



## Question: “What can we learn from the story of Elisha and Naaman?”

Answer: Naaman was the commander of Syria's (Aram's) army and well regarded as a military man, but he had leprosy. His Israelite servant girl suggested he go to Elisha to be healed. Naaman left for Israel, taking a large gift with him and a letter from Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, asking the king of Israel to heal Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-6). The king of Israel's reaction was panic - how could anyone heal leprosy? The king of Israel thought Ben-hadad was trying to start a fight (2 Kings 5:7).

When the prophet Elisha heard of the king's distress, he sent to the king, saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel” (2 Kings 5:8). Naaman then came to Elisha's house with his chariots, gifts, and servants.

Elisha did not even come out to greet Naaman. Instead, he sent a message to wash in the Jordan River seven times to be healed. “Naaman was angry and went away, saying, 'Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the

place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?' So he turned and went away in a rage” (2 Kings 5:11-12).

Naaman's servants urged him to reconsider, and Naaman wisely did. After dipping himself in the Jordan River seven times, he was completely healed as Elisha had said. In fact, “his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy” (2 Kings 5:14). Naaman returned to Elisha and said, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant” (verse 15). Elisha refused the gift and sent the Syrian commander away in peace.

However, Elisha's servant, Gehazi, followed Naaman and deceitfully asked for a gift in Elisha's name. Naaman gave him “two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing” (2 Kings 5:23). Gehazi hid the loot and returned home, where Elisha confronted him. Gehazi lied again to cover the matter. The Lord had given Elisha insight, and the prophet told Gehazi, “Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever” (verse 27). Gehazi immediately contracted leprosy.

Much can be learned from this account. First, there is a clear contrast between the faith of the young servant girl, who knew of Elisha and believed in his

power; and the distress of Israel's king, who did not even think of Elisha and fretted over his own lack of power.

Second, we have a contrast between the pomp of Naaman and the lowliness of Elisha. Naaman came to be healed carrying rich gifts in fine chariots; Elisha had no such finery, just the power of God. Naaman's pride was almost his undoing: too proud and stubborn to follow the prophet's simple instructions, he almost bypassed the blessing that God had in store. We, too, should obey the Word of God, even when God's way does not make sense to us.

Also, those who serve God do not do so for financial gain but out of love and simple obedience to the Lord. Elisha refused the princely gift offered to him. God is a giver, not a taker, and His gifts cannot be bought. Naaman's healing from leprosy is a wonderful picture of our salvation from sin - freely bestowed by the grace of God in response to faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Gehazi's greed and deception are warnings to us. The Bible warns us against "pursuing dishonest gain" (Titus 1:7). We are called to be honest in all of our dealings, knowing that God sees everything and will judge accordingly. We can be sure that our sins will find us out (Numbers 32:23).

Jesus used the story of Naaman and Elisha as an illustration of Israel's problem of unbelief. In Luke 4:27, Jesus tells the crowd in the synagogue of Nazareth, "There were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed - only Naaman the Syrian." The lepers of Israel overlooked the healing that could have been theirs through Elisha, so God healed a Syrian instead. In the same way, the Israelites of Jesus' day were missing the Power right in front of their eyes. But God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35), and the Gentiles eventually received the gospel that Israel rejected.