

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 3 THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives a marvellous but sobering account of God's Sovereign will in the affairs of men. It shows that the LORD God of Israel is the only One living and true God who rules the whole universe. He is concerned for all people without respect for anyone. The accounts show the strengths and weaknesses and sins of people.

Elisha continued to be used by God in a great and mighty way. The healing of Naaman is perhaps the high point of Elisha's ministry of miracles. The incident involved no less than eight characters. It is a classic illustration of the spiritual truths concerning the salvation of a soul. Events recorded in this chapter give us valuable insights into human behaviour in interpersonal relationships and relationships between man and God.

The account begins with a leper who needed to be healed. A prophet of God was sought after for healing. It includes an outsider of God's covenant who witnessed the existence of the living and true God in his life. Israel's

apostate condition is contrasted with a pagan army commander who was healed by faith. An insider of God's covenant with Israel failed to realise the grace bestowed on him because of his greed and lies.

This chapter of 2 Kings has many precious lessons for today's Christians or rather professing Christians.

OUTLINE

1. Naaman, a Syrian general sought help from the King of Israel to cure his leprosy because of his wife's maid who mentioned Elisha's power (vv.1-6);
2. The King of Israel feared an Syrian attack and Elisha came forward to show the presence of God's true prophet (vv.7-10);
3. Naaman was healed physically and spiritually (vv.11-19);
4. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha sinned (vv.20-27).

COMMENTARY

Naaman – 5:1

Naaman is introduced for the first time. The name means "pleasantness". He was a general of the Syrian army. He was highly esteemed by his king, who was probably Ben-Hadad II, the son of Ben-Hadad I, the king who was captured by King Ahab (1 Kings 20). Later when King Ahab and Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, joined

forces to attack Syria even against the warning of Micaiah, a true prophet of the LORD, they were defeated. King Ahab was fatally wounded in that battle by an archer of the Syrian army. Josephus, the Jewish historian, believed that Naaman was the nameless archer who shot the arrow that killed Ahab. This is of course speculation on the part of Josephus. The current King of Israel then was probably Jehoram.

Naaman was also described as an honourable, victorious and courageous man because the LORD God of Israel was gracious to him and gave him success in his military campaigns against other nations. But there is a very sad note to this otherwise great dignitary: "he was a leper."¹ In those days, there was no cure for leprosy. The great and mighty military man, Naaman, who could conquer nations and empires, was reduced to a helpless mortal by a small virus.

Naaman's Maid – 5:2-6

The text indicates that there was an uneasy relationship between Israel and Syria. Border skirmishes occurred between the two countries. In one of these border raids, the Syrians took a Hebrew girl out of the land of Israel. Her name was not given. Naaman made her a slave to wait upon his wife. Little did Naaman realise that the LORD would use her

as a channel of great blessing to him! This Hebrew maid was a believer of the LORD God of Israel. She knew of the great prophet Elisha who lived in Samaria. Her knowledge of Elisha's supernatural healing power must mean that Elisha had gained widespread reputation in the land of Israel. She humbly informed her mistress that if Naaman were to be with Elisha, the prophet would heal him of his leprosy. She was so sure about it. This was declared with certain faith. The word "him" i.e. Naaman is emphasised to demonstrate the slave girl's faith in the LORD! Then Naaman's wife must have gotten one of her servants to report to Naaman about what the maid had said.

Naturally, Naaman must have been overjoyed to hear that there was hope for him. He had to ask permission from his king to leave Syria and go to Israel. So the King of Syria handed him a letter addressed to the King of Israel. In addition, Naaman took a great amount of gifts for his mission – "ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces (shekels) of gold, and ten changes of raiment" (v.5b).² So Naaman took an equivalent of about US\$1,247,240 with him to Israel. This was a very large sum. This was obviously befitting his high position as well as the price he was prepared to

¹ The Hebrew word which is translated "leprosy" here is used for a wide range of skin diseases (Leviticus 13 & 14). According to the Mosaic Law such diseases would render the person ritually unclean and socially ostracized.

² A talent was about 70.4 pounds which is equivalent to 844.8 troy ounces. Therefore 10 talents of silver would amount to 8448 troy ounces of silver. At the current price of about US\$5.00 an ounce that amounts to about US\$42,240. 6,000 shekels of gold would come to about US\$1,200,000, if it is calculated at current price of gold at about US\$500 an ounce. 10 changes of clothing would add up to about US\$5,000, given a change of clothing to be about US\$500.

pay to be healed of this terminal disease called leprosy! Probably, he wanted to impress upon the King of Israel that he would pay for the medical treatment whatever it might cost. Cost was not a problem as long as he could be cured of his leprosy as this cure would give him a new lease of life.

King of Israel's Response – 5:7-8

Naaman must have delivered the letter to the King of Israel. Having read the letter, the king “rent his clothes”.³ The whole content of the letter was not given. The writer omitted the customary formalities of greetings and compliments for they were not necessary. He went straight to the main theme of the letter. The King of Syria requested the King of Israel to heal his captain's leprosy. The King of Israel's reaction to the letter was quite understandable. He was right when he exclaimed that he was not God who could heal Naaman's leprosy. He further interpreted the King of Syria's intention as one to find an excuse to pick a quarrel with him. In fact, the sad thing about the King of Israel was that he did not know of Elisha's power to heal. Even the unknown Hebrew slave maid knew about Elisha and the LORD's ability to heal. The King of Israel missed an opportunity to honour the LORD God of Israel and to build

peace and goodwill between Syria and Israel. So he failed to take advantage of it because of his lack of faith and spiritual insight.

Elisha Saved the Day – 5:9-10

Elisha was in his home in Samaria. It was reported to him that the King of Israel had “rent his clothes” (v.8). Elisha took the initiative to send a message to the King of Israel asking why he had torn his clothes which symbolised sorrow and despair. Elisha told the King of Israel to let Naaman come to him so that the latter might know that there was a true prophet of God in Israel. Elisha saved the King of Israel from personal embarrassment.

So Naaman, riding in his own chariot driven by horses, went with his entire grand entourage arrived at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha did not go out to welcome Naaman. Elisha instead sent a messenger, probably his servant Gehazi, with a message to Naaman. The message was simple and specific: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (v.10). It required Naaman to act in simple faith and with much humility.

That made Naaman very angry. He expected Elisha to give him a reception that was befitting his status. Obviously, Elisha was not impressed with the grandeur and pomposity of Naaman's entourage and of course Naaman himself. Naaman expected Elisha to come out of his house, and with some religious ritual to call upon the name of the LORD his God and dramatically touch him and heal him. Naaman had his own ideas of how he

³ The tearing of clothes as a ritual gesture of grief or as an act of uncontrollable rage; a display of strong feeling.. If we trace the three dozen explicit references to people's tearing their clothing, we find four main categories of crisis—grief or mourning over the loss of something or someone; sorrow for sin in an act of repentance; fear or alarm and anger or frustration (Dict. Of Biblical Imagery, s.v. “Garments”).

should be healed. In addition, he felt insulted that he should dip himself in the waters of Jordan instead of dipping in the rivers of Abana and Pharpar, two rivers of Damascus which were more superior to that of Jordan.⁴ Naaman turned and went off in a rage!

Naaman came with a request for a specific need. Elisha prescribed precisely the cure for his leprosy. His instruction to Naaman consisted of a clear and simple command and a sure promise. But Naaman would not do as instructed because he was a proud man. Elisha wanted Naaman to realise that the LORD God of Israel was in control of the miracle and that the healing could only be done in His way. Naaman's way or "good works or grandiose show of power" could not be accepted by the LORD. Actually Naaman needed to be healed of a greater "disease" which he was not aware of at the time when he came to seek healing.

Naaman Humbled – 5:11-14

Naaman kept his pride and went off deeply disappointed that he was not healed. Now Naaman was blessed with good and sensible servants. This was one of God's blessings to him. His servants "came near" to him and reasoned with him. They addressed him as "My father" (Hebrew, *ab'bi*), a term of endearment. It appears that Naaman had a good

rapport with his servants and they in turn loved him like a father rather than as a master. They said that if the prophet had told him to do some great thing, he would not hesitate to do it. But how much easier for him when the prophet told him to wash and be clean! His servants were pragmatic and very sensible and biblical. Naaman was persuaded. He yielded to the gentle persuasion of his humble servants, who told their master that he was not acting wisely. He humbled himself. Naaman went and dipped in the river of Jordan seven times and according to Elisha's word, the rotten flesh of his body became new like that of a little child, and he was completely cured!

Naaman a Changed Man – 5:15-19

One can imagine how happy and elated Naaman must have been. He must also have realised that he had been very foolish. His pride and foolishness nearly cost him his "new" life in the LORD! Naaman returned to Elisha in Samaria with his whole entourage. He travelled thirty-two miles back to Samaria. But this time, he was feeling very happy. When he reached Elisha's house, he stood before Elisha and declared to him: "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant" (v.15). Naaman was grateful and returned to show his gratitude through an offering of a gift. He was a changed person. He openly confessed that there was no other God but the LORD God of Israel who is the only living and true God.

⁴ Today these two rivers are known as the Nahr Barada and the Nahr el-Ahwal respectively. The former flows through the city of Damascus. These clear rivers are well known for their legendary beauty which made the city of Damascus a beautiful oasis. The Arabs call it the "Garden of the World" (Russel Dilday, 1:2 Kings, p.307).

Elisha declined Naaman's offer of a gift. Naaman urged him to accept it, but Elisha firmly refused. Elisha genuinely refused to accept a gift from Naaman probably for the following reasons. Naaman was a new convert. Elisha wanted Naaman to understand that he could not buy God's blessings. Elisha said to him "as the LORD liveth before whom I stand, I will receive none" (v.16). Elisha's refusal to accept the gift was to impress on Naaman that it was God who healed and not Elisha. Although the biblical principle that a labourer is worthy of his hire, and prophets relied on the gifts of the people, the circumstances of the moment restrained its acceptance. The miracle was done to demonstrate that salvation cannot be bought with money or gifts like what Simon tried to do when he asked Peter for the power of the Holy Spirit with payment of cash (see Acts 8:18).

Naaman then asked two things from Elisha. He asked for two mule loads of earth from the land of Israel. His reason for wanting the soil was to erect an altar on it to offer sacrifices to the LORD (YAHWEH). Thence, he would not worship any other god. This reason was a pagan superstition which he still innocently held. Another matter which he wanted Elisha to understand was his concern about his official duty. When he returned to Syria, he had to sometimes accompany the King of Syria to worship in the temple of Rimmon. Rimmon was the name of the Syrian god, the equivalent of Canaanite Baal. Naaman said that when the King of Syria leaned on him and bowed to Rimmon, he had to

follow him. He asked the LORD for His pardon in this thing. Elisha's response was customary "Go in peace", wishing him peace of God on his return trip. Elisha did not commit himself. He did not approve nor disapprove. He understood that Naaman's conscience had been quickened. Elisha was trusting the LORD for further guidance and grace as Naaman would struggle through this problem of serving the LORD in his country. Elisha did not lecture him nor admonish him at that moment. Elisha would definitely pray for him and trust God to use him in his new ministry in Syria.

Gehazi Sinned – 5:20-27

After Elisha bade him farewell, Naaman left for Syria. While Naaman was not far away, Gehazi thought to himself that Elisha, his master, had let Naaman off easily without accepting his gifts. He was determined to get something from Naaman. So Gehazi quickly went after Naaman, who saw him approaching. Naaman alighted from his chariot and asked Gehazi whether all was well. Gehazi replied in the affirmative. He added that Elisha had sent him to say that two young prophets from Mount Ephraim had come to Elisha. His master was pleading Naaman for a talent of silver and two changes of garments. Naaman urged Gehazi to accept two talents of silver instead of one, including the two changes of garments. Naaman also assigned two of his servants to carry the gifts back to Samaria. When they reached the "tower" which was an erected stronghold at the outskirt of the city,

Gehazi took over the gifts from Naaman's servants and sent them off. Gehazi's plan was obvious. Naaman's servants must not be seen re-entering the city.

Gehazi had lied about his master and concocted the false story that the two young prophets needed financial help, and that his master was asking for aid from Naaman. It was despicable of him. Gehazi was an opportunist. He was driven by greed and covetousness. By his dastard act of deception and greed, he had failed as a servant of the great prophet Elisha. He did not believe in his master's ability to prophesy! When he returned home and resumed his duties, Elisha asked him where he went (v.25b). He answered that he had not gone anywhere. He lied again. Elisha then said, "Went not mine heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee" (v.26a)? This writer understands Elisha's words spoken to Gehazi "went not mine heart with thee" to mean that Gehazi should share his master's heart-desire concerning the non-acceptance of Naaman's gift. The next statement seems to indicate that Elisha saw or knew that Gehazi went after Naaman who got down from his chariot to meet him. If this were true, it would be God who had enabled Elisha to have this knowledge and insight.⁵ Elisha's next remarks to Gehazi are instructive: "Is it a time to receive money and to receive garments, and oliveyards and

vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and menservants and maidservants" (v.26b)? In these words Elisha was saying that Gehazi's plan to have money and garments, which he deceitfully got from Naaman, was to improve his status by having orchards and livestock and even servants to serve him. And Elisha said to Gehazi that it was not the right time to have these at the expense of Naaman. His behaviour and action could have a wrong effect on Naaman. Elisha had been trying very hard to impress on Naaman that God's blessings could not be bought. But Gehazi had undermined that effort. As a young convert, Naaman's mind and heart needed to be filled with the grace of God and his faith in God needed strengthening. Hence, Gehazi's sin went beyond mere greed, lying, misrepresenting and abusing his master's name. It was not just chasing after filthy lucre, but it "endangers the very nature of faith and obscures the grace of God."

Elisha then pronounced the judgement on him and his descendants. Gehazi was afflicted with leprosy. Gehazi went out from the presence of Elisha as a leper. This is very sad. Gehazi was an Israelite, a member of the chosen people of God. He had all the privileges of serving Elisha, who was a true prophet of God, and of witnessing the many miracles done by God through his master. He could have understood and given himself to trust and serve God or wait upon His timing to reward him for his faithful service. He had forfeited all the blessings which God would have given

⁵Amos 3:7 Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

him but for his greed and faithlessness. How could he now be happy and enjoy the financial gains which he received from Naaman? He despised his “duty” as servant of Elisha. Naaman on the other hand was an outsider. He was initially proud but he humbled himself by obeying and exercising simple faith in God. He was healed and became a child of God. God’s sovereign will and righteousness and mercy are manifested here.

PRACTICAL VALUE

In this chapter, God reveals that He is the living and true God as Naaman came to realise. While He is the LORD God of the chosen nation Israel, He is also the God of all the other nations. In fact, He is the one living and true God of the Universe! We see that God is sovereign and He chooses whom He will have mercy. He had mercy on Naaman, who was a Syrian outside God’s covenant nation Israel. Naaman was healed of his leprosy because he humbled himself and obeyed God by simply dipping himself in the river Jordan seven times as commanded by God. In contrast, Gehazi who belonged to God’s chosen people suffered the judgement of God because he was covetous, greedy, deceitfully manipulative and a liar. It is a sobering warning to anyone who is born into a Christian family to honestly examine himself whether he truly belongs to God – whether he is truly a Christian who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. It would be an irrevocable and terrible loss on the day

of judgement to know that he is not a truly born-again Christian.

God can use little and insignificant people. God used Naaman’s little slave girl whom he took captive in a battle with Israel. Little did he know that she would subsequently be such a great blessing to him. In addition, God used Naaman’s faithful servants to persuade him to obey God and was healed of his leprosy. So never consider ourselves useless, for God can use us in His way to bless others immeasurably. God has been true to His Word. Just as He has said that He is pleased with people who are humble, He favours them; and as for the proud He resists them. Naaman humbled himself and he was blessed. Faith is the key. Courage is the hand that holds the key which unlocks the grace and mercy of God and the channel of blessings to others.

Another practical value in this account of Naaman’s conversion is that a converted person shows a changed life. Naaman confessed that he would worship only the LORD God of Israel who is the true and living God, and none else. We see evidence of his conversion when his conscience was quickened and he was troubled about the trials he would be facing when he returned to Syria to resume his duties as the king’s army commander-in-chief. A person who professes that he is a believer of the LORD God of Israel and who worships Him only must show a change in his life. A tree is judged by its fruit, so says the Lord Jesus Christ. If the tree is a genuinely good tree, it will bear good fruit. A bad tree

cannot bear good fruit. Gehazi seemed to be a good tree outwardly but he was proven to be a bad one to the core. His fruit of greed and deception betrayed the rot and blackness of his heart.

There are many more precious and practical lessons which we can learn from this chapter. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 2 Kings 5:1-3; Luke 4:23-32; Romans 3:23.

TUESDAY: 2 Kings 5:4-7; Romans 10:13-17.

WEDNESDAY: 2 Kings 5:8-14; Luke 17:11-19; 1 Peter 5:5.

THURSDAY: 2 Kings 5:15-19; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 9:7-11.

FRIDAY: 2 Kings 5:20-27; 1 Timothy 6:6-11

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think God has this incident of the healing of Naaman, a mighty Gentile captain of the Syrian army, recorded?

2. How much are you prepared to “pay” for the soul of your children, or parents or friends or relatives or your own soul to deliver them from the bondage of sin which is greater than leprosy?

3. Why was Naaman offended by Elisha’s prescription for a cure of his leprosy? Was Naaman’s behaviour and response justified? What was the significance of Elisha’s offer?

4. Why did Elisha not accept any gift of gratitude from Naaman? Does this mean that full time workers should not accept love gifts from members whom they minister to?

5. Is it OK for a Christian to accompany his aged mom into the temple when she worships her gods? How do you apply what Naaman requested from Elisha with what is asked of the pastor today in terms of entering these places of worship of other gods?

6. What was Gehazi's root problem? How did this root problem lead him into one sin after another?

7. Did Gehazi's punishment from the LORD commensurate with his sin? Did he not know that Elisha was a prophet who was supposed to "know" things? Then why did he lie?

8. What can we learn most from what was written about the characters of Elisha, Gehazi, Naaman and his slave girl in this chapter and their values?
