



## STORY

Naaman and Elisha - 2 Kings 5

## TEACHER PRAYER

Dear Father, In this age of technology and interest in the complex, help me to remember that the gospel message is beautifully simple. As I teach this lesson, allow me to impart the simplicity and the beauty of what *You* have to say. Though Your ways are above our ways, You have graciously revealed to us the mystery of being saved by grace alone. For this I am ever thankful. Amen.

## VOCABULARY

*Aram* - A people and a nation named for Aram, a son of Shem and grandson of Noah. The Aramaean (Aramean) peoples inhabited the areas northeast of Israel (modern day Syria). They developed the Aramaic language much in use during Jesus' day.

*Leprosy* - A disease undoubtedly different than the disease known today as leprosy (*elephantiasis*

*Graecorum*). Biblical leprosy referred most often to a whiteness that may have disfigured those who suffered from it, but did not disable them. Interestingly a leper that was completely covered from head to toe by the whiteness of the disease was to be pronounced clean by the priests - apparently an indication that the disease was no longer contagious.

*Abana and Pharpar* - Rivers of Syria. The Abana is today known as the Barada and flows from the wooded hills of Lebanon into Syria and through Damascus. The Pharpar is a 40 miles long river flowing south of Damascus.

*Rimmon* - A Syrian idol also known as *Ramman* and *Hadad* - the Syrian Baal. "*Rimmon*" literally means "*pomegranate*" which because of its many seeds was used as a symbol of fertility by pagan cultures.

## OUTER AIM

The Lord, through Elisha, heals Naaman of his leprosy.

## INNER AIM

Do not despise the gospel for its simplicity.

**BACKGROUND** (*Rupprecht Volume 1, pages 366-371*)

### Verses 1-8

Naaman was the commander of the army of Syria under King Ben-Hadad II. The country is also called Aram (see note above) after the grandson of Noah who settled this region. Note that Naaman was able to hold high office in Syria despite his leprosy, something that would not have been possible in Israel.

*"...by him the Lord had given victory to Syria"* - it should be neither troubling nor surprising for us to hear that the Lord also grants victories to those nations that have rejected him (cf. Amos 9:7). Against whom these victories were won we do not know, but we can have confidence that they served God's purpose of preserving Israel for the birth of the Promised Messiah.

Slavery was common in those days. Captives were considered war plunder and were sold at the slave markets in Damascus. Note how the young Israelite girl continued to serve to the best of her ability despite being torn from her home and family and sold as a slave. (See application below.)

Though Elisha traveled all over Israel and Judah, he spent most of his time teaching and prophesying among the northern Ten Tribes of Israel (Samaria).

The kings mentioned here were Ben-Hadad II of Syria and Jehoram, the son of Ahab, in Israel. (Jehoram is also called Joram to distinguish him from Jehoram the King of Judah - see notes in previous lesson.)

Tearing his clothes was an act of desperation and frustration on the part of Jehoram. Although he recognized that God (he did not use the more personal name Jehovah) could cure Naaman, he apparently did not expect that God would help him in his hour of need.

### **Verses 9-19**

Elisha does not even appear before Naaman, but sends a messenger out to him with instructions to wash seven times in the Jordan River. Although Naaman was ceremonially unclean to the Jews, it is unlikely that that is the reason Elisha did not appear before him. Elisha wanted Naaman to understand that it was the power of the Lord, not Elisha himself, that would heal him. The 25-mile trip to the Jordan and multiple washings called for trust in the Lord's power.

It is not known whether Naaman's rage was caused by Elisha's breach of protocol by not coming out personally to greet him, or by the logically absurd remedy commanded by Elisha, or by a combination of the two. The point is that the humble simplicity of the cure almost caused Naaman to reject it. As noted by the Inner Aim above, this is the most important lesson of this Bible story. God's simple cure for sin (the gospel) is often rejected for its very simplicity.

Naaman's advisors serve him well. Lacking the pride of high position that had blinded Naaman, they served their master with sound advice.

While the miracle of healing caused Naaman to recognize and accept the supreme and unique power of the one true God, true saving faith comes not through the observance of miracles but through the hearing of the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Salvation came to Old Testament believers through faith in the promise of a Savior.

While Elisha himself appears before Naaman after he is cured, he refuses any gift or payment from him. Elisha wanted nothing to obscure the fact that God, not Elisha, had cured Naaman, and that the gift of healing had been freely given, not earned or purchased.

In asking for soil from Israel, Naaman may have been exemplifying the pagan notion of a localized god who must be worshipped only over native soil. This request may also have been a simple indication that Naaman now believed that nothing in Syria was as good as its counterpart in Israel --not the god Rimmon, not the rivers that he had once thought superior, not even the soil itself. Whatever his thoughts, it should be noted that Elisha does not condemn the request.

Note the character of the man Naaman. During his return trip from the Jordan (about 25 miles) he had time to reflect on how his life had now changed. He recognized the God of Israel as the only true God, but he also understood his duties to King Ben-Hadad II of Syria. Those duties included physically supporting the King as he worshipped the idol Rimmon. Naaman recognized the compromising position into which this service would place him and brought the dilemma to the attention of Elisha. Here, again, Elisha offers no condemnation (see application below). True worship is a matter of the heart.

## Verses 20-27

Gehazi, heretofore an exemplary servant of Elisha, gives in to greed. His reference to Naaman as "this Syrian" may also be an indication of bitterness or racial bigotry on his part.

Note how easily lying came to Gehazi after he gave in to the sin of greed.

Gehazi allowed the servants of Naaman to carry the booty, but only so long as Elisha could not see him. Nor did he want Naaman's servants to see that he hid the gifts in his own tent.

As is so often the case, sin begets lying, and one lie often leads to another.

Sin has its consequences. Gehazi was allowed to accept one gift from Naaman - his leprosy.

## STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Father in heaven, There are times when I have a hard time taking You at Your Word. As I grow older and receive more education about this world, I pray that You will help me to continue to put my faith above my head knowledge. Though on my own I would not understand the news of my Savior, yet You have caused me believe it with all of my heart. Help me to treasure that news even when I am confronted by pressure to despise it. Amen.

## PRESENTATION

This Bible account is too long to read in class. Assign its reading of this lesson to the students the week before it is presented, and then retell or summarize the story for your students in your own words.

## APPLICATION

1. The chief application of this account is the parallel between Naaman's initial rejection of God's simple cure for his leprosy and natural man's rejection of God's simple cure for sin - the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ).
2. Paint a vivid picture in the minds of the students as to the trauma that must have been endured by the young Israelite maiden who was taken captive and sold into slavery. Lead them to imagine themselves in her position. Point out that she served her new masters well by offering advice and was a witness to her God that was above and beyond the call of her duties as a slave. Adverse conditions do not remove our calling as witnesses for our God and Savior. If anything, they make that witness all the more remarkable to the hearer.
3. King Jehoram serves as a negative example of what to do when faced (humanly speaking) with an impossible task. He gave way to despair. Our initial reaction may often be the same. From this lesson we learn to turn all such matters over to our God, for "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)
4. As God through Elisha told Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan River, so he at times calls for faithful, trusting obedience from his children in order to bless them. So today we bring our children to be baptized, not understanding how that simple act of applying water in connection with the Word of God can serve as a vehicle for the Holy Spirit and His work of creating saving faith in the human heart.
5. The gospel has been given freely *to* us; freely it should be given *by* us. Though Elisha refused the gifts of Naaman, he did not refuse all compensation. Clarify to the students that pastors and teachers are not paid for preaching and teaching the Word. Rather, the congregation provides for their earthly needs so that the pastors and teachers can carry on the Lord's work of ministry full-time and without distraction.
6. As Naaman recognized the difficulty he would have in carrying out his official secular duties as a new convert to the one true God, so also such dilemmas may well confront us. Ask the students to come up with examples in their own

- lives (e.g., paying taxes to a government that does bad things, defending 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment rights to free speech, even when what is said is morally wrong, working as a policeman or judge to enforce laws with which he disagrees, etc.)
7. Sin blinds us and makes us do foolish things. Remind the students how Adam, once so wise, tried to hide from God in the Garden after he sinned. Here too note how Gehazi, who had witnessed such great things during his time of service under Elisha, was fooled by his greed into believing that he could fool the Lord whom Elisha served.
  8. The fact that Gehazi had to hide the gifts from Elisha should have convinced him that what he was doing was wrong. Emphasize the need to listen to our conscience, which is a gift from our God to warn us when we sin or are being tempted to do so.

## **PASSAGES**

**These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.**

### **Lower**

Psalm 119:105 - Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

John 17:3 - And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

1 John 1:7 - The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

### **Middle**

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 20:31 - But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

1 Corinthians 1:25 - The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

### **Upper**

2 Timothy 3:15 - From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

1 Corinthians 1:18 - For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

## **HYMN CHOICES**

Preserve Thy Word, O Savior - TLH #264:4-5

O Word of God Incarnate - TLH #294:1-2

The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace - TLH #297:1-2, 5-6