

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings

Lesson 16: Naaman Healed and Other Wonders -- 2 Kings 5:1–6:33

Picture the scene: the most powerful military commander in Syria, a man accustomed to obedience, a man whose name made soldiers stand up straight, standing on the bank of the Jordan River. He has come a long way. He carried a letter from the king of Syria to the king of Israel. He brought ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten festal garments. He came with horses and chariots, with all the pageantry of greatness. And now Elisha has not even come out to meet him. He has simply sent a servant with a message: go wash in the Jordan seven times and you will be clean (5:10). Naaman is furious. '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' (5:11). He expected a ceremony proportional to his status. What he got was dirt-road instructions and a muddy river.

Naaman's story is one of the most theologically rich episodes in the entire history of the kings. It is a story about pride and its cost. It is a story about where the word of God actually resides and what it costs to obey it. It is a story about a small, nameless girl whose quiet faith set the whole chain of events in motion. It is a story about a servant who spoke truth to power at exactly the right moment. And woven through all of it is the consistent signature of the God of Israel: He is not impressed by military rank or silver talents, but He is moved by humble, obedient faith, even when it looks foolish to the person practicing it.

The miracles that follow in the second half of these two chapters, the floating axe head, Elisha's sight of the fiery army, the blinding of the Aramean soldiers, are not disconnected spectacle. They are extensions of the same truth the whole section is teaching: the God of Israel is sovereign over armies, over metal that defies physics, over sight and blindness, over every power that the nations could bring against His people or His prophet. When Gehazi stretches out his hand for Naaman's silver, he is not just committing a personal sin; he is defecting from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of stuff, and God's response is devastating and immediate.

These chapters will press every person in the room on the question of whether they will do what God says in the way God says to do it. Naaman almost missed his healing because the instruction seemed too simple, too undignified, too inconsistent with his understanding of how things should work. He almost walked away from the miracle because he had already decided how the miracle should come. The nameless servants around him, a captive girl, a Syrian officer's subordinates, had to talk him into what his pride was talking him out of. That dynamic is timeless. God still gives instructions that our pride resists. The question is whether we will listen to the humble voice that says 'if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?' (5:13).

Group Discussion: Naaman almost missed his healing because the instructions were too simple for his pride. Where in your own life have you found that obedience to God was resisted not because it was too hard but because it seemed too simple or undignified?

Personal Reflection: The nameless captive girl in 2 Kings 5 had every reason to be bitter and every reason to stay silent, but she pointed her captor's household toward the prophet of God. What does her example say to you about the witness you bear in whatever circumstances you find yourself?

Read 2 Kings 5:1–6:33

Study Questions

1. Read 2 Kings 5:1–5. Naaman is introduced as a great man, a mighty warrior, favored by his king, but he is a leper. The chain of events that leads him toward healing begins with a 'little girl,' a captured Israelite servant who says to her mistress, 'Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy' (5:3). What does this detail about the girl's witness tell us about the kind of people God uses to set His purposes in motion, and what does her confident faith about Elisha's God tell us about the testimony she carried from her home?
2. The captive girl had been taken from her family by force, was living as a servant in a foreign land, and was under no obligation to help her captors. Yet she spoke up about the God of Israel with confidence and without apparent bitterness. Where in your own life have your circumstances made it easy to justify staying silent about God, and what does her example challenge you to do differently?
3. Read 2 Kings 5:6–14. Naaman arrives at Elisha's door with letters from the king of Syria and a fortune in gifts. Elisha sends a servant with simple instructions: wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman is furious. His expectation of a dramatic ceremony is thwarted by what seems like an insultingly simple command. What does Naaman's initial response reveal about the relationship between pride and obedience, and what finally brings him to wash as Elisha commanded?

4. Naaman's servants reasoned with him: 'If the prophet had commanded you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'' (5:13)? His pride had almost talked him out of the miracle God had waiting for him. In what area of your walk with God has your pride or your expectation of how things should look been the obstacle between you and what God has for you?

5. Read 2 Kings 5:15–19. When Naaman is cleansed, he returns to Elisha and declares, 'Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel' (5:15). He offers gifts, which Elisha refuses. He asks to take home two mule-loads of Israelite soil, and he asks for Elisha's understanding when he is required to bow in the house of Rimmon with his master the king. What does Naaman's transformed confession and his two practical questions reveal about the nature of genuine conversion and the real challenges of new faith lived out in a hostile environment?

6. Naaman returned to a pagan king's court where he had to keep serving, where the pressures of his old world did not simply disappear. The compromises and pressures of his environment did not go away when his heart changed. Where in your own life do you face the equivalent of 'bowing in the house of Rimmon,' pressures from work, family, or culture to conform to expectations that conflict with your faith, and how do you navigate those tensions faithfully?

7. Read 2 Kings 5:20–27. Gehazi watches Naaman's silver and garments leave with Naaman, then runs after him and lies to get them for himself. When he returns, Elisha confronts him: 'Did not my heart go with you when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?' (5:26). Naaman's leprosy transfers to Gehazi. What does Gehazi's sin reveal about the nature of covetousness, the specific danger of being close to God's work without letting it transform your own heart, and the connection between inner compromise and outward consequence?

8. Gehazi served alongside Elisha and witnessed miracle after miracle, yet his heart was captured by Naaman's silver and garments the moment the opportunity arose. Proximity to God's work does not automatically produce godly character. Where in your own life is there a gap between your knowledge of God and your actual desires, a Gehazi-shaped place where you know what is right but your heart is still reaching for something else?

9. Read 2 Kings 5:1–14 carefully in light of Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 2:38, and Romans 6:3–4. Naaman's cleansing came through humble obedience to a specific, God-appointed means: washing seven times in the Jordan as the prophet commanded. His pride had nearly kept him from it because the means seemed too simple. How does Naaman's story illuminate the principle of obedient faith that does what God commands in God's appointed way, and how does this principle apply to the New Testament pattern of salvation, including baptism as God's appointed means of entering into Christ, without claiming that Naaman's washing was itself Christian baptism?

10. Looking back over all of 2 Kings 5:1–6:33, from the captive girl's witness to Elisha's vision of the fiery army, name one specific truth about God or one specific call on your life that has become more vivid through this passage, and describe one concrete step you will take this week in response.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Luke 4:27, where Jesus specifically cites Naaman's cleansing to illustrate that God's grace has always moved beyond the boundaries of Israel; Romans 6:3–4, where Paul explains baptism as dying and rising with Christ for forgiveness and new life; Acts 2:38, where Peter commands repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins; 2 Kings 6:15–17, where the fiery army visible to Elisha's servant illustrates that the heavenly host far outnumbers any earthly threat; Colossians 2:11–12, where Paul connects baptism to circumcision as the new covenant rite of entering God's people