invalid (Werrett 2013:509). The presence of this vision is crucially important for this

research because it helps us understand the origins of baptismal theology that was developed among Christians later. The connection between ritual impurity and moral impurity was not previously known in Judaism. It represents a later development that evolved over time in some Jewish circles, especially among groups with eschatological views. Despite the fact that such an idea was absent in Judaism before, we see it in sectarian texts from the Qumran community and among the movement of John the Baptist. Joel Marcus points out that the water rite which was practiced by John the Baptist (Mark 1:4) and in the Qumran sect (1QS 3:4–12) had a similar meaning of connection such practices with repentance and forgiveness of sins (Marcus 2018:28). The vision that allows the association of sin and impurity is a developed theological view that is becoming more and more popular over time; we see such a tendency within the Qumran community and in the movement of John as well, and later, it became commonplace in Christianity.

In conclusion to this section, I would like to stress some important points. It is evident that the members of the Qumran Community regularly practiced different types of ablutions. In order to do it correctly, they built special ritual pools. Regular ritual baths accompanied the life of each community member. The initiation bath allowed people to enter the community, and after that, members practiced daily ritual baths, which they did several times a day, maintaining the highest level of ritual purity. Their views on the meaning of such practices can be considered as a new theological development that partly corresponds with some ideas we can find in early Christian theology. Can we say that such views were inherited by Christians from the Essenes? Or maybe at that time, such views just became one of the popular streams in Jewish theology? It is very likely that similar ideas could be shared in some Jewish circles and very likely that they were part of natural views among Jewish baptismal movements, including inhabitants of the Qumran

Community. Whether they were the Essenes or not is still a matter of debate; according to scholarly consensus, Qumran inhabitants are considered Essenes. However, their self-designation, as we know from Qumran texts, is the name *Yahad* (יהד), which means “together” or “one unity.” The name can point out their communal lifestyle and sense of inner brotherhood.

Thus, the name Essenes was not used by them for their self-designation; rather, this word was given to them by outsiders like Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, and Pliny the Elder. Pliny pointed out the geographical location of the Qumran area. His text allows many scholars to suggest that the inhabitants of Qumran were a settlement of the Essenes, even if they did not use this name for their self-designation.

At the same time, as I mentioned above, there is an obvious inconsistency in Josephus’s works about allegedly different orders among the Essenes, where some were celibate, and some could be married. Interestingly, the Damascus Document contains practical community regulations concerning children, marriage, and divorce. In addition, the archaeological excavations in the cemetery at Qumran show at least a minimal presence of female skeletons (Magneess 2021:185). Different interpretations of this excavation exist, but the questions about women’s presence in the community remain unclear. However, there is also another possibility that among the Essenes were different groups, and it is possible to conclude that the Qumran Community was one of such groups. If this is correct, we can raise the question about the correctness of using the term Essenes in general. We can suggest that the word Essenes could be used as an umbrella term for some streams within Judaism, and the word Essenes did not represent one particular group. This problem needs to be studied in more detail in future scholarship, but what is important for this current study is to highlight that the views and practices within the Qumran Community point out the presence of developed practices and views that were unknown in Judaism earlier. They paid extremely

Careful attention to water ritual practices that accompanied each member of the community from the very beginning. They practiced immersion as an initiation rite, and they practiced different purification rituals on a daily basis. Their views can be characterized by eschatological expectations, and they believed in the imminent end of the world. Understanding such views and practices helps us understand the origins of Christian views and the Christian ritual practice of baptism that was shaped by previous theological and ritual development, which we can find in different streams within Judaism, including the views and practices of inhabitants of Qumran.

3.6 John the Baptist and His Baptismal Practice

John the Baptist is known as a figure who played an important role in the New Testament. However, the description of his mission in the New Testament was subordinated to the idea that he was the forerunner of Jesus. Because of that, he remains in the shadow of Jesus. However, we should not underestimate John's crucial historical role. He was the leader of his baptismal eschatological movement, which fits the description of Jewish baptismal movements. Despite the limitations of the available historical sources about John and his practice of baptism, we still have a relatively clear picture of his views and the purpose of his practice. By sources, I mean information from the Gospels and writings of Flavius Josephus. A critical examination of sources can be helpful in understanding his practice and views.

Flavius Josephus mentions John the Baptist in a favorable way in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. He considered John a natural part of the Jewish landscape, known for his preaching of righteousness among Jews, his piety to God, and his practice of baptism. John, according to Josephus, was killed by Herod because of his great influence and potential threat to raise rebellion (AJ 18:5:2). The Gospels portrayed John as a prophet who preached repentance and baptized

people. We do not have reasons to doubt that John the Baptist's practice affected subsequent baptismal practice within Christian communities, even if the practice and its understanding were transformed over time. The Gospels tell us about the importance of John. At the same time, there is reason to suppose that his role was downplayed in the Gospels. New Testament scholarship developed different criteria for examining historical accounts according to historical probability. Two of them are multiple attestation and the criterion of embarrassment. We can use examples from the New Testament that are directly related to the topic to illustrate how it works.

All four gospels describe the important event of Jesus's baptism. The same event, described by different authors, fits the multiple attestation category. We see it in the Gospels of Mark 1:9-11, Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:29-34. Let's look at the text in Mark's Gospel first. Mark 1:9-11:

Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρετ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου. καὶ εὐθὺς ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν· καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν· σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.

(Mark 1:9–11, NA28)

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

(Mark 1:9–11, NRSV)

The earliest Gospel of Mark described the event as neutral but showed the elevation of Jesus after his baptism. Other Gospels feel more embarrassed when describing the baptism of Jesus. Here is the part from Matthew's Gospel:

Τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ. ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης διεκώλυεν αὐτὸν λέγων· ἐγὼ χρεῖαν ἔχω ὑπὸ σοῦ βαπτισθῆναι, καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς με; ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· ἄφες ἄρτι, οὕτως γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην. τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν. βαπτισθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εὐθὺς ἀνέβη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἠνεώχθησαν [αὐτῷ] οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδεν [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ καταβαῖνον ὡσεὶ περιστερὰν [καὶ] ἐρχόμενον ἐπ’ αὐτόν· καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα· οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα.

(Matt. 3:13–17, NA28)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

(Matt. 3:13–17, NRSV)

In Matthew, John was reluctant to baptize Jesus (Matt. 3:14). Matthew seems embarrassed. This is how the Gospel of Luke deals with Jesus’s baptism:

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα τὸν λαὸν καὶ Ἰησοῦ βαπτισθέντος καὶ προσευχομένου ἀνεωχθῆναι τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ καταβῆναι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον σωματικῶς εἶδει ὡς περιστερὰν ἐπ’ αὐτόν, καὶ φωνὴν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ γενέσθαι· σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.

(Luke 3:21–22, NA28)

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

(Luke 3:21–22, NRSV)

We see here that Luke is trying to pass by the event by mentioning that all were being baptized, as well as Jesus, and then he is paying more attention to the elevation of Jesus (Luke 3:21–22). The role of the dove is apparently not accidental. Alan Streett points out that the Lukan account of Jesus’ baptism already put Jesus as an anti-imperial king, who was augured by the dove, which can be read as a mimicking of Roman Imperial inauguration where birds, specifically eagles, played a symbolic role as a confirmation of the imperial power (Streett 2018:64). Leif Vaage gives an additional example from Suetonius about the life of Emperor Augustus, when the Emperor performed a purification ceremony, a large number of people witnessed an eagle circling around him (Vaage 1996:289). Luke thus not only elevated Jesus above John but explicitly hints that Jesus received power as the true King who can challenge Caesar’s authority. Luke’s interpretation of Jesus’s baptism clearly shows Jesus as an anti-imperial king. However, Streett emphasizes that any baptism, whether it was a baptism of John, Jesus, or his followers, could be seen as a potentially subversive and dangerous act because it always offered an alternative for people to “adopt a kingdom-oriented lifestyle, and submit to baptism as a pledge of allegiance to a different Lord than Caesar” (Streett 2018:65).

The last Gospel, and the most theologically elaborate, is the Gospel of John (John 1:29–34):

Τῇ ἐπαύριον βλέπει τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐρχόμενον πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ λέγει· ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου. οὗτός ἐστιν ὑπὲρ οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον· ὁπίσω μου ἔρχεται ἀνὴρ ὃς ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν. καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ᾔδειν αὐτόν, ἀλλ’ ἵνα φανερωθῇ τῷ Ἰσραὴλ διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθον ἐγὼ ἐν ὕδατι βαπτίζων. Καὶ ἐμαρτύρησεν Ἰωάννης λέγων ὅτι τεθέαμαι τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον ὡς περιστερὰν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔμεινεν ἐπ’ αὐτόν. καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ᾔδειν αὐτόν, ἀλλ’ ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζειν ἐν ὕδατι ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν· ἐφ’ ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον καὶ μένον ἐπ’ αὐτόν, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. καὶ γὰρ ἐώρακα καὶ μεμαρτύρηκα ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

(John 1:29–34, NA28)

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

(John 1:29–34, NRSV)

In the Gospel of John, the author allegedly quotes John the Baptist, who believes that the primary purpose of his mission is to reveal Jesus to people. Jesus is presented as superior to John because Jesus is the person who will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33).

Looking at these different texts, I find it evident that in all these Gospel passages, the authors are uncomfortable with Jesus’ baptism. It seems that they want to smooth this event out through the subsequent elevation of Jesus. We see this tendency throughout all the Gospels, though it is less evident in Mark and more evident in the later ones. The authors do not want to present John as superior to Jesus. But this embarrassment tells us two things: by the criterion of embarrassment, it indicates a high probability that the baptism occurred, and it also points to John as a more significant figure than the Gospel writers wished to portray him.

Thus, we see that the figure of John the Baptist was very important, but what exactly can we say about his practice regarding our main topic, the origins of baptism? John the Baptist is often considered a founder of baptism, and the emergence of baptism within early Christian communities is simply impossible to understand without the figure of John the Baptist and his baptismal practice. However, John the Baptist did not come from nowhere. He was a very influential leader, but his characteristics, which we know about him from the Gospels and Flavius

Josephus, allow us to look at him as an eschatological prophet who fits the definition of Jewish baptismal movements. The movements paid particular attention to ritual purity and the necessity of ritual washings. John's baptism and his views shared some common elements with other movements. Comparing the views and practices of the Qumran community and John's movement, we can see some parallels and distinctions. The important common thing is the evolved view on purification, which implies ritual and moral purification simultaneously. It represents an evolution of views on the concept of ritual purity, a vision shared by John and the Qumran community.

This vision was common for local Jewish movements with eschatological views. John could have inherited such views from his predecessors, but he placed new stress on baptism and repentance as necessary actions facing the new eschatological reality. The purpose of his baptism is inseparable from the eschatological issue (Robinson 1957:189). Both movements were eschatological, and both practiced ritual immersion into water.

However, in the Qumran community, we see elaborate and repeated ablutions to maintain a high level of purity. On the other hand, John's baptism was a non-repeated eschatological baptism. There is an opinion proposed by James McGrath that there is a reason to think that John's baptism was a repeatable ritual due to its connection to forgiveness of sins, as people need forgiveness more than once (McGrath 2024:49). His view deserves to be taken into account, but I do not see evidence to support this claim. This opinion might make sense if we look at the baptism of John as a regular ritual practice. However, John was an eschatological prophet, and if we look at his mission from an eschatological perspective, there is no need to repeat baptism because his baptism was more likely considered a final purification before the imminent end, which would soon come.

John the Baptist preached his baptism and was regarded as a prophet, which means that people saw the importance and uniqueness of his ministry. However, in order to understand the origins of his views, it is essential to examine the influences that shaped them. While some popular literature suggests that John's baptismal practice originated in Qumran, this viewpoint is not widely accepted among scholars. However, some scholars find it plausible to speculate that the movement led by John the Baptist may have had connections to the Qumran community and that he potentially could have been associated with the Essenes. Marcus points out that it is likely that John's views were shaped in the Qumran community, including his belief in the imminent end of the world and his understanding of the connection between immersion into water and the delivery of the Spirit (Marcus 2018:45). If he is correct in his assumption, we can better understand the origins of his baptism. However, despite some common features, John's teaching has some important distinctions.

Firstly, John's baptismal practice seems more likely to be a one-time ritual, while Qumran's practices of ritual cleansing were constantly repeated rituals. They had an initiation ritual that looked like a separate baptismal practice, but initiation had different stages, and overall, even the initiation ritual was among other purification rituals practiced every day.

Secondly, John did not create a closed community; he invited everyone to take his baptism. The baptism of John focuses on baptism as an act of purification connected with the repentance of sins, which should precede God's intervention into the world in terms of expecting an eschatological reality soon. So, despite some common features, it is also evident that his baptism also had distinct elements. Thus, it is possible that John the Baptist could have been a member of the Qumran community before his public activity, and his baptismal practice could have been

under the influence of the community. Still, his vision and the aim of his practice had distinctions, and it can rather be considered a developed and rethought practice.

However, John the Baptist practiced his form of baptism without the intention to create a new, distinct religion and perfectly fit the prophetic tradition, which was a part of Judaism. The Prophets might seem radical and provocative, but they were a natural part of the Jewish religious landscape. The Jewish people perceived John the Baptist as a genuine prophet, and his practice did not look totally unusual.

Joan Taylor pointed out that John's form of baptism was perceived as another practice that corresponded to the general concept of rituals closely associated with ritual purification. At the same time, John's baptismal practice was distinct; it was not just regular ritual cleansing but an important initiation rite (Taylor 1997:63–64). This initiation is connected to repentance. Marcus stressed that in John's baptismal practice, one can actually find an important relationship between “baptism,” “repentance,” and the “forgiveness of sins” (Marcus 2018:62). On the one hand, this practice was familiar to the Jewish audience, resembling traditional ritual purification rites. On the other hand, John expanded existing practices, incorporating not only cleansing from ritual impurity but also purification from sins (Marcus 2018:78).

Furthermore, the uniqueness of his ritual can be understood only in the eschatological context. John's practice was a window for salvation for everyone who needed to be clean in God's age, which had already invaded the earth (Marcus 2018:79). James Dunn, however, emphasizes that John's ministry served as preparation for the coming messianic kingdom, which did not come yet but is near, and that the ministry of John is the ministry of a messenger who can prepare people for this new reality via his baptism (Dunn 1970:14). Thus, John's baptismal practice and its meaning were not separated from the eschatological vision of John and his disciples.

Long before Marcus and Dunn, Joseph Thomas pointed out that baptism was a necessary preparatory rite that allowed people who went through this ritual to enter the Messianic Kingdom, which was about to come (Thomas 2010 [1935]:275).

Some scholars, including Oscar Cullmann, have attempted to connect John's baptismal practice with proselyte baptism – an initiatory ritual for those seeking conversion to Judaism (Cullmann 1950:62). Cullmann suggests that John the Baptist took the existing proselyte baptism and adapted it into a new context. However, his argument lacks persuasive evidence that could allow scholars to connect proselyte baptism to the practice of John. Nevertheless, he rightly argues that John's baptism, regardless of its origins, evolved as a distinct preparatory rite that can be understood only within an eschatological framework, and this practice was central in his preaching.

John's baptism was rich with symbolism. The Jordan River, where John performed his ritual, was not just any random river but a location associated with significant historical memory. In addition, during the time of John the Baptist's ministry, the Jordan River served as a natural borderline of Judea.

This geographical boundary held significant symbolic meaning by itself, and its association with some events in the past made this place very symbolically loaded. According to the story from the book of 2 Kings, chapter 5, when Naaman had lepra, the prophet Elisha instructed him to wash seven times in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:10):

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֵלָיו אֱלִישָׁע מַלְאָךְ לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹךְ וְרָחֲצָתָ שִׁבְעַ־פְּעָמִים בַּיַּרְדֵּן וְיָשָׁב בְּשָׂרְךָ לֶךָ וְטָהָר:

(2 Kings 5:10, BHS)

*Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the **Jordan** seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean."*

(2 Kings 5:10, NRSV)

As a result of following these instructions, Naaman was restored and cleansed of his lepra:

וַיֵּרֶד וַיִּטְבֹּל בַּיַּרְדֵּן שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים כְּדָבָר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיָּשָׁב בְּשׂוֹר כְּבָשָׂר גֶּעֶר קִטָּן וַיִּטְהַר:

(2 Kings 5:14, BHS)

*So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the **Jordan**, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.*

(2 Kings 5:14, NRSV)

The Jordan River is technically a naturally flowing river suitable for purification purposes according to Jewish law. Additionally, the river holds symbolic significance, being associated not only with purification but also with healing. At the same time, serving as a natural border, the Jordan River holds important cultural and historical significance. If we take into account that John was a Jewish eschatological prophet, where symbolism traditionally played an important role, we can better understand the significance of the river Jordan.

This river was symbolically perceived as a borderline between illness and recovery, between the old and the new world; the new world that was accessible for pure people who went through John's baptism in the river Jordan. Crossan emphasizes the symbolic role of baptism as "a popular repetition of ancient Israel's coming out of the desert, crossing the Jordan, and entering the Promised Land" (Crossan 2007:112). However, this repetition was not just a symbolic recalling of events from the past. This recalling was connected with the context of anticipation of God's imminent intervention in the present, and baptism was a preparation for it. People confessed their sins and were immersed in the river Jordan, receiving moral purification through the symbolic physical washing (Crossan 2007:112). Crossan also points out the political significance of the place. In the context of John's message of God's imminent apocalyptic intervention, which he addressed to large crowds of people who gathered for baptism in this particular location, it could be perceived by authorities as a political subversion (Crossan 1991:235). Using James Scott's term, behind the baptism as a symbolic act was a "hidden transcript." This transcript represented a hope

of Jews who were a subordinate group under Roman occupation, but they dreamed about another reality, and baptism was a preparation for it. Scott argues that the inclusion of hidden transcripts in ritual practices of subordinate groups is widely present in many societies, and they are not just abstracts; they have had a powerful force that often has “provided the ideological basis of many revolts” (Scott 1990:80).

The baptism of John was unique in many ways. Though the ritual originated from Jewish ritual purifications, it was significantly transformed and became a practice with its own distinctive characteristics. In contrast to traditional Jewish practices of purification, the person could not perform this ritual alone but had to be baptized by another person (Barth 2002:31). John’s baptism was not intended to be repeated; its goal was ritual and moral purification. The necessity of moral purification in the eschatological context was obviously crucial, because it was a part of what was necessary before God’s intervention. Oestreich emphasizes that, starting with John and continuing with Jesus, baptism becomes an initiation rite that allows the baptized to escape the coming judgment by entering into the eschatological people of God (Oestreich 2002:36). John’s baptism was open to everybody; it was not closed to outsiders like the practices of the Qumran inhabitants, but required repentance. The idea that John’s baptism was connected with repentance and forgiveness of sins is present in all three Synoptic Gospels (Mark 1:4–5; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:3):

ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης [ὁ] βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ κηρύσσων βάπτισμα **μετανοίας** εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο πρὸς αὐτὸν πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία χώρα καὶ οἱ Ἱεροσολυμίται πάντες, καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν.

(Mark 1:4–5, NA28)

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

(Mark 1:4–5, NRSV)

Ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν, ὁ δὲ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἰσχυρότερός μου ἐστίν, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς τὰ ὑποδήματα βαστάσαι· αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί· (Matt. 3:11, NA28)

I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matt. 3:11, NRSV)

ἦλθεν εἰς πᾶσαν [τὴν] περίχωρον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. (Luke 3:3, NA28)

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:3, NRSV)

While the Gospel of John does not explicitly mention the forgiveness of sins through baptism, it is important to consider John's distinct theological perspective. The current consensus in scholarship suggests that John's Gospel is considered a later source compared to the Synoptic Gospels, and John provides a unique viewpoint on the subject. Consider his description of John's baptism in John 1:26–31:

ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰωάννης λέγων· ἐγὼ βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι· μέσος ὑμῶν ἔστηκεν ὃν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε, ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ [ἐγὼ] ἄξιος ἵνα λύσω αὐτοῦ τὸν ἱμάντα τοῦ υποδήματος. ταῦτα ἐν Βηθανίᾳ ἐγένετο πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, ὅπου ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων. Τῇ ἐπαύριον βλέπει τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐρχόμενον πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ λέγει· ἴδε ὁ ἄμνός τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου. οὗτός ἐστιν ὑπὲρ οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον· ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεται ἀνὴρ ὃς ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν. καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ᾔδειν αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἵνα φανερωθῇ τῷ Ἰσραὴλ διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθον ἐγὼ ἐν ὕδατι βαπτίζων.

(John 1:26–31, NA28)

John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks

ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

(John 1:26–31, NRSV)

In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist is an important prophet who preaches and baptizes people. However, his mission is not independent of his main goal, which is to prepare for Jesus’s appearance, who has greater significance, and who will continue the job that John has started. The Gospel’s text speaks for itself, and if we look at it, we see the obvious logic of the author that the baptism of Jesus by John is the main purpose or the culmination of John’s mission. John identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), emphasizing Jesus’ role in forgiveness. This description is distinctive from the Synoptic Gospels, where repentance and forgiveness of sins are inseparable from John’s baptism, regardless of Jesus.

In contrast to the Synoptics, John’s Gospel places greater emphasis on Jesus as the source of forgiveness rather than on John’s baptism. In this context, we observe the incorporation of the idea that repentance and complete baptism come through Jesus. The absence of this concept in the synoptic Gospels shows that it is likely a later-developed theology rather than a real historical memory. From a historical perspective, the Synoptic Gospels are considered more reliable due to their earlier authorship and similar multiple attestation between them. However, this does not mean that the Synoptic Gospels do not have their own theological perspective. Still, due to their earlier origins and multiple attestation, Synoptic Gospels are more likely to contain earlier layers of memory regarding John the Baptist and his ritual practice.

In the previous chapter, I examined the growing importance of ritual purification in Judaism, which helps us understand the origins of baptism. However, a significant turning point in the development of baptismal practice is the emergence of the baptism of John. His baptism was

practiced within the context of his eschatological preaching, which provides a new understanding of the practice of purification. It is not just a ritual purification; it is a new purification in preparation for the expected new reality.

However, the Gospels do not provide many details about how exactly John officiated this practice among ordinary Jews. The authors' main concern is the baptism of Jesus, and they focus their attention mostly on the theological meaning of this event rather than the ritual itself. Since the very beginning, Gospel writers have tried not to show John's possible superiority over Jesus, but rather to elevate Jesus.

In the Gospel of Mark, we see that John makes a distinction between his baptism and the baptism of Jesus: he is baptizing with water, and Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8):

ἐγὼ ἐβάπτισα ὑμᾶς ὕδατι, αὐτὸς δὲ βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

(Mark 1:8, NA28)

I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

(Mark 1:8, NRSV)

If we abstain from implying Trinitarian interpretations and examine the text *per se*, we must admit that the precise meaning of John's reference to the Holy Spirit in this context remains unclear. It is obvious that a subsequent theological interpretation tends to elevate Jesus's baptism in relation to John's. The distinction between water as a material element and the Spirit, which has nothing to do with the material world, suggests that with the advent of Jesus, a new era had commenced, and Jesus opened a door for a new superior baptism. Nonetheless, it is difficult to say what John really thought because in Matthew 11:2–3 we see that John and his disciples were not sure about the role of Jesus as the Messiah:

Ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης ἀκούσας ἐν τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Χριστοῦ πέμψας διὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· σὺ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἢ ἕτερον προσδοκῶμεν;

(Matt. 11:2–3, NA28)

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

(Matt. 11:2–3, NRSV)

It is interesting that their uncertainty about Jesus as the Messiah arose practically at the end of John’s ministry. It seems somewhat peculiar if we assume that John the Baptist was initially confident in Jesus’ special role. Why did he later begin to doubt it? Was he really confident from the very beginning? It is a serious historical question, but it is plausible that the passage from Matthew represents some historical memory, while Mark provides a theological interpretation rather than an accurate depiction of John’s thoughts on Jesus. It is evident that from early on, Christian tradition shows the superiority of Jesus. However, from a historical-critical point of view, it seems more likely that Jesus was actually a disciple of John, and the baptismal practice, which later became crucial for the Christian tradition, represents the evolution and rethinking of John’s previous practice.

Crossan suggests that the first serious rethinking likely happened after the execution of John the Baptist. He calls two related movements by two different names – *John’s baptismal movement* and *Jesus’s movement of the kingdom of God*. He suggests that John preached mostly divine revenge while Jesus preached the divine justice of a nonviolent kingdom of God (Crossan 1998:287). Thus, when people were coming to receive the baptism of John, they mostly viewed it through the perspective of the necessity to escape God’s revenge. Still, Jesus’ baptism offered another vision; it was an act of nonviolent resistance to structural and individual evil (Crossan 1998:287).

Unfortunately, the available sources do not describe John's practice in detail, and he undeservedly appears in the shadow of Jesus. However, the available information allows us to outline the main contours of his practice.

Firstly, John was an eschatological prophet who called for repentance before God's imminent intervention in the world. His practice was a visual expression of repentance in the context of the expectation of a new reality.

Secondly, his practice was conducted in the river Jordan, which met the requirements of traditional Jewish ritual purification and included full immersion into the water. His baptism still carries the symbolic Jewish significance of a purification ritual but began to be perceived in a new eschatological context.

Thirdly, his baptism was unique in terms that it was a non-repeated act. While there is a suggestion that John's baptism could be repeated, the lack of clear evidence supporting this assumption makes me doubt that it is a correct assumption. I think the traditional consensus remains more persuasive, and it is more plausible that John's baptism was unique and perceived as a final preparation for the coming new reality.

I left aside a detailed biography of John the Baptist and the tragic end of his life, focusing on his practice, which is crucial for my research. At the same time, his life and its ending, as well as the life of Jesus, clearly demonstrate that it is impossible to look at their religious activity without understanding the harsh political reality of that time. As Richard Horsley rightly points out, a significant problem in past New Testament scholarship was the assumption that Jesus was viewed solely as a religious figure, and scholars did not pay sufficient attention to the political significance of Jesus. However, even the form of execution of Jesus was not intended for casual troublemakers; it was used by the Romans specifically for people who were considered political

agitators (Horsley 2014:26). This is the reason why at least two main leaders of baptismal movements were executed.

John, who was not only a bright, charismatic preacher but also taught nonviolence, could be seen by authorities as a source of unrest (McGrath 2024:109). Eschatological prophets who preached justice in an unjust world always stood on the edge between politics and religion. Their religious aspirations led them to expect a better world from God. In the case of John the Baptist, people came to receive his baptism, believing it to be not only an act of personal spiritual change but also a preparation for a global transformation of the world. This vision was what troubled authorities, and understanding this context of baptism helps us better understand why John and Jesus were put to death. Roman authorities believed that killing the leaders of these movements could minimize the potential for a Jewish uprising. They were killed not only because of their religious activities but also because such activities implied a political vision that troubled authorities who wanted Jewish people to be loyal to Rome and accept the current status quo of Roman domination. In this sense, baptism was seen not merely as a religious ritual but as a religious–political action perceived by authorities as dangerous, and this is why the ending of John and Jesus was the same.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter showed the importance of knowing the Jewish context in order to understand the origins of baptism. This context shows us the presence of water-based rituals in the Jewish religion and the emergence of new movements within Judaism, which started to emphasize their attention to such practices. These movements have some common characteristics that allow us to designate them as Jewish baptismal movements. Their characteristics include specific attention to

the water rituals, which tend to be substituted for Temple ritual practice. They also hold eschatological views, and the emergence of Jewish baptismal movements is connected with an apocalyptic mindset, which became popular among some Jewish groups in the intertestamental period.

One of the most famous groups among such movements is the sect of the Essenes. According to contemporary scholarly consensus, the Qumran community represents the Essenes settlement. Evidence from their sectarian texts and material artifacts indicates a profound emphasis on a diverse range of baptismal practices. These practices included daily rituals of purification, with the highest level of observance, and initiation practices that included water immersion as an important component of the initiation process.

The other important Jewish baptismal movement was the movement of John the Baptist, who practiced his baptism for the repentance of sins in the context of the expectation of God's intervention into the world. On the one hand, his baptism was a continuation and rethinking of previous purificatory rituals. On the other hand, his practice had its distinct features.

John's baptism was a one-time ritual not intended to be repeated, and its significance was inseparable from its eschatological meaning. The expectation of the coming end of the current situation gave birth to the idea of the necessity of some kind of religious preparation for the new coming reality. In such terms, John started to preach his baptism. The ritual itself was familiar to Jewish people as a traditional form of purification. However, John's baptism implied the idea of repentance and forgiveness of sins, which can be traced through all the Synoptic Gospels. This idea was unknown in the traditional Jewish understanding of purificatory rituals. We do not see such an idea even in the late practice of the so-called proselyte baptism. Thus, John's practice of purification evolved under the influence of an eschatological perspective. In essence, John took

the practice of purification that was known before and transformed it into a new way, putting it into eschatological frameworks. In this way, his baptism did not look like an ordinary ritual, but rather, the liminal ritual which represented a transitional stage between the current state and the future expected state that would come after God's intervention. This eschatological context is crucial for our understanding of his baptism. John was an eschatological preacher who, within his eschatological perspective, reshaped and transformed Jewish purification rituals. Jesus inherited an existing tradition from John which underwent internal evolution and continued to develop over time. The connection between Christian baptism, with its subsequent evolution, and its origins in the practice of John the Baptist seems pretty clear.

In the following chapter, I will explore how and why baptism changed in the early Christian communities. It is important to emphasize that baptismal practices not only were maintained but also evolved within a variety of communities, including those labeled as heretical in some Christian literature. For instance, groups such as the Elkesaites and Ebionites, mentioned in Christian texts, were well known for their ritual bath practices (Thomas 2010:310).

In conclusion to the topic of Jewish baptismal movements, I would like to mention the group that continues to represent an existing religion today, known as Mandaism. The origins of Mandaism remain disputed. Some scholars argue that this movement could be considered an offshoot of the John the Baptist movement. This assumption comes in part from the fact that the Mandaeans revere John as a prophet and continue to practice the *Masbuta*, a repeated ritual of purification. However, despite some parallels and the important role of John the Baptist in the Mandaean tradition, scholars cannot prove this connection historically (Rudolph 1987:363; Barth 2002:30). Of course, it is impossible to be certain, but there are two important reasons to doubt the direct connection of John the Baptist with Mandaism.

Firstly, while John the Baptist is highly revered in Mandaism, he is not a central figure. Secondly, the Mandaean baptismal practice is a repeated rite, when John's baptism appears to be more of an initiatory practice (Marcus 2018:19). However, it is possible that Mandaism emerged as an offshoot of one of the previous Jewish baptismal movements, which underwent their own evolution and eventually became a distinct religious tradition, existing independently from Christianity and Judaism even today.

In this chapter, I wanted to illustrate how purification practices evolved over time under socio-political circumstances. In many respects, the particular circumstances shaped John's baptism, which became a practice of purification with new eschatological significance. This context was known and inherited by early Christian communities. Understanding this context enables us to trace the evolution of baptism from its origins to its subsequent development within Christian communities as a gradual process of evolution of ritual and the meaning that was attached to it.

Chapter 4

The Diversity of Views on Baptism in the New Testament

4.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, I explored the origins of baptism, looking at the traditional Jewish purity rituals and the emergence of Jewish baptismal movements. In this chapter, I would like to show how baptism was practiced and understood by early Christians. Having its roots in the Jewish practice of purification and influenced by eschatological views of Jewish baptismal movements, the early Christian approach to baptism very early became Christocentric. Christ was put at the center of baptism, and it was something that made Christian baptism distinct from other similar practices. However, it does not mean that the approach to baptism in different Christian communities was exactly the same. Giving tribute to James Dunn's approach that early Christians were united and diverse at the same time, it is important to stress that diversity could cover not only ritual practice but also understanding of the role of Christ. James Dunn sees a pattern of unity among early Christian communities through the exaltation of Jesus, but the communities differ in their emphasis. For example, Palestinian Jewish Christians stressed that "Jesus is the Messiah," Hellenistic Jewish Christians stressed that "Jesus is the Son of God," and Gentile Christians stressed that "Jesus is Lord." These formulas represent the earliest faith, and their short form and variations left a place for different interpretations (Dunn 1990:58–59).

Thus, the diversity in early Christian communities in the 1st century CE was a given norm. It also had a growing diversity due to the fact that Christian communities consisted of people who came from different religious backgrounds. It is not surprising that Jewish Christian groups and those who were converted from paganism had different cultural heritages, which affected their views. The culturally diverse people looked at the same acts from different perspectives, and those

perspectives shaped their understanding of ritual practices. The earliest followers of Jesus were Jews, and they looked at baptism from a Jewish point of view. Baptism was carried out by Jesus's disciples, who were aware of Jewish purification practices and the existence of Jewish baptismal movements. Because the origins of the baptismal ritual were genetically connected with the practice of John the Baptist, the early Christians looked at their baptism as a continuation of the previous tradition.

However, during the 1st century, Christians gradually separated from Judaism, and we observe trends toward the formation of distinctive Christian rituals with specific theology, which, at the time, tended to be more united. The formation of early Christian theology is an inseparable process from the formation of Christian identity, which becomes distinctive from previous Jewish identity. Thus, this process of formation of a new identity in many ways shaped early Christian communities, their understanding of ritual practices, and their theological meaning. It did not happen suddenly, and the formation of Christian baptism did not stop in the 1st century CE; it was an ongoing process that lasted for a long period of time. However, the purpose of this study is to look at the evolution of baptism in the 1st century. This period is crucial in terms of understanding how Christian baptism was initially formed and developed. The only challenge for the task of this research is the limitation of textual sources.

The earliest texts that can provide us with any reliable information on baptism exist in the New Testament. Fortunately for us, the New Testament consists of different testimonies on baptism and different points of view on it. Regarding this research topic, it is crucial to understand that Christian baptismal practices were not fixed at the time when New Testament texts were written. If we imagine that we had the chance to visit the first century CE, we would likely observe different types of baptismal ritual in different communities, and different understandings of the meaning of

baptism. Thus, early Christian baptism was not a united ritual; there were different approaches to baptism that were practiced in different communities, but at that time, baptism was in the process of formation towards subsequent unification.

Therefore, baptism in the 1st century was widely diverse. This might seem odd today, when Christian baptism looks like a largely unified practice. Distinctions between denominations certainly remain, and the current diversity is real. At the same time, the essentials are broadly shared, which was not necessarily the case during the first decades among different Christian communities, when diversity in views on the ritual and its performance was much greater, even in comparison with the diversity that we know today in modern churches.

It is no wonder, but rather evident, that any ritual can be changed over the years due to different causes; it is commonly dependent on the evolution of theological thought and practical reasons. I do not think that one would argue that modern baptismal practices are identical to practices of early Christian communities. At the same time, I do not think that most modern Christians are aware of how baptism looked and was understood in the 1st century CE.

Since Walter Bauer's significant research, we know that early Christianity should not be judged in terms of our time, and we should not look back from our biased perspective, which is a product of developed tradition (Bauer 1971:XII). Bauer, in his book, showed quite well that terms such as orthodoxy and heresy were not relevant for the early period of Christianity. The obvious question is, if there was no normative Christianity, can we say anything with certainty about normative baptism in the 1st century? This is the main question I want to address in this chapter. What can we say about baptism at that time? If distinctive rituals existed, how did they differ, and what did they have in common? Was there any tendency to unify the ritual in the first century? If

so, on what basis? These questions could be answered from a historical perspective. However, the evolution of Christian baptism in the 1st century is still a challenging scholarly issue.

On the one hand, it is easier to look at the evolution of baptism through a long-term perspective when we get a chance to compare many sources. Still, when it comes to the 1st century CE, we have to deal with the limited sources available in the New Testament. The later sources, such as the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, Clement, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr, are important because they show how baptism developed over time, but they do not work for our task, which is the formation of baptism in early Christian communities.

The main problem is that for the first century, we have quite limited sources. Still, our common knowledge of the history of the region can be helpful, but when it comes to texts, we should admit that in order to understand the evolution of Christian baptism in the 1st century, we should rely on different texts from the New Testament as main sources. New Testament texts are not bad sources per se, but they are problematic for different reasons.

First of all, they cannot be considered as representations of the sheer history, but they reflect constructed views (mythmaking) of particular communities, which involved dependence on earlier meaningful texts (intertextuality) and the social contexts from which these texts emerged (Cameron 1996:39). One may suggest that if we recognize that the New Testament is a collection of different views, it is likely that among them could be found the original one. It is possible, but if we want to be totally honest, we should not be afraid to state that we cannot be sure even about that. All New Testament texts are products of later development and perceiving them simply as a representation of original Christian views would be very uncritical and undermine the principle of historical neutrality. Using the historical-critical approach in this work, I would like to stress that Early Christian Studies and New Testament Studies are overlapping disciplines, but they are

distinct. Van den Heever emphasizes that Early Christian Studies, as a discipline, has more research tools than a much narrower field, such as New Testament Studies (van den Heever 2020:1–3). The New Testament is an important source for historians, but in addition to it, a historian is able to use other tools, including interaction with other relevant fields and subfields. It provides an opportunity to examine the text through a broader perspective, which makes it possible to establish a more probable understanding of the situation that occurred many years ago. The critical approach does not exclude the fact that the New Testament is an important source. Still, I would like to stress that even if we had the possibility of obtaining all original copies of New Testament texts, they still could not be perceived as a clear representation of historical facts, but rather as a representation of the views of the particular people who wrote these texts.

Secondly, the earliest New Testament texts are the epistles of Paul, who was not a direct follower of Jesus, and he created his specific theology, which focused on Gentile converts. His vision does not reflect the variety of other views that existed even in Paul's time among more conservative Jewish Christians.

Thirdly, the other sources, which in some places seem probably as a reflection of the early views, were still written later than Paul's epistles, and it is important to be cautious, because they could include later theological development rather than the representation of the original view. At the same time, the contemporary critical study of the New Testament texts developed critical tools that allow a critical examination of later written texts in order to extract the original view and establish historical facts with a high level of probability. That is what critical study does with relative success in a quest for a Historical Jesus or in the study of early Christianity. My goal is more modest; I want to show the formation and development of baptism in the 1st century, and,

acknowledging all limitations, it is possible to establish a relatively close picture of baptism and its development during this time.

The first century is the period of the formation of baptism as a practical ritual, and it is also the formation of its theological understanding. The Christian meaning of baptism constantly evolved; I am arguing that this evolution did not start in the 1st century but was a continuation of a long process; it was the evolution from repeated purity rituals intended for ritual cleansing toward baptismal movements and, finally, the formation of baptism in the early Christian tradition. James Dunn argues that Christian baptism comes out of the ritual act performed by John the Baptist, and his practice can be understood as an adaptation of Jewish ritual washings (Dunn 1990:152). This evolution and reinterpretation of water-based rituals was an ongoing process within Judaism during this long period of time, and it was then reinterpreted again by Christian tradition (Marcus 2018:113). However, the final interpretation of the meaning of baptism is not what happened right away after Jesus. The performance of baptism in the earliest Christian communities carried the eschatological meaning, which was initially inherited from John's baptism (Dunn 1990:171). The moving of Christianity towards the Hellenistic audience diminished eschatological emphasis and increased the emphasis on union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Dunn 1990:172). It is no wonder that in early Christian communities, the previous religious background of their members played an important role in affecting formation rituals and understanding of their meanings.

The purpose of this research is to look at baptism from an evolutionary perspective as a ritual that was developed over time. However, as I showed above, understanding this development through a strict timeline perspective might be challenging because the same time period can give us different perspectives on baptism depending on which communities the texts were created. So,

if we have a particular textual testimony about baptism, it is also important to know to whom this testimony was addressed and in which community it was written. Such knowledge allows us to understand that baptism could vary; its understanding or emphasis on the meaning highly depends on factors such as the previous background of a particular Christian community.

The good thing is that the historical perspective allows us to look at texts about baptism as products that were written in different communities and represent different approaches. Our contemporary knowledge makes it possible to unveil the variety of views on baptism in the 1st century and look at how this variety was evolving towards the unification of the ritual. For this reason, in this chapter, I examine our sources, which are the baptism descriptions in the texts of the New Testament, as products of particular communities. Their content depends on the background of the communities where they were created, and it affects the views on baptism, which these texts represent. I prefer to look at these texts as cultural artifacts that are helpful sources in addition to general knowledge of the historical and religious situations that took place at the time when these texts were produced.

Acknowledging that even texts that were produced at the same period of time can have different views on the problem, I still prefer to look at texts in the time sequence order. In this way, we are able to see that despite the variety of initial approaches, the ritual was gradually moving toward unification. Thanks to the contemporary research in the field of the New Testament, we are able to look at texts from historical and time sequence perspectives. By this logic, it will be correct to put the texts of the Apostle Paul first and then present other texts by using the right time sequence perspective. However, I decided to put the Gospels first, despite their later origins. They describe the events that happened during the life of Jesus, which could be considered as an introduction to the following study of baptism in early Christian communities. At the same time, the Gospels

themselves are the reflections of the views of the communities that created them. However, the critical approach could help us to extract the historical memory presented in the Gospels from the author's interpretations.

The research on baptism is quite a narrow topic; it does not require a deep exegetical study of the texts. I am using texts only as testimonies on baptism, which are helpful for our historical understanding of the origins and the development of baptism. After the Gospels, I am moving to the genuine texts of the Apostle Paul on baptism and then to other sources.

At the outset, I would like to say that I realize that the scholarly consensus in regard to the sequence of the texts is not a universal truth. The consensus represents the common agreement between the majority of scholars, but they could have slightly different opinions regarding some books. Some contemporary scholars, such as Nina Livesey, challenge the traditional scholarly consensus concerning the authenticity of the Pauline letters and, consequently, their traditional dating (Livesey 2024). I do not intend to change the consensus or to enter the existing debates. This is why, in this research, I am mostly relying on Marcus Borg's work *Evolution of the Word. The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written* (Borg 2013). This is not the only work I have consulted, and I will also reference others. However, for the sake of consistency, I find Borg's book particularly useful. This book represents the scholarly approach to the time sequence of the New Testament texts and the main achievements of contemporary scholarship in this regard. Applying a historical-critical perspective to the study of the origins and evolution of baptism is crucial because it is the way to understand the formation of baptism and the causes that affected that process.

4.2 Baptism in the Gospels

Despite scholarly agreement that the Gospels were written much later than some of the epistles, they describe the earliest events and may contain important layers of real historical memory embedded in the author's narrative. The value of the Gospels is important in terms of providing historical information on the initial baptism of John and reflecting later understanding among the early Christian community.

According to the scholarly consensus, the first Gospel to be written is **Mark's** Gospel. This Gospel is an important testimony of the early Christian community, dating to the time of the Jewish War, likely around 70 CE, after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (Marcus 2000:38). The events that happened during this period made an impact on the author's understanding of the story. He likely used the earliest available sources in written or maybe oral form and integrated them into his complete narrative.

The Gospel of Mark also clearly shows the author's knowledge of Hellenistic culture. At the same time, the text itself was written in quite poor Greek, which includes Latin and Semitic interference, which points out that this language was not native and likely was obtained as a result of the cultural colonization of Palestine (Myers 1988:95). It seems likely that the tragic events of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple drove the author to write the comprehensive story of Jesus. However, he frames this story as unfinished, and the story will be complete with the second coming of Jesus. Such a vision of the future was especially emphasized in chapter thirteen. Mark is unique in terms of looking at the second coming of Jesus, as previous Jewish eschatologists looked at the imminent intervention of God into the world and the end of the current age of injustice. As Marcus Borg puts it, "The Gospel of Mark is marked by imminent eschatology" (Borg 2013:155). Thus, if we look at the Gospel of Mark and Mark's expectation of the second

coming of Jesus, we can see the same idea that we know from traditional Jewish eschatology about divine intervention into the world, but in the case of Mark, this idea becomes Christocentric, Jesus will come again into the world in order to fix it in the more appropriate direction.

Regarding our topic in the Gospel of Mark, we encounter the importance of the baptismal mission of John and the baptism of Jesus by John (Mark 1:4–11). Unlike the leaders of other baptismal movements, John did not establish a closed community like the one at Qumran; he preached the necessity of baptism for everyone, and his mission was quite successful; people were coming to him from different places to accept his baptism. Unfortunately, Mark did not provide many details about how the ritual itself was conducted. However, we can be certain that he was performing it in the Jordan River, and it included repentance and forgiveness of sins (see Mark 1:4–5 and my previous discussion in section 3.6).

The text of Mark 1:4–5 provides the most important information about John, who appeared in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance. It also describes people who came to John, confessed their sins, and were baptized. We do not know exactly how this confession of sins happened; it is possible that it was some sort of public confession, but likely not in a standardized form, but rather close to a spontaneous charismatic confession of sins, which were believed to be removed through water baptism. This emphasis on the baptism of repentance is important because historically, the connection between ritual impurity and moral impurity was not common in Judaism. However, such a connection is noticeably present in Jewish eschatological movements, and John, as an eschatological prophet, believed that baptism is necessary for repentance of sins in the face of the coming new reality. Despite the Gospel's image of a desert recluse, John was not seen as an outsider of Jewish society; many people recognized the importance of his mission, and even Jewish elites were afraid to question his authority due to his popularity (Mark 11:30–33).

The important passage concerning baptism is found in Mark 10:38, where Jesus speaks of a baptism of suffering:

ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· οὐκ οἴδατε τί αἰτεῖσθε. δύνασθε πιεῖν τὸ ποτήριον ὃ ἐγὼ πίνω ἢ τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι
(Mark 10:38, NA28)

But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

(Mark 10:38, NRSV)

The common explanation for this passage is that baptism, in this case, is the figurative description of the immersion in troubles, and the mention of the cup is a common expression of undeserved suffering and even martyrdom (Marcus 2009:747). Unfortunately, many commentators gloss over this passage concerning baptism, but I suggest that this passage is a direct reflection of the early Christian community’s views on the meaning of baptism. Baptism is not only a ritual of forgiveness; it is a life-changing experience that can lead to martyrdom, and the acceptance of baptism includes readiness for possible martyrdom. This theme is more explicit in Paul’s letters, which I will discuss in detail below, but I suggest that both this passage and Mark 10:39 reflect the experience of the early Christian community. They reflect that baptism is not just a religious ritual, but a crucial life-changing act that represents readiness for possible martyrdom. It is not surprising because, from the very beginning, we see that John was killed, Jesus was killed, and many of the apostles were killed. If we take into account that the Gospel of Mark was likely written during the Jewish War, it is understandable that reflection on the meaning of baptism from early on started to include the real possibility of suffering and even death.

The other place in the Gospel of Mark that highlights the importance of baptism is the last chapter (Mark 16:16):

ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται.

(Mark 16:16, NA28)

The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.

(Mark 16:16, NRSV)

On the one hand, these final words are important for this study because they point out Jesus's direction to baptize people and confirm the importance of baptism. On the other hand, this passage is problematic. It is part of the so-called Longer Ending of Mark that includes the last 12 verses of Mark's Gospel (16:9–20) but lacks support in the earliest manuscripts (Metzger and Ehrman 2005:322). However, there is still no agreement on the origins of this passage; it could exist as a parallel text that was included in Mark's corpus later, there is a possibility that it was presented in oral tradition before it was fixed as a text, or it could be a later reflection of the Christian community of the events of the past. There are many different possibilities, but there is no clear answer. Marcus believes that this question will probably never be certain (Marcus 2009:1092). I suggest that clear emphasis on the importance of baptism in the context of salvation, which is clearly stated in Mark 16:16, is a result of a developed understanding of the crucial role of baptism in a Christian community of the 2nd century, so the text has its importance regardless of the exact date, but it should be understood as the representation of views on the importance of baptism in the Christian community of the 2nd century rather than an original view. This text is much more similar to the *Apocalypse of John*, with two possibilities of salvation and condemnation. Such theological dualism was not a Christian innovation. The idea itself is quite common in Jewish apocalyptic literature, but the connection of this idea with baptism, where some people will be saved through baptism, and some will be condemned, seemed likely as a later

development of the Christian community of the 2nd century rather than an original understanding of baptism in the 1st century.

Matthew's Gospel confirms many ideas that are already present in Mark, but this Gospel is unique in the sense that it is the most Jewish Gospel. There is a paradox here: the most Jewish Gospel can also be called the most anti-Jewish. The Gospel includes an interpretation of the destruction of Jerusalem, which points out that it was written after 70 CE. Conservative dating prior to 70 CE relies on the possibility that Matthew reflects Jesus's predictive prophecy (Köstenberger et al. 2009:186). However, such dating is a matter of theological interpretation that lies beyond the historical-critical approach, and it is the reason why I do not use this possibility as a default option, but I refer to it as part of a possible discussion.

This Gospel has a lot of parallels with the Gospel of Mark, and there is no doubt that Matthew used the Gospel of Mark as one of his major sources by creating his own version of the Gospel, which was likely written in the 80s or early 90s (Borg 2013:213). The structure of the Gospel and many Jewish sentiments and cultural allusions to Jewish culture pointed out that this Gospel was likely a product of the Jewish Christian community. The Gospel is divided into five sections following the example of the Pentateuch, and Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses who is superior to the original Moses (Gale 2011:2). The reasonable question is, why does this Gospel also include many passages that are quite hostile toward the Jews? The most probable answer is that this Gospel was written at a time of growing conflict between Christian Jews and non-Christian Jews (Borg 2013:217). Before this time, Christians did not tend to separate themselves from Judaism, but the tension between Jewish followers of Jesus and other Jewish groups that did not accept Jesus created a tense atmosphere, and the Gospel of Matthew reflects this process.

In contrast to the earliest New Testament texts, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' negative attitude toward synagogues and the negative role of Jewish leaders, which additionally supports the claim that this Gospel was written no earlier than the 80s (Carter 2001:37). For the Jewish Christian community, it was the time of searching for a new identity, but it was not an easy time.

The growing conflict between Jews who did not accept Jesus, together with the ongoing negative attitude against Rome, and the reflection on events of the past, represent the background behind the text, the text which was created as a reflection of these struggles of the Jewish Christian community. The Gospel of Matthew likely tells us much less about the original historical events during the time of Jesus and more about the situation in the early Christian community when this text was written. At that time, we see the development of an eschatological view and the presence of a dualistic scheme of the true Kingdom of the Son of Man and the Roman Empire, which connects with Satan (Sim 2005:93). Such eschatological reflections were known among Jewish eschatological movements before, and they are also clearly present and developed in the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew's community, in some sense, was trapped because they had an unquestionable negative attitude towards Rome, but they also had a negative attitude towards other Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. This separation affected their identity and the necessity to show boundaries in their ritual system. This is probably the reason why attention to baptism and the Eucharist became crucial for the Matthean community (Stanton 1992:383). The Gospel does not provide a detailed explanation of baptism, but it clearly situates the performance of baptism at the Jordan River and connects it with the confession of sins (Matthew 3:6):

καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν.

(Matthew 3:6, NA28)

And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

(Matthew 3:6, NRSV)

Thus, baptism through immersion into water and forgiveness of sins were inseparable parts of John's ritual. John stresses that he was baptized for repentance, while Jesus' baptism would be with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν, ὁ δὲ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἰσχυρότερός μου ἐστίν, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς τὰ ὑποδήματα βαστάσαι· αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί·

(Matthew 3:11, NA28)

I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
(Matthew 3:11, NRSV)

The Gospel's writer intends to show the succession of baptism through John. At the same time, the author is telling us that Jesus's baptism will be superior to John's because Jesus is going to baptize not just with water but also with the Holy Spirit and fire.

There were different attempts to interpret the meaning of the words of John the Baptist, but most likely, the meaning of Spirit and Fire should be understood in the eschatological context. If John performs his baptism as a preparation ritual, the coming of Jesus refers to the coming of a new eschatological reality, and baptism of Spirit and Fire means the new purgative baptism and messianic judgment, which will burn all impurity (Dunn 1970:11, 13).

John's baptism was initially understood in the eschatological context, but this context intensified with the appearance of Jesus. For Matthew, the importance of the Second Coming of the Messiah is crucial; it is especially expressed in chapter 24. The early Christian community still anticipated this final messianic judgment, and baptism was connected to repentance, forgiveness of sins, and acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. At the same time, baptism was the way to prepare for the final eschatological judgment, which was still expected in this community.

The problem with the Gospel of Matthew in regard to our topic is that it does not consist of much information on baptism and how it was practiced among Jesus's disciples. It is possible to speculate that calling the disciples in Matthew 4:19 in order to make them fishermen for people could be an allusion to baptism, but we cannot say it with certainty. The really important part in the Gospel of Matthew regarding baptism is the end of the Gospel, the text which is part of the so-called Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20), which consists of an important passage regarding baptism:

πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος,
(Matthew 28:19, NA28)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
(Matthew 28:19, NRSV)

This passage was historically used not only as an important testimony regarding baptism but also as evidence of the existence of the idea of the Trinity in the early church. The major problem with this passage is that, according to many scholars, this text and the whole Great Commission are likely to have been interpolated later. If we set aside the theory that this passage was inserted later and it was part of the genuine part of the Gospel of Matthew, the Trinitarian form of the baptismal words still suggests that it is a result of a developed theology (Barth 2002:11). Everett Ferguson states that even if we assume this is a later interpolation, it is likely that this text relied on early independent tradition (Ferguson 2009:133).

Despite the different scholarly approaches to Matthew 28:19, it is important to admit that since the beginning of the spreading of Jesus's teaching, baptism became a symbol of acceptance of Jesus as the Lord. Started with the eschatological baptism of John, very soon baptism became a Christocentric ritual, and the tradition which we see in Matthew 28:19 reflects the early Christian message as the crucial role of baptism, which makes a person a disciple of Jesus through an

unbroken succession through Jesus and his disciples to each new believer who accepts Jesus through this ritual (Ferguson 2009:138). It is impossible to be certain if the triune formula was an original expression of the faith of the early Christian community. Still, it is likely that very early, the baptismal formula became Christocentric, reflecting a new identity of believers through Jesus.

Luke's Gospel provides some information about baptism, but the question remains whether this information is reliable. According to contemporary scholarly consensus, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, commonly known as Luke-Acts, were written by the same author and dated to the late 80s or 90s (Borg 2013:424). Richard Pervo has proposed a later dating to the 2nd century CE (Pervo 2006); however, his view has not been widely accepted. At the same time, it is clear that the Gospel of Luke represents later reflections on the events by the early Christian community rather than an eyewitness account of the historical events. The analysis of Luke-Acts shows that the author had a sense of separation between Judaism and Christianity, and he tried to formulate his own separate history through a clear perspective of the Christian community. This view affected the full understanding and description of the events from the past, and it is what makes his approach unique in many ways.

In the previous chapter, I partly discussed Luke's description of the baptism of John. In Luke 3:3–22 John the Baptist was described as a preacher of baptism for repentance (Luke 3:3). He offered inclusive baptism, which was open to all people, including tax collectors who came to him in order to be baptized (Luke 3:3). In Luke, John the Baptist recognized the superiority of Jesus who will baptize with Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16):

ἀπεκρίνατο λέγων πᾶσιν ὁ Ἰωάννης· ἐγὼ μὲν ὕδατι βαπτίζω ὑμᾶς· ἔρχεται δὲ ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς λῦσαι τὸν ἱμάντα τῶν ὑποδημάτων αὐτοῦ· αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί·

(Luke 3:16, NA28)

John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

(Luke 3:16, NRSV)

Despite Luke’s desire to show Jesus’ superiority, John was likely the actual teacher of Jesus, and Jesus inherited baptismal practice from John. The passage from Luke 7:28, in which Jesus elevates John, is likely the remaining historical memory of John and his personal influence on Jesus:

λέγω ὑμῖν, μείζων ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν Ἰωάννου οὐδεὶς ἐστίν· ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν.

(Luke 7:28, NA28)

I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

(Luke 7:28, NRSV)

However, in Luke’s Gospel, we do not find any testimony that Jesus personally conducted any form of baptism. I suppose that when Jesus called his disciples in Luke 5:10, it could be an allusion to baptism, as in Matthew 4:19, but in both cases, there is no direct mention of it. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus also talks about his baptism as a future event (Luke 12:50):

βάπτισμα δὲ ἔχω βαπτισθῆναι, καὶ πῶς συνέχομαι ἕως ὅτου τελεσθῇ.

(Luke 12:50, NA28)

I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!

(Luke 12:50, NRSV)

In this text, baptism means the future disturbing event. In the New Living Translation, this part reads as *baptism of suffering*. The baptism here represents not a ritual but a metaphorical allusion to the future suffering of Jesus. This connection between baptism and suffering is not accidental but likely represents an experience of an early Christian community where baptism was connected with possible suffering ahead. It seems to me that this text is the additional testimony

that at the end of the 1st century, Christians clearly started to associate their acceptance of Jesus and baptism as a dangerous act that could lead them to martyrdom; this readiness for martyrdom became an important part of early Christian identity and baptism as a ritual and understanding of the meaning of it became very much related with such possibility.

The Gospel of **John** was traditionally considered the latest Gospel, dated around the 90s, with the possible presence of earlier and later layers (Borg 2013:304). There is a possibility that this Gospel is not the latest if we accept the later dating of Luke, which is theoretically possible, but that theory still does not represent the consensus among the majority of scholars.

The Gospel of John is highly distinctive in comparison to the Synoptic Gospels; there are many allegories, and this Gospel provides a theological perspective on the events rather than a real historical memory. The Gospel was written in a community of Christian Jews who experienced rejection from non-Christian Jews (Borg 2013:308). Such historical background explains the presence of hostile language against Jewish authorities.

Scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries often claimed that this Gospel was highly Hellenistic due to its highly philosophical terminology, which, compared to the Synoptic Gospels, is very distinct. It is true, but it is important to understand that the presence of Hellenistic thought does not indicate that the Gospel was created by a non-Jew. The Gospel consists of detailed knowledge of Jewish tradition, rituals, and Jewish symbolic language. The presence of Hellenistic elements should not surprise us because Jewish society at that time was highly influenced by Hellenistic thought, and Jewish eschatological groups were influenced by Hellenistic thought even more than the majority of ordinary believers.

The Johannine community inherited the Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, and even the usage of terminology in the Gospel of John points to this, including direct borrowings (Vermes

2013:121). It is likely that the community where this Gospel was created had a genetic connection with Jewish eschatological movements, which continued their existence in parallel after Jesus's life, and their ideas very much shaped their understanding of Jesus and his mission.

The distinctiveness of this Gospel looks appealing to readers, but for the task of this research, it is important to get a sense of what exactly this Gospel can tell us about baptism. Are there any historically reliable facts that can help us better understand the origins of baptism? And if not, maybe we can at least understand the approach to the baptism of this particular community at the end of the 1st century. There are only a few places where baptism was mentioned directly. Firstly, in the description of John's mission and Jesus's baptism (1:19–34); secondly, in the description of baptizing people by John and Jesus (3:22–26); and then in chapter 4 (4:1–2), which states that Jesus's disciples baptized more people than John. To say the obvious, these few mentions of baptism give us little information about baptism as a ritual. In the previous chapter, I also discussed the problem of John's baptism and the possible competition between John and Jesus, and I would like to focus now on a different question: is it possible to obtain at least some information about baptism or an understanding of it in the Johannine community? I do think so; since the Gospel is highly symbolic, it is possible to look at many events in this Gospel as allusions to baptism, even in passages where baptism is not mentioned directly. For example, the story about the wedding at Cana (2:1–12) describes the transformation of water into wine, which happens inside six water jars that were used for Jewish rites of purification (2:6):

ἦσαν δὲ ἐκεῖ λίθιναι ὑδρίαὶ ἕξ κατὰ τὸν καθαρισμὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων κείμεναι, χωροῦσαι ἀνὰ μετρητὰς δύο ἢ τρεῖς.

(John 2:6, NA28)

Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

(John 2:6, NRSV)

It seems to me that the mention of jars for Jewish purification is not a coincidence but rather an intentional allusion: the old jars for traditional Jewish rites, which were filled with ordinary water, became vessels for the new wine, which symbolically means the joy that Jesus brought to people. The new joy comes through new purification, which is baptism, and as a continuation of this idea, we see in the next chapter the famous discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus, where Jesus is talking about the necessity of being born of water and the Spirit:

ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῇ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.

(John 3:5, NA28)

Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”

(John 3:5, NRSV)

The scholarly consensus looks at this text as a reference to baptism; however, due to a lack of direct pointing to baptism, there are scholars who have different opinions on that passage (Ferguson 2009:143). The allusion to baptism in the conversation with Nicodemus is unlikely to rely on the real historical event; the author of the Gospel put words in the mouth of Jesus that were important for an early Christian community at the end of the first century, and these words likely became a reflection of the crucial importance of baptism by that time.

The text where Jesus promises Living water is likely an allusion to baptism:

Ἐν δὲ τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ μεγάλῃ τῆς ἑορτῆς εἰστήκει ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔκραξεν λέγων· ἐὰν τις διψᾷ ἐρχέσθω πρὸς με καὶ πινέτω. ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, καθὼς εἶπεν ἡ γραφή, ποταμοὶ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας αὐτοῦ ῥέουσιν ὕδατος ζῶντος. τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν περὶ τοῦ πνεύματος ὃ ἔμελλον λαμβάνειν οἱ πιστεύσαντες εἰς αὐτόν· οὐπω γὰρ ἦν πνεῦμα, ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐδέπω ἐδοξάσθη.

(John 7:37–39, NA28)

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

(John 7:37–39, NRSV)

It is more difficult to say if other similar places could be allusions to baptism in the Gospel of John. Such as the Healing of a Lame Man in the Pool of Bethesda (5:1–9), the Healing of the Blind Man (9:1–7), or the conversation with the Samaritan Woman (4:4–15), especially verses 13–14:

ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· πᾶς ὁ πίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος τούτου διψήσει πάλιν· ὃς δ’ ἂν πίη ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος οὗ ἐγὼ δώσω αὐτῷ, οὐ μὴ διψήσει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὕδωρ ὃ δώσω αὐτῷ γενήσεται ἐν αὐτῷ πηγὴ ὕδατος ἀλλομένου εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

(John 4:13–14, NA28)

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

(John 4:13–14, NRSV)

This text and others that I mentioned above were likely perceived in the Christian community at the end of the 1st century as allusions to baptism. The Gospel of John is beautiful in its metaphors, but the other side of that is that this Gospel likely does not provide us with much historically reliable information. However, we can see a variety of symbolic allusions to baptism, which suggest that, at the end of the 1st century, baptism played a crucial role in the Christian community and was rethought in a new way. Baptism became more Christocentric, and the “living

water” started to be understood not as flowing water for purification but as living water because of the living Christ who was put at the center of new Christian baptism.

Summing up the role of the Gospels in the understanding of baptism, I would like to stress that the Gospels provide us with some information on baptism, which is mostly related to the activity of John the Baptist and Jesus’s disciples, who also baptized people. We can relatively closely depict the baptism of John in the Jordan River, even if we do not have much detail on how the ritual itself proceeded. However, most likely, John’s baptism had been performed in the same pattern as traditional Jewish rituals of purification. Despite the fact that the Gospels do not provide us with information on baptism in the early Christian community, we are able to see how early Christians saw the meaning of baptism because the Gospels are products of the early Christian community. Their depiction of baptism is, in many ways, a reflection of their view on baptism within the communities that produced the Gospels. In my judgment, the most important point that can be seen in the Gospels regarding the meaning of baptism is the connection of baptism with certain events. First of all, baptism became tightly connected with Jesus, and the ritual itself became Christocentric. Secondly, baptism was connected with the power to purify sins, which is the way to eternal life. Thirdly is the connection of baptism with possible martyrdom ahead. We will see this tendency more explicitly in the writings of Paul, but some allusions to that are also present in the Gospels. This is not surprising, since Christocentric baptism established a connection with Jesus, who died on the cross, and baptism was perceived as a form of participation in his suffering, at least symbolically. However, the possibility of real suffering ahead became an important part of the understanding of baptism within the Christian community, likely in the early stages of its development.

4.3 Baptism in Acts

The Book of Acts contains many important passages regarding baptism. Considering the historical sequence of written texts, it would be better to place the book between 1 John and 1 Peter. However, I placed it right after the Gospels in order to preserve integrity with the Gospel of Luke, which was intended to write a complete story of the life of Jesus and the history of the early church. The book of Acts has many occurrences of baptism, and this book might seem like an exceptional source on this topic. In many regards, it is. However, it is also important to take into account that this book describes the events of early Christian history through the perspective of the author, who lived at the end of the 80s or in the 90s. Some scholars even propose a later dating, up to 115 CE (Pervo 2009:5).

The distance between the actual written time and the described events likely affects the author's perception. The author probably used a handful of sources and was aware of events of the past from oral tradition, but such sources were shaped by the perceptions of the Christian community, where such information had circulated. This does not mean they are entirely unhistorical; rather, they are better read as reflections of the views of a particular group of Christians than as accurate descriptions of historical events. Thus, the critical examination is important, and the goal of the current work is to look at the origins of baptism and its formation and development using a non-biased perspective, which is crucial for honest scholarly work.

In my view, the Book of Acts consists of real historical events, but they are described through the lens of the community that existed at the end of the 1st century. Thus, it seems likely that many occurrences were real, but their description was not accurate in terms of modern history. However, they are important because they witness the perception of the events of people who lived at the end of the 1st century and have their vision of baptism. In this regard, I would like to

emphasize some crucial events that are important for this research. One of the most crucial testimonies on baptism is present in the second chapter of Acts (Acts 2:38–41). There is no detailed description of baptism, but in 2:38, we can read about a minimum of belief that was necessary at that time to be baptized:

Πέτρος δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· μετανοήσατε, [φησίν,] καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.

(Acts 2:38, NA28)

Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

(Acts 2:38, NRSV)

Peter’s words represent the minimum of faith that was required in the early Church in order to be baptized. It consists of the repentance of sins and the willingness to be disciples of Jesus in whose name people were baptized. This minimum was enough, and if people agreed with that, there were no other obstacles to being baptized, as we see from Acts 2:41:

οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀποδεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθησαν καὶ προσετέθησαν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ψυχαὶ ὥσει τρισχίλια.

(Acts 2:41, NA28)

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

(Acts 2:41, NRSV)

The other important text is the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch. It is probably one of the most memorable stories from Acts regarding baptism. The full story is described in Acts 8:26–39, but the crucial verses are 36–39:

ὥς δὲ ἐπορεύοντο κατὰ τὴν ὁδόν, ἦλθον ἐπὶ τι ὕδωρ, καὶ φησιν ὁ εὐνοῦχος· ἰδοὺ ὕδωρ, τί κωλύει με βαπτισθῆναι;

καὶ ἐκέλευσεν στήναι τὸ ἄρμα καὶ κατέβησαν ἀμφότεροι εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, ὃ τε Φίλιππος καὶ ὁ εὐνοῦχος, καὶ ἐβάπτισεν αὐτόν.

ὅτε δὲ ἀνέβησαν ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος, πνεῦμα κυρίου ἥρπασεν τὸν Φίλιππον καὶ οὐκ εἶδεν αὐτόν· οὐκέτι ὁ εὐνοῦχος, ἐπορεύετο γὰρ τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ χαίρων.

(Acts 8:36–39, NA28)

As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

(Acts 8:36–39, NRSV)

Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch, who initially did not understand the Scripture, and asked Philip to explain it. In response to his request, Philip told the story about Jesus. Unfortunately, the direct speech of Philip is not presented in Acts, but it was likely not a long basic message about Jesus. Most importantly, as soon as the eunuch was ready to be baptized, Philip immediately baptized him by immersion into the water (8:38).

Acts 8:36–38 is a testimony that Christians conducted baptism in flowing water. Rudolph refers to this example alongside other early and later writings that baptism in flowing water was the original Christian practice (Rudolph 1999:496). Cullmann looks at Acts 8:37 as the short early Christian confession (Cullmann 1950:71). He refers to the eunuch’s reply, which is absent in the Nestle-Aland Greek text, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” the full verse in KJV reads, “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” However, the Nestle-Aland edition omits verse 37, and most modern translations, including NRSV, do not include this text because scholars

unanimously recognize it as a later interpolation, which does not exist in many manuscripts. Cullmann looks at this text in the context of the possibility of the existence of the ritual question before baptism, and the answer was required from people who wanted to be baptized. The Ethiopian eunuch in this passage gives the following answer: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Despite the consensus that this text cannot be considered ancient, I still think that Cullmann was right that verse 37 was an actual ritual question that was practically used in Christian communities, but not at the time when the Acts was composed, but likely at the mid of the 2nd century or even later.

The story of the Ethiopian Eunuch is important in terms of understanding the requirements to be baptized in the early Christian community. This story also shows that the acceptance of the Good News of Jesus and baptism are related things; people accept Jesus, and the next step is baptism. Baptism in the early community was not a long ritual that required certain preparation or long-term study in confirmation class; it was rather a situational procedure. One can accept Jesus during a short conversation, and this acceptance could lead a person to baptism right away. In Acts 16:33, we even see baptism at night:

καὶ παραλαβὼν αὐτοὺς ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ τῆς νυκτὸς ἔλουσεν ἀπὸ τῶν πληγῶν, καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ αὐτοῦ πάντες

(Acts 16:33, NA28)

At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay.

(Acts 16:33, NRSV)

The approach to baptism was quite simple: people accepted the good news and were baptized; such immediate baptism was the common practice among early followers of Jesus. There were no additional requirements, such as formal education; the only basic requirement was access

to water for full immersion, and the ritual proceeded similarly to Jewish purification practices in form but differed in the meaning attached to it.

Another piece of evidence that shows there was no such thing as long-term preparation for baptism among early Christians is Peter's sermon to the Gentiles in Acts 10:34–48. It was a short message about Jesus, after which people were baptized in the name of Jesus:

προσέταξεν δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ βαπτισθῆναι. τότε ἠρώτησαν αὐτὸν ἐπιμεῖναι ἡμέρας τινάς.

(Acts 10:48, NA28)

So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

(Acts 10:48, NRSV)

The whole passage from Acts 10:34–48 shows us again that the requirements for baptism were pretty simple: acceptance of the good news and baptism in the name of Jesus, which was the earliest baptismal formula. The very debated question is the possibility of children's baptism among early Christians. We already encountered above in Acts 16:33 that the entire family was baptized. A similar text is present in Acts 16:15:

ὥς δὲ ἐβαπτίσθη καὶ ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς, παρεκάλεσεν λέγουσα· εἰ κεκρίκατέ με πιστὴν τῷ κυρίῳ εἶναι, εἰσελθόντες εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου μένετε· καὶ παρεβιάσατο ἡμᾶς.

(Acts 16:15, NA28)

When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

(Acts 16:15, NRSV)

Such passages are often seen as testimonies that, in the early Christian communities, baptism could be performed not only among adults but also among children. Such a claim rests on the assumption that a household includes children. However, in the New Testament, we do not see

any mentions of baptized children, and household could simply mean the adults in the family because a family could consist of many adults. I am not going to go into the polemic on this matter; there are different opinions, but in my view, the mention of household does not include infants. Back in those days, women and children were part of the household, but they were counted differently. In cases when an author wished to indicate their presence, he named them separately, as in the passage from Matthew: “Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children” (Matthew 15:38, NRSV). I expect the possible objection that the household codes address children directly alongside their parents (Col 3:20; Eph 6:1). As Peter Balla notes, both versions address children directly, before turning to the fathers (Balla 2005 [2003]:172). However, both texts presuppose children capable of understanding and obeying instruction. What the codes attest is the participation of children old enough to be addressed by ethical standards, not the inclusion of infants. It is possible to discuss when a child becomes an adult, and it is true that our current understanding of childhood is not the same as it was in the first century. However, the suggestion that infants could be baptized cannot be supported directly by any available source from the first century. Since there are no clear indications of it, I do not see a reason to think that children were directly included in baptism, which makes me think that pedobaptism was not practiced among early Christians in the 1st century, but became practiced later.

As I mentioned above, in Acts, there are no difficulties for anyone willing to be baptized and become a Christian. The only thing that was necessary was the presence of a minimum of faith and acceptance of Jesus as the Lord (Acts 16:31). However, John the Baptist came to the stage as a prophet a long time before the appearance of Jesus, and it would be reasonable to ask how early Christians treated those people who were baptized during the life of John the Baptist? It is intriguing because, despite the fact that John was regarded as a forerunner of Jesus, it seems that

the baptism of John was not considered valid among Christians. At least that is what is evident in the descriptions in the book of Acts, which are not necessarily accurate reflections of the views of the disciples of Jesus, but rather a reflection of the Christian view at the end of the 1st century. We see in Acts that the people who received John's baptism are not considered as people who accept the full baptism (Acts 18:25):

οὗτος ἦν κατηχημένος τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ζέων τῷ πνεύματι ἐλάλει καὶ ἐδίδασκεν ἀκριβῶς τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἐπιστάμενος μόνον τὸ βάπτισμα Ἰωάννου·

(Acts 18:25, NA28)

He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.

(Acts 18:25, NRSV)

During Paul's third missionary journey, he found believers who received the baptism of John (19:2–7), and he rebaptized them in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:5–6):

εἶπέν τε πρὸς αὐτούς· εἰ πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐλάβετε πιστεύσαντες; οἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτόν· ἀλλ' οὐδ' εἰ πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἔστιν ἠκούσαμεν.

εἶπέν τε· εἰς τί οὖν ἐβαπτίσθητε; οἱ δὲ εἶπαν· εἰς τὸ Ἰωάννου βάπτισμα.

εἶπεν δὲ Παῦλος· Ἰωάννης ἐβάπτισεν βάπτισμα μετανοίας τῷ λαῷ λέγων εἰς τὸν ἐρχόμενον μετ' αὐτὸν ἵνα πιστεύσωσιν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν.

ἀκούσαντες δὲ ἐβαπτίσθησαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, καὶ ἐπιθέντος αὐτοῖς τοῦ Παύλου [τὰς] χεῖρας ἦλθεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐπ' αὐτούς, ἐλάλουν τε γλώσσαις καὶ ἐπροφήτευον.

ἦσαν δὲ οἱ πάντες ἄνδρες ὥσει δώδεκα.

(Acts 19:2–7, NA28):

He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John's baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the

baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied - altogether there were about twelve of them.

(Acts 19:2–7, NRSV)

As we can see here, Paul is arguing about the superiority of the new baptism and claiming that John’s baptism was only for repentance from sin. According to Paul, John himself believed that with Jesus’s appearance, the situation would radically change, and the proclamation about it was part of the mission of John the Baptist (Acts 19:4). However, I would like to add a historical-critical note to this claim allegedly made by Paul. I do not think that Paul really thought that people needed to be baptized in the name of Christ if they were baptized by John before. We do not find such a claim in Paul’s genuine letters. It is likely that this story is another reflection of the view of the Christian community at the end of the 1st century rather than Paul’s original view. This view was likely demanded due to the necessity to make a clear separation between Christian baptism and any other baptism or form of purification that existed before Jesus.

Thus, this story barely has a real historical memory about Paul, but the inclusion of this story about the necessity of rebaptizing is important because it shows the problem that was discussed at the end of the 1st century among Christians. This described event can be considered a clear testimony of the separation of the Christian community from its initial roots and the necessity to show that Christians had a distinct identity even from those groups from which Christianity itself originated. The necessity of such separation was a natural process in a time when there were different Jewish groups who still practiced different forms of baptism, and Christians also had different views in regard to baptism, with no unanimity. This story was intended to end debates regarding the acceptance of baptisms performed outside the Christian community. To

achieve this, the author of the Book of Acts used Paul as an authoritative example to resolve debates, which were a serious issue at the end of the 1st century.

The mention of the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism is a recurring theme in various parts of the New Testament, and it is another debated scholarly issue. There is no question that for early Christians, receiving the Spirit was inseparably connected with baptism (Barth 2002:65). The question is what exactly people meant by that. Barth points out that the Spirit is the divine power that brings justification and renewal to a human, which is promised in baptism (Barth 2002:66). James Dunn suggested that by the Holy Spirit, early Christians meant the receiving of Christ's presence. It was the marker of Christian identity and represented the uniqueness of Christian baptism. Dunn emphasizes that Christians cannot be unbaptized, but baptism itself is not what makes a person a Christian; instead, it is receiving the Spirit that makes a person a Christian (Dunn 1970:228). Thus, baptism should not be perceived as a mechanical ritual like ordinary Jewish purification. It was a different form of purification, connected to the acceptance of Christ and incorporation into the Christian community; it is the gift of the Holy Spirit, without which baptism is just an ordinary ritual purification and not genuine Christian baptism.

The book of Acts, as a prolonged version of Luke's Gospel, consists of important notions on baptism, which help us understand how Christians saw baptism at the end of the 1st century. First of all, baptism did not require a long time of preparation; it was quite a simple ritual using flowing water and a simple formula like "In the name of Jesus." The acceptance of Jesus was crucial; the understanding that Jesus is the Lord who came to the world as the Messiah was the minimum of faith that could be expressed during a short conversation while delivering the good news. There were no requirements for a long-time education or acceptance of high theology;

baptism could be performed situationally, during the day or at night, at any time whenever the person who wants to be baptized is ready for that.

Secondly, baptism was inclusive; it could be accepted by anyone regardless of the nation or ethnic identity. Gentiles and Jews who believed in Jesus were under the same ritual procedure. Thus, at the end of the 1st century, and likely in the first decades of the 2nd century, baptism and the requirements for it were still quite simple. It consisted of the necessity of clear recognition of Christ, and after that, any person could be baptized in the name of Christ and take a new Christian identity. The necessity of identification with Christ leads us to the third point, which is that baptism at the end of the 1st century, with its origins in Jewish tradition and the practice of John the Baptist, becomes a totally separate ritual. Any forms of baptism that were performed in non-Christian communities were rejected. So, at the end of the 1st century, baptism became totally Christocentric, and baptism in the name of Christ became the necessary condition in order to be baptized, and only this type of baptism was recognized by other Christians.

4.4 Baptism in the Genuine Letters of Paul

The genuine letters of Paul the Apostle are important pieces of evidence that help clarify the role of baptism in the early Christian community. First of all, historically speaking, these letters are important because they were written before the gospels, and the reflection on baptism is a witness to the importance of this ritual in the middle of the 1st century. The apostle Paul represents a crucial view on baptism, which influenced the further development of baptism's importance and meaning. At the same time, it is important to consider that Paul's understanding of baptism was not necessarily the only option in the 1st century. Even from Paul's letters, it is obvious that the

division between different communities concerned different topics and that they were not completely united.

Early Christian communities were diverse and could have not only a distinction between rituals but also different understandings of the meaning of rituals, and it goes on the topic of baptism as well. However, the Pauline letters are the only preserved source from the middle of the 1st century. Due to the lack of other written texts of that time, the Pauline letters could be regarded as the most trustworthy source.

Still, it is important to consider that this source is limited by Paul's vision and does not necessarily represent the variety of other approaches that could be presented at that time within non-Pauline communities. However, considering that Paul's view eventually became dominant among Christians, it is crucial to understand what Paul himself thought about baptism. Paul discusses baptism in several passages.

One of the earliest Pauline epistles is the letter to the **Galatians**, dated around 50 CE. Galatian communities consisted mostly of a specific group of Gentiles known as *God-fearers* or *God-lovers* (Borg 2013:46; Schnelle 2005:122). They had an initial sympathy for Judaism but were not fully converted and did not obey complex Jewish laws; this raised debates among Christians about their legitimacy as followers of Christ without acceptance of the full Jewish tradition. Paul's letter was a reaction to these debates. It shows his inclusive position towards former Gentiles who, through Christ, receive the same privileges as Jews without the necessity to follow the full complexity of Jewish laws, including circumcision and kosher rules. However, Paul's position was not universally accepted; it remained contested among Jewish followers of Jesus, even as it appealed to Gentiles.

To preserve new communities with a Gentile background and reconcile them with other communities with a traditional Jewish background, Paul was trying to clarify his position among Jewish Christians, who required Gentiles to follow the full complexity of Jewish laws and did not accept Paul's inclusive position. To explain his view to the Galatians and persuade his Jewish opponents, Paul took an important step towards making a new Christocentric identity that, through baptism, unites followers of Christ regardless of their ethnicity, gender or social background (Galatians 3:26–29, 3:14):

Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ·
ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.
οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληγ, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ·
πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα ἐστέ, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι.
(Galatians 3:26–29, NA28)

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

(Galatians 3:26–29, NRSV)
ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως.
(Galatians 3:14, NA28)

In order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

(Galatians 3:14, NRSV)

These two texts represent Paul's belief that all distinctiveness among people should be erased in Christ through baptism; using Paul's symbolical language, in baptism, believers are put on Christ, and through Christ, they become the true children of Abraham. Believers put on Christ

through baptismal immersion in Christ, which transforms and unites them to such an extent that all previous distinctions become relative and invisible (Beyer 2024:147–149). In Christ, people become one through their faith and shared baptismal experience. There is no doubt that baptism at Paul's time was a common practice among different communities.

Considering the facts that we know from Jewish purificatory practices and Jewish baptismal movements, it is likely that the early Christian communities in the 50s looked at baptism as an important practice connected with repentance and forgiveness because such a vision was already presented during the life of Jesus. However, Paul was taking an important step toward a new understanding of baptism; he made baptism Christocentric.

Baptism becomes the way to become a part of Christ and, through it, become an heir of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). Here is not just an equality of men and women in Christ; Paul challenges the patriarchal view on ancestral genealogy via the paternal line; any baptized woman becomes an heir of Abraham on the same basis as men. Brigitte Kahl argues that such destruction of patriarchal norms sounded pretty radical even for Galatians, and decades after Paul, pastoral letters worked hard to reduce Paul's radicalism and bring back patriarchal normativity (Kahl 2000:49). However, any attempt to suppress Paul's radicalism could not suppress the general line of Paul's inclusive theology.

Philip Esler pointed out that the connection with Abraham was an important part of the collective memory of Jews, but Paul simply attached this collective memory to the Christ movement and paved the way for changing the importance of Jewish ethnic identity toward a more universal social–religious identity (Esler 2006:33). In this way, Paul's baptismal theology helps to form a specific Christian identity that ultimately replaces the Jewish identity. This approach was,

in itself, quite radical and was hardly welcomed by all the communities of Paul's time. However, it was its inclusiveness that ultimately ensured the success of the spread of Christianity.

1 Corinthians is the other important epistle. This epistle was written approximately during the same period as Galatians around the 50s CE (Borg 2013:57; Schnelle 2005:75). In Corinthians, Paul provides a new perspective on the problem of Temple purity. Yulin Liu conducted an important study on this topic in the book *Temple Purity in 1–2 Corinthians* (Liu 2013). The author of this book traces the Jewish and Greco-Roman origins of the concept of purity and argues that Paul's message on purity was accessible to both Jews and Gentiles, because it was part of their mutual concern. (Liu 2013:234). Knowing this, Paul uses the image of Temple purity but gives it a metaphorical interpretation.

The Temple in his vision is not a physical building but an individual and communal body of believers (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:16; 6:19; 12:12–14). Paul understands Temple purity not in terms of formal ritual purification, but as a purification from moral defilement. From this vision comes his understanding of baptism as a power that purifies an individual (the individual Temple) and incorporates them into the community of believers – the body of Christ (the communal Temple). This is why Paul's concern goes beyond the initial purification: he emphasizes the importance of maintaining purity in the community and exposes the sins of its members because an individual who falls defiles not only their body (the individual Temple) but also the communal Temple. This is why Paul calls on each believer to make an effort to live by high ethical standards out of a sense of responsibility to the community (Liu 2013:238; Beyer 2024:127). This reinterpretation affects the understanding of baptism, which is seen as initiation into a long Christian journey through the first complete purification that provides a new way of living according to new standards within the community of believers. Paul recognizes that believers do not meet high ethical standards after

their baptism, and he reminds people of their responsibility to the community, which comes through entering the community through baptism. However, he still uses the language of purification, which was likely not his distinctive feature, but a part of a common lexicon among early Christian communities. As Petersen puts it in his characterization of early Christian ritual practice: “we find an amalgamation of elements pertaining to rituals of purification as well as rituals of initiation” (Petersen 2011:4). Thus, for Paul, the language and practical elements of purification were not alien; they were part of his natural understanding of things, and he thought that baptism was not merely a rethinking of the Jewish understanding of purity but also a continuation of it.

1 Corinthians also expresses many similar ideas that can be found in Galatians. However, this epistle was written within the specific context of internal division in the church in Corinth, which Paul initially established, and he addressed the direct issues of this church. In 1 Corinthians 1:12–17, Paul refers to baptism in the context of the problem of people starting to claim their discipleship from the person who baptizes them instead of having identification with Christ only. He criticizes such people and says that people are not baptized in the name of Paul but in the name of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:12–13):

λέγω δὲ τοῦτο ὅτι ἕκαστος ὑμῶν λέγει· ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ, ἐγὼ δὲ Κηφᾶ, ἐγὼ δὲ Χριστοῦ.

μεμέρισται ὁ Χριστός; μὴ Παῦλος ἐσταυρώθη ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, ἢ εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Παύλου ἐβαπτίσθητε;

(1 Corinthians 1:12–13, NA28):

What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

(1 Corinthians 1:12–13, NRSV)

Everett Ferguson sees here a clear allusion to the early baptismal formula “into the name of Christ” in Paul’s paraphrase, “into the name of Paul” (Ferguson 2009:149). Paul states that people should not identify themselves with the Apostles who taught them but with Christ. His statement makes us suggest that baptism in the name of Christ was already a common practice at that time, and this simple formula was probably the main feature of Christian baptism, which created a sense of belonging to Christ and a specific common identity among followers of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–13, Paul, like in Galatians 3:26–29, emphasized that all baptized share the same Spirit regardless of their ethnic or social background:

Καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἓν ἐστὶν καὶ μέλη πολλὰ ἔχει, πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος πολλὰ ὄντα ἓν ἐστὶν σῶμα, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός·

καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἐν πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν.

(1 Corinthians 12:12–13, NA28)

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

(1 Corinthians 12:12–13, NRSV)

In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul likely uses baptismal terminology:

καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε· ἀλλ’ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλ’ ἡγιάσθητε, ἀλλ’ ἐδικαιώθητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

(1 Corinthians 6:11, NA28)

And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

(1 Corinthians 6:11, NRSV)

The form “in the name of” directly or with minimal distinction also occurs in Acts 8:16; 19:5; 10:48; 2:38. According to scholarly consensus, this phrase is very old and likely was not

invented by Paul but taken over by him from a previous tradition (Hartman 2011:399). Gerhard Barth suggests that in this passage Paul combines the early Christian terminology of baptismal purification of sins, which is also attested in Acts 22:16, with his idea of justification (Barth 2002:37). The connection between baptism and forgiveness of sins is widely attested in early Christian writings, which should not surprise us, because it was already present in John's baptism. Paul follows and enriches the baptismal tradition that existed before. Barth emphasized that basic characteristics of John's baptism also constituted Christian baptism, which can be considered as an expanded form and further interpretation of John's baptism (Barth 2002:37, 87). Hartman stresses that the idea of forgiveness of sins through baptism was not new and was already presented in John's baptism. At the same time, Paul takes an important step towards making forgiveness dependent on the death of Jesus (Hartman 1997:81).

Thus, the initial understanding of forgiveness of sins was independent of Jesus. However, Paul changes the previous theology and makes Jesus a crucial factor in the forgiveness of sins. In Paul's theology, believers receive purification from their sins through Jesus' death and resurrection, to which they participate via baptism. Thus, although the idea of forgiveness of sins through baptism was not new, Paul's theological approach was different and represented a significant development.

The other important epistle, which contains one of the crucial expressions of baptism, is the letter to the **Romans**. The letter was written around 58 CE and was addressed to communities in Rome with the prevalent Christian Gentiles (Borg 2013:119–120). In the passage in Romans 6:1–11, especially in verses 3–4, we see the equating of baptism with joining Christ's death:

ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν;

συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὥσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν.

(Romans 6:3–4, NA28)

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

(Romans 6:3–4, NRSV)

For the Jewish tradition, the idea of baptism into death was uncommon, but it was natural for Gentile audiences. A similar conception of joining the death of God was very common in Greco-Roman mysteries. Paul uses the language from the Greco-Roman cults and attaches Christian meaning to it. This language was familiar to Gentiles who accepted Jesus.

James Dunn looks at Paul as someone who actually changed the direction of baptism toward the death of Christ (Dunn 1990:160). It is unlikely that such a meaning was implied in baptism before Paul and was probably initially known only among communities that consisted primarily of Gentile Christians. At the same time, it is likely that the association with the death of Christ through baptism and the forgiveness of sins presented in the communities that were dependent on Paul (Ferguson 2009:158). However, considering the crucial role of Paul in spreading Christianity and the influence of his particular views on Christian communities, it is likely that his ideas were spread quite rapidly among different communities, even among those that initially were not dependent on Paul but also became influenced by his theology.

Paul's demanding idea that each individual, through baptism, participates in the death and resurrection of Jesus creates a specific identity of believers who identify themselves with Christ as part of Jesus's body. In this one body of Christ, there are no social distinctions; they are no longer relevant because all believers represent one body and are bound together (Sanders 1983:209).

Cross-culturally, the theme of death and life is so common in initiation rituals that it can be regarded as their default characteristic (Beyer 2024:129). However, early Christians did not look at death with Christ as just a symbolic act; any baptized person realized the possibility of martyrdom, so the unknown future was part of one's emotional experience. This experience was new and completely distinct from any previous ritual purifications practiced among Jews. That is what made Christian baptism unique and unforgettable. It is unlikely that a similar approach existed before Paul, but it seems obvious that after Paul, this understanding of baptism spread to different communities, and as we observed above, even Gospels written after Paul allude to the connection of baptism with the possibility of future suffering.

4.5 Diverse Views on Baptism in New Testament Texts

Early Christianity was very diverse, and this diversity included different views and forms of worship, including baptism. The variety of texts from the New Testament represents different approaches to baptism. We have already looked at the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles of Paul, and even there, we were able to see some differences. In this section, I examine the remaining New Testament texts relevant to the study of baptism. When it comes to New Testament texts, the diversity of views on baptism across communities is evident. However, this diversity in each case has its own roots, and without knowing the actual background behind each text, it is not easy to understand the real causes of such diversity.

If we look at the New Testament texts in their chronological progression, we can see a tendency toward unity. However, I do not think that it is possible to discuss a full unity of views and traditions during the period of the 1st and 2nd centuries. There was a tendency toward further unity, yet this period was still a time of ongoing development in the baptismal ritual and its

understanding. The common form of baptism had taken shape, but it had not yet been fully unified, which is why we can see different approaches to baptism in different texts.

One of the important texts regarding baptism is the letter to **Colossians**. This letter is formally attributed to Paul but likely represents one of the earliest pseudepigrapha, dated around the eighties (Borg 2013:203). The purpose of this letter was likely to provide an authoritative explanation for the problems that arose in communities established or influenced by Paul after his death (Schnelle 2005:347). Colossians contains an important passage about baptism in 2:11–12:

Ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνεγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.
(Colossians 2:11–12, NA28)

In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

(Colossians 2:11–12, NRSV)

This passage repeats general ideas that were written by Paul before in Galatians and Romans; the author emphasizes spiritual circumcision, which cuts away the sinful nature, against physical circumcision, which is a physical procedure (Col. 2:11). Everett Ferguson points out that this passage was the basis of the view on baptism as a Christian circumcision (Ferguson 2009:159). The implementation of this idea was very important for early Christians due to the ongoing debate about the necessity of circumcision for Gentiles. The common perception that the possibility of abstaining from physical circumcision was merely a Christian issue is a simplified view. Jewish tradition includes a metaphorical understanding of circumcision as the circumcision of the heart (Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4). Of course, this ethical understanding does

not necessarily exclude the physical procedure. However, in the context of Jewish Hellenization, the situation significantly changed; some Jews did not think that circumcision was necessary any longer, and some even considered it acceptable to restore their foreskin through a surgical procedure known as *epispasm*. This practice already took place in the middle of the 2nd century BCE, and flourished in the 1st century CE, continuing to be practiced for the next several centuries onward (Hall 1988:82). Philo even needed to emphasize that the ethical understanding of circumcision does not abolish the physical one (Schweizer 1976:110). Thus, historical reality shows that Paul and his followers were not pioneering in questioning physical circumcision. They simply took a particular side in the debate that had already taken place before their appearance. We may argue that such a vision did not represent the mainstream of Judaism, but it was not new.

At the same time, many Christian Jews thought that the necessity of circumcision for Gentiles was undoubtedly necessary because they believed it was the way to become the true child of Abraham. Initially, they did not look at baptism as a substitute for circumcision; they considered them as separate rituals. The idea that baptism could be substituted for circumcision was not very popular among other Christian Jews except Paul and his followers. However, this very idea was appealing to Gentiles, for whom circumcision was the main obstacle on their way to the Christian community. Thus, the author emphasizes the idea that baptism is a substitute for circumcision. Such a vision is not new and initially appears in Paul's epistles, which means that it was known among his followers. If we accept the consensus that Paul did not write the letter to Colossians, it is still evident that the author of this epistle inherited Paul's main ideas and was likely his follower. At the same time, he goes even further than Paul. He emphasizes that baptism is not only a substitution for circumcision but rather a superior act to circumcision. This emphasis was intended to put an end to debates on the necessity of circumcision, which made Jewish-Christian claims

regarding the necessity of circumcision less solid in the context of the superiority of baptism. Logically speaking, if baptism is superior to circumcision, there is no necessity to be circumcised.

In addition to the issue of circumcision, the author emphasizes that a recipient of baptism participates in Christ's sufferings. The ideas of renovation in Christ and participation in his sufferings are not new; they were already presented in Paul's genuine epistles, and the repetition of them in the context of baptism clearly shows that they became commonly accepted in the eighties, at least among Gentile Christian communities. Considering the fact that Colossians, as a text, was produced at a time when Paul's mission among Gentiles had already succeeded, it is likely that Colossians represents the first text that in some way reflects the established baptismal liturgy. Some scholars suggest that it is likely that texts present in Col. 2:9–15 and in Col. 1:12–20 were used in baptismal liturgy and could be considered as early baptismal hymns (Dunn 1990:143). Therefore, it is likely that at that time, baptism had shifted its way from the spontaneous and charismatic rite towards a tendency to be an established ritual tradition with inherited meaning and symbolic language, which Paul previously used and proclaimed in his baptismal preaching.

The author of this epistle also mimics the general inclusiveness of Paul, which was described in Galatians 3:26–29, and presents its essence in the context of renovation in Christ in Colossians 3:11:

ὅπου οὐκ ἔνι Ἕλλην καὶ Ἰουδαῖος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

(Colossians 3:11, NA28)

In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

(Colossians 3:11, NRSV)

Colossians emphasizes the equality of believers, but this equality comes through Christ, who suffered, died, and resurrected. Participation in these events unites people and makes them

equal. Colossians is quite clear that this participation is achieved through baptism, and the baptismal theology, together with the affirmation of equality, logically follows from one another. Therefore, Colossians follows Paul's established baptismal theology, which becomes a norm for the theological understanding of baptism.

One of the really fascinating books regarding baptism is the book of **Hebrews**. Compared with other epistles, the distinctiveness of this book is obvious. There is not much debate about the authorship of this book due to the fact that contemporary scholars unanimously accept that the author of this book is unknown. The more difficult question is about the dating of this text. The text is not only distinctive from other epistles but also has quite a developed theological view. The author also mentions persecutions, which allows us to look at this text as probably written at the end of the 80s or very early 90s (Borg 2013:278).

The letter was written for Christians, but it consists of rich Jewish references and an explanation of Jewish tradition in a new Christian way, which probably suggests that this text was created among a group of Jewish Christians and likely was intended for those who are very familiar with Jewish tradition. The mention of rejection of temple worship in Hebrews could be explained by the fact that at the time of the creation of this text, the Temple did not exist anymore. However, it is also entirely possible that such mention was not developed theology in new circumstances but was part of a continuation of previous Jewish theology that existed before the destruction of the Temple, when certain Jewish groups already looked at the Temple as a corrupted place (Weiss and Zellentin 2016:200). The familiarity with Jewish sectarianism could help us understand the origins of such rejection, which I discussed previously. It is therefore possible to suggest that, although Hebrews, as a text, was written after the destruction of the Temple, it likely represents not a fully reformulated Jewish theology but the continuation of a previous tradition that existed among

Jewish baptismal movements. Thus, it is likely that the Letter to the Hebrews addressed the Jewish Christian community of people who, in the recent past, were part of one of the Jewish baptismal movements.

Let us begin with chapter six, where the author points out the main rudiments of the Christian faith, and he also mentions baptisms in plural form (Hebrews 6:2):

βαπτισμῶν διδαχῆς ἐπιθέσεώς τε χειρῶν, ἀναστάσεώς τε νεκρῶν καὶ κρίματος αἰωνίου.

(Hebrews 6:2, NA28)

Instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

(Hebrews 6:2, NRSV)

The use of the plural form “baptisms” instead of the singular “baptism” is not common in New Testament writings. The singular form was commonly used for baptism in other letters. The baptism of John in the Gospels also refers to “baptism,” not to “baptisms.” Therefore, it is likely that in this place, the author, who wrote his letter for a Jewish audience, meant not only “baptism” as a singular ritual but also a variety of Jewish purification rituals, which were likely still practiced at that time in Jewish-oriented communities. Accepting this view, it becomes more understandable that this text was addressed to Christianized people who, in the recent past, belonged to some Jewish baptismal movement since such streams continued to observe their previous traditions. Their Jewishness was not an obstacle, but a perspective through which they were looking at Christ and his teaching. They certainly had a distinction between “baptism” and “baptisms.” The author of this text makes such a distinction, and despite the origins of singular baptism from Jewish purification practices, which could be called “baptisms,” the singular baptism was a separate ritual that was used in conversion to Christianity.

The new form of baptism becomes a non-repeatable Christological and eschatological event (Byrskog 2011:598-600). At the same time, “baptism” is regarded as a part of a broad tradition of baptisms, which are immersion rituals. These rituals were familiar to the audience who were supposed to read this text, and they continued to practice them on a regular basis even after their conversion to Christianity. Thus, even in Hebrews 9:10–11, the author uses the term “baptisms” regarding Jewish practices of purification; he emphasizes that since a better system was established now, there is no real necessity for various cleansing ceremonies:

μόνον ἐπὶ βρώμασιν καὶ πόμασιν καὶ διαφόροις βαπτισμοῖς, δικαιώματα σαρκὸς μέχρι καιροῦ διορθώσεως ἐπικείμενα.

Χριστὸς δὲ παραγενόμενος ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν διὰ τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειότερας σκηνῆς οὐ χειροποιήτου, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως,

(Hebrews 9:10–11, NA28)

But deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right. But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)

(Hebrews 9:10–11, NRSV)

Throughout the letter, the author connects Christian rituals, including baptism, with Jewish roots. He is trying to justify Christian practices, showing them as a new covenant, which is a natural continuation of the old covenant. At the same time, the author clearly states that a new covenant supersedes the old, and there is no real necessity to hold the complexity of the old Jewish ritual system in the new context. Thus, the author is trying to slightly change the existing tradition of this particular Jewish-Christian community, providing arguments that some of the previous traditions are obsolete.

At the end of the 1st century, there were a variety of Jewish-Christian communities that still held many Jewish traditions, including purificatory practices, but the text of Hebrews shows the gradual change in this situation through an emphasis on the superiority of new practices and

the optional character of the old ones. Hebrews is unlikely to be the final text to raise this issue, as parallels can be observed with *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840*. This manuscript is dated around the fourth century, but it was likely composed between 150–200 CE (Zelyck 2014:178). The crucial scene in this fragment is the dispute between Jesus and the high priest, who criticizes Jesus and his disciples for entering the Temple without proper purification. Jesus argues that the high priest used defiled water for his purification when:

“My disciples and I, whom you say have not bathed, have been dipped in waters of eternal life, which come from . . .” (*Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840*, translated by Ehrman and Pleše 2011:273).

Although various explanations exist for this fragment, the text appears to reflect the historical debates of that era regarding the necessity of ritual purifications in relation to the superiority of baptism.

In contrast to *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840*, Hebrews is a unique source because it is a part of the canonical New Testament. Still, it clearly shows how Jewish-Christian communities viewed baptism through Jewish lenses and how they were changing their views via new theological arguments, ultimately leading to the unification of existing traditions.

There are only a few mentions of baptism in the letter to **Ephesians**; the focus of this text is on the unity of Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles (Borg 2013:352). However, there is a famous and important expression of the belief of the early church, which can be found in Ephesians 4:4-6:

Ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν·

εἰς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἐν βάπτισμα,

εἰς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων,

ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν.

(Ephesians 4:4–6, NA28)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

(Ephesians 4:4–6, NRSV)

The reference to one baptism here occurs in a series of “ones”, indicating the unity of believers. This text is also an important testimony of developing baptismal theology, which frames baptism as a non-repeated ritual – one baptism. The necessity of this emphasis could be the reflection of existing debates about the possibility of repetition of baptism. It is important to note that throughout the whole New Testament, we cannot find any other view on this issue because other views were suppressed very early. The letter to Hebrews is not an exception because it differentiates “baptisms” as purificatory practices and “baptism” as a ritual of initiation. Thus, the New Testament shows us that from early on, baptism as a ritual of conversion, in contrast with purificatory rites, was regarded as a one-time ritual, and the possible different opinions on this issue were rejected. The letter to Ephesians also clearly states that baptism could be performed only once.

Everett Ferguson also sees a reference to baptism in Ephesians 5:26 (Ferguson 2009:161). However, looking at the context of this text, it does not seem to be a direct reference to baptism, but likely a metaphorical allusion to general baptism as the global purification that comes with Christ, and the baptism of each individual is a part of this global process:

Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς,

ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι,

ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἑνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπίλον ἢ ρυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ’ ἵνα ᾖ ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος.

(Ephesians 5:25–27, NA28)

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

(Ephesians 5:25–27, NRSV)

Metaphorical allusions to baptism are not unusual in the New Testament; in some places, we see baptism as an individual ritual. In some, baptism could be seen as a global purification, which we can observe in the **Book of Revelation**. This book does not contain direct information on baptism as a Christian ritual, but the symbolism behind the book likely alludes several times to baptism. James Dunn argues that in the text Revelation 1:5, the author uses established baptismal terminology (Dunn 1990:143).

Καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς. Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ,
(Revelation 1:5, NA28)

And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood.

(Revelation 1:5, NRSV)

Such indirect allusions to baptism also could be found in Revelation 7:14 and 22:1 and in other places. However, these passages do not add anything new to our understanding of baptism, except the fact that baptismal terminology was used not only in regard to individual baptism but also metaphorically; the cleansing effect of baptismal water was transferred to global cleansing of the world, which will finally be cleansed.

The **First Letter of John** does not give us much information on baptism, but it provides us with some important statements on Christian belief. These statements were likely used in Christian baptismal rituals; Everett Ferguson sees such a possibility in the text 1 John 5:5–8

(Ferguson 2009:193). I also suggest that the following verses 1 John 5:9–13, especially 11–12, could represent the early pre-baptismal testimony of faith:

Τίς δέ ἐστιν ὁ νικῶν τὸν κόσμον εἰ μὴ ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ;
οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι’ ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον, ἀλλ’
ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι· καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια.
ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες,

τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.

Εἰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαμβάνομεν, ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων ἐστίν· ὅτι αὕτη
ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι μεμαρτύρηκεν περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.

ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχει τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἐν αὐτῷ, ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ
ψεύστην πεποίηκεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐπίστευκεν εἰς τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν μεμαρτύρηκεν ὁ θεὸς περὶ
τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.

Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία, ὅτι ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεός, καὶ αὕτη ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τῷ
υἱῷ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν.

ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν· ὁ μὴ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἔχει.

Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ
υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.

(1 John, 5:5–13, NA28)

Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

(1 John, 5:5–13, NRSV)

The other important text in regard to baptism is the **First Letter of Peter**. This text is addressed to new converts; it consists of some fundamentals, such as an early catechism or baptismal sermon and possibly a form of early liturgy (Dunn 1990:142). In this letter, we see that the author makes a comparison of baptism with the story of Noah, who saved people from drowning and did not let humanity become extinct (1 Peter 3:20–21):

ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε, ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτὼ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος

ὃ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

(1 Peter 3:20–21, NA28)

Who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(1 Peter 3:20–21, NRSV)

According to this text, baptism is a new Noah's Ark that saves people from spiritual drowning; it cleanses people, and this cleansing is made possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Norbert Brox, in his commentary, points out that the use of a biblical story emphasizing “saved through water” is likely already aimed at baptism (Brox:1979:176). This short but important text emphasizes the connection between the old biblical story of the flood and Jesus's resurrection, which makes possible the new cleansing through baptism. Here is an attempt to reconcile different events through a new theological construct that connects different types of water – the cleansing but destructive water from the flood and the living water of baptism, which

comes to believers through the resurrection of Jesus, who overcame death and opened this door of life for other people who can become his disciples through baptism.

This text represents a more developed view, likely formulated at the end of the 1st century among Christian communities made up predominantly of Gentiles who had sympathy with Judaism before they turned to Christ, so-called “God-lovers” (Borg 2013:552–554). For them, it was important to emphasize the connection between Jewish history and their new faith in Jesus.

In this text, we see one of the examples of rethinking the meaning of baptism through the perspective of ongoing Jewish history, which was not ended but continues in a new way, and baptism is like a new door, similar to a door into Noah’s Ark to the new Ark of salvation through baptism. Peter’s letter also reflects the identity problem among believers. The author solved it by emphasizing the crucial metaphor “in Christ,” which binds a group of believers through shared memory in one community, and most importantly gives a new perspective for stigmatized believers who felt outside of society, through an opportunity to establish a secure basis, and to find a new location for identity (Moxnes 2011:621).

I want to end my observation of New Testament texts in baptism with a short passage from **Titus 3:5**:

οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ
ἃ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς
ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος
ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας
καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου
(Titus 3:5, NA28)

He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

(Titus 3:5, NRSV)

Although baptism is not explicitly mentioned in Titus 3:5, this verse has traditionally been interpreted as a reference to baptism (Leske 1966:191). Reformed theologians highly regarded this text because it contains key ideas, including salvation by God's mercy rather than by human works, and renewal by the Holy Spirit through the water. This verse is part of the epistle, which combines elaborate theology with practical instructions; this suggests that it was likely the product of a developed community, possibly half a century after Paul's death (Borg 2013:583). In comparison with earlier passages on baptism, we see that the understanding of baptism acquires a clearer and more developed theological form. Without directly mentioning baptism, the author presupposes that readers are already familiar with the topic and provides the theological significance of baptism.

The development of baptismal theology is one of the important aspects of the evolution of baptism. By evolution, I mean three essential processes: first, the theological understanding of baptism gradually developed. Second, the ritual itself took on a clearer form, with the baptismal formula as its key component. And third, the development of a creedal formula, that is, a declaration of faith, which was becoming an inseparable part of Christian baptism.

Jaroslav Pelikan emphasizes that proclamation and the administration of baptism went together, and this is the reason why, from the very beginning, creeds became necessary for Christian baptism (Pelikan 2003:379). Initially, candidates for baptism declared their faith before baptism using the short formula of belief that, over the course of Christian history, has grown into a symbol of faith (Pelikan 2003:383). Pelikan points out that the Christian tradition is known for its variety of Creeds. Still, before Creeds, even the primitive formulas of belief were varied and emphasized different points of faith. We are not able to know all the varieties of these short formulas; many of them likely existed only in oral form, but some can be found directly in the

New Testament. I analyzed various texts above and pointed out that some of them contain clear statements of faith that likely represent creedal formulas that were part of early Christian baptism.

There is no question that, to be baptized, the recipient of baptism had to confess their faith, but what exactly did people proclaim in the first century? First of all, they accepted Jesus as their Messiah, which is widely attested in the New Testament (Mark 8:29; Matt 16:16; Luke 9:20; Acts 11:26). Such recognition was likely the earliest necessary part of the proclamation that distinguished followers of Jesus, “messianists,” from other Jewish groups (Johnson 2004:13). They also recognized Jesus as their Lord (1 Cor 6:11, 12:3; Romans 10:9; Phil 2:11), a statement that was not safe during the time of Roman dominance. The recognition of Jesus as Messiah and Lord could be perceived as challenging Roman authority, since the Emperor was regarded as the Lord. Therefore, these earliest confessions, which were part of baptism, were not just statements of faith; their proclamation was a condition for baptism, but by accepting this condition, people took a risk because it could have led to practical consequences, including possible martyrdom.

The development of creedal formulas in the 1st century naturally affected baptism. The British scholar Kelly referred to the necessity of confessing faith before baptism as the *baptismal interrogations*. He points out that the initial form of confession was a simple interrogatory question, which much later developed into declaratory creeds (Kelly 2014:49). The development of formulas does not necessarily mean that they were trinitarian. Wolfram Kinzig notes that trinitarian formulas were rare in the beginning but became quite common by the middle of the 3rd century (Kinzig 2024:120).

Initially, people probably simply confessed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Lord; over time, their responses became more formalized and theologically loaded. As Pelikan states, “primitive formulas were binitarian rather than trinitarian in their verbal form, linking God the

Father with Jesus Christ the Son, but not explicitly with the Holy Spirit” (Pelikan 2003:380). Eventually, trinitarian formulas prevailed, and examples of these formulas can already be seen in the New Testament; however, it is important to understand that these examples reflect the evolution of theological thought rather than its initial stage.

In this chapter, I examined various texts from the New Testament related to baptism, but it is evident that they do not represent a uniform view on the topic. It is not surprising because the texts were produced at different times, by different people, and addressed to various communities. If the community consisted primarily of Jews, the approach to baptism differed from that of a mainly Gentile community. However, from the early stage, we see that baptism was performed in the name of Christ. This feature is repeated in different texts, allowing us to think that an initiation baptism becomes Christocentric from early on. I purposely used the word *initiation* in order to stress that I mean the initial baptism, which allows a person to enter into a Christian community. In some communities, the term baptism could be expanded to different types of purifications, but only the initial baptism was Christocentric. In this way, we see that despite the variety of practices in early Christian communities, likely in the middle of the 1st century, a certain basis for unity was established.

Baptism, similar to traditional Jewish purifications, included immersion into the water, but this immersion became Christocentric; it was the immersion in the name of Jesus. The additional requirements for baptism, such as the correct belief in Jesus as a Triune God, did not exist in early texts and did not explicitly appear in later texts, which can be dated to the beginning of the 2nd century. However, when different texts are observed through a time sequence perspective, in the later texts there are more shaped statements of belief in Jesus. These statements likely established

some foundation that later affects Christian theology in general and baptismal theology in particular.

4.6 Conclusion.

In conclusion to this chapter, I would like to acknowledge that New Testament texts provide us with important information regarding baptism and its understanding in the early Christian community. The texts differ from each other and, in many cases, can be considered as independent sources. The Gospels primarily give information about eschatological baptism, performed by John the Baptist and then inherited by Jesus and his disciples. Thus, the baptism that had been performed during Jesus's life should not be separated from its eschatological context, because it was the context of John's baptism, and Jesus was part of the same Jewish circle as John the Baptist and inherited the same tradition.

There is no evidence to suggest that Jesus preached a different type of baptism than John. However, after Jesus's life, baptism became a Christocentric initiation ritual, which allows a person to become a disciple of Jesus by entering the Christian community through it. The earliest evidence of that could be found in Paul's genuine letters. The variety of other New Testament texts does not always coincide fully with the perspective found in Paul's writings. Still, they consist of the same Christocentric perspective, which enables us to be certain that this was a common feature of baptism since the middle of the 1st century.

Paul's vision of baptism, as death and resurrection with Jesus, is reminiscent of the language of Greco-Roman mystery cults. This language was likely simply borrowed and adapted by Paul and existed in communities established by him; it is unlikely that such language was used in non-Pauline communities. However, due to Paul's very strong influence on other communities,

it seems plausible that at the beginning of the 2nd century, his vision became prevalent even among those communities he had not founded.

The other thing that is noticeable from the texts is that early Christian baptism was a spontaneous ritual and did not require much preparation. The available examples show that baptism could be performed after a short conversation; the only requirement was to believe in Jesus, and if the person was ready, the baptism was performed in the water. The initial requirements for the water were the same as for traditional Jewish purification rituals; the typical place for spontaneous baptism was any accessible river, and a person would be baptized “in the name of Jesus.”

This Christocentrism is the main distinction between Christian baptism and traditional Jewish purification rituals. However, before the total separation of the Christian community from Judaism, Christian Jews continued to practice traditional purification rituals, which in some cases were called baptisms. At the same time, in Jewish Christian communities, people had a distinction between regular traditional purification and baptism in the name of Jesus, which was an initiation ritual. However, as we see from Hebrews, at the end of the 1st century, there was a tendency to look at other forms of purification as less important or not important at all. At least we see the attempts to convince people that the observance of old Jewish traditions, including regular purifications, is not important in the new reality. The attempt to persuade people that it is not important is a clear testimony that by the end of the 1st century, the simultaneous presence of baptism and purification rituals was not uncommon. The situation likely changed by the 2nd century, and the communities that still practiced purification rituals existed only as minorities. Baptism was still seen as the continuation of previous purification rituals. Still, in the context of the view of the superiority of baptism, there was no longer a need to continue practicing other

rituals. Thus, this process of changing attitudes towards previous rituals was connected with forming a Christian identity.

Initially, among Christian Jews, there was no tendency to strictly separate themselves from their tradition, but as soon as Christianity developed, the tendency for such separation gradually grew. As soon as Christianity primarily became the religion of Gentile converts, the tendency to observe and even remember the origins of baptism was no longer necessary; baptism became quite a self-sufficient ritual, and its following development was conditioned only by inner processes of development within Christian communities.

The continuation of the evolution of baptism was related to the issues of the right baptismal formulas. The initial simple formula of baptism, “In the name of Jesus,” became more complex, and the previous spontaneous baptismal ritual turned into a planned ritual with additional requirements, such as a long time of preparation and correct belief. These processes could be observed in more detail in the following stages of the development of baptism from the 2nd century onwards. However, the foundation for such development is already seen in the New Testament writings, specifically among later written texts.

My attempt to look at texts from the New Testament as a source for research on baptism and its evolution during the 1st century showed that if we look at texts sequentially, we can already see the progression of views that established the foundation for the following evolution, which continued after the 2nd century as well.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: The Evolution of Baptism Through a Contemporary Perspective

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I would like to summarize the results of the current study and apply contemporary theories that can help better understand the formation and evolution of baptism.

In the previous chapters, I mainly focused on the historical evolution of baptism and analyzed predominantly textual sources. At the same time, for the study of baptism, it is not only useful but, in my judgment, even necessary to consider the achievements of sociology and related disciplines by applying contemporary data and theories that can significantly enrich our understanding of this topic.

Baptism is a ritual, and like any ritual, it shares common patterns with others. Baptism evolved in a specific historical and social situation, and the established practice of baptism represents not only the memory of the origins of baptism but also manifests trauma, hope, and the identity of the early Christian communities. These aforementioned topics have been separately and extensively researched in the social disciplines, and their achievements might help to have a better sense of the evolution of baptism and the causes that affected this process.

In previous chapters, I showed how baptism evolved, and it is time to recapitulate the main stages of its evolution, which will be helpful in our understanding of the changes that happened within the early Christian community.

In the first chapter, I demonstrated that the initial basis for water-based rituals is the concept of purity – a cross-cultural phenomenon, especially widely known across the Mediterranean world.

Chapter two revealed how this concept worked and evolved within Judaism, and the third chapter was devoted to Jewish baptismal movements and the practice of John the Baptist. The appearance of such movements was an important turning point, not only because the concept of purity evolved in general but because the necessity of purification started to be seen in eschatological terms.

Early followers of Jesus inherited this eschatological perspective. However, the views across a range of early Christian groups were quite dynamic. In the fourth chapter, I observed the Christian perspective on baptism during the 1st century. This observation showed two things. On the one hand, the Christian community cannot be seen as a single group; there were a variety of views among early Christians. On the other hand, it is fair to say that from the middle of the 1st century, we have seen unifying tendencies that have progressed. It contributed to the formation of a distinct Christian identity, and the formation of baptism played an important role in this process. I would like to specifically stress this issue in this chapter because the four previous chapters were mostly devoted to the origins of baptism and its historical progression.

Historical perspective is crucial, and it is the way to see how baptism has changed over time, but I want to point out that baptism is not a ritual that should be studied through a purely historical perspective. I see the practical necessity of applying some anthropological insights because the changes that happened in baptism during its formation and evolution reflect the formation of early Christian identity. An important role in this process was the desire to fix the memory of crucial events from the recent past. The role of memory fixation in ritual practices is an issue that is part of a contemporary discussion among scholars who study rituals. They usually do not limit their research to only religious rituals from the past; they use modern examples from religious and non-religious rituals, analyzing the role of social memory and the necessity of transmitting memory through rituals. This broad socio-anthropological approach and the

achievements that have been pursued lately can be helpful for this research and open the door for the inclusion of this topic in a broad cross-cultural discussion.

This perspective is especially important if we want to have a correct understanding of the formation of Christian baptism in the middle of the 1st century. The significant shift in baptism happened as a result of the reflections of Jesus's followers on historical events concerning Jesus's life. The most traumatic event for followers of Jesus was his death on the cross. Years after this event, it was described in detail in Christian writings and reflected in ritual practices. This shows the extreme significance of Jesus's death to his followers. Thus, the reflections on recent history that took place among early Christians affected their understanding of the meaning of baptism and influenced the identity of followers of Jesus. Contemporary achievements from interdisciplinary fields such as memory studies, trauma studies, and identity studies can provide additional insights for our understanding of the shifting of baptism in the early Christian community and give us a better sense of the causes that affected the formation of baptism.

5.2 Baptism as a Ritual

In this research, in most cases, I am using the term *ritual* in regard to baptism. In the first chapter of my work (see section 1.5.1), I explained that I am not using the word *sacrament* in order to maintain a neutral position. The term *rite* could be a good alternative, but some Christian denominations have been using this term as opposed to sacrament due to theological reasons; I prefer not to create any ambiguity and use the term *ritual* as a technical term for baptism.

The term *ritual* is a relatively modern analytical concept that entered scholarly discourse in religious studies around 1900 (Stollberg-Rilinger 2013:15). However, there are different perspectives on how to define ritual, and the precise definition may depend on the particular

research school that is using this term. Ronald Grimes shows that even among the top scholars in the field, the definition of ritual could differ (Grimes 2014:189). Therefore, the history of ritual research includes a history of different definitions of ritual (Matthes 2017:22). This situation can puzzle people and give the impression that the term is problematic. However, many terms are problematic in this sense; the term *religion* is even more difficult to define, and many attempts to provide a clear definition have failed to gain widespread acceptance (Smith 1963:21). Risto Uro emphasizes that, because the ritual is a scholarly construction, it is always good practice to provide a working definition of the term before its theoretical analysis (Uro 2019:5).

However, if we leave aside scholarly debates and extract the basic consensus about the term, I think it makes perfect sense to define the ritual as a concrete set of actions that have their own symbolic language and represent an important meaning for the community. It is clear that not only Christian baptism but also traditional Jewish purifications that preceded baptism and from which baptism originated fit this definition. Jewish cleansing rituals also represent a specific set of actions that have their own meaning. The meaning was usually not clear to outsiders, but it could easily be decoded by any person who was living within Jewish tradition. In both cases, whether baptism or Jewish purifications, we see some commonality. However, despite the similarities, during its formation, the symbolic meaning of Christian baptism has shifted. Catherine Bell views baptism as a ritual that illustrates both gradual and sudden shifts in emphasis and theological meaning that can be observed historically (Bell 2009 [1997]:212).

Barbara Beyer argues that, despite different definitions of ritual, there is no doubt that baptism should be considered a ritual (Beyer 2024:128) and classified as an *initiation ritual* (Beyer 2024:127).

Defining baptism as a ritual allows us to apply the research methodologies that have been established to study rituals. The theoretical frames for this were suggested by Arnold van Gennep. He proposed to look at structural elements of rituals that can be cross-culturally observed. In his book *The Rites of Passage* (Van Gennep 1960 [1909]), Van Gennep focuses on rituals that mark social transitions. He identified three separate stages that represent the structural elements of ritual – separation, transition, and incorporation. Each stage has its own importance, and together, they constitute the ritual. Separation indicates the partial or full break with the past, the transition or liminal stage is the time of transformation from one stage to another, and the final stage is incorporation. At this stage, a person becomes renewed and acquires a new status. Van Gennep shows this basic structure, which can be easily applied to a variety of rituals – religious or secular.

Victor Turner, in his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Turner 1991 [1969]), developed Van Gennep's theory by focusing specifically on the liminal (transitional) stage of rites of passage. The research on the issue shows that the liminal stage is considered a time of uncertainty and danger. It is the time when people lose their previous state but have not acquired a new one yet. A person overcomes this stage through initiation, and after it, one gets incorporated into the new state and acquires a new identity. The patterns in the ritual process that Van Gennep and Turner described can be applied to different rituals, and baptism is one of them.

In baptism, a person is separated from the previous way of life, symbolically dies and is buried with Christ, and then is incorporated with Christ and acquires a shared identity with other members of the Christian community. As I showed in the previous chapter, for early Christians, baptism was a situational ritual and did not require a long time of preparation, and all of these stages were experienced during a baptism. Later, baptism became a more elaborate procedure requiring sufficient preparation, which extended the liminal stage. For example, by the 4th century

in Jerusalem, baptism was no longer performed on any day but was linked to the annual Easter worship, which included a developed baptismal liturgy (Van den Heever 2005:265). This complication of the procedure led to the fact that a person who wanted to be baptized had been in a long-term transition before acquiring a new identity. Thus, Van Gennep's and Turner's structure of ritual can be applied to baptism, and in such a framework, we can examine the initial form of baptism and its development.

I noted above that different scholars might have different definitions of ritual; Turner defined ritual as a "prescribed formal behavior for occasions" that has reference to belief (Turner 1992 [1982]:79). However, he does not think that the formal behavior in ritual should always fit into a defined framework of particular actions. Ritual is a meaningful performance, and as a performance, it includes the possibility of improvisation, which is not strictly framed (Turner 1992: 79). Turner objects to the vision of ritual as totally unchangeable behavior. Cross-cultural and historical-critical observation shows that if we look at the origins and development of any ritual, regardless of tradition, we are able to face non-fixed ritual behavior. The initial form of ritual tends to be spontaneous, but over time, the shape of the ritual becomes more strictly defined. Following Turner's example, we can compare rituals with theater. In theater plays, a director determines actors' roles according to the scenario, but within the script, actors have a possibility for improvisation.

If we look historically at early Christian worship, not only in regard to baptism but also to the Eucharist, it becomes evident that these liturgies were not strictly fixed but rather charismatic. It is not specifically a Christian feature; across different cultures, rituals tend to be charismatic in their initial stages before they become formalized. A ritual has a purpose, and the actions performed during the ritual reflect the purpose and the meaning of the ritual. At the same time, the ritual

performance is not a static system with strict requirements for the necessity of a particular sequence of actions. A charismatic approach characterizes the initial stage of the ritual, but over time, there is a tendency for a stricter approach to the ritual in all its aspects – a clearer definition of its meaning and a more fixed external form. I would say that at this very moment, ritual becomes ritualized. The ritualization of the ritual is not its initial form but the result of the evolution or regression, depending on how you look at this process.

Thus, by defining baptism as a ritual and incorporating this topic as a part of the ritual studies discussion, we have the opportunity to expand our understanding of the evolution of baptism by putting it into a wider context. Contemporary ritual studies provide additional data that allow us to look at baptism as one among many rituals that follow the same pattern of evolution. It does not exclude the unique history of baptism; on the contrary, it helps us understand the causes of the changes in this ritual and enables us to get a sense of the process of evolution of baptism at a more proficient level.

5.3 The Transformations of the Ritual

In previous chapters, I pointed out the historical connection between Christian baptism and existing Jewish practices. The analysis, which was done in chapter two, showed that Jewish purification practices were under inner development. The important turning point happened during the Second Temple period. It is evident that in the 1st century BCE, among some Jews, we see the appearance of a new tendency to connect ritual impurity with moral impurity; such a connection was unknown before. At the same time, there was growing attention to regular purification practices, sometimes observed on a daily basis and regardless of Temple visits.

It is not unusual that understanding the meaning of the ritual and the approach to it can change over time. In fact, it is cross-culturally observed, and Jewish purification practices are not unique in this sense. However, the history of such changes and the shifting of the meaning of any given ritual usually has reasonable social and historical explanations. As I stated before, the increased attention to purificatory practices among Jews was not just the inner development of such ritual practices but the process that occurred in response to social and cultural changes that came with Hellenization. This process had at least two results: the penetration of Hellenistic thought into the Jewish mind on the one hand, and the tendency to define distinct Jewish identity on the other. However, it was a gradual and, therefore, less noticeable process. The changes that happened in the ritual sphere were not seen in Jewish society as something new but rather as a natural development and enhancement of an earlier existing ritual practice.

By the 1st century, we can see a desire to maintain a high level of ritual purity among ordinary Jewish individuals. In addition, we also see the appearance of movements that put purification practices at the center of their religious activity. The most well-known case in terms of historical and archeological evidence is the so-called Qumran Community – the ritual practices of this community I discussed in chapter three.

The other movement that is crucially important for this research is the movement of John the Baptist. Christian baptismal practice has a historical connection with the practice of John the Baptist, and it is crucial to understand this practice from a ritual studies perspective in order to get a better sense of what exactly Christian baptism inherited from this previously existing tradition and what was developed later within the Christian community.

The key difference between regular Jewish purification and the practice of John the Baptist lies in the eschatological ground. The eschatological sentiments were a characteristic feature of

Jewish baptismal movements, and John, as a leader of one of these movements, was perceived as an eschatological prophet.

However, in both cases, whether it was an individual Jewish purification or purification in the context of Jewish baptismal movements, it was all about the necessity of being purified. Regular purification was intended to remove ritual impurity whereas John's baptism was connected with the necessity of repentance and forgiveness of sins, which was a necessary purification in the context of preparation for God's intervention. Thus, John's baptismal purification cannot be separated from the eschatological context; his baptism was a part of the preparation for God's intervention.

From Turner's perspective, John and his followers can be seen as people who have been in a liminal state. It was a time of hope and uncertainty for them, but it was not the state experienced by most Jews. Many Jews were not satisfied with their situation and likely held some form of passive expectation that God would help their people, but they did not know when or how this would happen. They adapted their religious practices to the current situation and lived with just this passive hope. John's preaching was different; he believed that God could intervene at any moment, and his baptism was an act of preparation for this intervention. This preparation included repentance and forgiveness of sins, which was an important part of John's baptism.

The idea that people need to repent is related to some thoughts that can be found in the apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple period. This literature reflects thoughts that existed in some streams within Judaism of that time, which consisted of the idea that God's wrath could soon fall on sinners and that justice would be restored.

The expectation of divine punishment for oppressors and sinners is natural for humans who want justice, but the unknown results of this justice can also be fearful. It is obvious that when

people think about divine revenge, they would like to be spectators of this act and not the victims of God's wrath. However, who can be sure that they are really pure in the face of God? Probably because of that fear and the desire to be on the side of God, we see the appearance of the necessity of repentance. Repentance purifies individuals and makes them clean before God.

Despite the presence of such a view among some groups of Jews, this does not mean that it was shared by the majority; people could have different perspectives. However, it was the view that John the Baptist had, and precisely because of this view, he called for repentance. The necessity of repentance was crucial, but John's practice included not just inner or verbal repentance but a physical immersion in the Jordan River. This act was seen as part of repentance, some sort of confirmation of spiritual cleansing through ritual immersion. There is no question that Jews were used to similar ritual immersion, and John's baptism seemed familiar; at the same time, his baptism presented a different meaning.

The purification in the Jordan River was unique because it was not a repeated ritual; it was an act that was perceived as the final purification in the face of a new reality. Just as the ancient Hebrews, freed from bondage in Egypt, crossed the Jordan River to enter the promised land, their descendants came to the same river to become free again. People got purified by the water from the Jordan River and expected God's imminent intervention. In Van Gennep's terminology, John's baptism can be described as a liminal ritual that was received by people who were in a liminal stage.

John's baptism had two important features that constituted his practice. On the one hand, it is a familiar practice of purification. On the other hand, this practice was inseparable from the view that the present moment was a time of uncertainty in the face of coming changes. The meaning of John's baptism cannot be understood without getting a sense of Jewish eschatological

views. Thus, the baptism of John was a type of purification that was the product of Jewish eschatology. This connection between the familiar Jewish practice and the eschatological perspective made John's baptism unique in comparison with other similar practices.

Given the fact that John baptized Jesus, I do not see any reason to doubt that Jesus's initial view of baptism, as well as a view of his disciples, presupposed that this act was carried out in the eschatological context as the preparation for the new coming reality. Over time, baptism shifted its focus from eschatology to Christology (Marcus 1995:521). The question that needs to be asked is: at what point did the meaning of baptism shift? It is possible that partial shifting already happened during Jesus's life, supposedly after the tragic death of John the Baptist, which was the first significant trauma for all people who were more or less related to John and believed in his prophetic mission regarding the imminent and near end of the current world.

God's intervention did not happen during John's life, and it is quite natural that people started to correct their views accordingly. It is also not surprising that after Jesus's death, his disciples experienced a more significant trauma, which affected their understanding of Jesus's mission and his role in history. However, it was not a spontaneous but rather a gradual process of reflection. During the first decades, the followers of Jesus were part of the movement, which still fit into the general frames of Jewish eschatological movements, and at this stage, baptism still carried an eschatological meaning combined with acceptance of Christ's discipleship. These two components were crucial from the very beginning. At the same time, the united view on baptism has not yet been formulated, and it is not surprising that during the 1st century, we can see different approaches to the same ritual in different communities. In the previous chapter, I showed that baptism could be distinct from community to community at the earliest period. Still, the question for this chapter is different: what can we say about factors that paved the way to eventual unity for

baptism, and what eventually made baptism distinct from other Jewish rituals? In the next section, I will present suggestions that rely not only on historical facts but also on the achievements of contemporary sociology, cultural anthropology, and related disciplines, and I am pretty sure that their helpful insights can shed additional light on this problem.

5.4 Baptism and the formation of Christian Identity

I propose to look at the process of evolution of Christian baptism as a reflection of the formation of Christian identity. In the 1st century, Jesus' disciples did not separate themselves from Judaism. Jesus himself operated in the Jewish system of values, and even if he opposed some rules, his opposition was part of internal debates that existed in Judaism at that time. However, if we agree that Jesus and his disciples continued to maintain their Jewish identity, the next question we should ask is this: what exactly is Jewish identity?

By the end of the Second Temple period, Jews did not have a common territory; the majority of them lived in the Diaspora, did not speak Hebrew, and were culturally and socially diverse (Herr 2009:212). However, despite all differences among Jews, they had a sense of shared identity and distinctiveness from non-Jews (Gruen 2009:101). The images that solidified this identity are present in the Torah, which describes Jews as people who have a special bond with God through the covenant, which served as a starting point for Jewish collective identity. Other biblical texts describe the great past and the challenges of the Israelite nation. In such a context, the oppression of Jews by Rome was seen through the lens of historical memory about the great past, and the current situation was not considered fair and did not represent the true will of God to his people. Thus, the religious identity of Jews in the 1st century was bound up with their political identity as a separate nation under oppression. This was the basic vision within which different

approaches were developed. People could have different perspectives on how to look at the current situation in terms of politics and religion. The existence of different Jewish sects is the result of this diversity. Jesus's movement had its own features, but it was one group among others. The actual separation of this group from Judaism happened as soon as followers of Christ started to perceive Jews who did not recognize Christ as the Messiah as "others" and made a claim that only followers of Christ were the true children of Abraham who had the correct interpretation of the Bible (Lieu 2016:188). The growing exclusivism of followers of Christ led to total separation from Judaism. At the same time, it was a gradual process and was not connected to one particular event.

Initially, the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah was a part of an internal discussion within Judaism, similar to those that we can observe in modern churches in regard to the challenges of our time. Sometimes, church discussions may be heated, but they do not necessarily lead to a total breakup of two different groups within one church. Daniel Boyarin argues that it is impossible to point to any particular date that could indicate the separation of Judaism and Christianity, and until very late antiquity, there were no different entities such as Judaism and Christianity (Boyarin 2004:21). He recognizes the existence of different social groups, such as non-Jewish Christian, Jewish Christian, and non-Christian Jewish, but the interlapping between them was so deep that it is very questionable if we can put any clear boundaries between them (Boyarin 2004:21). Clear boundaries did not exist for a long time; in some communities, boundaries seemed clearer, but in others, they were blurred. Defining boundaries was not a goal of early Christians; it was the result of the construction of orthodoxy when some Christians tried to unify other Christians according to their understanding of the correct belief. Many people who allegedly did not have the correct belief disagreed with such frames and started to resist. At the same time, some isolated communities even had no idea that there was any necessity for the normalization of their faith. The formation of

Christian orthodoxy can be seen as the continuation of the construction of Christian identity, but it is a separate and more complex topic. The reality is that in the 1st century, there was no normative Christianity, but a variety of groups. As Lieu suggests, it would be more appropriate to view them within their own intercommunal traditions, such as Matthaean, Johannine, or Pauline Christianity, without using generalized terms (Lieu 2004:4).

However, I would like to focus on a different issue, which is the specific identity of followers of Christ. They could have multiple identities, both as Jews and as followers of Christ. There was no contradiction here; people who believed in Christ as the Messiah existed within a larger Jewish identity. They considered themselves descendants of Abraham, and each identity was important in its own sense, so followers of Christ did not sacrifice one identity at the expense of another. Historically, one identity superseded the other, which was a result of the growing gap between followers of Christ and other Jews. However, this would not have happened if, in its initial state, followers of Christ had not developed a strong sense of inner identity based on shared beliefs and a sense of communal fellowship. The prominent scholar in the field of identity, Rogers Brubaker, in his definition of collective identities, states:

“This is the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders” (Brubaker 2004:46).

This definition fits the situation that we are able to observe among early followers of Christ, even at the time when they did not separate themselves from Judaism. The question that is reasonable to ask is, to whom could early Christians have antipathy? In its initial state, they could not have had an antipathy to other Jews because they were Jews themselves, and as Jews, they still had more in common with those Jews who did not believe that Christ was the Messiah than with

pagan society. Messianic and non-messianic Jews shared the same tradition and political solidarity in the thought that the Roman Empire was a force that oppressed their nation.

However, the Christian community gradually evolved, and during this process, they acquired more unique characteristics, such as ritual practices and rich narrative materials, which were distinctive from other Jewish groups. Due to a growing gap between these groups, it is not surprising that over time, we see a tendency among Christians to look at Jews, who did not accept Jesus as Messiah, as “others.” In the previous chapter, I analyzed how some texts from the New Testament had already reflected this distance. Some passages even make Jews responsible for Jesus's death, such as the well-known passage from Matthew 27:25 and a variety of other passages from different Gospels and Acts that contain anti-Jewish sentiments. Despite the existence of such passages, I do not think that they reflect the author's anti-Jewish or antisemitic trope. I prefer to look at such passages as the reflection of family discord when, due to frustration, people from the same family try to create psychological distance, and not necessarily the form of total separation.

It is worth noticing that the association of people as descendants of Abraham was important not only for those who were Jews by birth but also for Gentiles who became Christians. The question is not whether early Christians considered themselves Jewish or not; I am quite positive that they had a Jewish identity. However, in addition to that, they also had an identity as followers of Christ. The construction of this identity at a time when Christians did not separate themselves from Judaism is related to the problem of the construction of Christian baptism because the evolution of baptism is a reflection of this process.

From the very beginning, for followers of Christ, it was important to spread the word that Jesus is the Messiah. The messianic message was spreading among people by sharing stories and describing personal experiences. Besides the external message, which was intended to convert

people, there was also a life within the Christian community that delivered messages to newcomers and converted members. The messages consisted of meaningful oral stories and actions that were intended to enhance people's experience as followers of Christ. The stories that were told in communities and ritual practices played a role in the formation of a specific identity, and baptism in such a context was a crucial ritual that served as a way to reinforce this identity.

In the early Christian community, baptism became not just a necessary ritual but a tool that created a specific memory and identity among new members. Kirk, in his analysis, shows that early Christian communities as genuine communities were communities of memory. They incorporated new individuals into the group through participation in the shared memory by telling and retelling meaningful stories, and rituals are a vital part of this process (Kirk 2005:4). In baptism, an individual's experience becomes part of an encompassing story that is not limited by time. The boundaries between time and place become barely visible or not visible at all, as personal experience is integrated into a broader story, and individual memory becomes part of the memory of the community. Baptism and Eucharist played a crucial role in the construction of the collective memory of early Christians. Keightley points out that the Christian church could be seen as a body of shared memories. It was a memory of the past, which was distinctive from history in the modern secular sense. The Christian understanding of the past was formed through meaningful stories that were transmitted through participation in early Christian rituals (Keightley 2005:136).

Eucharist and baptism were the central rituals of the early church. They allowed people to have bodily involvement in timeless events that created a unique connection between past and present, destroyed any time framing, and produced the unique shared identity of the Christian community. Over time, Christians solidified both their identity and their theological understanding of baptism. Cyril of Jerusalem, in his *Mystagogical Lectures* (*Katecheseis Mystagogikai*),

explicitly says that baptism is sharing Jesus's death and resurrection: "sharing His sufferings in a symbolic enactment we may really and truly gain salvation" (Cyril of Jerusalem 2000:164). However, I would like to emphasize that Cyril repeated a meaning that represented an established understanding of baptism already known among early Christian communities, specifically after Paul, who first introduced this view. His understanding became very influential, especially as it helped to make a clear distinction of baptism as an initiation ritual, as Barbara Beyer puts it, "The death-life-motif is a default characteristic of initiation rituals. It blends together the aspects of termination, transformation, and initiation" (Beyer 2024:129).

Among early followers of Jesus, baptism was not perceived as a Christian innovation but as a familiar Jewish ritual that was enriched by new meaning and grasped the meaningful memory of the recent past. In this regard, I would like to refer to Yosef Yerushalmi, who proposed to look at the Jewish understanding of history as the memory of a series of meaningful events. This memory is distinct from the modern understanding of history, where history is subordinated to its sequence. As against our modern history, Jewish historical memory is selective; it discards unnecessary historical events and leaves those events that are essential for the purpose of community, an approach which later was inherited by Christianity and Islam (Yerushalmi 1989:8). In this sense, Jewish rituals and festivals represent the evocation of a meaningful historical past rather than just a description of the past. This evocation enables people to feel a connection with the past and have a sense of personal involvement in it (Yerushalmi 1989:9). Early Christian communities followed the same pattern, but the focus of meaningful events was shifted to the recent past instead of the distant past. This focus allowed the construction of a specific Christian identity, which initially was not different from Jewish identity but had its own features that were the result of a reflection of recent experience. The key rituals that evoke the experience of the

recent past were baptism and Eucharist; they represent meaningful events that were important for the community.

Both baptism and Eucharist represent the trauma of the community as well as hope. I would like to stress that the element of trauma is important in terms of collective memory. Baptism is associated with dying and resurrection with Christ, which is simultaneously trauma and hope. The Eucharist is the remembrance of tragic events as well as a participation in the supper with Christ, who is still present within his community. The focus of the early Christian community on two rituals that reflect traumatic experiences created a specific sense of belonging to a recent traumatic past. The traumatic past, which members of the community were not witnessing directly, still affected them. The modern scholars of trauma distinguish the traumatic event from the trauma itself. The actual event belongs to the past, but trauma is the result of the past; it is a wound that could exist and develop in the human psyche after the event. For the Christian community, one of the most important events from the past was the Golgotha experience. The horrific death of Jesus was not just a matter of the past; it was a collective experience that affected the identity of each follower of Christ. Such a phenomenon is not unique and has been explored in the social sciences. Sociologist Jeffrey Alexander uses the term *cultural trauma* for groups that were subjected to a horrific event in the past, but this event still affects group consciousness in the present and constitutes their identity (Alexander 2004:1). Cultural trauma, as opposed to individual trauma, is something that constitutes the identity of the group with a fixation on the past event, and in the case of the early Christian community, this event was the experience of Jesus's death. Not all believers could witness this event, but they could be involved in it through stories and ritual practices. As John Dominic Crossan demonstrates in *The Birth of Christianity*, early Christianity

was shaped by oral stories and ritual practices (Crossan 1998). Rituals not only preserved the stories; they also helped believers shape a sense of participation in events of the past.

Baptism, in this sense, was the first introduction for new believers to the Christian mystery of death with Jesus and resurrection with him. There is no doubt that from early on, the shared memory about Jesus's death and resurrection becomes a distinctive feature of the identity of early followers of Jesus. Cathy Caruth, one of the leading scholars in Trauma Studies, proposed to look at traumatic experiences as events that can go beyond an individual experience but could be transmitted into society through meaningful stories and images (Caruth 1996). The traumatic images from the past can become an important part of societal identity; in such terms, we can look at early Christians as a traumatized society.

The death of Jesus was a significant trauma for his followers, and its subsequent centrality in the Christian community represents a deep trauma that continues to be reflected among new followers of Jesus. They did not experience this event in real time but could experience it through ritual action, intended to produce the same experience as the direct disciples of Jesus. Baptism as a ritual was subordinated to this goal. It was not a story about the past; it was the personal involvement of each baptized person in this story. Christian believers were not separated from the past – they were part of it.

Overcoming the boundaries of time, which is obtained through a ritual, is a feature that could also be observed in Greco-Roman mysteries. The initiation into mystery was not just a repeated drama of the past; it was the way to become a part of a big story. Everything in mysteries was directed to create this sense of participation – meaningful stories, bodily involvement, and the use of special agents. The goal was to create an unforgettable psychological impact that would give a person a sense of new belonging.

In my research, I tried to show the complexity of the formation of baptism; I do not accept the idea that Christian baptism was the result of solely one tradition, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman. Historically, Christian baptism was formed as a result of different influences. It would be incorrect to say that baptism is just an evolved Jewish practice, and it is also a mistake to look at baptism as a practice that has nothing to do with Jewish tradition but rather as a variation of existing practices that came from Greco-Roman mystery cults. The reality is that we have to recognize the complexity of baptism's formation, and I would like to stress that its origins have two main sources – Jewish and Greco-Roman. The formation of baptism was a result of this hybridity, which became possible because of a political situation and mutual cultural influences, which, of course, affected religion. I am emphasizing this because, in the previous scholarship, there was a tendency to take one side or the other in terms of underestimating the influences. Some scholars held the view that baptism was solely of Jewish origin and that the Greco-Roman component was insignificant and not worthy of attention, while others believed that the Greco-Roman component was crucial. In my view, it is important to reject these extremes and recognize that baptism could not be formed without both of these components that have equal value in the process of formation of Christian baptism.

The historical connection between Christian baptism and Jewish purification practices was examined in detail in chapters two and three. For the Christian community, the connection of baptism with previous Jewish practices was not just a matter of the past; it was crucial for their identity to have a sense that this ritual practice was a continuation of a Jewish tradition and not an invention of a new one. The continuation does not mean unchanging, and I showed previously that Jewish practices of purification were changing under the influence of Greco-Roman culture even before Jesus was born. Thus, the appearance of new elements, and even the shifting of meaning,

was not necessarily understood by people as something new, but it was considered a useful change in the current situation. This approach allowed people to add new meaning to the ritual and change the practice without the sense that they were constructing a new ritual apart from the old one. The changes were seen as a new emphasis, which was considered a natural and actual development.

Thus, Judaism, in its variety of streams, including the early Christian community, could accept elements from other religious practices when they were considered useful. Knowing this context, it seems unlikely that the Hellenistic element that infused Christianity was crucial in its subsequent separation from Judaism, simply because this Hellenistic influence on the Christian community was not isolated from a more global influence on Judaism as a whole. The question is not whether Christianity eventually became a separate entity because of Hellenistic influence or not, but what exactly shaped Christian identity. It seems quite evident to me that the shift in the understanding of baptism in the middle of the 1st century is a great example of the construction of Christian identity. This is why this research contributes not only to the research of baptism but also to Christian identity.

Baptism as a ritual gave access to a community of believers, where each person at some point went through the same initiation and acquired a sense of involvement in such crucial events as the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The ritual created a specific sense of unity with Christ and each member of the Christian community. The community represented a mystical fellowship where people had a special bond of spiritual belonging to each other. I suppose that this sense of communal identity eventually produced the separation of the Christian community from Judaism, but in its earliest stage, it was mostly a matter of belonging to the messianic community within Judaism, not a separate one.

At the same time, the community challenged previous social boundaries. It was open to everybody regardless of ethnicity, age, or gender. People entered the community with no hierarchical distinction and even with no time limitations. New members could feel that they had experienced past events as if they had been real witnesses and even participants. These aspects are expressed in Christian writings, and they are reflected in ritual practices. Christian baptism is the best example of that; this ritual represents the faith and vision of the early Christian community through symbolic actions. Actions during baptism are a specific and unique language that goes beyond ordinary words. Our modern understanding of the necessity of verbal or textual explanation of religion and ritual is quite far from what early Christians thought about it. For them, the personal experience and involvement in ritual create a sense of profound understanding of events from the past and belonging to them. This sense was invaluable and superior to our modern attempts to explain past events logically. There was no need for additional explanation for things that were experienced personally. The ritual is some sort of visual icon that represents the view of the community on events from the past, not through text but through a set of actions. These actions serve as instruments that help to explain crucial events that were meaningful for the Christian community, and they experienced them on a deeply personal level. All ritual actions that constitute baptism are intended to create a sense of involvement with crucial events of the past.

5.5 The Role of Baptismal Symbolism

The profound symbolism that characterized baptism is not something that was very common in Jewish ritual practices. There is no ground to doubt that baptism had its origins in traditional Jewish purification, but it also absorbed features that were typical of Greco-Roman mysteries, and it made Christian baptism unique. Early Christians, as well as other Jews in the late

Second Temple period, did not regard such borrowings as the inclusion of alien elements into their tradition but looked at them as tools taken from their common cultural repertoires that served to transfer symbolic meaning in the best possible way. The way baptism was eventually formed is nothing but a reflection of crucial beliefs of the early Christian community, including three main points. Firstly, for the Christian community, it was important to testify to the importance of Jesus's sufferings, and each new member had a sense of participation in them through symbolic actions that were performed during baptism. Accepting baptism also meant accepting the possibility of personal suffering in the name of Christ in the future. Secondly, the belief in Jesus's resurrection was a source of hope. The resurrection was not perceived as an event from the past; it was perceived that, in a mystical way, Jesus was still present in the community, which was open to each believer through baptism. Thirdly, baptism has opened the door to an egalitarian community of people who are mystically united with each other, and where traditional social boundaries no longer exist.

All three of these points can be found in Paul's genuine writings regarding baptism. Paul expressed his vision clearly, but most Christians had not read Paul for centuries and had a similar view. Why? Simply because baptism as a ritual basically reflected the same view through ritual actions. They were highly symbolically loaded, and each believer who went into baptismal waters could easily understand their symbolic meaning without supporting written text. The performance of baptism was a visual, non-written testimony that spoke for itself.

The mystical unity of all believers that was acquired through baptism challenged the traditional social order. Christian egalitarianism appeals to modern society, but it was not the situation in the 1st century, when equality was unusual, and inequality was the norm of society. The equality of people and the challenge of a socio-hierarchical society represent the vision that

went back to Jesus, whose movement implied the direction toward an egalitarian community. Richard Horsley describes the early Christian society as the communities that were constituted in “nonpatriarchal familial terms” (Horsley 1987:240). At the same time, the rapid spread of Christianity brought new people who became believers, but even for them, the egalitarian Christian ideas seemed radical, and they perceived them with a sense of unease because they contradicted the traditional social norms to which they were accustomed. The unwillingness to accept Christian egalitarianism in its full initial form drove some authors to deradicalize the early Christian approach towards more acceptable social norms, and this is why we see such radical contradictions between the genuine letters of Paul and the letters that were ascribed to him but belonged to later authors. However, the integration of these more conservative elements into the Christian mindset affected the subsequent understandings of social norms. These norms were taken for granted by later authoritative authors, who in the Christian tradition came to be known as the Fathers of the Church. They accepted texts claiming to be written by Paul and believed him to be the author of a broad corpus of writings, including 1 Timothy, which effectively deradicalized Paul’s egalitarian views and promoted a less radical approach to societal norms by appealing to the apostolic authority (Clark 1983:16). This approach became dominant in Christianity for centuries and affected patristic literature, which was left quite a little from an initial radical egalitarian vision that was dominant in the early community. At the same time, baptism, through its symbolism and ritual actions, has kept the memory of early Christian egalitarianism.

As an egalitarian ritual, baptism was inclusive. Any person could be baptized, and the ritual did not differ for Jew or Gentile, for a person who held a burden of slavery or was free, for women or men. The ritual itself eliminated sexual differences and erased the boundaries between genders. Victor Turner points out that the erasing of sexual differences in the initiation context is not

surprising; it is a very common cross-cultural feature, but this is conditioned by liminal situations (Turner 1974:247). In the case of baptism, it goes beyond the liminal stage; through baptism, believers enter the egalitarian Christian community where “there is no longer male and female” (Galatians 3:28). At the same time, baptism as an initiation to this community consists of rich and unique symbolism.

One of the most evident features is that baptism requires the person being baptized to be nude, regardless of gender. It was not unusual in Judaism because nudity was required in traditional Jewish purification rituals. However, the traditional Jewish purifications were not initiation rituals, whereas Christian baptism became an initiation ritual. The ritual nudity was customary in the initiations into the Greco-Roman mysteries. So, it is unlikely that nudity was any obstacle for Jewish or Gentile audiences; people with different backgrounds were accustomed to nudity in the ritual context.

There is a tendency among some evangelical scholars to argue that the mention of nudity in a baptismal context does not necessarily imply total nudity and could include basic covering of the body (Guy 2003:140). The author is rightly cautious in recognizing that there could be some cases with total disrobing but still arguing that it was not very common, especially in cases when an adult cleric was dealing with an adult female (Guy 2003:140). Guy’s argument does not represent the consensus on this issue, but it is worth mentioning as an alternative view. However, knowing the facts that nudity was a part of Jewish practices of purification, presented in Greco-Roman mysteries, and cross-culturally observed among different initiation rituals, I do not think that Christian baptism should be seen in totally different frames. It seems to me that Guy’s approach is an attempt to remove embarrassment towards early Christian baptism, where nudity was part of it, through the presentation of an accustomed version that would be a better fit for

modern presuppositions about what an early version of baptism should look like. I do not think that he did it consciously, but it is likely the result of an embarrassment towards nudity, which is still present in modern Western society, and it affects the perception of the situation that took place centuries ago.

At the same time, I am not arguing that early Christians were unashamed of nudity. They were likely more modest about public nudity in comparison with Gentile society, but ritual nudity was normalized because it was seen in a different category. Jonathan Z. Smith pointed out that it is true that there was the presence of shaming towards nakedness in Judaism and then in Christianity; at the same time, nudity played an important symbolic role in the baptismal context (Smith 1966:220). It is connected to the idea of transformation through baptism, in which a person is reborn in baptism and, as an innocent baby, naked and without shame, symbolically returns to Eden (Smith 1966:234).

Jensen identifies at least five symbolic functions of baptismal nudity: 1. Stripping off an old identity; 2. The symbolism of the newborn child; 3. The return to the initial innocence of Adam and Eve; 4. The innocence and genderlessness of post-baptismal society; 5. The initial vulnerability of the body and the protection that a baptized person acquires through baptism (Jensen 2011:166–168).

Roy Rappaport emphasizes the important role of bodies in the ritual; they become instruments that transmit those meta-messages that are difficult to convey by ordinary language (Rappaport 1999:252). The involvement of the body in the process of the baptismal ritual is a different symbolic language that was unknown to outsiders. As soon as participants in the ritual go through baptism, they acquire a new experience that is inexpressible by ordinary language and can only be grasped on an emotional level. The stories that accompanied baptism and the involvement

of the body were intended to create a very strong emotional response. The bare body of the baptized serves as a tool that connects the events from the past with the present – starting with the blissful life of ancestors, the human fall and suffering, the crucifixion of Jesus, and his resurrection. Baptism is the reality where the lines between the present and the past become blurred. An individual who receives baptism is not just a person who lives here and now but represents a part of a larger story. A person acquires a unique sense of unity not with the state, common society, or even the present time but with people who are part of the community and have received the same experience. In such terms, the ritual not only erases gender differences during its performance, but it also changes the life of a baptized person through access to a community where social norms are different in comparison to ordinary society. Baptism helped believers acquire a sense of unity with a community in which all members were equal. Through baptism, they were integrated into this egalitarian society, where each person was seen as a part of the mystical body of Christ, as the apostle Paul puts it (1 Cor. 12:12–27). This sense of belonging to one body, which had been connected in a mystical way with both the past and the present, was an important part of early Christian identity. However, this sense of belonging could only be acquired through baptism. Thus, baptism was a turning point for each believer, changing their life and perception of reality.

I would like to indicate that baptism was not only a ritual that allowed one to enter into a Christian community; it also affected each person's identity on multiple levels. The immersion into the waters of baptism meant that each baptized person experienced, on an emotional and even physical level, participation in a drama of Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection. The resurrection part was no less important than the others. The resurrection was understood as a victory, and each member of the community was part of it. It was also a source of individual hope because nobody could be certain about the future. Each Christian could be martyred, but the

readiness for martyrdom was connected with the belief in the resurrection, which was seen as a victory over death. Victory comes through participation in the whole story, the story that has not yet been finished because each baptized person has been a part of this story as a member of the mystical body of Christ. It means that the story continues, and each believer is part of it, and the whole community from the past, present, and future is a big mega-family of one body. The integration into this body comes through baptism. All baptismal symbolism was intended to create these feelings, and as a result, allows each person to feel that they are part of a big and meaningful story.

5.6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, my intention was to show how contemporary interdisciplinary research can enrich our understanding of the evolution of baptism from a broad, cross-cultural perspective. From chapter one to chapter four, I showed the historical development of Jewish purification rituals and how they changed and transformed due to different circumstances. For some unfortunate reason, many scholars in the past looked at baptism as some sort of innovation rather than a transformation. Throughout this work, I have been showing, and I hope to have persuaded the reader, that baptism developed out of the Jewish practice of purification. The word “offshoot” indicates an origin, but it is not synonymous with an initial practice. The practice was transformed and rethought in a new way due to political, social, and cultural circumstances. One of the crucial points is the appearance of the Jewish baptismal movements and the practice of John the Baptist, who was one of the most prominent leaders of such movements. These movements had their roots in Jewish purification, but their practices were developed and transformed. The famously known practice of Jewish proselyte baptism, which is often mistakenly attributed as the predecessor of

Christian baptism, also had the same root but was transformed and rethought. These practices, including Christian baptism, are different but share the same origin; this makes them related but not identical.

It is hard to know exactly within which frameworks early Christians looked at baptism. It seems likely that clearly defined frames did not exist until the emergence of Paul. Paul himself indicates that divisions had existed among believers. Thus, Paul's writings should not be considered as a united view of all Christians but as one of many expressions that likely reflect some tendencies that previously existed. Paul's contribution was crucial because he set clearer frames, and they became the basis for the following understanding of baptism. Thus, Paul certainly did not invent baptism, but he was someone who clearly articulated frameworks. What is important is that these frames allowed the creation of a specific sense of belonging among all baptized people as a united fellowship. Initially, it was just a specific sectarian identity within Judaism, but this sense of common identity paved the way for the future separation from Judaism. Paul's vision eventually prevailed, and the alternatives that existed before him were pushed to the margins of Christian history. I do not think that Paul could realize it, but through Paul's framing, baptism became a door through which a new Christian identity began to take a clear shape. It was a crucial turning point that affected the following development of the Christian church as a separate entity and not as a part of Judaism.

Due to the division between Christianity and Judaism, people rarely reflect on the origins of Christian baptism. They are usually unable to see Christian baptism as a practice that originated in Judaism and had several turning points before it was defined as a Christian practice. However, the historical approach I have used in presenting the origins of baptism allows us to see the complexity of its origins and formation. The goal of my research, as presented in the title, is to

research the origins and the development of Christian baptism. This goal has been achieved through historical observation of the evolution of Jewish purification rituals and an indication of crucial points that accompanied this evolution. The results of this research show that the origins of baptism go back to the practice of Jewish purification, a practice that itself was under internal development and was affected by different influences in different periods. I specifically emphasized the importance of Greco-Roman influence, which occurred during the Second Temple Period and was highly influential not only on the Jewish practice of purification but on Judaism in general. The appearance of so-called Jewish baptismal movements, which first emerged in the 2nd century BCE and existed in various forms at least up to the 1st century CE (Thomas 2010:435), is another turning point. It indicates that, at that time in Judaism, the problem of ritual purity went beyond ordinary observance and became a practice that created unique movements that saw this practice as one of the most important in their religious life and even as a substitute for worship in the Temple. The prominent leader of one of these movements was John the Baptist. Historically, Jesus and his followers had a direct connection with the movement of John the Baptist, and John influenced Jesus. At the same time, Jesus's movement was not the same as the movement of John, but baptismal practice was very likely similar. The key turning point of this practice happened in the early Christian community after Jesus's life when baptism became a Christocentric ritual. The tendency to see baptism as a Christocentric ritual likely began before Paul. However, because Paul's writings are the first textual documents, we can be sure that a Christocentric understanding of baptism existed by the middle of the 1st century because Paul's writings undoubtedly express such a vision. However, it does not prove that it was the only possible understanding of baptism. Still, it likely was widely spread, especially after Paul's missionary activity and the spreading of his letters. I do not want to argue that Paul invented Christocentric baptism, but he successfully

promoted this idea. He also played a role in developing Christian self-consciousness through the symbolic baptismal language he offered. It is quite clear that Paul's impact on Christian history was crucial, and Paul's baptismal language became part of the baptismal ritual. His understanding of baptism very soon became a common norm, and baptism itself became a manifestation of Christian identity. The evolution of Christian baptism did not stop in the 1st century. However, at that time, its main meaning had already been formed and clearly articulated.

There are several texts that reflect the later development of baptism, including Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, Tertullian's treatise *On Baptism*, and the *Apostolic Tradition*, among others, but this subsequent evolution lies beyond the scope of this particular research. The only non-biblical text that could fit into the time frame of this research is the text called *Didache*. The current scholarly consensus has not established the exact date, and any dating remains hypothetical; however, it generally places *Didache* in the range of the late 1st century to 110 or 120 CE (Niederwimmer 1988:52–53). I did not discuss the *Didache* in chapter four because I wanted to demonstrate the diversity of approaches to baptism within the canonical New Testament. The *Didache* is a text outside the New Testament and therefore falls outside the scope of that chapter. Furthermore, even if the dating of the *Didache* overlaps with that of some New Testament writings, it is unlikely to coincide with the earliest written texts; rather, it is more likely to coincide with the later ones. A comparison between the earliest New Testament texts and the *Didache* shows that the *Didache* represents a more instrumental and less charismatic approach to baptism, which indicates a later origin of the text.

Thus, baptism was evolving and, due to the course of history, became more instrumental than charismatic ritual; the consideration of later sources regarding baptism shows this clearly. However, the most important process happened in the 1st century when baptism was under its

initial formation. In comparison with regular Jewish purification practices, baptism became a distinct initiation ritual, which was connected with the recent past and experience of the early Christian community. It transmitted the memory of the Christian community into the personal experience of every believer who received baptism. The important part of baptism was the psychological impact that created the sense that each believer had participated in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was not just a symbolic language; it was the experience that each recipient of baptism felt through the body, the body that was mystically involved in the events of the past. As soon as a person goes through baptism, they acquire a specific memory that cannot be erased; it becomes a part of personal and communal identity. Each follower of Jesus, through baptism, felt that they were part of a mystical fellowship where each person is equal and has the same experience and the same values.

Thus, baptism was not an ordinary ritual; it was a life-changing experience that transformed each baptized person into a participant in a larger story that was an essential part of the early Christian community's memory. A baptized person acquired the Gospel not through a written text, but through explanation within the community and personal experience through baptism. The community itself was seen as a part of the Gospel and perceived as a continuation of the Gospel. Each individual who went through baptism felt that they had become involved in the Gospel story. This was a unique feature of baptism: it was not an ordinary ritual but part of a living memory of the past into which any person could be incorporated.

It will be useful to continue the conversation about the evolution of baptism by using a broader time frame, which will help us understand the long process of baptism's evolution. I plan to continue this work in the near future. However, the task of this particular research is to show the origins of baptism and its evolution in the 1st century. The challenge I experienced included the

reality that we do not have many written documents from that time. Any scholar would agree that it is generally better to have more documents than fewer. Still, even those pieces of evidence allow us to see a common picture of the situation that took place in the 1st century. They allow us to track the evolution of baptism and look at different approaches initially presented in the early Christian community.

In addition to textual documents, which should always be considered crucial evidence for any historical research, I hope that I have persuaded my readers that the achievements of other disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology, could help us understand the current topic better. I insist on the importance of this because history cannot be separated from people, and contemporary achievements from subfields such as ritual studies, memory studies, and identity studies can help get a sense of cross-cultural patterns that can be useful for understanding the situation regarding baptism in the 1st century. I am not the first person who found the interaction of historical research with social disciplines useful, but I am a strong believer that the study of the development of rituals cannot be complete without referring to the achievements of social disciplines. At the same time, a large group of conservative historians and theologians still do not think that engaging with social disciplines makes a big difference, and their conclusions mostly rely on written and archaeological sources. This narrow approach impoverishes the research's possibilities and makes it less connected with the broader context of the issue. I do not think that repetition of common historical knowledge about the topic can push the research to the next level, but I do believe that interaction with other disciplines can significantly enrich understanding of the context and enable better results for the research in general. I held this approach during my research, and it helped not only to understand the historical development of baptism but also to make sense of the causes of changes that had happened during its evolution.

Like any finite thing, this work should have its end. At the end of this work, I have to admit that the limitations of this research forced me to leave aside many things that, in the initial stage of this work, I wished to include, but in order to be more precise and stick to the established time frames, I had to abandon a number of initial plans. It does not mean that I completely refused to work on them. However, the task of this work has been completed, and I believe that this particular research will make an important contribution to contemporary scholarship on baptism in the first century. At the same time, I want to continue this work from a broader time frame, and I am certain that this topic has potential in contemporary scholarship and is worth further attention.

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