



A STUDY ON THE TERM ὕδωρ (WATER) AND ITS USAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (JOHN 2:1-11)

Jobson John Ayuba & Andy-Philip Nesta, PhD

Department of Christian Studies and Religious Communications, University of Abuja, Nigeria

ayubajohn52@gmail.com

Abstract

Aquatic imagery permeates scriptural texts, serving diverse theological purposes. Throughout biblical literature, water frequently illustrates divine rejuvenation and the sustenance God provides. Conversely, it also functions as a motif for periods of profound adversity or hostile forces that believers must navigate and ultimately overcome, as seen in passages like 2 Samuel 22:17-18 and Psalms 18:16-17; 124:4-5. In both testamental covenants, aquatic terminology symbolizes the eternal salvation granted through faith in Christ, highlighted in Revelation 21:6 and 22:1. During His dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Christ utilized "living water" as a profound metaphor for His redemptive grace and eternal life (John 4:10-16). This Johannine motif of "living water" (ὕδωρ ζῶν) consistently directs believers toward the Holy Spirit, a connection explicitly drawn in John 7:37-39. Lexical examinations reinforce this, demonstrating that the Greek word ὕδωρ acts as a foundational symbol for spiritual regeneration within Johannine theology. Beyond this, scriptural metaphors liken water to divine assistance (Isaiah 8:6), divine judgment sweeping away refuges (Isaiah 28:17), the profound depths of human speech, and the deep-seated intentions of the human heart (Proverbs 20:5).

Keywords: ὕδωρ (Water), βαπτίζω (Baptize), Johannine Theology, Biblical Metaphor, Spiritual Regeneration, Christian Sacraments, Divine Atonement.

Introduction

In the purely physical realm, ὕδωρ (water) is an absolute prerequisite for biological existence. Characterized as a transparent, flavorless, and scentless fluid originating from precipitation, aquifers, and natural waterways, it sustains all terrestrial life. Humans inherently depend on it, unable to endure prolonged periods without hydration. The scriptures elevate this vital physical necessity to a spiritual plane, using it to represent the faith in Jesus that imparts everlasting life. As Christ declared to the Samaritan woman, partaking of His spiritual sustenance permanently quenches spiritual thirst, creating an internal, eternal spring (John 4:13-14). Consequently, aquatic symbolism frequently represents the spiritual purification accompanying divine salvation (Ezekiel 36:25; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 10:22). Ephesians 5:26 specifically connects the washing of the church to the Word of God, illustrating water's symbolic power. Crucially, Jesus equates the "streams of living water" flowing from believers directly with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). Because biblical narratives often unfold in arid geographical contexts, water holds



immense cultural and physical significance; droughts represented severe hardship (Ezekiel 17:1), whereas rainfall signified divine favor (Psalm 23:2).

The theological implications of water in John 3:5 have generated considerable scholarly debate. Certain exegetes interpret "being born of water" as an explicit reference to the sacrament of water baptism. Alternatively, others propose a hendiadys, arguing that "water and Spirit" operate as a singular conceptual reference to the Holy Spirit's regenerative power. This view aligns with the writings of early church fathers like Tertullian, who posited that baptismal waters and the Spirit synergistically facilitate the new birth. Modern lexical studies, including Vine's Expository Dictionary, support this grammatical structure, suggesting water in this context mirrors the purifying Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). A third perspective argues that "water birth" denotes natural human procreation, preceding the spiritual rebirth—an interpretation seemingly shared by Nicodemus during the actual discourse.

Nothing But the Blood of Jesus

The classic hymn penned by Robert Lowry powerfully articulates an essential theological doctrine: "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus". These lyrics encapsulate a fundamental biblical truth regarding the absolute indispensability of Christ's sacrificial blood for human redemption. The present study emphasizes that the sole mediator of the New Covenant laid down His life on Calvary, offering a sacrifice that remains supremely acceptable and unparalleled before the Creator. Consequently, contemporary practices that attempt to substitute or equate blessed water with this divine sacrifice must be rigorously evaluated against orthodox biblical standards to determine their validity.

Within atonement theology, the primacy of blood over water is firmly rooted in the Levitical code, which asserts that the life of the flesh resides within the blood (Leviticus 17:11). While the Old Testament utilizes water for ceremonial cleansing rituals (Numbers 19; Ezekiel 36:25), genuine atonement for transgressions is exclusively achieved through blood. The New Testament actively sustains this paradigm. The author of Hebrews categorically declares that forgiveness is impossible without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22), thus tethering Lowry's poetic theology to solid scriptural bedrock.

The redemptive capacity of Christ's blood remains central to Christian doctrine, signifying the definitive sacrifice required to reconcile humanity with God. While recognizing the unparalleled spiritual magnitude of Jesus' blood, believers must refrain from projecting this sacred efficacy onto alternative elements, such as water.

The modern custom of consecrating water with the expectation that it morphs into the blood of Christ finds its origins in historical and symbolic rituals rather than clear scriptural directives. Although water holds legitimate sacramental value in Christianity—most notably in baptism (Matthew 3:16)—the biblical text completely lacks endorsement for transmuting water into Jesus' blood through pastoral prayer. Historically, the belief that mundane elements acquire magical properties through incantations aligns closely with ancient pagan customs. In such archaic traditions, water functioned as a mystical conduit for spiritual energy or a means to summon deities—a theological framework that sharply contradicts orthodox Christian theology.

Biblical Perspective of the Use of Water



Scriptural theology places paramount importance on placing faith in the intangible. According to Hebrews 11:1, faith is fundamentally defined as the assurance of anticipated outcomes and the conviction of invisible realities. Consequently, the scriptures exhort adherents to anchor their trust in God's unseen dominion rather than in material artifacts. The contemporary ritual of praying over physical water to invoke the properties of Christ's blood severely deviates from this foundational tenet, redirecting faith toward a tangible commodity rather than the sovereign, unseen power of the Creator. This shift inherently undermines the core nature of Christian belief, which thrives on spiritual realities over physical totems.

Furthermore, Exodus 20:4-5 provides a stringent prohibition against the creation and veneration of physical idols, warning against crafting images of anything situated in the heavens, the earth, or the waters below. While practitioners who utilize "blessed water" may not harbor overtly idolatrous intentions, the practice inherently risks ascribing divine omnipotence to an earthly object, paving the way for idolatrous worship. This behavioral pattern echoes the ancient Israelites' fabrication of the golden calf, which they erroneously viewed as a material manifestation of God's presence.

When Christ identifies Himself as "living water" (John 4:14), stating that His provision results in an eternal, internal spring that banishes spiritual thirst forever, He utilizes a metaphor carrying immense theological gravity. Throughout the Old Testament, the phrase "living water" (ὕδωρ ζῶν) denoted fresh, kinetic water possessing inherent purifying qualities (Genesis 26:19; Leviticus 14:5-6). By adopting this terminology, Jesus claims a divine status previously reserved for Yahweh, whom Jeremiah 2:13 identifies as the "fountain of living waters". The Gospel of John explicitly clarifies that this living water signifies the Holy Spirit, bestowed following Christ's glorification (John 7:38-39). Therefore, this metaphor is firmly anchored in Trinitarian theology, illustrating that spiritual sustenance and eternal life emanate directly from Christ Himself, effectively rendering any intermediary physical substances redundant and unbiblical.

The Role Evangelists/Pastors and the Blessed or Anointing Water

A concerning trend has emerged wherein contemporary pastors and evangelists distribute "anointing" or blessed water to their congregations, utilizing it as a tool for demonic exorcism and the impartation of blessings. Even if these religious leaders possess genuine intentions and believe they are spiritually assisting their flock, the theological foundation underlying this practice is significantly defective and spiritually deceptive. Scripturally, true spiritual authority is vested exclusively in the name of Jesus, never in auxiliary physical objects.

Christ explicitly instructed His followers to present their petitions directly in His name, establishing Himself as the sole conduit to the Father, a truth underscored in John 14:6. Consequently, for prayers to find divine acceptance, they must be routed through Christ. Invoking the name of Jesus requires honoring His divine worth while simultaneously manifesting His authoritative presence over earthly circumstances. As theologian Wayne Grudem explains, approaching in someone's name implies operating under their delegated authority. When the apostle Peter commanded a paralyzed man to walk "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 3:6), he operated strictly on Christ's authority, not his own inherent power. Similarly, when the Sanhedrin interrogated the apostles in Acts 4:7, inquiring about the power or name behind their miracles, they were fundamentally questioning their source of authority. Furthermore, Paul's disciplinary actions against immorality in 1 Corinthians 5:4 were executed precisely "in the name of the Lord Jesus".



Author Joyce Meyer corroborates this perspective, noting that speaking the majestic name of Jesus demands profound reverence, as it encapsulates His absolute power and presence. To vocalize His name is to summon His very essence into the environment, essentially exercising a spiritual power of attorney. The Book of Acts consistently illustrates this dynamic. Miraculous healings occurred exclusively via Christ's name, entirely circumventing the use of consecrated oils or waters. The early Christian community invariably conducted baptisms and healings "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5; 1 Corinthians 6:11). Scholars assert that this specific phrasing (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ) signifies covenantal ownership and delegated authority, permanently anchoring spiritual efficacy in the person of Christ rather than physical media. Watchman Nee further elucidates that while the name itself is not the authority, it actively represents and triggers the authority entrusted to Jesus by God.

Because Christ is the supreme authority, the solitary mediator, and the ultimate intercessor, the prayers of believers achieve validity before the Father only when presented through the Son. Grudem additionally notes that God promises a sympathetic ear solely to prayers aligned with His will and mediated by Christ. Dr. Nesta Andy-Philip reinforces this concept, teaching that praying in Jesus' name necessitates aligning with His divine will and fulfilling His apostolic commission.

Crucially, the earliest extrabiblical Christian texts demonstrate a profound absence of water-blessing rituals designed for supernatural protection. The Didache (circa AD 50-70) details instructions for baptism and communion but completely omits any guidelines for weaponizing blessed water in spiritual warfare. Similarly, Justin Martyr's comprehensive accounts of second-century Christian worship omit any reference to therapeutic consecrated water. This historical silence strongly implies that apostolic tradition never endorsed such rituals; had they been legitimate, the early church would have fiercely preserved them.

Ultimately, invoking Christ's name must align with His primary mission: human salvation. The Gospel records do not depict Jesus organizing standalone crusades exclusively for exorcisms or physical healing, a stark contrast to certain modern paradigms. In Christ's ministry, miracles of deliverance, healing, and resurrection functioned concurrently with His primary work of preaching and teaching the Word.

Effective prayer in Jesus' name requires an unwavering belief that He listens and responds in accordance with His sovereign will. Consequently, petitions offered in His name are only actualized when they harmonize with Christ's overarching purposes. Jesus exemplified this posture in the Garden of Gethsemane; despite immense agony, He did not manipulate the Father's will but submitted completely to the divine plan leading to the cross. The Epistle to the Hebrews highlights that during His earthly tenure, Christ offered fervent petitions with tears to the Father and achieved an audience due to His reverent submission. Having learned obedience through suffering, He became the ultimate wellspring of eternal salvation. Believers must emulate this submissive posture to ensure their prayers resonate with the divine intent. This study definitively asserts that every spiritual benefit is guaranteed solely through the name of Jesus.

The Usage of Water in the New Testament

Prior to the inauguration of Christ's public ministry, John the Baptist conducted a ministry of immersion in the Jordan River. His baptismal rite was fundamentally symbolic, representing an individual's outward confession of repentance without imparting an internal sacramental transformation. Multiple New Testament accounts clearly differentiate John's preliminary water



baptism (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26) from the ultimate baptism introduced by Jesus, which uniquely integrates both water and the Holy Spirit. While John administered a "baptism of repentance" (Mark 1:4), Christ instituted the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Notably, when Jesus underwent John's baptism, He required no repentance for sin; rather, this act visibly demonstrated His profound solidarity with the fallen humanity He arrived to redeem.

Linguistically, W.E. Vine (1969) explains that the English term "baptize" originates from the Greek verb "baptizo," which primarily denotes the action of dipping. In classical Greek usage, this term described the immersion of garments into dye or the plunging of one vessel into another to draw water. Vine's Expository Dictionary indicates that the noun ὄδωρ permeates the New Testament in both literal and figurative dimensions. Within Johannine literature, water is highly symbolic, representing the regenerative power of God's Word (John 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23), the presence of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39), and the purificatory nature of Christ's earthly mission (1 John 5:6).

The specific assertion in 1 John 5:6 that Christ "came by water and blood" served to dismantle emerging Gnostic heresies. It confirmed that the identical Jesus who experienced water baptism at the Jordan was the same incarnate Son who subsequently shed His blood at Calvary. This crucial theology dismantles any attempt to bifurcate Christ's supernatural power from His physical, historical suffering—a theological error that unfortunately mirrors modern tendencies to seek spiritual power through inanimate objects rather than the finished work of the cross. Scholars, supported by early theologians like Tertullian, Augustine, and Cyril of Jerusalem, interpret the "water and blood" as Christ's baptism and crucifixion, respectively. John vehemently countered the proto-Gnostic illusion that the divine Christ abandoned the human Jesus prior to the crucifixion, insisting that the three witnesses—Spirit, water, and blood—unanimously validate the unified, historical work of the Savior.

Historically, the Greek scholar Plutarch utilized "baptizo" to describe the act of submerging a cup into a wine bowl. Etymologically, the root "bapto" signifies momentarily dipping an object into a liquid, akin to a blacksmith quenching hot iron in cold water. The structural addition of a syllable transforms this root into a causative verb, cementing its definition across Greek literature as the act of plunging, dipping, or completely submerging. Within the New Testament, it describes the act of ceremonial washing in Luke 11:38, reflecting the Old Testament account of Naaman the Syrian, who dipped himself in the Jordan River to secure his healing (2 Kings 5:14).

Throughout the early Gospel narratives and Acts, the term frequently references the ritual administered by John the Baptist, which required genuine repentance for the remission of sins. Participants openly confessed their transgressions, recognizing their unworthiness to participate in the impending Messianic kingdom, establishing the precedent that personal confession must antecede water baptism.

Theologian Francis Turretin (1993) articulated a vital distinction between the external administration of visible water by human hands and the internal, invisible baptism executed by the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist clearly delineated this dual reality when he prophesied that while he utilized water, the coming Messiah would baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire (Matthew 3:11).

Forms of Baptism

The sacrament of baptism encompasses a twofold reality: the external physical act and the internal spiritual transformation. The external dimension functions as a visible sign, incorporating sensory



elements within a legitimate baptismal administration. This visible component is further subdivided into the physical element and the external ceremony. Adhering strictly to divine institution, the physical element must be natural, pure water. The ancient church strictly prohibited the substitution of water with foreign substances like oil, salt, honey, or spittle, preserving the integrity of Christ's mandate. The ceremonial aspect addresses the physical mode of application, typically executed through either sprinkling or full immersion.

Methodologically, this research employs an expository design to unpack and elucidate the intricate usage of aquatic terminology within the New Testament context. By relying fundamentally on biblical texts alongside secondary sources such as scholarly journals, theological treatises, and academic books, the researchers seek to illuminate the hidden doctrinal truths surrounding this subject.

Conclusion

This comprehensive analysis unequivocally highlights the problematic shift among contemporary believers and ecclesiastical bodies toward venerating physical water over the supreme name and blood of Jesus Christ. As articulated by Sixbert Sangwa, a growing segment of modern Christianity mistakenly attributes healing, deliverance, and protective powers to prayed-over water, believing it undergoes a mystical transmutation into Christ's blood. Unfortunately, numerous pastors and evangelists actively propagate this error, disseminating "anointed" water to combat demonic forces, despite the fact that genuine, unparalleled spiritual power resides exclusively in the actual blood of the Savior.

By meticulously tracing the legitimate biblical parameters for water usage, this journal aims to rectify the theological misconceptions held by modern congregations and spiritual leaders. The use of "blessed" or "anointed" water for purification, therapeutic healing, or supernatural guidance blatantly subverts the biblical mandate to pray directly in the name of our Lord and Savior. Water does retain a profound and indispensable function within the New Testament, but that function is strictly bound to the sacrament of water baptism.

Properly understood, water acts as the physical medium for baptism, an ordinance that visually represents a believer's spiritual union with the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-4). The Apostle Peter explicitly positions water baptism as a subsequent response to the prior, internal reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47). In this biblical framework, water does not mediate the Spirit's power; rather, it follows and signifies the Spirit's independent regenerative work. The Apostle Paul echoes this in 1 Corinthians 12:13, asserting that the paramount baptism is entirely spiritual, rendering physical water baptism as an act of obedient outward expression rather than an instrumental cause of salvation. Absolutely nowhere within the New Testament canon is water authorized as an independent conduit for deliverance or physiological healing outside of its confessional baptismal context.

Scripture unequivocally calls the faithful to invest their trust in the invisible sovereignty of God and the completed atoning work of Jesus, actively discouraging reliance on physical artifacts. The practice of magically transforming water into the blood of Christ via prayer lacks all scriptural validation. Believers are therefore exhorted to place their unyielding confidence in the exalted name of Jesus, ensuring their faith remains firmly anchored in the invisible spiritual truths clearly established in the Holy Scriptures.



Recommendation

The study recommends the following:

- Christian practitioners must deliberately recalibrate their faith, relying solely on the authoritative name of Jesus and the power of His blood rather than physical mediums.
- Theological scholars and educators bear a profound responsibility to emphasize that Christ, the exclusive mediator of the New Covenant, accomplished final and complete redemption on the cross.
- Religious leaders must actively combat and correct the erroneous doctrine suggesting that prayer can physically or spiritually transmute ordinary water into Jesus' blood.
- Ecclesiastical instruction must constantly prioritize the invisible, spiritual realities of the biblical worldview, actively steering congregants away from physical objects that historically and practically open the door to deception and idolatry.
- Finally, modern Christians, including lay individuals, entire congregations, and pastoral leadership, must definitively cease the distribution and application of "blessed water" for spiritual warfare or physical healing.
- In place of these artifacts, the faithful must return to the biblical standard of invoking the unparalleled name and blood of Jesus Christ for all divine guidance and protection against adversarial forces.

Article Publication Details

This article is published in the **Pedagogy Forward**, ISSN 3139-1338 (Online). In Volume 2 (2026), Issue 2 (May - August). The journal is published and managed by **Erudexa Publishing**.

Copyright © 2026, Authors retain copyright. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> (CC BY 4.0 deed)

Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the editors and the reviewers for their valuable suggestions on this paper.

Authors' contributions

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.



Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable. This study did not involve human or animal subjects.

Funding

The authors declare that no funding was received for this work.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

References

- Alamu, S. S., & Andy-Philip, N. (2021). Jesus' teaching on "heal the sick" in Matthew 10:8a and its relevance to the healing of COVID-19. *Journal of University Scholars in Religions (JUSREL)*, 9, 21-30.
- Andy-Philip, N. (2018). Re-thinking the nuances of Shalom and Tsedeq: Implications for peace building in Nigeria. *Journal of the Arts/Humanities Volume*, 1(1).
- Andy-Philip, N., & Alamu, S. (2021). Blood for blood: The Old Testament teaching on the sanctity of life-blood a remedy for suicide in Nigeria. *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy*, 12(1).
- Andy-Philip, N., & Zhiya, S. J. (2018). The Christian religious education as a means of curbing moral decadence among Nigerian youths. *Journal of Moral Education in Africa*, 2(2).
- Barker, K. L., & Kohlenberger, J. R. (1994). *The Expositor's Bible commentary: Old Testament* (Abridged ed.). Zondervan.
- Barker, K. L. (Ed.). (1994). *The Expositor's Bible commentary* (Abridged ed.: New Testament). Zondervan.
- Beasley-Murray, G. R. (2006). *Baptism in the New Testament*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Ben, U. (2003). *Water baptism and its significant to the believers*.
- Bromiley, G. W. (1987). *Historical theology: An introduction*. Eerdmans.
- Bruce, F. F. (2000). *Tyndale New Testament commentaries*. Inter-Varsity Press.
- Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John (Pillar New Testament Commentary)*. Eerdmans.
- *Didache (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)*, Chapter 7.
- Kruse, C. G. (2003). *The Gospel according to John (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*. Eerdmans.
- McGrath, A. E. (2005). *Zondervan handbook of Christian beliefs*. Zondervan Academic.
- Meyer, J. (2000). *Jesus name above all names*. Warner Faith.
- Oke, F. W. (1989). *The precious blood of Jesus*. Eagle.
- Raheem, A. I. M. (2005). *The power of Jesus name in deliverance*. A New Art Publications.
- Rambo, T. (2013). Tertullian on baptism. *Access: November 20*.



- Schwartz, J. (2000). *The compact guide to the Christian faith*. New Life Literature.
- Ujata, L., & Ujata, A. S. (2024). Role of Christian ethical teaching in curbing moral decadence in Nigeria. *Zaria Journal of Educational Studies (ZAJES)*, 24(1), 21-26.
- Vine, W. E. (1940). *Vine's expository dictionary of New Testament words*.

Publisher's Note

ERUDEXA PUBLISHING remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations. The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of ERUDEXA PUBLISHING and/or the editor(s). ERUDEXA PUBLISHING disclaims responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.