

NAAMAN



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Naaman

A Type of Believer's Baptism

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1 • Hidden in a Single Verse

Believer's baptism lies hidden like a shadow in a single verse of the Old Testament, in a verse about a leprous army commander. More than 1,800 years ago the church father Irenaeus — around AD 190 — wrote about this very verse as a type of baptism and the new birth, just as Jesus said. Which verse are we talking about?

Second Kings 5:14, WEB · Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Naaman was no ordinary man. He was commander of the army of the king of Aram — Israel's enemy to the north — «honorable» and «a great man with his master». And listen to this strange line: «by him **Yahweh** had given victory to Syria» (2 Kings 5:1). The

God of Israel had already been at work through this pagan, long before the man knew him. God would readily use other nations to correct Israel when there was need for it. He was a great warrior at the height of his power. «But he was a leper» (5:1).

Which disease? Scripture does not say directly — it uses the word *šāra* ‘**צָרַע**^{H6879}, a category of skin conditions that made a person ritually unclean. Leviticus 13 describes several different conditions — swellings, scabs, bright spots — which all fall under the same category, and later it is extended to cover mould in clothing and house walls. It is not one medical diagnosis but a *state of uncleanness*. All his rank, all his victories, all his honour — and yet: unclean.

Then word came to him from the prophet Elisha:

Second Kings 5:10, WEB · Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you, and you shall be clean.

He was furious: were not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? He had pictured something grand — the prophet himself coming out, calling on God, waving his hand over the place. Instead he got an instruction: go and wash. It was too simple. Too humbling. Exactly like salvation: we want something to *do*, something to boast of, an act worthy of our position. But God says: go down and be clean. Believe and be baptized. So simple that the proud man rages.

Mark 16:16, WEB · He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned.

But his servants reasoned with him (2 Kings 5:13). And when he finally obeyed, this happened:

Second Kings 5:14, WEB · Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

2 • The Words Beneath the Surface

The English «dipped himself ... like the flesh of a little child ... was clean» carries more in the original than shows on the surface. Five words decide everything — but let us first

see the whole: the command and the act, in Hebrew and then as close in English as can be managed.

Second Kings 5:10, Leningrad Codex

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֵלָיו אֱלִישָׁע מִלְאָךְ לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹךְ וְרַחֲצֵתָ שֶׁבַע-פְּעָמִים בַּיַּרְדֵּן
וַיָּשָׁב בְּשָׂרְךָ לָךְ וַיְטָהָר

Second Kings 5:10, word for word · And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying: Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall return to you, and you shall be clean.

Second Kings 5:14, Leningrad Codex

וַיֵּרֶד וַיִּטְבַּל בַּיַּרְדֵּן שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים כְּדִבְרֵי אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיָּשָׁב בְּשָׂרוֹ
כְּבֶשֶׂר נֶעַר קָטָן וַיְטָהָר

Second Kings 5:14, word for word · Then he went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh returned like the flesh of a little boy, and he was clean.

Both verses end on the same word — *taher*, «be clean»: what Elisha *commanded* (5:10), and what Naaman *became* (5:14). Now, the five words — one by one:

«Went down» is *yarad* — the descent. «Dipped himself» is *tabal*, to go wholly under. When the New Testament comes to name what John did in the Jordan and what the apostles commanded, its Greek word is baptizō βαπτίζω^{G907} — and it means exactly that: to go wholly under. Two testaments, two languages, one act.

«Again» is *shuv*, the word for turning back and being renewed: the flesh came *again*. «A little child» is *na'ar* — a word that reaches all the way down to the nursing infant. And «was clean» is *taher* — precisely the word God himself uses when he promises: «I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean» (Ezekiel 36:25).

Now stay with *tabal*, for it is a rare word — sixteen times in all of Scripture. The first two times it is blood: Joseph's coat dipped in blood (Genesis 37:31), and the hyssop in the Passover blood (Exodus 12:22). Thirteen of the sixteen come before Naaman, and every single time it is a thing or a body part that goes down — a finger, a foot, a cloth, a morsel, the end of a rod. At this very river, even the priests carrying the ark of the covenant were *tabal* only as to their feet, in the brim of the water (Joshua 3:15): the feet, not the man. The Law already required a man to wash all his flesh in water (Leviticus 15:16) — so what is new is not the act but the *word*: Naaman is the one place in Scripture where *tabal* takes a whole human being.

But notice which word the prophet used. The command was «go and **wash**» — *rāḥaṣ*, the ordinary word for washing, the same word Aaron was washed with when he was made priest (Leviticus 8:6) and the leper cleansed himself with (Leviticus 14:9). But the act stands in a different word: *tabal*. Naaman went completely under the water, seven times, «according to the saying of the man of God» (5:14). The command to wash was obeyed by full immersion.

And both halves of the mikveh are Scripture's own. The pool is *miqveh* (miqweh מִקְוֶה^{H4723}) — the word God uses on the third day for the gathering of the waters (Genesis 1:10), and the word the purity law uses for the fountain or cistern holding water enough to stay **clean** (Leviticus 11:36). The act is *tabal*. The rabbis later named the rite *tevilah*, from that very verb — but they coined the noun; they did not invent the thing. The pool and the verb were given in the Law, centuries before any Mishnah.

And the word keeps one more secret. In the Hebrew, *miqveh* is also the word for **hope** — both senses grow from the same root, *qavah*: to bind together, to collect, to wait for. It is *miqveh* that Jeremiah cries out: «Yahweh, the hope of Israel» (Jeremiah 17:13) — and in the same breath he calls him «the spring of living waters». The gathering of the waters and the hope of Israel are one Hebrew word.

3 • Ezekiel's Promise

Now hear what the prophet Ezekiel said — for Naaman is only the shadow of a far greater promise. Six hundred years before Christ, God promised this to his whole people:

Ezekiel 36:25-27, WEB · I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances, and do them.

One word binds this to the Jordan. When Naaman rose out of the river, «he was clean» — *taher* טָהַר^{H2891}. That is precisely the word God uses here: «you shall be clean», *taher*. And *taher* is no ordinary word — it is the priest's word. When a leper was healed, it was the priest who declared him *taher*, and the rite turned on washing in water and becoming clean, with *seven* over it (Leviticus 14:7-9). Now look at Naaman: a leper, told to *wash seven* times, who became *taher* (2 Kings 5:10, 14). He kept none of the rite — no

priest, no offering. But the leper's three words follow him: wash, seven, clean. But then Ezekiel lifts the same word — the word for a healed man's *skin* — and promises it for a whole people's *heart*. The body's leprosy becomes sin's; the *taher* of the skin becomes the *taher* of the heart.

But Ezekiel says three things the Naaman narrative does not spell out — and each Hebrew word opens a door.

The first: God *sprinkles* (zaraq זָרַק^{H2236}) the clean water. This is not a bathing word — it is a covenant word. At Sinai, Moses took the blood of the sacrifice and *sprinkled* (zaraq) it on the people; it was the blood of the covenant, the seal that made Israel God's own possession (Exodus 24:8). When God says he will *zaraq* clean water on his people, he is making a new covenant — sealing them as his own, as the blood sealed them at the mountain.

The second: the heart and the spirit are *new* — chadash חָדָשׁ^{H2319}, the same word Jeremiah uses when God promises a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). The new heart is not a patched heart; it belongs to an entirely new covenant.

The third: God puts his own ruach רֹּחַ^{H7307} — breath, wind and spirit in one — *within* (qereb קָרַב^{H7130}) the human being. Not on the outside, but in the innermost. Mark the word *ruach*: wind and spirit at once. Hold on to it.

For now comes the decisive point — this is exactly what Jesus spoke about with Nicodemus. «Unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God» (John 3:5) — *water and Spirit*, just as in Ezekiel: clean water and God's *ruach*. And see what Jesus does with the word: «The wind blows where it wants to ... So is everyone who is born of the Spirit» (John 3:8) — he is playing on *ruach* itself, wind *and* Spirit, straight out of the prophet. Then he rebukes him: «Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things?» (John 3:10). Why should he have known? Because it stood written in Ezekiel, in his own Bible. The teacher of Israel should have known the promise of water and Spirit by heart.

And notice what Jesus did immediately after the conversation: he went out into Judea «and baptized» (John 3:22). The same chapter that holds the birth of water and Spirit ends with baptizing going on around him — though John is careful to add that Jesus himself did not baptize, but his disciples (John 4:2). The teaching became action.

- **c. 850 BC** — Naaman goes down into the Jordan and becomes *taher*, clean as a child. **The shadow.**
- **c. 590 BC** — in exile, Ezekiel promises clean water, a new heart and God's Spirit — some 260 years later. **The promise.**

- **c. AD 30** — Jesus requires birth of water and Spirit of Nicodemus and goes out baptizing himself — a good 600 years after the prophet again. **The fulfilment.**

So the three stand in a single light. Naaman is **the shadow**: one foreigner, *taher* in the Jordan. Ezekiel is **the promise**: a whole people *taher* by sprinkled covenant water, with a new heart and God's Spirit in the innermost. And Jesus is **the fulfilment**: the new birth of water and Spirit that he required of Nicodemus, and that baptism has sealed ever since. One word — *taher* — runs like a shining thread from the leper in the river, through the prophet's covenant promise, all the way to the Saviour's own lips.

4 • Faith Before Water

But the deepest thing lies in the *order* — four steps, and they turn the argument for infant baptism on its head.

First, the obedience. Naaman did not go down blindly — but not in finished faith either. He had just raged and turned away (5:11-12). It was the *servants* who believed for him, and their faith reasoned him round: «My father, if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? how much rather then, when he says to you, Wash, and be clean?» (5:13). That is how believers lead a man toward salvation. But what Naaman himself did was to *obey*: he bowed and went down on the word, before he could yet confess. Obedience — not a finished understanding — came before the water. An infant can be carried to the water, but it cannot obey a word; Naaman could. And Jesus said: «if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed ... nothing will be impossible for you» (Matthew 17:20). That little is all it takes. Naaman's was no bigger: he raged, he turned away, and his own servants had to reason him round. But it was enough — because it obeyed.

Then the water that makes new. He went down and dipped himself, and came up «like the flesh of a little child» (5:14). It was in the water he was made new.

Then the confession that ripens. When he came up, he said: «See now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel» (5:15). The faith that had obeyed now became full confession.

And mark the word he confesses with. «I know» is yada יָדָע^{H3045}, and it stands in the perfect — a thing settled, not a thing supposed. It is the word Jeremiah lays at the heart of the new covenant: «they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them» (Jeremiah 31:34). And Jeremiah measures that promise with the very two

words this story is built from. Naaman was «a great man» — gadol גדול^{H1419} (5:1) — who would gladly have done «some great thing» had the prophet asked it (5:13), and who rose out of the Jordan with the flesh of «a little child» — qaton קטן^{H6996} (5:14). From the least to the greatest: the whole reach of the promise, walked by one man in one river, more than two centuries before the prophet spoke it. The great man had to become the least before he could say: I know.

Last, the conversion that is completed. He asked for earth from Israel and vowed: «your servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but to Yahweh» (5:17). A new Lord, a new belonging.

Mark carefully: faith did not come *after* the water, as though the water regenerated an unbelieving man — that would make baptism a magic act. No: obedience went down first — a faith carried by others, but his own to obey — and the water cleansed and made new, and the confession grew to fullness. Obedient faith → water that renews → confession that ripens → conversion that is completed. That is believer's baptism, step by step.

Therefore: what large parts of the church call infant baptism is not the baptism Scripture shows. The order decides everything. Faith and obedience come *before* the water, confession *after*. An infant can be carried to the font, but it can neither believe, obey nor confess — and then what happens is not this baptism, but another thing under the same name. However sincerely the tradition means well, the type itself judges it, quietly and clearly: this is not God's will for his own.

Anyone who wants to see this order lived out in our own time — a man who barely believed, but obeyed, and was given a vision in the moment he received — can read Jørn André Halseth's own testimony in [Through the Water](#).

And the type keeps leaving traces. When Jørn André Halseth received Christ, he was given a vision of standing inside a great white egg — *not made by human hands*, lit from outside, clean within — only days before a brother led him down into the water. What he did not yet know was that «not made with hands» is Scripture's own word for exactly this: «circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands ... having been buried with him in baptism» (Colossians 2:11-12) — and that Naaman's flesh came again «like the flesh of a little child», newborn. Then he doubted the vision for seven years — as many years as Naaman's seven dips — until in 2015 the Holy Spirit sent a young pastor in Trondheim, audibly and twice, with a command as strange as the prophet's: «Take three eggs and go down to the city centre.» He obeyed without understanding — as Naaman did — and carried the answer to a stranger he had never met: the eggs mean new life. And the answer came in threes — three eggs, three men of God, three strangely alike young women — a threefold witness (Deuteronomy 19:15), stamped like the Name we are baptized into (Matthew 28:19), old as the three visitors at Mamre who announced

a birth and left laughter in the tent (Genesis 18), and arranged like the city the new birth admits you to — foursquare, with three gates on every side (Revelation 21:13, 16). And the place itself carried a signature: the meeting happened on Trondheim's foursquare town square, at the foot of the column of Olav Tryggvason — the king who brought baptism to Norway — on the sight-line of Nidaros Cathedral. The whole account stands in Jørn André Halseth's testimony *Født På Ny* («Born Anew»).

And the water Naaman went down into was no random river. It was the **Jordan** — the same river Israel crossed dry-shod into the promised land (Joshua 3:14-17), the same river where John baptized to repentance (Matthew 3:6), and the same river where Jesus himself went down to fulfil all righteousness (Matthew 3:13-15). And the word the evangelists put on what happened to him there is baptizō βαπτίζω^{G907} — the same word. Luke sets it twice in one sentence: «when all the people were baptized, Jesus also had been baptized» (Luke 3:21). The word carries the case. The same water. Naaman was the shadow — baptism into Christ is the reality. Peter calls baptism the *antitype* — antitypon ἀντίτυπον^{G499} — and Noah's water the type it answers to (1 Peter 3:21): the flood the copy, baptism the reality. If the flood prefigured baptism, how much more Naaman's river?

5 • Among All the Waters

Walk back through Scripture and you meet water after water. God's people are never saved with the water left out — there is always a water to pass through. Naaman is neither the first nor the only one. Why then lift up precisely him?

First the **flood** rises: the world perishes, and eight souls are carried safely through the judgment in an ark — Peter himself calls it a type of baptism (1 Peter 3:20-21). Then the **Red Sea** parts: a whole people walks out of slavery between walls of water, and Pharaoh's army drowns behind them — Paul says outright that they were «baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea» (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). Then the **Jordan** stills: the priests carry the ark of the covenant into the river, the water flowing down from above is cut off, and the people cross dry-shod to inherit the land (Joshua 3:13-17). And through the whole Law of Moses run the **Levitical washings** — *rāḥaṣ*, to wash: the Law required a man to wash all his flesh in water (Leviticus 15:16). In the Law *tabal* is never a person bathing, always the priest dipping something — a finger, a bunch of hyssop, a bird. The cleansing became a fixed ordinance, the mikveh John's hearers already knew. Four waters, four shadows of baptism. Two of them even carry something Naaman lacks: the apostles name them expressly as types.

But ask what each water *does*, and the picture divides. The flood *saves* through judgment. The sea *delivers* from bondage. The Jordan crossing *inherits* a land. The washings *cleanse* by ordinance. Magnificent, every one — but none of them is a birth. No man rises young out of the flood; no one becomes an infant in the Red Sea.

Only long afterwards does a solitary man come down to this very Jordan — not a people, but one; not an Israelite, but a foreigner. He goes *down* (*yarad*), is immersed (*tabal*, the Hebrew verb for going wholly under), his flesh *returns* (*shuv*) «like the flesh of a little child» (*na'ar*), and he is made clean (*taher*). Descent, immersion, renewal, child, cleansing — in one single verse. The other waters saved people *through* the water; this water made a man *new*. That is exactly what Jesus later said to Nicodemus: born anew of water and Spirit.

And one thing sets him apart in the end. The other waters Scripture speaks of — this *man* Jesus names with his own mouth. In the **first sermon** Luke records, he reaches past all Israel's history for two outsiders — and the one he ends on is this: «not one of them was cleansed, except Naaman, the Syrian» (Luke 4:27). What he means by it, we shall come to. But mark already now whom he chooses. The flood saves, the sea delivers, the Jordan bequeaths — only Naaman makes *new*. And only Naaman rises from the water with his own confession on his lips.

6 • The Foreigner

And notice *who* this happens to. Naaman was a *foreigner* — a pagan without a single claim of inheritance in Israel. No eighth-day circumcision, no covenant sign from birth, no lineage among God's people. He came with one thing alone: a faith that obeyed, a deliberate descent into the water.

So he becomes the first picture in Scripture of what the scholars many hundreds of years later would call *proselyte baptism* — the stranger who turned to the God of Israel, went down into the water and came up with the flesh of a little child. But here lies the decisive point: this was never the rabbis' own idea. They *wrote the custom down* only centuries after Christ; but the truth was God's own word — shown already in Naaman and promised in Ezekiel, eight hundred years before any Mishnah. The stranger reborn through water is no late invention — it lies in Israel's own prophets.

And that is exactly how *we* came in. Paul calls the Gentiles a wild olive branch that has been «grafted in» to the cultivated tree (Romans 11:17) — but *how*? «By their unbelief they were broken off, and you stand **by your faith**» (Romans 11:20). One belongs to

God's house not by flesh, lineage or a sign from the cradle, but by one's *own* faith. So we, who were «strangers and foreigners», became «fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God» (Ephesians 2:19). Naaman, *the foreigner*, is the first picture of us.

7 • Jesus Points

That this is no small side story, Jesus himself shows — in the first sermon Luke records. In the synagogue in Nazareth he read from Isaiah: «The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news ...» (Luke 4:18), and said that today this word was fulfilled. But when they wanted a show of signs, such as they had heard about from Capernaum (4:23), he refused — and pointed instead to two Gentiles who received what unbelieving Israel missed: the widow in Zarephath, and Naaman.

Luke 4:27, WEB · There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, except Naaman, the Syrian.

Notice *how* he says it. Not «one of them was Naaman», but «**not one** of them was cleansed, **except** Naaman, the Syrian» — every leper in Israel on one side of that sentence, and one foreigner on the other. Of everything in Israel's history he could have opened his ministry with, he opened with this man.

For this they tried to kill him: «They were all filled with wrath in the synagogue ... and led him to the brow of the hill ... that they might throw him off the cliff» (Luke 4:28-29). This first sermon nearly ended in his own death — over this Syrian.

And he had already said why: «no prophet is acceptable in his hometown» (Luke 4:24). First the rule, then the two prophets as its proof — so the word reaches backwards as well. Elisha was mocked on the road up to Bethel (2 Kings 2:23); Israel's king never sent for him — the prophet had to send for the king (5:8); and later that same king swore to have his head off before the day was out (6:31). Meanwhile a Syrian went home confessing that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. So Jesus did not read his own rejection as something new; he read it as the last in the line — and Nazareth proved him while he was still speaking. But the line was not the whole truth about him. In the vineyard the owner sent servant after servant, and they were beaten and killed; then, «still having one, his beloved son», he «sent him last to them» (Mark 12:6). The same rejection — a different one sent. The prophets were servants. The Son is the heir.

And Luke makes the same move once more. Ten lepers are cleansed; one turns back — «and he was a Samaritan» — and Jesus asks: «Were there none found who returned

to give glory to God, except this stranger?» (Luke 17:16, 18). The same sentence-shape, the same outcome: many lepers, and only the foreigner. And the same three beats as at the Jordan — the stranger is cleansed, *returns* (Naaman returned to the man of God, *shuv*, 2 Kings 5:15), and confesses. Luke does not call this baptism. He shows how God works: the stranger comes, is cleansed, and turns back.

And see where he stands when he says it. He is in Nazareth, «where he had been brought up» (Luke 4:16). He knows every face in the room, and he knows what they are. This is not a man losing his temper mid-sermon. He carried the grief in with him — the same grief that later looks at Jerusalem and weeps over it (Luke 19:41), and that looks around «with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their hearts» (Mark 3:5). He came «to his own, and those who were his own didn't receive him» (John 1:11), and he knew it before he stood up to read.

And then he chooses. Not some random foreigner, but the enemy's commander — the man of whom it is written «by him Yahweh had given victory to Syria» (2 Kings 5:1) — and he chooses the very years when Israel itself was whoring after other gods: the calves at Bethel and Dan, Baal in Samaria. That is what makes the sentence unbearable. He is not merely saying that a Gentile received grace. He is saying that of all the lepers in Israel not one was cleansed — only the man God had used to strike them. The unclean enemy went home clean; the chosen people were left standing. And they thought they owned it all. The Baptist had taken the objection out of their mouths one chapter earlier — «We have Abraham for our father» — answering that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from those stones (Luke 3:8). And the verdict is Jesus' own: «whoever doesn't have, from him will be taken away even that which he thinks he has» (Luke 8:18). *Thinks* — Greek *dokeō* δοκέω^{G1380}, what a man believes he owns. They had the lineage, the promises and the temple, and lost what they had never owned. God had foretold exactly this answer: «I will move them to jealousy with those who are not a people» (Deuteronomy 32:21). They heard it, and they understood it. The boundary must still be said plainly: Jesus does not say «baptism» here, he says «cleansed» — but the man he chose was made clean by going all the way under the water. And the purpose is what Paul states outright: «by their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy» (Romans 11:11) — not to cast them off, for «God didn't reject his people» (Romans 11:2). The one who *comes* and obeys is made new; the one who rests in his own loses what he never had.

And the arrow does not only point backwards. One Greek word binds it together, and Luke uses it himself: *atheteō* ἀθετέω^{G114}, to set aside, to nullify. Of the water: «the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the counsel of God, not being baptized by him themselves» (Luke 7:30) — that was John's baptism, but that baptism was the counsel of God, and they set it aside as regards themselves. Of the sent ones: «whoever rejects you rejects me. Whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me» (Luke 10:16) — the same word, three

times in one verse; to spurn the apostles is to spurn him. And of the custom: «Full well do you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition» (Mark 7:9). The water, the sent ones and the Word stand or fall together, by the same verb. But say it precisely: this does not concern the one who cannot — the thief on the cross never came into any water, and heard «today you will be with me in Paradise» (Luke 23:43). It concerns those who stood at the river, could, and would not. And it is not said to deny anyone his brotherhood, but because the counsel still stands, and the water is still there.

8 • The Two Men

We set Naaman against Nicodemus, and the distance between them is the whole point.

The one was Naaman: a pagan, a foreigner, without one word of Israel's teaching. Proud, yes — but when the servants reasoned with him, he *obeyed*, went down into the foreign river and came up clean as a child.

The other was Nicodemus, and he was everything Naaman was not. Not a pagan, but one of Israel's own. Not unlearned, but «the teacher of Israel» (John 3:10) — a Pharisee and a ruler, a member of the Sanhedrin, the nation's highest court (John 3:1). A wealthy man; later he brought about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to Jesus' tomb (John 19:39). He had devoted his whole life to Scripture. Of all people, he above all should have known Ezekiel's promise of water and Spirit by heart.

And yet: the unlearned pagan, who knew nothing, obeyed and was made new. The learned teacher, who thought he knew everything, was left standing with the question of how these things could be (John 3:9). The stranger with empty hands came in; the citizen with full hands stumbled.

Notice, too, *where* and *when* Jesus and Nicodemus met: in Jerusalem, at **Passover** (John 2:23) — the feast of the lamb's blood, kept in memory of the night the hyssop was *dipped* in the blood on the doorposts (Exodus 12:22). That is the second time *tabal* sounds in Scripture — the same word that would later immerse Naaman. That it was that very Passover, Nicodemus says himself: he opens with «these signs that you do» (John 3:2), and those were the signs of the feast that many had just believed at (John 2:23). The teacher stood, then, in the middle of the feast, and the feast's own sign carried the word he did not recognize — while only just before, John the Baptist had cried: «Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!» (John 1:29).

And notice *how* the two came. Naaman came in broad daylight — with chariots, a letter and silver, in full view — and went down into the water before his own men. Nicode-

mus came *by night* (John 3:2), alone, under cover of darkness; John never forgets it, and at the tomb still calls him «who at first came to Jesus by night» (John 19:39). The foreigner had only his pride to lose and hid nothing; the teacher had everything worldly to lose and hid himself. But the light reached him in the end: from the night, through a cautious defense in the council (John 7:50-51), to broad daylight at the cross. In Nicodemus too the confession ripened — only more slowly than in Naaman.

Here lies the sting of Jesus' question: «Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things?» (John 3:10). Nicodemus was not asked to guess something hidden — he had two witnesses in his own Bible. *The promise*: Ezekiel's word about clean water and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:25-27). And *the picture*: the leprous Syrian who went down into the Jordan and came up clean as a child — the same water, the same word *taher*, the same new birth. The prophet had promised it, the narrative had already shown it; the teacher carried both the promise and the picture, and still did not recognize the reality when it stood before him in the night. The shadow points to the promise, the promise to Christ — he who owned the first two should have seen the third.

That is the whole book in two men. Grace belongs to the one who *comes and obeys* — not to the one who *rests in what he already thinks he owns*.

9 • The Witnesses

This is no new reading. It is one of the oldest in the whole church.

Around AD 190 — two lifetimes after the apostles — Irenaeus of Lyons wrote about this very verse. Naaman's cleansing, he said, was «a sign to us»: we are lepers in sin, and «by means of the sacred water ... we are made clean, as newborn babes». Then he added Jesus' own words to Nicodemus: «Unless a man be born of water and Spirit ...» In one single breath he bound together Naaman, baptism, the newborn child and the conversation in the night — eighteen centuries before this text was written. (Irenaeus, *Fragment 34*.)

And he did not stand alone. Gregory of Nyssa said that the Jordan «alone among rivers» sanctified baptism for the whole world. Ambrose of Milan saw in the little servant girl the church gathered in from the Gentiles, and heard Naaman teach that «it is not of the water but of grace that man is cleansed». Ephrem the Syrian sang that the fountain of baptism «makes the old young again, as the river made Naaman young». Four fathers, three languages, one picture.

Even the bridge between the two men is old — the foreigner who became like a child, and the teacher who could not find the birth of the child: the church saw them together long before us. We have found nothing new in the Jordan. We have only bent down to the water the faithful have always known — that a leper rising clean out of the river is a type of baptism, and baptism a new birth.

10 • The Centrepiece

Here is why this one verse is a centrepiece in the answer to infant baptism.

No one carried Naaman. He went down himself. An infant is *carried* to the water; Naaman *went* down into it — deliberately, by his own faith, in obedience to the word. The very picture Scripture gives of the new birth through water is the way of a *believing, obedient* man — the exact opposite of an unconscious infant being carried and sprinkled.

He came in by faith, not by lineage. The pagan had nothing to inherit. He stood on his own faith alone (Romans 11:20). So the whole foundation under infant baptism falls: no one enters God's house by flesh, lineage or an infant sign — only by the faith that itself goes down. (The whole answer to the objections around infant baptism, link by link, stands in [Baptized on Your Faith](#); the red thread of water through all of Scripture — Noah, the Red Sea, the Jordan, the mikveh — in [Through the Water](#); and the same pattern — the descent, the Name, the new birth — hidden in the very letters of the Torah at the Red Sea, in [Olam](#).)

He had already saved a nation, and could not save himself. He was the man of whom the narrator says «by him Yahweh had given victory to Syria» (5:1) — and the word there is teshuah תְּשׁוּעָה^{H8668}, deliverance and salvation, from the root yasha יָשַׁע^{H3467}. A whole nation was rescued through this man's hand. Then the same verse ends with two words the Hebrew lays side by side with nothing between them: *gibbor chayil*, mighty man of valour — and metsora מְצֹרָע^{H6879}, leper. Our English Bibles supply «but he was»; the Hebrew supplies nothing at all. He could win a kingdom and not his own skin. «For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits his own self?» (Luke 9:25)

And it could not be bought. He came carrying ten talents of silver, six thousand of gold and ten changes of clothing (5:5), and Elisha refused every ounce of it under oath: «As Yahweh lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none» (5:16). The cleansing was already given; there was nothing left to pay for. Then Gehazi swore by the same living God in the opposite direction — «as Yahweh lives, I will run after him, and take somewhat

of him» (5:20) — and what he carried home was not silver: «The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave to you, and to your seed forever» (5:27) — *davaq* דָּבַק^{H1692}, to cling fast. So the chapter stands framed: it opens with a foreigner who is *metsora*, a leper, and closes with an Israelite who is. The leprosy changed hands; the gift stayed free. Salvation is not for sale, and never was: «the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord» (Romans 6:23) — free, or it is not that gift at all.

And let one thing be said plainly: this verse does not *teach* baptism as a doctrine, and «a little child» does not literally mean «newborn». It is a *shadow* — but a shadow so clear that Jesus himself could point to it, and that a teacher of Israel should have known it. The foreigner went down unclean and came up like a child, clean.

And what of «Allow the little children to come to me»? It is the verse most often brought into the field for infant baptism, and it should be met head on in the text. Luke is the hardest: he does not write merely *children* but *brephe* βρέφη^{G1025} — *babies* (Luke 18:15). Real infants were carried up, and Jesus received them. But read what he then did: «He took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands on them» (Mark 10:16). He blessed them. He did not baptize them. That is no argument from silence — the text states positively what he did, and baptism is not there. And the sentence immediately after settles it: «whoever will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child, he will in no way enter into it» (Mark 10:15). The question is who is *like the child*. Mark alone does not decide it: *paidion* παιδίον^{G3813} is neuter, and in the neuter the nominative and the accusative are the same form. Matthew decides it, with the same word in the same matter: «unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven» (Matthew 18:3). There the matter is beyond doubt — the verb is *become*, and those who are to become as the children are the hearers themselves. The child, then, is not what is received; the child is *the one who receives*. And even so he must **receive**: the word is *dechomai* δέχομαι^{G1209}, an act the person performs himself. There lies the whole matter. An infant already *is* little — but it cannot receive. Naaman could receive, and had to humble himself to do it: he laid down the silver and his own reasoning, went down, and came up «like the flesh of a little child». The children were carried to Jesus and blessed; Naaman went down himself and was made clean. Scripture gives both, but it does not confuse them.

And it does not concern that generation only. Where an inherited custom is given the last word where Scripture has spoken, the move is the same one Luke described in those who owned the law and still went around the water (Luke 7:30). Not because those who keep the custom are not brothers — but because the counsel of God still stands, and it stands at the water.

That is believer's baptism, painted in the Jordan more than eight hundred years before Christ. Believe — and be baptized.

How this was made

This is the author's own work. It was composed with [junifye](#) and an AI assistant, drawing its Scripture and original-language work (Greek, Hebrew, cross-references) from [Darash](#) (Hebrew *darash*, “to seek, inquire, study”), a tool and reference work for the Bible in its original languages.

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