

There is a Prophet in Israel – 2
(2 Ki. 5:15-27)

Chapter 5 of 2 Kings is peculiar, in that the writer links both stories of the blessing of Naaman and the curse of Gehazi. Yet this feature is consistent with the Deuteronomic purpose of Kings. One is blessed for obedience, while the other is cursed for disobedience.

This time, however, there is a role reversal. Yahweh blesses the foreigner (Naaman) for his obedience, but curses the Israelite (Gehazi) for his disobedience. What does that mean? The blessing of the foreigner fulfills Yahweh's desire to proclaim His name to all the peoples of the earth (cf. 1 Ki. 8:41-43).

The stories of Naaman and Gehazi may be seen then as a microcosm of the bigger picture of Israel. The bigger picture is that Israel has turned away from Yahweh. The result of this apostasy is exile.

The implication is that the first exilic Israelite readers should know that there was indeed a prophet in Israel. Through His prophet, Yahweh's presence and power was really in Israel.

In the second part of the two stories, only three characters are involved—Naaman, Elisha, and Gehazi.

A Note of Conversion (vv. 15, 17-19)

After his healing, Naaman returns to Elisha converted. We note three things about Naaman's conversion to Yahweh. First, Naaman makes a confession of faith in Yahweh (v. 15). Naaman says that there is no God in all the earth. This belief is called monotheism—the belief in one God. But he also says that this one God is in Israel. This one God in Israel is Yahweh. This is called Yahwism—the belief in Yahweh alone. He puts his faith in Yahweh alone.

There are two positive and negative signs of Naaman's healing. First, positively for Naaman, his healing signifies the power and reality of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Negatively, his healing is a sign of the powerlessness of the Syrian god, Rimmon. Thus, Naaman says that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel alone. He attests that only Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the only true God in all the earth, and there is no other.

Second, and positively again, Naaman's healing achieves its purpose in v. 8—so that he will know the only true God in Israel. Negatively however, Naaman's conversion condemns the unbelief of the Israelites of his day, as in Jesus' day.

Jesus said in Lk. 4:27, "*And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.*" This is how Jesus applied the healing of Naaman to the unbelievers of Nazareth. There were many lepers in the time of Elisha, but only Naaman was healed. The reason is the unbelief of the Israelites of Elisha's time. In the same way, the unbelief of many Israelites in Jesus is the cause of their rejection of Him even in His hometown, Nazareth (vv. 23-24). Unbelief then limits the blessings of God to Nazareth, just as the unbelief in Elisha's time limits the blessings of God to Israel.¹

Your unbelief limits God's blessings on your life. If unbelief curbs God's blessings, faith brings in the blessings. If you would expect God's blessings, you must go to the next level of faith. You must believe God for the impossible. I believe the Lord has answered our prayers for a church lot and building in one stroke, because of our faith. He has also seen us fit to handle such blessings, for the preaching of the Gospel and the advancement of His kingdom.

Second, Naaman makes a commitment of faith to Yahweh (v. 17). It is a commitment of gratitude. He gives a material gift to Elisha, who refused it (vv. 15-16). He gives back to Elisha, because Elisha was the Lord's instrument of blessing.

Do you give back to servants of God whom God has used to bless you? I can't help but note that a grateful heart always gives back. If you don't give back, I am not so sure how grateful you are to the Lord.

Naaman's commitment is also a commitment of worship. He asks to bring home two mules' load of soil from Israel. This is the normal custom of the day.² Today, tourists bring back souvenirs from the Holy Land. But Naaman is not bringing back souvenirs, but holy soil from the holy land of Israel. In Naaman's time, people

¹ John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (WBC 35A; ed. Ralph P. Martin; Dallas: Word, 1989), 201.

² James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings* (ICC; ed. Henry Synder Gehman; New York: Scribner, 1951), 377.

believed that their god is connected with their land. Naaman now believed that the only true God is in Israel. If God is based in the land of Israel, he must worship on the soil of Israel.

But how can he do that in Syria? The solution is to bring with him soil from Israel.³ On that holy soil, he will build an altar to the Lord.⁴ He will offer no sacrifices to any other god, but Yahweh.

Third, Naaman shows a conviction of faith in Yahweh (v. 18). As part of his duty as the king's trusted general, he must go with the king inside the temple of Rimmon. There, he must bow down with the king before Rimmon. "Hey, it's part of my job," Naaman seems to be saying. But he no longer wants to worship the Syrian god, Rimmon. There is now a conviction that Yahweh is the only true God. It is the conviction that bowing to Rimmon is idolatry.

I remember soon after I was born again. After listening to God's Word in Bible studies, God convicted my heart that I should throw away the idols in our home. Our pastor never told me to do it. But there was that conviction from the Spirit.

Naaman's act of bowing down with the king is no longer out of worship of Rimmon, but out of deference for the king.⁵ That is why he asks Elisha for the forgiveness of Yahweh. There are times when our job compromises our conviction. We know it is wrong, but we are forced to do it.

My advice is to find another less compromising job. If that is impossible, minimize the compromise and ask God for forgiveness, just like Naaman. Get ready to face the consequences, like the early Christians. The first Christians suffered for their convictions even in the face of death. We should be ready to suffer for our beliefs.

Elisha then told Naaman, "*Go in peace.*" Elisha does not indicate approval for such compromise. But he certainly wishes Naaman the peace of God. Whatever challenge you face, go in the peace of God.

A Note of Integrity (v. 16)

We see three key elements in Elisha's integrity. First, he stands before God. Naaman stands before Elisha the prophet. But Elisha stands before Yahweh, the living God.

The verb, "stand" (Heb. *amad*) means, "attend upon, become a servant of"⁶ in the Qal perfect. Elisha used the same word in 2 Ki. 3:14, to show his loyalty to Yahweh, compared to the disloyalty of King Jehoram. In v. 16 then, the word refers to Elisha's loyalty to Yahweh, in response to Naaman's faith in Yahweh. To stand before Yahweh therefore is to stand in loyal service to Him, in total dedication to Yahweh, and in absolute allegiance to the honor of Yahweh.⁷

Many pastors today are more loyal to money than God. They are more loyal to the word of rich members than the word of God. But Elisha stands before the LORD.

Do you stand before the LORD today?

Elisha received the Shunnamite woman's gifts of board and lodging. Why refuse Naaman's gifts now? It is possible that the LORD may have told him to refuse it; although the text is silent about it. Out of his total obedience to Yahweh, he now refuses it. But Elisha may also want Naaman to know that he cannot buy the Lord's blessings.⁸ Naaman's miraculous healing is a gift of God's grace. God gets all the glory. Elisha should not receive a single centavo for it.

Compare Elisha's refusal to receive money for healing, to today's healing evangelists. They always ask for money. Send your money envelopes. Call in your donations. It is a money-making campaign, really.

Second, he is set against greed. Elisha said, "*I will receive none.*" This is an amazing decision, esp. in a time of famine. Many are hungry in Israel, including his junior prophets. He could use the money to buy food for the student prophets. Besides, a grateful, generous person will give anything. But Elisha refuses to exploit the gratitude of Naaman. His heart is set against greed.

³ Bob Deffinbaugh, *The Life and Times of Elisha the Prophet— The Healing of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-27)*. Cited May 18, 2011. Online: <http://bible.org/seriespage/life-and-times-elisha-prophet%E2%80%94healing-naaman-2-kings-51-27>.

⁴ G. H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings* (vol. 2; NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 418.

⁵ Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 289.

⁶ BDB, s. v. אָמַד, ¶150.

⁷ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, s. v. אָמַד, ¶WOT 1:1637.

⁸ Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 289.

Jesus said, “*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*” (Lk. 12:15). I think that the best way to fight greed is to set your minds on a heavenly agenda and not on an earthly agenda. What is your agenda in life—to get rich in this world, or to get rich in heaven? Why do you make money—to accumulate more things or to advance the kingdom?

Another way to fight covetousness is to live simply and simply live—to be content with whatever you have. Elisha is set against greed.

Third, he is steady in his conviction. Some pastors would refuse your gift, because they don’t want to appear like they are eager for it. But deep inside, they are really saying, “Please urge me again, and I will say, ‘Yes!’”

Elisha refused the first time. When Naaman urged him again, he refused the second time. That, brothers and sisters, is conviction. And that is what many Christians lack today. We have all the good Bible teaching we need. But we lack the courage to stand up for what we believe.

Are you ashamed of the Gospel? Do you stand up for what God’s Word says? Ask the Spirit of God to give you a heart of conviction.

A Note of Deceit (vv. 20-24)

In v. 20, Gehazi decides to get something from Naaman. He runs after Naaman, who turned back for him. In v. 22, Gehazi lies to Naaman, telling him that Elisha sent him to ask for a talent of silver and two clothes. Gehazi said, “Oh, General Naaman, two poor seminary students have just arrived from Mt. Ephraim, a rural area. Elisha needs the money for a student scholarship.”⁹

It is a perfect lie, for it was a time of famine. This is Gehazi’s first lie and the first act of deceit.

In v. 23, Naaman gives Gehazi the money and clothes with two servants to carry them. In v. 24, Gehazi gets the money and clothes from the servants before they re-enter the city, to avoid suspicion.¹⁰ He then hides his ill-gotten wealth in a house. This is Gehazi’s second lie and the second act of deceit.

In v. 25, Gehazi goes inside the house of Elisha. Elisha asks, “‘*Where have you been, Gehazi?’ And he said, ‘Your servant went nowhere’*” (v. 25). This is Gehazi’s third lie and the third act of deceit.

Yet the root cause of Gehazi’s deceit is the sin of covetousness.

Brethren, greed will cause you to commit more sins. Paul wrote, “*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs*” (1 Tim. 6:9-10, ESV).

Be content with what you have. Get away from greed. Pursue righteousness and godliness (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11).

The writer portrays the contrast between Elisha and Gehazi. Elisha is determined to refuse the gifts of Naaman. Gehazi is determined to take it.¹¹

Elisha stands before the LORD. Gehazi stands for himself.

Elisha is set against greed. Gehazi sets his heart to covet.

Elisha refuses to exploit the gratitude of Naaman. Gehazi exploits Naaman’s generosity.

Like Elisha, there are pastors who serve without the goods. But like Gehazi, there are pastors who pursue the goods. There are pastors who stand before the LORD. But there are pastors who stand for themselves. There are pastors who refuse to exploit people’s generosity. But there are pastors who are set to covet.

Which kind of pastor do you have in your church today?

A Note of Divine Judgment (vv. 25-27)

Elisha’s heart—his mind, soul, and spirit—was with Gehazi when Naaman turned to meet Gehazi. How can that happen when Elisha was nowhere near Gehazi? It is possible that Elisha received a vision from God. God enabled Elisha to see Gehazi and Naaman. But more significantly, Elisha saw Gehazi’s heart.

⁹ Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 289.

¹⁰ Spence and Exell, *The Second*, 98.

¹¹ Deffinbaugh, *The Life and Times*. Cited May 18, 2011. Online: <http://bible.org/seriespage/life-and-times-elisha-prophet>.

In v. 26, Elisha said, “*Was it a time to accept money and garments*”? The list of money, garments, olive orchards, vineyards, sheep, oxen, and servants signifies prosperity. Elisha seems to be saying, “This is a time of famine. Many are hungry and needy. And you want to be rich?” Thus, Elisha pinpoints Gehazi’s greed.

The LORD warns against the perils of prosperity. Deut. 8:10-14, 19 says, “*And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. . . Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments . . . lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God . . . And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.*”

Brethren, if you want to be rich, be careful that you will not forget God in your life, by not obeying His commands. If you forget God and follow after the god of money, then God will judge you.

It is the desire to be rich that led Gehazi away from God. Gehazi served Elisha for years, but fell into materialism. Judas served Jesus for many years, but fell into greed. Demas served with Paul, but fell into worldliness. It is possible to serve in the presence of godly leaders, but still fall into materialism and worldliness. It is possible to read the Bible and go to the church every day, but still fall into materialism.

In v. 27, Elisha declared divine judgment against Gehazi. The leprosy of Naaman was transferred to him and his kids. He went out of Elisha’s house a leper, as white as snow. With Naaman and his servants, Gehazi is successful in his fraud. But with Elisha, he is punished for it.¹²

Here is a serious question for all of us. Do you really think that you can get away with your sin? Sooner or later, God will judge you for it.

Conclusion

There is a prophet in Israel and he is Elisha. There is true prophecy in this holy Book, the Bible.

There is the only true God in Israel and He is Yahweh. There is the only true God and Savior—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Israel is called to welcome the foreigner, in order to lead him into a saving knowledge of Yahweh. We are called to go and make disciples of all nations.

Yahweh blesses Naaman, a pagan, for obedience. But Yahweh curses Gehazi, an Israelite, for disobedience.

God blessed the Gentile, Naaman. God is now blessing Gentile nations with the Gospel. Though Israel has rejected her messianic king, she will someday come to repentance and faith in Christ (cf. Rom. 11:25-32).

Let us join God in His work to bring glory to Himself by making disciples among the nations.

¹² Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 60.