**Old Testament Baptism**

Our English word baptism is simply a transliteration of the Greek word baptisma which meant immersion or submersion. While there was no ceremonial immersion under Moses’ Law, there is a Hebrew word tabal that meant to dip or plunge. We find the word most often used to describe dipping a finger or other object in blood or oil or water. In those cases only the object in question is submerged in the liquid.

There is only one Old Testament example of a person immersing themselves in water in order to comply with a command of God. That example is found in 2 Kings 5. We are told of a respected captain of the Syrian army named Naaman who was afflicted with the dreaded disease leprosy. As it turns out, there was a young Israelite captive girl who waited on Naaman’s wife, and the girl informed them of a prophet (Elisha) in Israel who could cure him. The great warrior traveled to the house of Elisha laden with gifts, expecting the prophet to come out to meet him, call on the name of his God and waive his hand over the place and cure him with great fanfare. Instead, Elisha sent a messenger out with instructions. Naaman was furious and actually left in a rage. Were it not for the sound advice from a trusted servant, Naaman would have lived out the rest of his days as a leper. Instead, he humbled himself and complied with the instructions of God. He was told to “go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean.” God’s instructions for us are pretty simple. The problem arises when we begin to think we are wiser than He is.

In the end, Naaman went down into the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean. Here is our little word tabal again. Naaman demonstrated his faith in God by immersing himself seven times as the prophet had instructed him; in so doing, he obtained a gift from God that he was totally powerless to obtain for himself.

Few people today are victims of leprosy, but we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Each of us has placed ourselves in dire straits because we are powerless to fix the problem. I separated myself from God with sin and I can’t simply begin doing a lot of wonderful works to offset the sins of my past. It doesn’t work that way. I am totally dependent on the grace and mercy of God for my spiritual healing.

So I come to God and plead with Him to rid me of this loathsome condition that is destroying my soul and He sends His messenger to tell me to repent of my sins and allow someone to submerge me under water to wash them away (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). If I have enough faith in God to comply with His simple commands, I can obtain from Him a gift that I am hopelessly incapable of obtaining for myself: The remission of my sins! Anyone who struggles to see the simplicity of God’s plan of salvation should go back and study the case of Naaman. The principles are identical. Naaman was a leper until the moment he washed the seventh time in the Jordan, demonstrating his faith in God’s promise. A person today is guilty of his past sins until he is immersed for the remission of his sins, demonstrating his faith in God’s promise. Once the person has been baptized into Christ, he need only confess any subsequent sin to receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Salvation is truly the free gift of God granted by grace through faith!

**John A McKee**