

“Naaman the Leper & the Jewish Servant Girl”

2 Kings 5

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

☞ Pray for God's guidance as you study

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

² Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

⁴ Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ⁵ “By all means, go,” the king of Aram replied. “I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels^[c] of gold and ten sets of clothing. ⁶ The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: “With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy.”

⁷ As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!”

⁸ When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: “Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.” ⁹ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage.

¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!” ¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant.”

¹⁶ The prophet answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

¹⁷ “If you will not,” said Naaman, “please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD. ¹⁸ But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.”

¹⁹ “Go in peace,” Elisha said.

After Naaman had traveled some distance, ²⁰ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, “My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him.”

²¹ So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. “Is everything all right?” he asked.

²² “Everything is all right,” Gehazi answered. “My master sent me to say, 'Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.'”

²³ “By all means, take two talents,” said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. ²⁴ When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house. He sent the men away and they left.

²⁵ When he went in and stood before his master, Elisha asked him, “Where have you been, Gehazi?”

“Your servant didn't go anywhere,” Gehazi answered.

²⁶ But Elisha said to him, “Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes—or olive groves and vineyards, or flocks and herds, or male and female slaves? ²⁷ Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.” Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow.

1. Did you have any “heroes” as a little kid? If so, who? Fiction or non-fiction?
2. How might the servant girl have learned about Elisha? What had Elisha done that might have created “news” in the Jewish community? (Read 2 Kings 4)

3. When this story takes place, the people of Aram and Israel were officially at peace, though border skirmishes were not uncommon. Why do you think the king of Israel responded as he did when Naaman arrived? (2 Kgs 5:6,7)
4. What is significant about the contrast between Naaman's grand arrival and Elisha's quiet, even cool, reception? (2 Kgs. 5:9-11)
5. Why does Naaman become angry:
 - a. So that his soldiers won't think that he's naïve?
 - b. Because Elisha's reception was so cool?
 - c. Because the healing will require his cooperation?
 - d. He wanted a big spectacle?

6. The Abana and Pharpar rivers were composed of high mountain runoff. Not so with the Jordan River. How are Naaman's servant persuasive in urging him to lighten up and get into the Jordan? (5:13)

What was the result of Naaman's humbled, simple faith? (5:14) Read Ephesians 2:8, 9. What can we learn here about faith and God's intervention in our lives?

7. Naaman was a wealthy man. He'd come prepared to purchase a miracle, now he returned offering a statement of faith and sacrifice of gratitude. Why do you think Elisha refused "payment" from Naaman? (2 Kings 5:15-16)

8. Why did Naaman want a load of dirt from the area?

- a) he wanted to erect an altar to God back at home and considered this to be "holy ground"
- b) he thought being in this "place" had magical powers of healing
- c) he wanted the dirt for a garden
- d) he didn't want to come home empty handed
- e) this was his way of openly honoring his conversion to following God

9. In what ways is Naaman's experience at the Jordan similar to baptism? In what ways is it different? (Rom. 6:2-4)

10. Why did Naaman ask for an exclusion regarding his service to the king? (2 Kings 5:18) Do you think his request highlights his conversion or undermines it? Can you think of similar social situations that Christians today might struggle with? (Consider 1 Corinthians 8.)

Prayer: For one another

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|----------------------------|---|
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DID YOU KNOW?

His name was Tran. He was from SE Asia, I don't recall where. What I remember most were the words "**Hansen's disease**" and the phone call from a health official. You see, I worked for a government program where Tran was enrolled. The health official informed me that Tran had been negligent in continuing with his treatments and his condition would soon become contagious. I was asked to remind him.

That's when it all clicked. Hansen's disease is another name for leprosy. Tran was a leper. He had been in my office just the other day. Dread bled through my veins like ice as I recalled the disfigured slides I'd seen as a child at our church's annual missionary conferences. I hated those presentations. Silently I'd hoped for slides of huge snakes, jungle huts and crocodiles. For my eight-year-old mind the leprosy slides caused fearful tears and nightmares. Now LEPROSY had arrived in my office – at my desk!! You can believe Tran was reminded about his treatments the next time I saw him – and from a distance.

Naaman was a leper. Knowing what I know now neither Naaman nor Tran were cause for fear. While leprosy is contagious, it is passed on in such a way that you must have extremely close contact with another person. Even then it can take years to manifest itself. And, of course, now we have medications that can treat and even cure leprosy.

I've also learned that the leprosy mentioned in the Bible (Leviticus 13, 14 and Numbers 12:9-15) was most likely somewhat different than the classic leprosy we think of today. Not only are the symptoms different, but the original adjective (*lepros*) was used primarily to describe psoriasis or similar but contagious skin disorders. Leprosy (*Elephantiasis graecorum*) as we know it today was not introduced into the Biblical world until around the time of Christ or later. In his book, A Disease Apart, author Tony Gould suggests: "*it is now considered a relatively recent arrival in the lands around the Mediterranean, probably brought there by Alexander the Great's troops returning from India about 300BC.*" Another authority speculates that it came from Northern Africa along the Nile River. And a third commentator speculates that the crusaders are to blame for bringing leprosy back to Europe. Wherever it came from, leprosy is now worldwide but not the skin disease of the Old Testament.

What is apparent from the story in 2 Kings is that Naaman's skin disease was bothersome and embarrassing. His servant girl wished he could know relief from his symptoms. But obviously it was not endangering his career. He appeared at Elisha's home with wealth and self-esteem that bordered on arrogance.

True leprosy begins as a swelling beneath the skin or lesion and attacks the vision and nerve endings. It is not initially obvious. A renowned Christian doctor (Dr. Paul) has written a book addressing the "gift" of pain (Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants). Leprosy is a disease without pain, because the nerve ending are destroyed in the process. It also attacks the leper's vision. It seems inconceivable that a person with true leprosy would have been able to continue in any kind of military service, let alone leadership.

The disease is now worldwide, still being more common in areas where malnutrition and medical resources make people more receptive to catching it. Surprisingly, one of the main carriers of leprosy are armadillos. If you've been in the southern U.S. you've no doubt seen these scaly creatures splattered on the roadways. They seem to be everywhere and are somewhat of a nuisance. But resist the urge to hug one. Armadillos have been used in leprosy research and are the main source of leprosy infection in the U.S. today.

