



# The Baptism of Matthew 28: 19

Matthew 28: 19-20

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

Let's compare this to something that Paul says in 1 Corinthians.

1Co 1:17

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

There seems to be a problem here; in Matthew we have an instruction for baptism, yet Paul says, "Christ sent me not to baptize". What's going on?

## Did the Apostles baptize with water?

If you read the beginning of the book of Acts, you will see that the Apostles used water baptism when people were saved. Look at what Peter says here:

Acts 10:47

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

There can be no doubt that this is talking about water baptism. So how does this fit in with the previous verses that we looked at?

## The Author of the Bible

The Bible was originally written by different people and at different times, however, although there were many writers, there is only one author: God. For this reason, passages that were written by different writers can nevertheless augment each other. It's similar to the way your hand and your mouth work together when you're eating thanks to your brain coordinating the two.

# Literal and Figurative meanings

Not everything that Jesus spoke was immediately understood by his disciples.

Matthew 16:6-12

- 6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.
- 7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is* because we have taken no bread.
- 8 *Which* when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?
- 9 Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?
- 10 Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?
- 11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake *it* not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?
- 12 Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

The word leaven here has two meanings. First, the figurative meaning intended by Jesus. Second the literal interpretation taken by his disciples.

Matthew 4:4

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Here we see again that bread is used in close connection with doctrine.

## The Word "Disciple".

In common English, we have two very similar words: 1. Disciple 2. Discipline.

It is easy in English to think that a disciple must be disciplined and in doing so, it is possible to exaggerate the degree of rigidity of lifestyle that this might entail.

However, in the Aramaic language, there is no such problem. The word commonly translated as "disciple" in the English is simply the word with a meaning along the lines of "one who is taught", or "one who joins himself to" something in the Aramaic. The word is based on a root word meaning "to join". In the gospels it signifies that they gave up their normal way of life so that they could be with Jesus.

Luke 8:22-25

- 22 Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth.
- 23 But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled *with water*, and were in jeopardy.
- 24 And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.
- 25 And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.

The word used for those who went with Jesus is the word "disciple". However, you will see from this verse, as well as many others that they did not show much sign of acting in a "disciplined" way when they were on that ship.

The word disciple in the Aramaic is the word talmida. The significance is that they were there to "learn directly from the teacher". Were they already perfect? Were they still in training?

Are we still in training sometimes? Do we feel bad about it when we fall short? The disciples here may have felt bad about things and perhaps rightly so, but they got back up and carried on.

# The Meaning of the Peshitta Text

Matthew 28: 18-20 (Peshitta Interlinear Version)

is given	to them	and said	with them	and spoke	Yeshua	and drew near	
ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	.18
my Father	has sent me	and as	and on earth	in heaven	authority	all to me	
ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	
nations [of] all	make disciples	therefore	go	you	I	send	
ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	.19
and [of] the Spirit	and [of] the Son	[of] the Father	in the name	them	and baptize		
ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	
I have commanded you	that all	to keep	them	and teach	Holy		
ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	.20
the end	until	the days	all	I [am] with you	<I>	and behold	
ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	
						Amen of the world	
						ܘܥܘܕܝܢܐ	

Aramaic is written from right to left, hence the literal translation must also be read from right to left.

Some of us might have trouble reading the Aramaic characters, so I'm going to use the nearest English equivalents from here on. If you're fluent in Aramaic, you'll have the option of being able to read the text direct from the above.

The words "make disciples" in the Aramaic is the imperative form of the word talmud. It could be translated as "teach", however, this may not give sufficient insight into what is being said, hence it is translated as "make disciples". The word emphasises that they were to go out and preach or herald forth the truth to the point that people joined themselves to them. It could (but not always) be taken to imply the **personal presence of the teacher**. Jesus was telling them to GO to the nations and personally herald forth the message of deliverance.

Now they are told to teach "all nations". This is much different to Matthew 10:6 where they were sent only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel". Now they are told to reach out to "All Nations".

The second word translated "teach" in verse 20 is used in a context that implies a more intimate form of instruction than the first word. "Teach them to keep", indicates that this form of teaching was by close instruction. They were to help people to live the things that they had learnt.

The context of the passage is teaching and instruction. What was it that they needed to know?

The Gentile nations, unlike the Judeans, would have little or no knowledge of what we know today as the Old Testament; the Psalms, Prophets and Other Writings. They would lack understanding of 1) the Old Testament. Also, they would need to know about 2) Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. This is recorded in the books we know today as the Gospels. Finally they would need to know about 3) the works of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and following, the books we know today as the Book of Acts, the Church Epistles and the other letters.

From the context, we see that Jesus was not talking about a literal baptism of water, but a figurative baptism. Baptism "in the name of" something indicates instruction in that thing. The name of the Father represents the works of God particularly as we now see recorded in the books of Genesis to Malachi. The name of the Son represents the works and accomplishments of Jesus Christ, particularly as we now see recorded in the Gospels. The name of the Holy Spirit represents the works and accomplishments of the Holy Spirit, God, in relation to the new birth, particularly as we now see recorded in the book of Acts and following.

# How did the Apostles baptise?

When the apostles later on began to teach their fellow brethren who were also Judeans, they did not primarily have to teach them about the Old Testament writings, because they had already received instruction in these. They began with baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son. That this baptism was initially signified by the use of water does not deter from the true figurative meaning intended by Jesus Christ.

There are many cultural gestures that we all follow, which when not fulfilled correctly would be unacceptable. One example is the custom of the handshake used in Western countries as a symbol of greeting and friendship.

If, in a particular culture, water baptism is used to accompany a person entering into a new spiritual undertaking in their lives, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this providing that it is understood in this way.

1Co 1:17

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

That is why Paul states that Christ "sent me not to baptise", talking about water baptism. He did not forbid water baptism as such, but pointed out that the most important thing was to "preach the gospel".

## In Conclusion

The words used in the Peshitta version give emphasis to the requirement of the teacher to be close to his followers. He was to follow through what he taught them by spending intimate time with them as they applied those things in their lives.

There was initially some misunderstanding of what Jesus was teaching, because emphasis was given to water baptism as an accompaniment to salvation.

Later on, both Paul and Peter realised that it was preaching the gospel that led to people being saved, not water baptism. This became more significant with the conversion of the Gentiles, when it became apparent that the Gentiles could receive salvation by believing the gospel without them fulfilling the works of the law of the Old Testament. Christ had fulfilled these requirements on their behalf by giving his own body on the cross in redemption of their lives.

## References

Younan, Paul D, for the aramaic interlinear passage at <http://www.peshitta.org/> Last Accessed: 01.01.12

