

Elisha: Seeing the Hand of God at Work

Session 4

May 18, 2025

God's Hand in Restoring Lives

Session Passage: 2 Kings 5:1-3,10-19a

2 Kings 5:1-3

Connection to the Point. God used a Jewish servant girl to point Naaman's wife to the prophet of God.

Aram (v. 1). Aram was a loose confederation of cities and towns sometimes referred to as Syria; it is also referred to by its most prominent city, Damascus. The Old Testament mentions people from Aram on several occasions. Deuteronomy 26:5 indicates Jacob and by extension Abraham were Arameans. The father of Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was "Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram" (Gen. 25:20). While there was never an Aramean empire like those of the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, Arameans played a role in Old Testament history (for example: 2 Sam. 8:5-6; 10:8-19; 1 Kings 11:25; 20:1-29). The shift in focus from the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4) to the Aramean Naaman (chap. 5) emphasizes that God's focus was not limited to the descendants of Abraham; God's intention was always to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). That *the Lord had given victory to Aram* indicates that God is sovereign over all nations and history.

Important . . . highly regarded (v. 1). Two terms describe Naaman, commander of the army of Aram. First, Naaman was *important* to his master, the king of Aram. Second, Naaman was *highly regarded*. The Hebrew term for *important* conveys the idea of greatness. It can refer to greatness in physical size, quantity, degree, or social status. In this context, Naaman was a powerful warrior and military leader on whom the king of Aram depended. *Highly regarded* means to be lifted up, and it further emphasizes Naaman's greatness and importance. Naaman was not just great in the senses of his authority and power; he was also held in high esteem by the king, the military, and most likely the people of Aram. In a subtle reminder that God is sovereign even over the affairs of non-Israelites, the reason that Naaman was both important and highly regarded was because through him, the Lord had given victory to Aram. While the king and others elevated Naaman because of his military ability and accomplishments, the Lord was ultimately responsible for Naaman's power and influence.

Skin disease (v. 1). While the Hebrew term can be translated as “leprosy,” the generic phrase *skin disease* better conveys the meaning of the Hebrew word because it is a collective term for a variety of ailments of the skin. In short, we do not know with certainty the precise nature of Naaman’s skin disease. However, from the immediate context we can conclude that the skin disease was not so severe that it prevented Naaman from performing his military and leadership duties. However, we also know that the skin disease was significant enough for the king of Aram to offer a huge amount of gold, silver, and clothing to the king of Israel for Naaman to be healed (v. 5).

A young girl who served (v. 2). Naaman, “a valiant warrior” (v. 1), is contrasted with his wife’s young servant girl, an Israelite who had been captured during an Aramean raid on Israel. This seemingly powerless servant girl had knowledge concerning the prophet Elisha that the mighty warrior Naaman did not. She knew this man of God could cure Naaman’s skin disease.

Israel . . . Samaria (vv. 2,3). After the death of King Solomon, the new king Rehoboam refused to lessen the hard service Solomon had placed on the Israelites. So all the tribes of Israel except Judah and Benjamin declared their independence under Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:1-17). The two nations were known as the Southern Kingdom of Judah (under Rehoboam) and the Northern Kingdom of Israel (under Jeroboam). Samaria, a city about forty-two miles from Jerusalem, eventually became the capital of the Northern Kingdom. In a figure of speech known as a synecdoche, where a small portion of a larger thing is used to represent the whole (or vice versa), Samaria was sometimes used as a synonym for the entire Northern Kingdom. So, in this context the young servant girl was not necessarily claiming that she knew Elisha was in the city of Samaria. Instead, she probably was saying that Elisha lived and carried out his ministry in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

2 Kings 5:10-12

Connection to the Point. Elisha directed Naaman to wash in the Jordan River, which initially offended Naaman.

Context. Naaman responded positively to the young servant’s information by informing the king of Aram “what the girl from the land of Israel had said” (v. 4). As a result the king of Aram ordered Naaman to go to Samaria with a letter to the king of Israel along with 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. The king of Aram was fully invested in seeing the commander of his army healed. The letter was extremely brief, simply saying that the Aramean king had sent his servant Naaman for the Israelite king to

cure him of his skin disease (v. 6). Upon receiving the letter, since he had no ability to cure a skin disease, the king of Israel assumed that the Aramean king was trying to start a war with him. The king of Israel tore his clothes in a sign of grief and mourning. This response most likely reflects that Israel was weaker than Aram and would have lost a war with the Arameans.

Upon hearing of the Israelite king's response, the prophet Elisha sent a message to the Israelite king that he was to send Naaman to the prophet. Elisha had confidence that God would heal Naaman and therefore Naaman (and the Arameans) would know that "there is a prophet in Israel" (v. 8), which is the same as stating God is in Israel. The miracle would demonstrate to the Arameans that the Lord, the one true God, is more powerful than anything—including Naaman's skin disease.

Wash . . . in the Jordan (v. 10). The Jordan River served as a geographical dividing line between the eastern and western tribes of Israel. The longest river in Israel (more than two hundred miles), it flows from Mount Hermon in the north down to the Dead Sea. When the Israelites entered the promised land, God miraculously stopped the flow of the river so that the Israelites crossed on dry ground (Josh. 3:17). Elisha's message to Naaman reflects the instructions God gave concerning ritual cleansing in Leviticus 13–14. The Hebrew term for *wash* appears in Leviticus 14:8-9; the term for *will be clean* appears about twenty times in the two chapters in relation to skin diseases.

Seven times (v. 10). Throughout the Bible, the number *seven* represents wholeness or completeness (see session 3 commentary on 2 Kings 4:35: "sneezed seven times," on page XX). By instructing Naaman to wash himself seven times in the Jordan River, Elisha was looking for complete obedience to his and by extension God's instructions for Naaman. If Naaman followed the instructions God would heal him.

Restored (v. 10). The meaning of this Hebrew word is "to turn back" or "return." The term is associated with restoration (Gen. 40:13), returning (8:12), and repentance (1 Kings 8:47). In this context, there is probably a connection between ceremonial washing and both repentance and restoration.

Angry (v. 11). By instructing Naaman to wash himself in the Jordan River, Elisha was having Naaman perform a ritual cleansing that likely would have been humiliating for him. After all, from Naaman's perspective the Jordan River was a small river in an insignificant and weak country, and he was a great warrior, a servant of a king, and part of the elite in his country.

The Hebrew word for *angry* is connected to the idea of wrath. Naaman was not merely annoyed or frustrated with Elisha's suggestion. It angered him to the point of being wrathful. Naaman was angered for at least two reasons. First, he had expected Elisha to come out and see him personally rather than only sending out his servant with a message. Second, he expected Elisha to do something spectacular rather than merely having Naaman perform a ritual washing in a local river.

He will surely come out (v. 11). Naaman's words reflect at least two concerns. First, he was a powerful and important man of Aram, demonstrated by his arrival at Elisha's door with an entourage of horses and chariots (v. 9). The presence of a man of such a high social status called for a greeting equal to his importance. Elisha's use of a messenger rather than coming himself to greet someone of Naaman's stature and power would have been seen as an insult.

Second, from Naaman's perspective the God of the Israelites was a local deity who was manipulated by His prophet, Elisha. He had expected Elisha to greet him personally and work magic to heal him. This is reflected in his words, "He will surely come out, stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the skin disease." Instead of humbly accepting what God had instructed him to do through Elisha, Naaman acted arrogantly and tried to control the situation (and by extension manipulate the God of the Israelites).

Abana and Pharpar (v. 12). These are two rivers near Damascus in Naaman's homeland of Aram. The reason for Naaman's desire to wash in those two rivers rather than the Jordan is not stated. Some suggest these two rivers may have been clearer compared to the muddy Jordan River while others note Naaman's desire may have been an expression of national pride and/or familiarity with his homeland.

Rage (v. 12). The Hebrew term for *rage* could also be translated "burning anger" and comes from a root word meaning "heat" or "to become hot." The term is used in relation to both God's holy wrath (Num. 25:11; Deut. 29:28) and the subjective wrath of human beings (2 Sam. 11:20). For the reasons stated above, Naaman's blood was figuratively boiling over both from Elisha's treatment of him and the prophet's instructions. Rather than obey, Naaman stormed away in a rage.

2 Kings 5:13-19a

Connection to the Point. Naaman humbled himself, washed in the Jordan River, and was healed.

My father (v. 13). The servants speaking to Naaman in this verse were not Naaman's children. The use of familial language to imply a close relationship is common in the Bible and in many cultures around the world today. The use of familial language has already been seen in the relationship between Elijah and Elisha. Elisha referred to Elijah as "my father" (2 Kings 2:12). Additionally, the "sons of the prophets" mentioned in 1 and 2 Kings were not biological sons of the prophets. Instead they were members of a prophetic order or guild under the leadership and guidance of a more spiritually mature man of God whom they called "master" (vv. 3,5). In a similar way, the servants speaking to Naaman were addressing him respectfully and acknowledging their subservience to him.

Clean (v. 13). The meaning of the Hebrew word translated *clean* is not merely something that has been washed off. Instead, it has a deeper and more wholistic meaning—something like "pure." It is used in the senses of both ceremonial (Num. 8:15) and moral purity (Josh. 22:17). The laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy taught that impure people were not able to enter the tabernacle (the presence of the Lord). Jews who heard or read the story of Naaman would have had this distinction between pure and impure in mind. Naaman's outward healing from the skin disease was vitally important to his life. However, the more important transformation happened in Naaman's heart, as demonstrated by his words, "I know there's no God *in the whole world* except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15, emphasis added). This confession of the exclusivity of Yahweh ("the Lord") is remarkable given that Naaman was a man of high standing from a pagan background where people believed in and worshiped a pantheon of gods and goddesses. By making this profession of faith in the presence of both Elisha and Naaman's entire entourage, the healed man was rejecting his past pagan beliefs and declaring his allegiance to Yahweh alone.

Please accept a gift (v. 15). Naaman's response to his being cured was to offer a gift to the prophet of God. However, just as Elisha had downplayed his role and elevated God by not personally coming out to greet Naaman and not personally performing the miracle of healing Naaman, now he did the same by refusing Naaman's offering of a gift. It was God who had healed Naaman, and it was God alone to whom Naaman should have been thankful for being cured.

Soil (v. 17). Naaman wanted to take two loads of dirt from Yahweh's special land to construct an altar for worship in his homeland. This territorial understanding of deities was common in the ancient Near East, as was the transportation of the dirt from a deity's

territory (essentially transporting “land” over which a deity ruled into the territory of another god). While Naaman’s words indicate an incomplete understanding of who the Lord is—the one true God of all creation—still his faith was directed exclusively toward the Lord.

The temple of Rimmon (v. 18). *Rimmon* was the chief Syrian god associated with storms and thunder. What this false god could not do, Yahweh the one true God had done by healing Naaman. Despite his new-found faith, Naaman’s duties for the king of Aram included accompanying the king into Rimmon’s temple when the king worshiped the pagan god.

Leaning on my arm (v. 18). There are at least two possibilities behind this phrase. First, it is possible that the king of Aram was an old man who physically needed help walking, and Naaman was tasked with carrying out that duty. The second, more probable scenario is that this expression refers to a ceremonial responsibility Naaman had as the commander of the Aramean army. In either case, Naaman told Elisha that he would not be participating in worship in these situations but rather simply be accompanying his king.

Go in peace (v. 19). With these words, Elisha indicated that Naaman’s heart orientation toward God was correct. Naaman had declared that there is no God other than Yahweh, and he would only offer sacrifices to and worship Him (v. 17). Elisha acknowledged that while Naaman’s duties dictated that he had to enter the temple of Rimmon with the Aramean king, the healed man would not be participating in the worship of the false god.