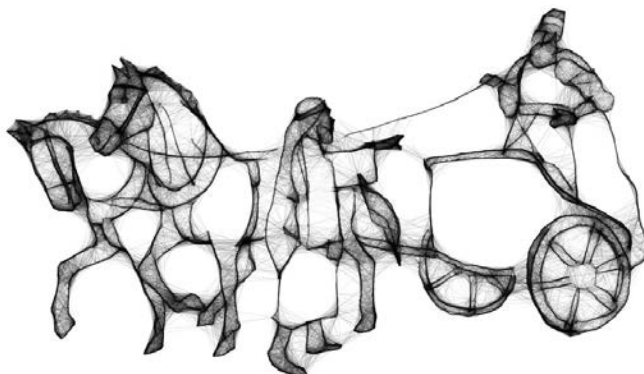


The Unexpected Missionary



SABBATH—JULY 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Kings 5; Mark 1:40–45; 2 Kings 2:1–15; John 15:5; Romans 6:1, 4–11; Romans 6:1.

MEMORY VERSE: “And there were many in Israel who had skin diseases in the days of Elisha the prophet [special messenger from God]. But not one of them was healed except Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27, NIV).

THE BOOKS OF KINGS COVER THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOMS OF ISRAEL FROM ABOUT 970 TO 560 B.C. They record exciting times and political events touching God's people. Woven into these stories are those about Elijah and Elisha, daring prophets (special messengers) of God. Their adventures have excited children and adults in every time period of history.

Here is something else interesting. Did you know that there are many things that are similar between the work of Elisha and the work of Jesus? In the ministries (work done for God) of both, dead persons were raised, lepers cleansed, and hungry people fed from small amounts of food.

This week's lesson studies one of these miracles: the healing of Naaman. Naaman was a wealthy, powerful, and very proud idol worshiper who, in his great need, came to experience the power of the living God. But he first did so through the witness of an unexpected missionary.

Among the many spiritual truths that can be found in this story, we can get an example of witnessing to people of different cultures during difficult times. We can understand, too, in this story an example of how the plan of salvation works.

HE HAD IT ALL . . . BUT (2 Kings 5:1)

Second Kings 5:1 gives four descriptions or titles that put Naaman among the top people of Syrian (also called Aramean) society. He had a major influence on the king of Aram, was held in high honor, and was the king's right-hand man in religious and military matters (verse 18). He was also very rich (verse 5).

But verse 1 tells us something important. All Naaman's power, honor, and bravery seemed worthless because he had the most feared disease in those days, leprosy. His leprosy affected every part of his life. But his leprosy also brought him in touch with God's prophet. And through that meeting Naaman became a believer in the true God.

Read Mark 1:40–45; Luke 8:41–56; and Mark 2:1–12. Jesus did miraculous healings, but what is one thing in these stories that brought all these people to Jesus?

Upsets in life, tragedies, and changes can make people more open to spiritual truth and set them on a search for God. Physical, psychological, political, or other disasters can open people up to the real God. Personal loss, serious national tragedies, and wars are the big reasons people seek a power greater than themselves. The church has long known that they have success in soul winning in areas in which people are struck by suffering.

On one level Naaman seemed to have it all. But he also was a broken man without much hope. In what ways are we all like Naaman, having good things and bad things in our lives? How can both good and bad things keep us connected to the Lord?



Upsets and tragedies in life can set the heart on a search for God.

AN UNLIKELY WITNESS (2 Kings 5:1–7)

Read 2 Kings 5:1–7. Why would the Syrians even have listened to what a slave girl had to say? What does this story tell us about the influence a humble servant may have?



The little slave girl shared with Naaman's wife her unshaken faith in God's power to heal Naaman.

The Bible gives us no real details of how this young girl acted in the home. But it is clear that there was something about her that caught the family's attention. Think about it: on the word of a slave child in his household, a wealthy and powerful military leader (Naaman) goes to his king, tells him what she said, and then gets permission from the king to go visit the prophet. Even more so, Naaman loads up on gifts to bring to the prophet. Clearly, more was going on than what we know from these verses. But it is clear that God's agent (worker) to plant the knowledge of Him in the ruling circles of Syria was an unnamed little Hebrew slave girl. She had been cruelly taken away from her home by a Syrian raiding party. But the little girl did not think badly about what had happened to her. She did not stay upset about her life of slavery. Instead the girl shared her unshaken faith in the life-changing power of God. It was the same God who was working through Elisha in Samaria (2 Kings 5:3). Like Daniel and his companions in Babylon, the girl was able to turn her own misfortune into a way to glorify (praise and honor) God. And so, God turned her slavery into an opportunity to share her faith. According to Ellen G. White, "The slave girl's actions in that heathen home are a strong witness to the power of early home training."—Adapted from *Prophets and Kings*, page 245.

What should this story tell us about how our faith, lifestyle, and actions can lead others to us and to the truths that God has given us to share with them?

What is interesting, too, in this story is how the king of Israel felt when he received the letter. *Am I God? Can I heal leprosy?* His words point out just how dreaded the disease was and why only a miracle could bring about a cure. For whatever reason, the letter suggested the expectation that the king was to bring the cure. And the king knew that he could not do that. So he suspected it was all a trick to start trouble.

ELISHA, THE PROPHET (2 Kings 2:1–15)

The ministry (work done for God) of the prophet Elisha in the ninth century B.C. comes to us in a series of 18 stories. His work lasted more than fifty years. Elisha's ministry was done mostly as the head of the school of the prophets and was largely public. His ministry included signs and wonders that were well-known all over the Israelite nation. Both kings and common people depended on Elisha for advice.

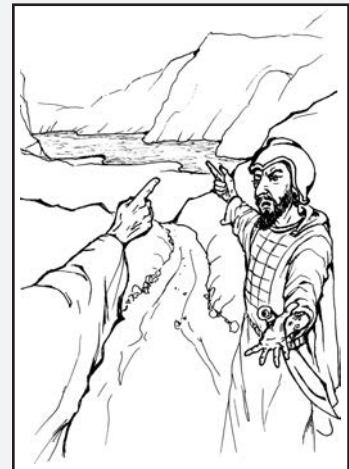
Read 2 Kings 2:1–15. What do these verses tell us about the calling and ministry of Elisha?

No question that Elisha was called by God. He had some wonderful experiences that must have supported his calling as a prophet. More important, Elisha did ask for a “double portion” of the Spirit. This tells us that he knew he would need God's power. He also knew that without God he would be helpless. Thus, even back then, this man of God understood what Jesus said hundreds of years later: “ ‘I am the vine. You are the branches. If anyone remains joined to me, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. You can't [cannot] do anything without me' ” (John 15:5, NIV). It is a lesson that, no matter our position in the Lord's work, we all need to recognize.

Clearly, as we can learn from the story of Elisha's calling, this power had been given to Elisha. So Elisha revealed that he had a healthy and honest understanding of his own work and calling when he declared to the king: let Naaman “know that there is a prophet in Israel” (2 Kings 5:8).

Also interesting must have been the time when this military commander (Naaman) and his soldiers came in all their glory (strength) to the door of Elisha's house. Probably Elisha's house was small and simple in comparison with the wealth that Naaman enjoyed. But Elisha did not seem to worry or show fear to Naaman and his troops. In fact, Elisha did not go outside to meet his powerful caller. Instead he sent a messenger, who gave the military commander (Naaman) a command! The only reward for his long trip from Damascus was the bold command to go to the Jordan and bathe! But it came with a promise: “ ‘you will be cleansed' ” (2 Kings 5:10, NIV).

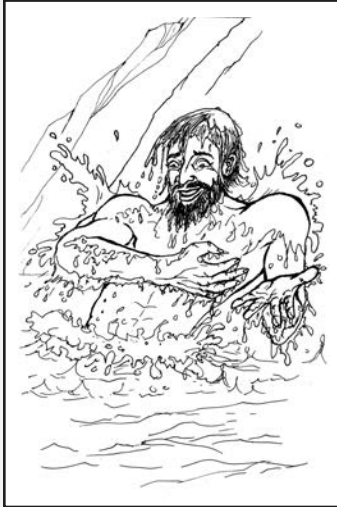
No doubt the pride of this important man was hurt. But perhaps that was the point.



The only reward for Naaman's long trip from Damascus was the bold command to go to the Jordan and bathe!

THE HEALING OF NAAMAN (2 Kings 5:11–14)

Read 2 Kings 5:11–14. What does this story teach us about Naaman and some of the lessons he had to learn? What can we learn from this for ourselves too?



Naaman's story shows that God rewards full obedience.

If the prophet Elisha had personally met his important guest Naaman and used magic or rituals as unbelievers did, Naaman might have accepted it without question. Naaman felt insulted when he met Elisha because of two things: (1) Elisha did not personally come out of his house to meet Naaman, and (2) Elisha directed Naaman to the Jordan River as the place to get his leprosy cured.

From the viewpoint of political courtesy, Naaman was right. Elisha should have left his house to greet him. And the rivers in Damascus were probably better. Their water was clearer than the muddy Jordan's. But, through Elisha, God directed Naaman to the Jordan, a river in Israel. The entire cure process was designed to teach, first, that there was a prophet of the true God in Israel. And the second purpose was to teach that God rewarded full obedience.

Naaman's soldiers convinced him to surrender to his new "commander [God]" and at least give it a try. They also argued that if the cure had required Naaman to do difficult things, he would have done them. But because the cure was so simple, Naaman had a hard time believing it would work. When these things were pointed out to Naaman, he understood the foolishness of his own thinking and pride. It must have been hard for Naaman to swallow his pride at having to listen to a slave girl, a foreign prophet who gave him little respect, and, finally, to his own servants. But he was desperate for healing.

"So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy" (2 Kings 5:14, NIV).

The first requirements for Naaman's healing were belief and obedience. As soon as Naaman gained victory over his pride and obeyed God's will by bathing seven times in the muddy Jordan, he was cured.

Read Romans 6:4–11. How does the story of Naaman teach some of the principles (important rules) found in these verses? In what ways have you experienced how real a "new life" in Christ is?

A NEW BELIEVER (2 Kings 5:15)

“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant” (2 Kings 5:15, NIV). In what way do these words help to reveal the experience of salvation? Read Revelation 14:12; 1 John 5:2, 3; Romans 6:1.

It would have been easy for Naaman to return directly from Jordan to Damascus after his healing. But because of his thankfulness, Naaman and his servants returned to the prophet’s place. This time they met Elisha in person. The confession that the God of Israel is Ruler of the world is the main theme of the Bible. These words coming from a pagan are one of the high points in Old Testament stories. Naaman’s conversion made clear that his new experience had to be tied to the God of Israel. The prophet was Israelite, the river was the most important in Israel, and the number seven was a clear connection to the God of Creation.

What we learn from Naaman is an example of how true faith works: Naaman received something that he could never have earned on his own. The fact that Elisha refused the gifts (2 Kings 5:16) was a way of teaching that salvation cannot be earned or bought. Instead, it is wholly of God’s grace.¹ But, at the same time, Naaman’s willingness to give something to Elisha for what he had done for him reveals how faith works in the heart. The man of faith gives thanks for what God has given him. Elisha refused the gift. Here he followed the example of Abraham when he helped the pagan kings but refused rewards with the words that no one should be able to say, “ ‘I made Abram rich’ ” (Genesis 14:23, NIV). Elisha knew that acceptance of a gift would have spoiled the lesson Naaman should learn. The healing was the work of God and an act of pure grace.

“Let this point be fully settled in every mind: If we accept Christ as a Savior, we must accept Him as a Ruler. We cannot have the promise and trust in Christ as our Savior until we accept Him as our King and are obedient to His commandments. So we give proof of our loyalty to God. Then we have true faith, because it is a working faith. It works by love.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, page 16.

If others were to look at your life, what would they see in it that reveals your love for God because of what He has done for you in Christ?

DEFINITIONS

1. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Naaman returned to his Syrian home. He had been healed in body and converted [changed] in spirit. Hundreds of years later Naaman’s wonderful faith was praised by the Savior as a lesson and example for all who claim to serve God. ‘And there were many in Israel who had skin diseases in the days of Elisha the prophet. But not one of them was healed except Naaman the Syrian,’ ” said the Savior. Luke 4:27, NlrV. God passed over the many lepers in Israel because their unbelief closed the door of good to them. A heathen nobleman who had been true to his beliefs of right, and who felt his need of help, was more worthy of God’s blessing than were the sufferers of leprosy in Israel. Why? They had abused and ignored their God-given rights. God works for those who appreciate His favors and accept the light given them from heaven.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 252, 253.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Over the years there has been a lot of discussion about what happened after the healing of Naaman. In 2 Kings 5:17–19, Naaman makes a powerful confession of faith, saying, “ ‘I won’t [will not] ever bring burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god again. I’ll [I will] bring them only to the LORD’ ” (2 Kings 15:17, NlrV). But, right after, he says, “ ‘From time to time my master will enter the temple to bow down to his god Rimmon. When he does, he’ll [he will] lean on my arm. Then I’ll [I will] have to bow down there also. I hope the Lord will forgive me for that’ ” (2 Kings 15:18, NlrV). What does Elisha’s answer suggest? To what level do Christian missionaries have to exercise patience and understanding to new converts (believers), especially when they come to us from a different religious background and culture?
- ② How rapidly should new converts and believers grow? “The widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian had lived up to all the light they had; so they were recognized as being more righteous [holy] than God’s chosen people who had backslidden from Him and had sacrificed principle for worldly honor.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers and Leaders]*, page 416.
- ③ Healing and salvation came to Naaman by a faith that was lived out in his actions. Discuss the relationship between faith and works. Why is it so important to understand the crucial roles that both faith and works have in the Christian life and witness?