

There is a Prophet in Israel – 1 **(2 Ki. 5:1-14)**

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The two major stories of Naaman and Gehazi are complicated stories. They involve no less than ten characters, multiple themes, and many plots.

My primary question concerns the reason for its inclusion in the book. Why did the writer include the blessing of Naaman and the curse of Gehazi?

The purpose of the writer of the book of Kings will help answer our question. He wants to show the failure of Israel’s kings to trust God and obey Him. Such disobedience is the cause of Israel’s current exile in Babylon. He also wants to demonstrate the role of the prophets in calling the kings and the nation of Israel back to the terms of the covenant. There is another aim—to reiterate the Mosaic stipulation to love the stranger and welcome the foreigner (cf. Deut. 10:19; 1 Ki. 8:41-43). Naaman is an enemy of Israel. But he is a foreigner in need—somebody that the Mosaic law expects the kings of Israel to accommodate.

Yet I think the ultimate aim of the healing of Naaman is “evangelistic.” A key verse is v. 8, “*that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.*” That pagan Naaman later declares that the only true God is in Israel, shows that this aim was achieved.

We see these aims achieved in the unfolding of the stories.

Today, we shall study the first major story—the miraculous healing of Naaman. The following outline reflects the plot and subplots of the story.

A Note of Irony (v. 1)

The writer presents Naaman as a commander of the Syrian army. He was the chief of staff of the king of Syria. He was the highest ranking general of the land. The writer also calls him a “great” man “in the face of his master” (Heb. *panim adon*), which is the literal translation here. The king himself considered him a great man.

He was also held in “high favor” (Heb. *nasa*), which means, “highly thought of, in high standing.” (Holladay) The king thought of him highly and in high esteem.

The writer gives the reason for Naaman’s greatness—“*because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria*” (v. 1). The word, “victory” (Heb. *teshuah*), means, “deliverance, salvation,” from oppression or in battle. Most likely, Naaman won the battle against Ahab of Israel, according to Josephus (who thinks it was Naaman who shot Ahab with an arrow) and the Targum on 2 Chron. 18.¹ But Yahweh gave Naaman and the Syrians victory that day. Thus, Naaman became a great man because of the LORD.

This is the first note of irony—Naaman was a great general, but only because the LORD gave him victory. We learn a lesson here. Man’s success is only by the sovereignty of God.

Are you highly respected in your workplace today? Are you a highly successful businessperson or executive? Know this—you are successful only by the will of the Lord.

There is a second note of irony in v. 1. Naaman is called, “*a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.*” In the Hebrew, the word “leper” is a verb (Heb. *tsara*) (Pual participle), which literally reads, “leprous.” The word “refers to a wider range of skin diseases.” (Harris) Naaman had a skin disease of some sort, but not necessarily Hansen’s disease (with pain, infection, and deformity). Note the irony—he was a mighty soldier, but a leper. Naaman was a great man, but he has a weakness.

What is your weakness today? Does your weakness cause you pain and despair? God sees you and knows you. God can heal your weakness today, if you come to God.

¹ T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; ed. John D. W. Watts; Dallas: Word, 1985), 62. A possible theory is that Naaman once won the battle against Assyrian forces of Shalmaneser II, that threatened to subdue Syria. See H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *II Kings* (TPC; London: Funk & Wagnalls, n. d.), 92.

A Note of Hope (vv. 2-4)

At this time, the Syrians conducted border raids against Israel. One objective of these border raids was to capture locals and make slaves out of them. They captured this young Israelite girl. The capture of Israelite slaves is the sovereign will of God, for He uses Syria to punish Israel (cf. 2 Ki. 13:3). As the Lord gave victory to Naaman, so the Lord now gave him a little slave girl, an Israelite.

This little girl knew about Elisha. One day, she told Naaman's wife, "If only my master would meet the prophet in Samaria. He will heal him." Unlike many Christians today, she did not hide her faith.

This is the first note of hope for Naaman. I can imagine that the little girl might have felt sad that she was taken away from her family, her friends, and her homeland. Like the first readers of Kings who were exiles in Babylon, she, too, was an exile in Syria.

Yet the Lord put her exactly where He wanted her. Instead of complaining about it, she shares the good news about Elisha. This indicates that the writer of Kings may be reminding the Israelite exiles in Babylon of their responsibility to witness to pagans, according to the Mosaic law.

Are you in a place that you dislike? Has it occurred to you that the Lord may have put you there for His glory? Where you are now is a good place to share the Gospel.

When Naaman told the king (probably Ben-Hadad; 2 Ki. 8:7-15), the king was very supportive (v. 4). He said, "Go now," or "Go, waste no time, and I will send a diplomatic letter to the king of Israel" (cf. v. 5). This is the second note of hope.

So Naaman packs his things and carries his gifts. He brings with him ten talents of silver (v. 5). One talent is 75 pounds or 34 kilograms. Ten talents is worth 750 pounds of silver! That's a lot of silver!

He also carries 6,000 shekels of gold. One shekel is 11 grams—for a total of 66,000 gms. of gold! The guy could afford it, being a nobleman and top general. He also brings with him ten changes of clothes. The practice of giving clothes is common in the East. Obviously, Naaman thought he could buy his healing.

A Note of Suspicion (vv. 6-7)

The king's letter in v. 6 is not a complete version. The official greetings and formalities are excluded. The writer here goes to the main point of the letter—that Naaman is sent by the king of Syria for healing in Israel.

After the king of Israel (probably Jehoram) read the letter, he tore his clothes. To him, the Syrian king's request is impossible. (READ v. 7) In the mind of the Israelite, "To kill and to make alive" means to have all power to do anything (cf. Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6). To suffer from leprosy is to be dead (cf. Num. 12:12). Thus, to be healed from leprosy is to be made alive. The king is saying, "I don't have the power to heal this guy."

Since it is an impossible request, if Naaman is not healed, then the Syrian king might use it as an excuse for war, so he thought. That's why the king of Israel tore his clothes—out of alarm.

We see here a note of suspicion from the king of Israel. Evidently, the king forgot the miracles of Elisha.

But really, the king of Israel shows his lack of faith in Yahweh. If his faith is in Yahweh, then he would seek a prophet of the Lord, to get the word of the Lord, as king Jehoshaphat of Judah did in the midst of a crisis (cf. 2 Ki. 3:11).

Yet what can you expect from a man who does not trust God? He tears his clothes in fear and alarm. He cries out and complains. Perhaps he drowns himself in alcohol, like many do today. But he fails to consult God for His guidance.

What do you do when you face a crisis? The first thing to do is to calm down. The next thing to do is to seek God's guidance in His Word, in prayer, and in the wise advice of His servants. Then God will answer you.

A Note of Promise (vv. 8-10)

When Elisha heard of the king's rant, he sent a message to the king, saying, "*Why have you torn your clothes*" (v. 8)? Why are you so fearful with the request for healing? Why are you alarmed when God can still show His power and might to Naaman and to Syria? It seems that he was saying, "Where is your faith in God?"

There is a good question for us—Why have you torn your clothes? Why are you filled with fear? Why are you worried about your situation? Claim the promises of God, and you will know that God is true and faithful!

Then Elisha said, “*Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel*” (v. 8). Let Naaman come to me, that he may know that there is a God in Israel, and I am His prophet (cf. 2 Ki. 1:6; 3:11). Let him come to me, that he may see the power of God through His prophet in Israel.

The prophet of God is the representative of God. Thus, to know that there is a prophet in Israel means to know that the one true God is in Israel, and not in Syria. To know that there is a prophet in Israel means to know that the true God is Yahweh, and not Rimmon, the Syrian god. This is the first note of promise.

The second note of promise is in v. 10. Naaman goes and stands at the door of Elisha (v. 9). This action is a sign of respect for the prophet (2 Ki. 4:15).² Elisha sent a message through his messenger. Naaman was to go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and his flesh shall be restored and he shall be clean (v. 10).

A Note of Pride (v. 11)

When Naaman arrived, he expected Elisha to meet him (v. 11). He was an aristocrat and a powerful general. With his own high sense of importance, he expected the prophet to give him the high respect that he was used to. But Elisha did not bother to meet him at the door. This made Naaman angry.

He imagined that Elisha would stand before him. Like the pagan priests of other gods, he thought that Elisha would launch a solemn invocation of his God. Naaman thought that Elisha would wave his hand over the place, in some priestly act, and then heal him (v. 11). But Elisha merely told him to go to the Jordan and dip himself seven times and he will be healed. God wants it done His way or no way.

Like Naaman, many people today have their own ideas of earning God’s salvation. They pray to a wooden image, give to church, or do good to others. But God’s way is simple—just go to the cross and wash yourself in the blood of Jesus and you will receive God’s forgiveness and eternal life!³

Remember this—God’s will done God’s way will gain God’s blessings. God’s will is in God’s Word, the Bible. Follow God’s will in God’s Word and God will bless you.

Naaman rode through the streets of Samaria in full public view. He may have supposed that Elisha would heal him publicly in the open street, before the eyes of men, women, and children, hence making it a public display.⁴ Instead, he is told to go to the Jordan, about twenty miles (sixty kms.) away. There, he is to wash himself in the river, with nobody watching except his servants—no ceremony, no program, no media, no pictures, no TV and Facebook to show it, and therefore, no glory.

Add to that is the fact that Jordan is a muddy, discolored, ugly river, while the rivers of Damascus, Abana and Pharpar, were pure, beautiful, and inviting (v. 12). Naaman must have thought that the pure rivers of Syria should give him the cleansing that he needed, not the dirty rivers of Israel!

Is that not what many people believe today? Many people in India wash in the holy river of Ganges. People in Asia also go to pure mineral springs, where they believe they could be cleansed. But who would like to go to dirty, muddy, discolored Jordan?

It is no wonder that Naaman is angry. We see here a note of pride.

Brethren, the ways of God are not the ways of people. If you want to receive the blessing of God, learn to humble yourself, obey His Word, and trust His ways. Then you will see the power of God in unexpected ways.

A Note of Healing (vv. 13-14)

It was a good thing that Naaman’s servants had cooler heads. They said, “My father, if the prophet asked you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? Certainly, you would do this simple instruction, ‘Wash and be clean.’” Naaman realized that it was indeed a simple thing, so he agreed.

² Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 64.

³ Russell Dilday, *1,2 Kings* (PCS 9; ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 288.

⁴ Spence and Exell, *II Kings*, 94.

He went down to the Jordan. There he dipped himself seven times, just as Elisha said.

Then the miracle happened. His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child. The verb, “restored” (Heb. *shub*) means, to “turn back; return” in the Qal stem. (BDB)

Naaman was the same old man. But his leprous skin turned back to the skin of a little child. The words, “little child” (Heb. *naar*) actually means, “little lad” (BDB) or little boy. Naaman’s leprous skin returned to the skin of his boyhood. What an amazing miracle of God!

It was a double blessing for Naaman. His skin disease was not only removed. His skin also returned to the skin of a little boy. (Even Belo, Nuskin, or Marie France cannot match that!)

Notice that Elisha was nowhere near the Jordan river, but Naaman was healed by God anyway. It is a miracle of grace, for Naaman did not deserve it. It was a miracle of sovereign will, for God chose Naaman above everyone else. It was a miracle of redemptive purpose, for God shall use Naaman to proclaim His redemptive message in Syria.

Jesus performed many miracles; but many people rejected Him. Miracles are no guarantee that people will trust Christ. But the miracles of Elisha served three purposes. It confirmed that Elisha is the prophet who replaced Elijah. In the case of Naaman, it confirmed to Naaman and the Syrians that there is no other true God but Yahweh.

Expect God to do miracles today according to His will. But we should not go around looking for miracles. We are to go and proclaim a miracle—the miraculous message of the Gospel of Christ (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). Paul said, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes*” (Rom. 1:16, NKJV). The miracle of the new birth, when people are born again, is the greatest miracle of all.

Conclusion

As the Lord gave victory to Naaman, so He also put a little girl in his house, to tell him about Elisha. This led Naaman to go all the way to Israel to seek healing. There he came to know that there is a prophet in Israel. He came to know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel, and His name is Yahweh.

The miraculous healing of Naaman served the redemptive purpose of God—to proclaim His Name in Syria through Naaman.

Our God is a missionary God. God will stop at nothing in bringing the nations into a saving knowledge of Him. Let us therefore join God in His work to glorify Himself in the nations.