

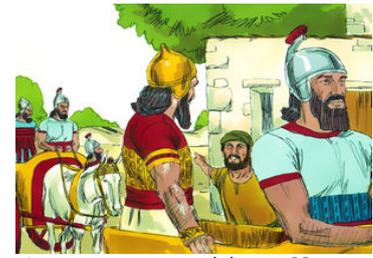
ELISHA AND NAAMAN

Introduction

1. A brief History of the relations between Israel and Syria¹:

a. Origins:

- 1) “The first occupants of Syria appear to have been of Hamitic descent - Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, etc. After a while the first comers, who were still to a great extent nomads, received a Semitic infusion, while most probably came to them from the southeast” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary).
- 2) Syrians can trace their Biblical heritage back to a man named *Aram*. He was a descendant of Shem, Noah's son. They were also known as Arameans. It is in the book of Genesis that we first hear mention of the people who would become Syrians: “The sons of Shem: Elam, Ashur, Arphaxad, Lud and *Aram*. The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshek” (Genesis 10:22-23).
- 3) Aram settled northeast of Palestine, stretching from the Jordan River to the Euphrates, and to Lake Gennesaret. Along with “Syria,” it was also called “Aram” and “Mesopotamia.” The name *Aram* in Hebrew signifies the high elevation found in this mountainous land.



A messenger giving Naaman instructions from Elijah to go and dip seven times in the River Jordan to be healed of his leprosy.

b. Israel and Syria:

Syrian Relations With Israel

- 1) It was during the time of Judges that God tested Israel by leaving several nations to train a generation that had not known war. Israel did not adhere to the Law of Moses, but married foreigners and worshiped their gods. Therefore, the Lord punished Israel by driving them into captivity: “The Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh; they forgot Yahweh their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. The anger of Yahweh burned against Israel so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram-Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years” (Judges 3:7-8). Aram-Naharaim, was a kingdom of Aram, i.e., Syria. Israel and Syria, then, were enemies at this time. However, when Israel cried out to Yahweh, He delivered them (Judges 3:9-10).



King David's Conquest Of Syria

- 2) Some time later, King David led a conquest against Syria and won (1 Chronicles 18:1-13, Psalm 60:1-12; 2 Samuel 8:3-13).

The occasion on which this Psalm was composed was after David had been engaged in wars in the East - in Aramea - and when he was meditating the completion of his conquests in the subjugation of Idumea.

“O Elohim, Thou hast cast us off, Thou hast scattered us, Thou hast been displeased; O turn Thyself to us again. Thou hast made the earth to tremble; Thou hast broken it: heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh. Thou hast shewed Thy people hard things: Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah. That Thy beloved may be delivered; save with Thy right hand, and hear me. Elohim hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is Mine, and Manasseh is Mine; Ephraim also is the strength of Mine head; Judah is My lawgiver; Moab is My washpot; over Edom will I cast out My shoe: Philistia, triumph thou because of me. Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me into Edom? Wilt not Thou, O Elohim, which hadst cast us off? And Thou, O Elohim, which didst not go out with our armies? Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through Elohim we shall do valiantly: for He it is that shall tread down our enemies” (Psalms 60:1-12).

¹ The following history is based on an article by Lauren Sanchez. www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/explore-the-bible/15-things-about-syria-s-people-and-history-as-found-in-the-bible.html

Rezon of Zobah, A New Adversary Of Israel

- 3) Following King David's defeat of the Zobah, his son, King Solomon, also had a conflict with Syria: "And God raised up against Solomon another adversary, Rezon son of Eliada... When David destroyed Zobah's army, Rezon gathered a band of men around him and became their leader; they went to Damascus, where they settled and took control. Rezon was Israel's adversary as long as Solomon lived, adding to the trouble caused by Hadad. So Rezon ruled in Aram and was hostile toward Israel" (1 Kings 11:23-25). Rezon, originally from Zobah, took control of the capital city, Damascus, and became the new ruler of Syria.

An Unlikely Alliance: Syria and Judah

- 4) After the kingdom became divided (Israel and Judah), a conflict arose between the two kingdoms, and King Asa of Judah reached out to King Ben-Hadad of Syria to help them. The ruler of Israel at the time was King Baasha, who led a siege against Judah (1 Kings 15:16-20). King Baasha withdrew from Ramah and ceased building his fortress. The supplies which he used, King Asa gathered for building up Geba and Mizpah. During the reign of King Ahab of Israel, Elijah the prophet was given a word from the Lord: "Yahweh said to him, Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel - all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:15-18). Though Hazael was chosen to be king of Aram, his evil desires would turn him against Israel.
2. We have now reached that point in history when Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Syria, was sent by the king of Syria, Benhadad, to Israel's king, Jehoram the son of Ahab, to be healed of his leprosy.
- This brief history will, hopefully, help us to better understand some of the statements made in the account of Naaman's healing.
 - Judging from the context, the king of Israel was probably Joram (aka Jehoram), who reigned 852-841 B.C. If this is correct, the Syrian king may have been Ben-Hadad II.
 - It seems that the account given in our text takes place during a rare time of peace, or at least a certain relaxation of hostilities, between Syria and Israel, making Naaman's journey to Samaria possible.
3. In the past, I have used this account to present a single lesson: that dipping in the Jordan was not a work, but a condition, and that he was cleansed (physically) by the grace of God. Likewise, baptism is not a work, but a condition, and that one is cleansed (spiritually) by the grace of God. But there are other important lessons we can draw from this account, and we shall observe several of these today.
4. Jesus said, "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:27). The Jews in the days of Elisha had no respect for the prophets and their unbelief denied them of many blessings. Instead, we see Gentiles such as Naaman receiving a blessing.

A Time Of Peace

- Naaman was able to travel into Israel to the king of Judah. This would not be possible if the two nations were at war at this time. Indeed, it would be extremely foolish!
- When Naaman arrived and handed over Behadad's letter, notice how the king replied: Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

Text: 2 Kings 5:1-27

Outline:

1. Naaman Comes To Elisha (5:1-9).

- Naaman's problem – leprosy (5:1).
- The testimony from a Jewish servant girl (5:2-3).
- Naaman comes to the king of Israel looking for healing (5:4-7).
- Naaman comes to Elisha's house (5:8-9).

2. Naaman Is Healed (5:10-19).

- a. Naaman's anger at Elisha's instructions (5:10-12).
- b. The good advice of Naaman's servants (5:13).
- c. Naaman is healed (5:14).
- d. Naaman offers to reward Elisha but the prophet refuses (5:15-16).
- e. Naaman's new faith (5:17-19).

3. The Greed Of Gehazi (5:20-27).

- a. Gehazi follows after Naaman (5:20-24).
- b. Gehazi's reward (5:25-27).

Observations:

1. Naaman was the general of the Syrian army. In the eyes of the king, Benhadad, he was a great man and honored and held in great esteem; he was also a mighty man in valor. We might be surprised to read that "... by him Yahweh had given deliverance unto Syria" (5:1). The sad thing is that he had leprosy.
 - a. Barnes says, "An Assyrian monarch had pushed his conquests as far as Syria exactly at this period, bringing into subjection all the kings of these parts. But Syria revolted after a few years and once more made herself independent. It was probably in this war of independence that Naaman had distinguished himself." It is possible that some of these victories had been at the expense of Israel!
 - b. God Himself was with Naaman and given victory in various battles. This ought not to surprise us because God is King and Ruler over all the nations (**Psalms 22:28; 47:7; Daniel 4:17**). Consider: God gave the king of Babylon victory over Israel and Judah.
 - c. "Leprosy had many degrees. Some of the lighter kinds did not incapacitate a man for military service, or unfit him for the discharge of court duties. But there was always a danger that the lighter forms might develop into the severer ones" (Pulpit Commentary). The word for "leprosy" designates not only Hansen's disease, but also serious skin conditions (**Leviticus 13:1-46**), and various types of fungi (**Leviticus 13:47-56; 14:33-57**).
2. If we are correct and that this incident takes place during a relative time of peace, then the raids on Israel refers to an early time of hostilities.
 - a. On one of the Syrians' raids in Israel, they had brought back a "little maid" that waited on Naaman's wife (5:2). I consulted several commentaries but I was unable to find any clues to her age. From the term "little maid", one gets the impression she is fairly young. She is old enough, though, to have faith, and she has knowledge of the prophet Elisha.
 - b. Despite being separated from her family, she is not bitter against her master and does not harbor any hatred of them; she accepts her fate with meekness and exhibits friendship and sympathy with her mistress and her husband, Naaman.
 - c. Robert Hawker asks, "Was there not an overruling providence in the captivity of this Israelitish damsel?" It is through the word of this little maid that the king of Syria came to a knowledge of a true prophet of God in Samaria. There are three instances where God planted one of His own people in a foreign land to fulfill His purposes: Joseph (**Genesis 39:1-41:44**), Moses (**Exodus 2:10**), Esther (**Esther 2:17**).
3. What they showed...
 - a. The little maid shows her knowledge, location, and understanding of the prophet and what he is able to do. She also shows her concern for her master, which proves she was not harboring any bitterness.

- b. Both Naaman and his wife show their humility in listening to and heeding the advice of their little maid. Even the king did not dismiss Naaman's request because of the advice of his little maid (5:3-4). If Naaman's wife had cast aside the little maid's words as foolishness, then her husband would not have been healed of his leprosy, and he would not have come to a greater understanding of the God of Israel.
- c. The king showed his care in allowing Naaman to go to Israel and providing a letter (5:5).

Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy.

4. The letter of Benhadad to Jehoram:

- a. It is extremely unlikely that this was the whole content of the letter; it probably consisted of the customary greeting and farewell.
- b. The letter makes no mention of Elisha because it assumed that the King would know of Elisha and his ability (God's ability) to cure Naaman and would send for him. Still, many argue that Benhadad should have made things clearer.
- c. It is unlikely that Joram (Jehoram) was ignorant regarding the miracles worked by Elisha; his failure to think of Elisha was due to his unbelief and his unwillingness to accept the authenticity of Elisha's prophetic ministry.

5. After hearing about the letter the king of Israel had received from the king of Syria, Elisha sent to the king and told him to send Naaman to him (5:8). So what were Naaman's expectations as he went to the house of Elisha? A few verses later we are told what he was thinking: "... I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper" (5:11).

- a. Elisha did not come out to meet Naaman but sent a messenger with instructions. Naaman was a great man (5:1) and probably had a high sense of importance, and, no doubt, believed himself superior to the prophet. As the Pulpit Commentary says, "Naaman was accustomed to extreme deference, and all the outward tokens of respect and reverence." By staying indoors and sending a messenger, Elisha rebuked such self importance and feelings of superiority; he was asserting the dignity of his office. "He had to impress upon the Syrian noble the nothingness of wealth and earthly grandeur, and the dignity of the prophetic office. He did not do more than was requisite for these purposes" (Pulpit Commentary).



- b. Elisha's instructions were simple: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (5:10). But Naaman became angry and stormed off! Naaman's angry response was due to the failure of his expectations to be met: "... I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper" (5:11). "Naaman had imagined a striking scene, whereof he was to be the central figure, the prophet descending, with perhaps a wand of office, the attendants drawn up on either side, the passers-by standing to gaze - a solemn invocation of the Deity, a waving to and fro of the wand in the prophet's hand, and a sudden manifest cure" (Pulpit Commentary).

- c. Due to his pride, Naaman was greatly offended by the disrespect he perceived in Elisha, and so he stormed off in a rage. You would think that one would be willing to do anything to rid one's self of such a terrible disease, but it just goes to show you the danger of pride.

6. Naaman is brought to his senses, humbles himself, follows the prophet's instructions, and is cleansed of his leprosy.

- a. It was due a servant's concern and advice that Naaman had sought out the prophet (5:2-3), and now again we see servants instrumental in bringing Naaman to his senses. Regarding these servants: other than the fact they were attendants to Naaman, we know nothing about them.

- b. The advice of the servants was logical and simple: “My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?” (5:13).
- c. Naaman heeded the advice of his servants and obeyed the prophet’s instructions and was cleansed of his leprosy by the grace of God (not of a meritorious work).

7. Naaman’s new found faith:

- a. After receiving his healing, Naaman returned to Elisha (a journey of about 30 miles) to offer a gift (5:15; cp. Luke 17:11-19). First, though, he makes this remarkable statement: “Behold, now I know that there is no Elohim in all the earth, but in Israel” (5:15). Naaman knew that Yahweh was Israel’s Elohim (5:11), but likely supposed He was like all the other gods of the nations. Now, though, He acknowledges Him as the only Elohim in all the earth! Also, we see that he asks Elisha for earth to take back with him to Syria (5:17). We cannot say for certain what he intended to do, but he may have intended to scatter the earth on a portion of ground to hallow it for the purposes of sacrificing unto Yahweh. The Pulpit Commentary says, “The Jews themselves are known to have acted similarly, transferring earth from Jerusalem to Babylonia, to build a temple on it.”

Rimmon

A Syrian deity, a local representation of Hadad the god of storm, rain and thunder. In Syria this god is called “Baal,” i.e., the lord par excellence, and to the Assyrians he was known as Ramanu, “The Thunderer.”

- b. Naaman was accustomed to entering the temple of Rimmon to worship, but he seems to know that this would be wrong. However, he was not prepared to offend his master. He asks to be pardoned (5:18)! Elisha answers, “Go in peace” (5:19). How does this answer Naaman’s request? Note the following comment...

“(i) Scholars of all generations have had trouble with this passage. Did Elisha actually give his consent to what Naaman suggested here? Did he not say, ‘Go in peace’? Stigers interpreted this as meaning that, ‘Naaman received assurance that God understood his heart.’ However, such a conclusion appears to be very questionable. (ii) ‘Elisha answered, Go in peace, without thereby either approving or disapproving the religious intentions just expressed by Naaman.’ ‘The clause, go in peace, merely means farewell.’ ‘Elisha’s words here, Go in peace, should be taken simply as Elisha’s parting wish that the peace of God would accompany Naaman on his way back to Damascus.’”

- c. Naaman had offered Elisha a gift that was, no doubt, intended to show his gratitude. Elisha refused his offer. “Elisha was no greedy Balaam. It was essential that Naaman and the Syrians should not look on him as on some vulgar sorcerer who wrought wonders for ‘the rewards of divination.’ His wants were so simple that he stood above temptation. His desires and treasures were not on earth. To put an end to all importunity, he appealed to Jehovah with his usual solemn formula – ‘As the Lord liveth before whom I stand, I will receive no present’” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary). While Elisha was content and free of covetousness, there was someone listening who saw an opportunity... !

8. Gehazi was the servant of Elisha and had witnessed all that had transpired. The moment Elisha refused the gifts of Naaman is the moment Gehazi’s heart was filled with covetousness.

- a. Gehazi was filled with covetousness and said to *himself*, “Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, *as Yahweh liveth*, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him” (5:20). It is shocking that Gehazi uses the phrase “as Yahweh liveth” when he is scheming to deceive and steal! Covetousness often blinds people to their foolishness; he is deceiving himself.
- b. Gehazi catches up with Naaman and spins him a yarn, saying, “My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments” (5:22). Naaman is deceived and hands over two talents of silver and two changes of clothes (5:23). This would be enough to purchase oliveyards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, and menservants and maidservants (see 5:26). So Gehazi took the silver and clothing, hid them in a safe place, and then departed (5:24).
- c. When Elisha confronted Gehazi, he denied any wrong-doing. Elisha then passed on him the judgment of the Lord: “The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever” (5:27).

Applications:

There are many applications to be drawn from this account, but I have just mentioned a few.

1. The nameless, little Jewish servant girl is often overlooked in this account, but we can learn at least three lessons:

a. Though captured during a Syrian raid, taken from her family, and made a slave in Naaman's household, she shows no signs of bitterness. Whether we are in a job we love or hate, or whether our "master" is kind or cruel, we are to work "as unto Christ" (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25; 1 Peter 2:18-20).

b. While she might have reason to resent her master, she does not. Indeed, she shows genuine concern for her master. Paul wrote, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4; 1 Corinthians 10:24; James 2:8).

c. This little maid has knowledge of the prophet Elisha, and has the faith to believe that her master might receive healing from God through him, which is more than could be said for many in Israel; even the king. Her faith is a credit to her parents that instilled such faith in her. It reminds us of what Paul said regarding Timothy: "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1:3-5). As Christian parents, we have a responsibility to bring up our children in the training and admonition of the Lord² (Ephesians 6:4; cp. Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

Applications in short:

- ☞ In your job, work as unto Christ and do your best.
- ☞ Always be looking out for the welfare of others.
- ☞ Bring up your children in the training and admonition of the Lord.



"The early knowledge this little maid had of Elisha and his miracles, may serve to give parents a profitable lesson by the way, how very speedily they ought to bring them acquainted with Jesus and his great salvation. Parents know not how soon their children may be sent out into life, or they themselves taken from them. Oh! that fathers and mothers, whose bowels yearn over their little ones, would seriously lay this to heart, and very early bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord! (Ephesians 6:4)" (Robert Hawker).

2. Naaman and his wife could have dismissed the advice of the little maid. After all, she was just a servant, and a child at that! Yet they were humble enough to heed and trust her advice. Let us be sure to be just as humble: being willing to listen to good advice from wherever it comes, lest we miss out on a blessing. This reminds us of the time when Paul's nephew overheard some Jews plotting to ambush and kill Paul. So he was taken to the commander and "the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, 'What is it that you have to tell me?'" The commander believed the boy and took the appropriate action (Acts 23:12-24).

Application in short:

- ☞ Be of a humble mind and be willing to listen to advice – from whoever it may come; even children!

3. Naaman had certain expectations as he went to the house of Elisha, and when those expectations were not met he became angry and stormed off. What expectations do we have in regards to how God will order our steps? What expectations do we have of our brethren? Yes, we may have certain expectations that are quite legitimate, but then we might also have expectations that are unreasonable. We need to discern the difference between the two lest we end up being disappointed, discouraged, angry, and miss out on a blessing.

Applications in short:

- ☞ Make sure the expectations you have of the Christian life are realistic.
- ☞ Make sure the expectations you have of brethren are realistic and fair.

² Sadly, many parents today leave the bringing up of their children to others.

4. We saw how the little maid advised her master: “And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leprosy” (5:2-3), and we saw how Naaman’s servants reasoned with him and cause him to turn back and obey the prophet’s instructions: “And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (5:13-14). Let us, too, seek a heart of wisdom that we might be able to offer sound advice, and develop a sound mind that we may be able to reason with those who contradict themselves (Acts 17:1-3; 18:18-19; 24:24-25).

Applications in short:

- ☞ Pursue wisdom that you might be able to give sound advice.
- ☞ Develop a sound mind that you may be able to reason with those who contradict themselves.

5. Naaman’s anger and baptism:

- a. It seems remarkable that Naaman would become so angry and forfeit his healing. When we become angry, we often say and do foolish things that we later come to regret. Sometimes, as in the case of Naaman, we will cut off our nose to spite our face!³ As Christians, anger is one of the things we must put off: “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Colossians 3:8).
- b. Naaman became angry and stormed off, but his servants reasoned with him and persuaded him to obey the prophet’s instructions (5:13-14). Let us be willing to listen to those that seek to reason with us because they are our friends and have our best interests at heart.
- c. Many today sneer and even become angry at the mention of being baptised for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). This account of Naaman is good example to which to turn to shew that baptism is a condition, not a work.

Applications in short:

- ☞ Put off anger.
- ☞ Listen to those who want to help you.
- ☞ Turn to this account of Naaman’s cleansing to shew how baptism is a condition, not a work.

6. Gehazi, no doubt, had seen the gifts that Naaman was willing to give to Elisha, and when Elisha refused them, covetousness arose in Gehazi’s heart.

- a. Seeing an opportunity, Gehazi pursued Naaman and took gifts from him on the pretext that he had a request from Elisha: “Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments” (5:22). Naaman believed Gehazi and handed over two bags of silver and two changes of clothes (5:23).
- b. Gehazi lied to himself (5:20), he lied to Naaman (5:22), and he lied to Elisha (5:25). Once you begin to lie, you keep on lying.
- c. Gehazi’s sins found him out (Numbers 32:23): “And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?” (5:26). Elisha then pronounced God’s punishment: “The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow” (2 Kings 5:27).

Applications in short:

- ☞ Beware of covetousness.
- ☞ Once you start lying it becomes a habit.
- ☞ Your sins will find you out.

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³ “‘Cutting off the nose to spite the face’ is an expression to describe a needlessly self-destructive over-reaction to a problem: ‘Don't cut off your nose to spite your face’ is a warning against acting out of pique, or against pursuing revenge in a way that would damage oneself more than the object of one's anger” (Wikipedia).