THE STORY

Naaman was a brave, rich, and famous commander for the army of Syria who contracted leprosy, the most dreaded disease of Bible times. Leprosy meant isolation from loved ones and a slow, wretched death. A Hebrew slave girl who worked in Naaman’s house said that if her master would only go to the prophet Elisha in Israel, he would heal Naaman of his leprosy.

Willing to grasp at any thread of hope, Naaman made the long trip to Israel. With him was a small band of personal bodyguards and a king’s ransom to pay for this miracle of healing. When Naaman finally stood before the humble house of the prophet, Elisha would not come out. Instead, he sent his servant with these simple instructions: “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.” 2 Kings 5:10

The prophet’s command to wash implied that Naaman was dirty! Being told to wash seven times—and in a muddy river, no less—was too much for the proud Syrian general. In a rage, Naaman spun his horse around and began riding home. But in order to reach Damascus, Naaman had to ride by the Jordan River. As he passed by, Naaman’s servants urged him to try the prophet’s advice. So he stopped his horse, slid down, and washed himself in the water. The river was muddy, and many people were splashing and playing in the water. In the mud, Naaman began to think that perhaps the prophet Elisha wasn’t the one to ask! After all, a crocodile or something might be in the river.

When Naaman finally came up the seventh time, he saw the heavens parting. Mark 1:9, 10

Jesus came … was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming out of the water, He saw the heavens parting.

NOTE: John baptized Jesus by immersion in the same river where Naaman was cleansed from leprosy. Note that they were “in” Jordan (not on the riverbank) and that Jesus came “up from” the water. This is why John was baptizing in “Amon near Salim, because there was much water there.” John 3:23. Christians are to follow the example of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21), who was baptized by immersion “to fulfill all righteousness.” Matthew 3:13.

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. What New Testament prophet used the Jordan River for baptizing, or cleansing?
   Matthew 3:1, 5, 6 In those days __________ the _______________________________ came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. … Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were __________ by him in the Jordan.
   NOTE: The gospel stories begin and end with the subject of baptism. Obviously this is a very important teaching to Jesus (Matthew 28:18, 19).

2. What glorious Bible ceremony symbolizes a “washing” from the leprosy of sin?
   Acts 22:16 Arise and be __________, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.
   NOTE: The Bible ordinance of baptism symbolizes the washing away of sin from a person’s life, as well as the new birth.

3. According to the Bible, how many different kinds of baptism are acceptable?
   Ephesians 4:5 One Lord, one faith, __________
   NOTE: At least 15 different ceremonies are called baptism today, but according to the Bible, there is only one true baptism.

4. What does the word “baptize” mean?
   Colossians 2:12 with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.
   NOTE: The Greek word “baptizo” means “submerge,” “plunge under,” or “immerse.” A person has not been baptized unless he has been completely submerged, or buried, in water. This word “baptize” is always used in the Bible in reference to the sacred ordinance of baptism. The Greek words for “sprinkling” or “pouring” are never used.

5. Jesus is our example. How was He baptized?
   Mark 1:9, 10 Jesus came … was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming __________ the water, He saw the heavens parting.
   NOTE: John baptized Jesus by immersion in the same river where Naaman was cleansed from leprosy. Note that they were “in” Jordan (not on the riverbank) and that Jesus came “up from” the water. This is why John was baptizing in “Amon near Salim, because there was much water there.” John 3:23. Christians are to follow the example of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21), who was baptized by immersion “to fulfill all righteousness.” Matthew 3:13.

6. How did Philip baptize the treasurer of Ethiopia?
   Acts 8:38, 39 And both Philip and the eunuch went they came __________ into the water, and he baptized him. Now when the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away.
   NOTE: Baptism symbolizes Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. There is first death to sin, then burial of the old life of sin in the water, and finally resurrection from the water to a new life. Baptism by immersion fits the symbolism perfectly. The life of sin dies, then there is brief suspension of breath while the person being baptized is leaned backward into the water until the body is fully covered, or buried, in the water. Then the person is raised up out of the water, taking a fresh breath as a newborn baby, to live an entirely new life, symbolizing the resurrection. No other form of baptism fits this Bible symbolism. Some say they keep Sunday holy in honor of the resurrection, but this practice is never mentioned in the Bible.

7. What other truths are symbolized by baptism?
   Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was __________ from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so also should we walk in newness of life.
   NOTE: Baptism symbolizes Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. There is first death to sin, then burial of the old life of sin in the water, and finally resurrection from the water to a new life. Baptism by immersion fits the symbolism perfectly. The life of sin dies, then there is brief suspension of breath while the person being baptized is leaned backward into the water until the body is fully covered, or buried, in the water. Then the person is raised up out of the water, taking a fresh breath as a newborn baby, to live an entirely new life, symbolizing the resurrection. No other form of baptism fits this Bible symbolism. Some say they keep Sunday holy in honor of the resurrection, but this practice is never mentioned in the Bible.

8. How important is baptism?
   Mark 16:16 He who believes and is baptized will be __________; but he who does not believe will be __________ with fire.
   John 3:5 Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he __________ enter the kingdom of God.
   NOTE: Baptism is clearly mandated by Scripture as essential. However, when baptism is impossible, as it was for the thief on the cross, Jesus gives that person credit for His baptism (Matthew 3:15).

9. What blessed ceremony can be compared to baptism?
   Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have __________ and come __________
   NOTE: Baptism is like the marriage ceremony. The Bible says, “For your Maker is your husband, the LoRD of hosts is His name.” Isaiah 54:5. As a woman takes her husband’s name in marriage, so Christians take the name of Christ—therefore to be called Christians. Both ceremonies must be based on love and commitment if they are to be meaningful. Baptism is as essential to the Christian life as a wedding is to a marriage.

10. What command did Jesus give to His people just before His ascension?
   Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, __________ them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
   NOTE: Peter followed this command when on the day of Pentecost he told the pentent people, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” Acts 2:38.
II. What biblical qualifications must precede baptism?

A. Understand Jesus' teachings (Matthew 28:19, 20).

B. Believe all of Jesus' teachings (Mark 16:16).


D. Believe with all your heart (Acts 8:37).

E. Agree to turn from sin (Luke 3:7, 8; Romans 6:5, 6).

F. Accept Christ as your personal Saviour and experience the new birth (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:3, 5).

NOTE: Since an infant cannot comply with any of the above steps, obviously it is not scriptural to baptize a child until he is old enough to comprehend the gospel.

12. Where did all of the counterfeit forms of baptism originate?

Mark 7:8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the traditions of men.

NOTE: Baptism by immersion was the only form of baptism practiced during Bible times and for centuries after the cross. But then, misguided men introduced other forms of baptism for the sake of convenience. Thus, God's sacred ordinance of baptism was distorted and its rich symbolic meaning obscured.

13. What does the Bible say about those who put the teachings of men before the truth of God?

Matthew 15:9 And in their teaching they add to the commandments of men, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

Galatians 1:8 But be sure you receive teaching from no one as doctrines the teachings of men. For as I have said before, and now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than the gospel you received, let him be cursed.

14. But doesn’t the baptism of the Holy Spirit replace baptism by immersion?

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

NOTE: Notice that while Peter was preaching (Acts 10:44-48), the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening, many of whom had not been baptized. But even though they had already received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Peter insisted that they be baptized in water as well.

15. Is rebaptism ever proper?

Acts 19:2-5 He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.” Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

NOTE: One day when Paul was preaching in Ephesus, he found 12 men who had been baptized by John the Baptist, but who had never heard of the Holy Spirit. So upon receiving this substantial new light, they were rebaptized. Likewise, if a person has completely lost his Christian experience, he should be rebaptized upon returning to the Lord. Rebaptism is also appropriate if a person was not baptized in the biblical method.

16. Is baptism connected with joining a church?

Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were added to them.

Acts 2:47 Prazing God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Colossians 3:15 You were called in one body.

Colossians 1:18 And He is the head of the body, the church.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.

NOTE: The Scriptures are unequivocal. All of God’s people are called into one body, which is the church, and we enter it by baptism. After birth, a baby must be placed in a family for nurturing, protection, and growth.

17. If I refuse baptism, whose counsel am I refusing?

Luke 7:30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

18. When Jesus was baptized, what did His father say?

Mark 1:9, 11 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. . . . Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

NOTE: When any of God’s children repent of their sins and are baptized, He is well pleased.

SUPPLEMENT

This section provides additional information for further study.

The Model Baptism

Jesus was not baptized because He needed cleansing from sin, for He was sinless (1 Peter 2:22). This is why John the Baptist was so perplexed when Jesus came to the Jordan River, asking to be baptized by him. John said, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” Matthew 3:14.

So why was Jesus baptized? There are three main reasons. First, He was baptized in behalf of those who cannot be baptized themselves. Sometimes when people accept the Lord in prison or in a hospital, circumstances do not allow them to be baptized. Jesus gives them credit for His baptism. The thief on the cross was one example (Luke 23:43). Second, Jesus was baptized as an example, that we should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:23). And third, Jesus was baptized so we can, by studying His experience, know what to expect by faith.

To illustrate, let’s take the following verses word by word and see what we can expect from our baptism. Matthew 3:16 and 17 reads: “When He had spoken these words, at once the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove upon Him.”

A voice came from heaven, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

We will begin to hear that still, small voice.

We recognize His leading.

We receive access to God.

“The heavens were opened” = We receive access to God.

“He saw” = Our spiritual eyes are now opened, giving us new understanding and perception.

“The Spirit of God” = We recognize His leading.

“Descending like a dove” = Peace gently enters our hearts.

“A voice came from heaven” = We will begin to hear that still, small voice.

“My beloved Son” = We are adopted into His royal family and become citizens of a different country.

“I am well pleased” = God gives us complete acceptance and forgiveness.

Your Response

Would you like to begin preparing for the sacred rite of baptism so God can say of you, “This is My beloved Son [or daughter], in whom I am well pleased?”

Answer:

If you would like to know more about baptism, contact the pastor or group leader who is presenting these studies and express your desire.