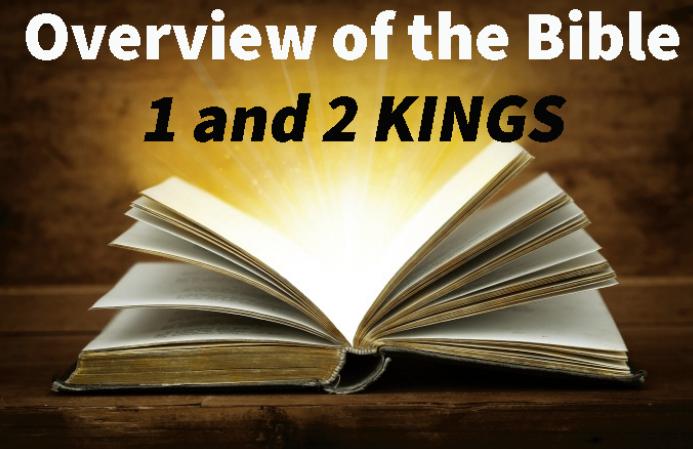


2 Kings 5-6

Lesson 108

Wednesday, November 2, 2022



Elisha's ministry expanded beyond the borders of Israel as recorded in this story of another miracle he performed.

Naaman's Disease (5:1–6).

5:1. **Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram**, Ben-Hadad II (860–841 B.C.; see the chart “Kings of Aram in 1 and 2 Kings,” near 1 Kings 11:23–25). Naaman was a successful and courageous warrior, **highly regarded because of the victories God had given** the Arameans under his leadership. However, **he had leprosy** (perhaps this was not leprosy as it is known today; cf. NIV marg.). This dreaded disease degenerated its victims and eventually proved fatal. No cure for it was known. In Israel lepers were normally isolated from non-lepers, but this was not always the custom in other nations including Aram. Naaman was able to carry on his duties as long as the disease permitted him to do so.

5:2–3. In the course of their occasional battles with **Israel**, Naaman's forces had captured some Israelites whom they made slaves. One of these was a **young girl** whom Naaman had given to his **wife** as a servant. Evidently Naaman and his wife were kind to this girl because she sought **Naaman's welfare**. **She told her mistress**, who told her husband, that a **prophet living in Samaria could cure ... leprosy**. This was Elisha; he lived in a house in the capital city (6:24, 32). Probably the girl had heard of Elisha before she was carried off as a slave. Apparently, she assumed he could cleanse leprosy in view of his supernatural power. No leper in Israel, though, was healed in Elisha's day (Luke 4:27). Later the slave girl's faith in the Lord may have been an indirect rebuke to Israel's King Joram who had no faith in God.

5:4–6. The Aramean **king** was anxious for his valuable commander to be cleansed, not only because he was a trusted friend but because the dreaded disease would eventually rob the king of his top military commander. **Naaman** set out to visit **King Joram** who he assumed would order the prophet to cure him. **With him** the commander took gifts of **10 talents** (ca. 750 pounds) **of silver, 600 shekels** (ca. 150 pounds) **of gold, and 10 sets of clothing**, all prized gifts in the Near East. He also carried a **letter** from his king to Joram requesting in matter-of-fact terms that **Naaman** be cured.

Naaman's Cure (5:7–14).

5:7. Joram was dismayed when he **read the letter** from Ben-Hadad II. Tearing one's **robes** indicated great anxiety and distress (cf. 2:12; 6:30; 11:14). Israel and Aram had been at peace, but it appeared to Joram that Ben-Hadad was trying to **pick a fight again** as he had done with Joram's father Ahab (cf. 1 Kings 20:1–3). Joram did not realize that Naaman did not expect **him** to cure the leprosy. Elisha did not even enter Joram's mind. The Israelite king had no use for that prophet who constantly opposed him. Joram wanted as little contact with him as possible.

5:8–10. **When Elisha** learned of Joram's anxiety over Ben-Hadad's letter he sent the king a **message** not to worry. If Joram would send Naaman to him the prophet would cure him. Naaman would learn, even if Joram had not, **that there was a true prophet in Israel**. Before long **Naaman** and his whole retinue arrived at **Elisha's door**. Not at all awed by the great general, **Elisha** did not even go out to meet him; instead, he **sent a messenger to** convey his simple “prescription.” Naaman was told to dip **seven times in the Jordan** River and he would be free of his disease. The cure lay not in the water of the Jordan but in obedient faith in God's promise through His prophet.

5:11–14. **Naaman** turned from Elisha's house **angry** for two reasons: (1) His pride had been offended by Elisha's offhanded treatment of him; he had expected a cleansing ceremony in keeping with his own dignity. (2) He resented having been told to wash in a muddy river that he considered inferior to the **Abana and Pharpar ... rivers** in his hometown; the water of the Jordan, he thought, could not possibly do him any good.

The commander's **servants**, however, had not been personally put down as their master had, and could view the situation more objectively. Approaching him tenderly they appealed to him as a **father** to be reasonable. They pointed out that it was not as though Elisha had requested something difficult (**some great thing**). What harm would there be in giving his remedy a try? Undoubtedly feeling rather ashamed Naaman humbled himself and obeyed the word of the Lord. As he obeyed in faith he was **cleansed**. God did even more for him and **restored** his flesh to its soft boyhood texture. God had prescribed that he wash **seven times** (cf. 4:35) to indicate that the healing was completely a work of God," for seven is the stamp of the works of God" (C.F. Keil, "1 & 2 Kings," in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, 3:319). The fact that in Elisha's day an Aramean leper was healed whereas no Israelite leper was (Luke 4:27) points up Israel's apostasy.

Naaman's Gratitude (5:15–18).

5:15–16. **Naaman** returned from the Jordan to Elisha's house in Samaria (about 25 miles) with a heart full of gratitude and hands full of gifts. Rather than expecting Elisha to come to him he willingly **stood before** the prophet and testified to his belief that Israel's **God** is the only true God. (Unfortunately, many in Israel, including her king, had not come to the same realization.) This was the highest purpose of Naaman's healing from God's point of view. Elisha agreed that **the LORD** whom he served **lives** (cf. comments on 1 Kings 17:1; 2 Kings 4:30). But the prophet **refused** to accept any reward for his ministry. Naaman's urging did not budge Elisha. The man of God had not performed his miracle for reward but at the word of the Lord and he did not want anyone to think otherwise. The false prophets could easily be bought, but not Elisha.

5:17–18. Since Elisha would not take anything, **Naaman** asked him to give **as much earth as** he could carry back to Damascus on two **mules**. He intended to use this in making an altar to the Lord. Many polytheists believed that no god could be worshiped except in its own land or on an altar built with the dirt of that land.

Naaman proposed to worship only Yahweh Himself (**the LORD**), but superstition shaped his thinking. In the course of his official duties, however, he would have to give token respect to the god of his **master** the king. The god of Damascus was Hadad-Rimmon, a god of rain and thunder, here shortened to **Rimmon**. It was Naaman's duty to participate in this official worship with the king and probably other officials of state. The commander was not prepared to risk his life, as Daniel's three friends would (Dan. 3:12), by refusing to bow before an idol. But one must remember that Naaman was not an Israelite with the advantage of knowledge of the revealed Word of God. Perhaps his responsibility therefore was not as great as an Israelite's would have been. **Leaning on my arm** (cf. 2 Kings 7:2) is a figurative expression for relying on an assistant for help.

Gehazi's Greed (5:19–27).

5:19–21. Elisha's departing benediction (**Go in peace**) probably was a blessing on the journey ahead of **Naaman** rather than on the compromising behavior the general had outlined (vv. 17–18), which the prophet neither approved nor disapproved verbally.

Gehazi became greedy of what Naaman had offered to give Elisha. Evidently, he justified his greed by reasoning that since **Naaman** was an **Aramean**, a natural enemy of Israel, he should at least be taken advantage of. So **Gehazi** pursued **Naaman** to get something from him. Gehazi was able to overtake the large slow-moving caravan on foot. Naaman **got down from** his **chariot** (cf. 4:26) and **asked if everything was all right**.

5:22–24. Gehazi said **everything was all right** but then lied to the commander. He said his **master** had received unexpected guests (**two ... prophets**) and wanted to give them some **silver** and a change of **clothing** each. Gehazi put this lie in Elisha's mouth and made the request sound very unselfish. **Naaman** was happy to oblige and urged Gehazi to accept twice as much **silver** as well as the clothing. He even provided **two ... servants** to carry these gifts back to Elisha. **Gehazi** followed **the servants** and when they arrived at **the hill** (on which Samaria was built) **he took the gifts from** them

and put them ... in his house.

5:25–27. Shortly thereafter **Gehazi** returned to **Elisha**. He did not realize that God had revealed his whereabouts to **his master**. So to cover one lie he told another. Elisha then explained that he was aware of everything **Gehazi** had done. **Elisha** added that true servants of the Lord should not **take** personal rewards from people, especially influential non-Israelites, in return for blessings that God, not His servant, had given them. False prophets were selfishly lining their own pockets and bringing contempt on the prophetic office; true prophets should avoid conduct that might be misunderstood as self-seeking.

Naaman's leprosy had been removed from him for his trust in and obedience to God. Now, ironically, leprosy would **cling to** Gehazi for his lack of trust in and obedience to God. The servant had brought dishonor to Yahweh's name. A bad case of leprosy turned one's skin and hair **white as snow**. Gehazi's judgment was serious because his sin had far-reaching consequences; this story was probably told all over Aram and Israel. As a servant of God Gehazi had more privilege than most people and therefore more responsibility than most people.

This story contains many lessons. Naaman's healing was another great proof of the Lord's power to restore health, power which only Baal supposedly possessed. This incident also helped spread the fame of Yahweh to another part of the ancient world. The contrasting behaviors of Elisha and Gehazi also model positive and negative attitudes and actions for God's servants of all ages.

The Floating Axe Head (6:1–7)

6:1–4a. Another incident involving **the company of the prophets** follows. At one of their schools their accommodations had become inadequate because of the growing number of young men, a tribute to the effectiveness of Elisha's ministry. This may have been the school at Jericho since the young men went to the nearby **Jordan** River for their wood. They intended to **build** new facilities at a new site **there**. **Elisha** gave his permission for this project and agreed to accompany the workmen.

6:4b–7. In the process of cutting **down trees** an **iron axe head** flew off its handle and **fell into the river**. The man wielding the axe **cried out** to his **lord** (i.e., to Elisha) in dismay because his tool had been **borrowed**. Ascertaining **where** the axe head had fallen into the water **Elisha** threw a **stick** into the river. Miraculously **the iron** implement floated to the surface. The workman was able to retrieve it easily.

Certainly, this miracle encouraged the group of faithful followers of the Lord that their God really is alive and that He would supernaturally provide for their needs even though many Israelites in that day had turned from the true God to Baal.

The Blinding of the Aramean Army (6:8–23)

6:8–10. As mentioned previously the Arameans were sometimes **at war** and sometimes at peace **with Israel** during the years of Elisha's ministry. At the time of this particular incident **the Arameans** were making profitable surprise raids into Israel. **The king of Aram** (cf. 5:1) was probably Ben-Hadad II. (Of the major persons in this narrative only Elisha is mentioned by name. This may suggest that readers should focus on the Lord and His prophet.) In preparation for another raid Ben-Hadad planned to pitch his **camp** on the border of Israel from which he could strike unexpectedly. However, **God** informed **Elisha** of the place and the prophet passed his information on to **the king of Israel** (Joram) with a warning to **beware**. Joram **checked** Elisha's information, found it to be correct, prepared for the encounter, and frustrated Ben-Hadad's secret attack. This happened several times.

6:11–14. **Enraged** by his continual failure to surprise the Israelites Ben-Hadad concluded that one of his men was tipping off the enemy. An officer assured **the king** that there were no traitors in his camp but that it was **Elisha** who had supernatural knowledge of all his plans. **The very words you speak in your bedroom** mean even his most private conversations were known to the prophet. Obviously, this officer had somehow learned of Elisha and his powers.

As long as Elisha remained free the army of Aram would be unsuccessful, so Ben-Hadad ordered that he be located and captured. He stealthily sent a strong contingent of soldiers with **horses and chariots.... by night** and completely

surrounded **Dothan** (12 miles north of Samaria), where Elisha was staying. The fact that Ben-Hadad would try to take Elisha by surprise even after the prophet had repeatedly anticipated the Arameans' moves indicates the king's lack of faith in the supernatural origin of Elisha's ability. Therefore, he needed to be convinced that Yahweh is the living and true God.

6:15–17. Since Gehazi had been dismissed as a disobedient servant and "leper" (5:27), the Naaman story must follow this one if Elisha's **servant** here is Gehazi. Or this servant may be someone who replaced Gehazi. **Early the next morning** the servant was terrified to see that **the whole city** was under the Arameans' control, or so he thought. He returned in a frenzy to Elisha and nervously asked, **what shall we do?** The servant's anxiety reflected his lack of understanding and trust in the Lord which, one would think, Elisha's previous revelations would have changed.

Elisha was not at all disturbed by the present situation. He encouraged his aide to stop fearing and assured him that they had behind them a force superior to that of the enemy. **Elisha** then asked the **LORD** to enable his servant to see this host and the Lord did so. He gave the servant the ability to **see** the normally unseen world of invisible spirits (angels) that are constantly ready to do God's bidding (cf. Gen. 28:12). The **hills** around Dothan were filled with superior **horses and chariots**. These appeared as fiery agents of God suggesting to the servant their superterrestrial origin (cf. 2 Kings 2:11). **The LORD** had surrounded the armies of Aram and was in control.

6:18–20. Proceeding with a divinely revealed strategy **Elisha** called on God to blind the Arameans as they began to converge on Dothan, and God did so.

Elisha said, **this is not the road and this is not the city** for that road and **city** were not where God intended them to go. They unknowingly followed Elisha **inside** the walls of **Samaria**, the capital of Israel. What the Israelite army might not have been able to do except with much fighting and loss of life, God did peacefully through one man. In response to Elisha's prayer God opened **the eyes of** the Arameans and they discovered that they were surrounded and helpless captives at the mercy of the king of Israel.

6:21–23. Joram, realizing that **Elisha** was in control, and almost hysterical because of his good fortune, **asked** the prophet, whom he respectfully addressed as his **father** (cf. 5:13), if he should **kill** his prisoners. Elisha said no. Joram probably would not have killed soldiers captured in battle and furthermore God's purpose was not to destroy the Arameans' lives but to save the Israelites' lives. The king then assured them of this in an unusual way. By setting a **great feast** before the soldiers he was expressing confidence in God's ability to control the enemy; Israel had absolutely nothing to fear and could even treat these soldiers as friends because God had them in His sovereign power. In the ancient Near East eating together under one's roof constituted making a covenant of peace (J. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974, p. 157). The Arameans were now bound by social custom not to attack the friend who had extended his gift of hospitality and protection. For these reasons the Arameans **stopped raiding Israel's territory** for a time.

The reference to the soldiers returning **to their master** suggests that King Ben-Hadad II was not part of the force that had been sent to capture Elisha (cf. 6:13). Evidently this was just part of the total Aramean army.

This incident demonstrates Yahweh is His people's defense. So, to depart from Him was the height of folly. Israel's victory by means of God's prophet rather than by warriors undoubtedly encouraged many in Israel and Aram to fear the Almighty God.¹

¹ Thomas L. Constable, "2 Kings," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 548–550.