

Was the baptism of John for the remission of sins?

The answer to this question is a definite yes. Luke and Mark present this teaching in the same way. Mark said in Mark 1:4-5: "4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." And Luke taught in Luke 3:3-4: "3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, one cannot dispute the plain fact of the teaching.

How can it be that sins are forgiven prior to Jesus shedding his blood?

It is a true principle of the gospel that apart from the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness. Heb 9:21-22 presents that principle as one flowing from the figures and copies of Old Testament, depicting the things to come:

21 In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. 22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Heb 9:27-28 describes Christ's sacrifice and taking away the sins of many people, and having borne those sins, he will bring salvation:

27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Throughout the Old Testament, numerous examples testify that those people of old expected eternal salvation and the redemption of their sins. Daniel was specifically promised an inheritance after this life in Dan 12:13: "13 As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." Job relates salvation more specifically to a redeemer. It is interesting to note that many scholars date Job at the beginning of the Patriarchal Age and predating Moses and his five books. Job said in Job 19:25-27:

25 I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

26 And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;

27 I myself will see him
with my own eyes – I, and not another.

How my heart yearns within me!

In addition to these Old Testament examples, Jesus forgave the sins before the cross and during a time when the Old Testament was still in effect, having not as yet been nailed to the cross as taught in Col 2:13-15:

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

The gospels report at least three occasions where Jesus forgave sins prior to the shedding of his blood. In Matt 9:2, Matthew recorded: "2 Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are

forgiven." Likewise, Luke recorded another example in Luke 7:48: "48 Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'" All of us know the story of the thief on the cross where Jesus promised him paradise in Luke 23:43: "43 Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" According to the Lord himself in Rev 2:7, paradise is heaven where the tree of life stands (Rev 22:1-5): "7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

Jesus had the spirit of God without limit, according to John 3:34-35: "34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands." This unlimited power included power over sin and death. Therefore, Christ and John the Baptist had specific powers during their earthly ministry that included the forgiveness of sins. In this way, as with the way of righteous of the Old Testament period, the blood of Jesus with its cleansing power was retrospective for those prior to the cross and prospective for those after the cross.

Why were Apollos and the Ephesians lacking, knowing only the baptism of John?

In Acts 18:24-26, readers encounter the account of the powerful preacher, Apollos, who knew only the baptism of John:

24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Priscilla and Aquila explained the way of God more adequately, showing a clear deficiency in his understanding and obedience to the gospel of Christ, knowing only the baptism of John. The point here is that the baptism of John is inadequate. What was true before the cross is no longer true. Jesus was emphatic in his teaching on the forgiveness of sins in Matt 26:28-29:

28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

Outside this specific covenant relationship, Apollos and the Ephesians had no forgiveness, nor were they in the Father's kingdom. Jesus added in Luke 24:46-47: "The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." From Pentecost after the resurrection in Jerusalem, the covenant of Christ required his blood and his baptism. Acts 2:38 states the role of believers: "38 Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" The benefits were the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. At this point, John's baptism could provide neither of these. Without obeying the Lord, Apollos and all other men are lost and yet in their sins and need to learn "the way of God more adequately."

The situation with the Ephesians demonstrates the complete inadequacy of John's baptism in their day and age. The proof is in the requirement to be baptized into Christ. Acts 19:1-7 records this example:

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

The Holy Spirit that they received by the laying on of Paul's hands was one which gave them the ability to perform spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12). However, as all baptized believers are raised from the waters of Christ's baptism, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as described in Acts 2:38 and Eph 1:13-14:

3 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

No baptism today will suffice except the baptism of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Eph 4:4-6 teaches that there is one baptism:

4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Many people today are baptized in modes (sprinkling, pouring, etc.) and for purposes (to eliminate original sin, to join a denomination, etc) not taught in the New Testament. They should all present themselves as penitent believers for baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus unto the remission of sins; and they will receive the forgiveness of those sins; and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, as they are raised to walk in newness of life—just like those men of Ephesus.