
2KINGS 5: 1 Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria: he was also a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.

The history of Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, a leper; who was informed by a little Israelitish captive maid that a prophet of the Lord, in Samaria, could cure him, 2Kgs 5:1-4. The king of Syria sends him, with a letter and rich presents, to the king of Israel, that he should recover him of his leprosy, 2Kgs 5:5, 2Kgs 5:6. On receiving the letter, the king of Israel is greatly distressed, supposing that the Syrian king designed to seek a quarrel with him; in desiring him to cleanse a leper, when it was well known that none could cure that disorder but God, 2Kgs 5:7. Elisha, hearing this, orders Naaman to be sent to him, 2Kgs 5:8. He comes to Elisha's house in great state, 2Kgs 5:9. And the prophet sends a messenger to him, ordering him to wash in Jordan seven times, and he should be made clean, 2Kgs 5:10. Naaman is displeased that he is received with so little ceremony, and departs in a rage, 2Kgs 5:11, 2Kgs 5:12. His servants reason with him; he is persuaded, goes to Jordan, washes, and is made clean, 2Kgs 5:13, 2Kgs 5:14. He returns to Elisha; acknowledges the true God; and offers him a present, which the prophet refuses, 2Kgs 5:15, 2Kgs 5:16. He asks directions, promises never to sacrifice to any other god, and is dismissed, 2Kgs 5:17-19. Gehazi runs after him, pretends he is sent by his master for a talent of silver and two changes of raiment; which he receives, brings home, and hides, 2Kgs 5:20-24. Elisha questions him; convicts him of his wickedness; pronounces a curse of leprosy upon him, with which he is immediately afflicted; and departs from his master a leper, as white as snow, 2Kgs 5:25-27.

Verse 1

Naaman, captain of the host - Of Naaman we know nothing more than is related here. Jarchi and some others say that he was the man who drew the bow at a venture, as we term it, and slew Ahab: see 1Kgs 22:34 (note), and the notes there. He is not mentioned by Josephus, nor has he any reference to this history; which is very strange, as it exists in the Chaldee, Septuagint, and Syriac.

King of Syria - The Hebrew is מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם melech Aram, king of Aram; which is followed by the Chaldee and Arabic. The Syriac has Adom; but as the Syriac dolath is the same element as the Syriac rish, differing only in the position of the diacritic point, it may have been originally Aram. The Septuagint and Vulgate have Syria, and this is a common meaning of the term in Scripture. If the king of Syria be meant, it must be Ben-hadad; and the contemporary king of Israel was Jehoram.

A great man - He was held in the highest esteem.

And honorable - Had the peculiar favor and confidence of his master; and was promoted to the highest trusts.

Had given deliverance unto Syria - That is, as the rabbins state, by his slaying Ahab, king of Israel; in consequence of which the Syrians got the victory.

A mighty man in valor - He was a giant, and very strong, according to the Arabic. He had, in a word, all the qualifications of an able general.

But he was a leper - Here was a heavy tax upon his grandeur; he was afflicted with a disorder the most loathsome and the most humiliating that could possibly disgrace a human being. God often, in

the course of his providence, permits great defects to be associated with great eminence, that he may hide pride from man; and cause him to think soberly of himself and his acquirements.

2KINGS 5: 2 The Syrians had gone out in bands, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maiden; and she waited on Naaman's wife.

Verse 2

The Syrians had gone out by companies - גִּדּוּדִים gedudim, troops. When one hundred or two hundred men go out by themselves to make prey of whatever they can get, that is called, says Jarchi, גִּדּוּד gedud, a troop. They had gone out in marauding parties; and on such occasions they bring away grain, cattle, and such of the inhabitants as are proper to make slaves.

A little maid - Who, it appears, had pious parents, who brought her up in the knowledge of the true God. Behold the goodness and the severity of the Divine providence! affectionate parents are deprived of their promising daughter by a set of lawless freebooters, without the smallest prospect that she should have any lot in life but that of misery, infamy, and wo.

Waited on Naaman's wife - Her decent orderly behavior, the consequence of her sober and pious education, entitled her to this place of distinction; in which her servitude was at least easy, and her person safe.

If God permitted the parents to be deprived of their pious child by the hands of ruffians, he did not permit the child to be without a guardian. In such a case, were even the father and mother to forsake her, God would take her up.

2KINGS 5: 3 She said to her mistress, "I wish that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would heal him of his leprosy."

Verse 3

Would God my lord - אֲחֵלֵי achaley, I wish; or, as the Chaldee, Syrian, and Arabic have, "Happy would it be for my master if he were with the prophet," etc.

Here the mystery of the Divine providence begins to develop itself. By the captivity of this little maid, one Syrian family at least, and that one of the most considerable in the Syrian empire, is brought to the knowledge of the true God.

2KINGS 5: 4 Someone went in, and told his lord, saying, "The maiden who is from the land of Israel said this."

Verse 4

Thus and thus said the maid - So well had this little pious maid conducted herself, that her words are credited; and credited so fully, that an embassy from the king of Syria to the king of Israel is founded upon them!

2KINGS 5: 5 The king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

He departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

Verse 5

The king of Syria said - He judged it the best mode of proceeding to send immediately to the king, under whose control he supposed the prophet must be, that he would order the prophet to cure his general.

Ten talents of silver - This, at 353 11s. 10 1/2d. the talent, would amount to 3,535 18s. 9d.

Six thousand pieces of gold - If shekels are here meant, as the Arabic has it, then the six thousand shekels, at 1 16s. 5d. will amount to 10,925; and the whole, to 14,460 18s. 9d. sterling: besides the value of the ten caftans, or changes of raiment. This was a princely present, and shows us at once how high Naaman stood in the esteem of his master.

2KINGS 5: 6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "Now when this letter has come to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy."

2KINGS 5: 7 When the king of Israel had read the letter, he tore his clothes, and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends to me to heal a man of his leprosy? But please consider and see how he seeks a quarrel against me."

Verse 7

Am I God, to kill and to make alive - He spoke thus under the conviction that God alone could cure the leprosy; which, indeed, was universally acknowledged: and must have been as much a maxim among the Syrians as among the Israelites, for the disorder was equally prevalent in both countries; and in both equally incurable. See the notes on Leviticus 13 (note) and Leviticus 14 (note). And it was this that led the king of Israel to infer that the Syrian king sought a quarrel with him, in desiring him to do a work which God only could do; and then declaring war upon him because he did not do it.

2KINGS 5: 8 It was so, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

Verse 8

Let him come now to me - Do not be afflicted; the matter belongs to me, as the prophet of the Most High; send him to me, and he shall know that I am such.

2KINGS 5: 9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariots, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

Verse 9

Came with his horses and with his chariot - In very great pomp and state. Closely inspected, this was preposterous enough; a leper sitting in state, and affecting it!

2KINGS 5: 10 Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you, and you shall be clean."

Verse 10

Sent a messenger - Did not come out to speak with him: he had got his orders from God, and he transmitted them to Naaman by his servant.

Wash in Jordan seven times - The waters of Jordan had no tendency to remove this disorder but God chose to make them the means by which he would convey his healing power. He who is the author of life, health, and salvation, has a right to dispense, convey, and maintain them, by whatsoever means he pleases.

2KINGS 5: 11 But Naaman was angry, and went away, and said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leper.'"

Verse 11

Naaman was wroth - And why? Because the prophet treated him without ceremony; and because he appointed him an expenseless and simple mode of cure.

Behold, I thought - God's ways are not as our ways; he appoints that mode of cure which he knows to be best. Naaman expected to be treated with great ceremony; and instead of humbling himself before the Lord's prophet, he expected the prophet of the Lord to humble himself before him! Behold I thought; - and what did he think? Hear his words, for they are all very emphatic: -

1. "I thought, He will surely come Out to Me. He will never make his servant the medium of communication between Me and himself.
2. And stand - present himself before me, and stand as a servant to hear the orders of his God.
3. And call on the name of Jehovah his God; so that both his God and himself shall appear to do me service and honor.

4. And strike his hand over the place; for can it be supposed that any healing virtue can be conveyed without contact? Had he done these things, then the leper might have been recovered."

2KINGS 5: 12 Aren't Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them, and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

Verse 12

Are not Abana and Pharpar - At present these rivers do not exist by these names; and where they are we know not; nor whether they were the Orontes and Chrysorroes. Mr. Maundrell, who traveled over all this ground, could find no vestige of the names Abana and Pharpar. The river Barrady he accurately describes: it has its source in Antilibanus; and, after having plentifully watered the city of Damascus and the gardens, dividing into three branches, (one of which goes through the city, and the two others are distributed among the gardens), it is lost in the marshy country about five or six leagues from Damascus. Two of these branches were doubtless called in the time of Elisha Abana, or Amana, as many copies have it; and Pharpar. And in the time in which the Arabic version was made, one of these branches were called Barda and Toura, for these are the names by which this version translates those of the text.

May I not wash in them, and be clean? - No, for God has directed thee to Jordan! and by its waters, or none, shalt thou be cleansed. Abana and Pharpar may be as good as Jordan; and in respect to thy cleansing, the simple difference is, God will convey his influence by the latter, and not by the former.

There is often contention among the people of Bengal and other places, concerning the superior efficacy of rivers; though the Ganges bears the bell in Bengal, as the Thames does in England, and the Nile in Egypt.

2KINGS 5: 13 His servants came near, and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had asked you do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? How much rather then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'"

Verse 13

My father - A title of the highest respect and affection.

Had bid thee do some great thing - If the prophet had appointed thee to do something very difficult in itself, and very expensive to thee, wouldst thou not have done it? With much greater reason shouldst thou do what will occupy little time, be no expense, and is easy to be performed.

2KINGS 5: 14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Verse 14

Then went he down - He felt the force of this reasoning, and made a trial, probably expecting little success.

Like unto the flesh of a little child - The loathsome scurf was now entirely removed; his flesh assumed the appearance and health of youth; and the whole mass of his blood, and other juices, became purified, refined, and exalted! How mighty is God! What great things can he do by the simplest and feeblest of means!

2KINGS 5: 15 He returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him; and he said, "See now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel. Now therefore, please take a gift from your servant."

Verse 15

He returned to the man of God - He saw that the hand of the Lord was upon him; he felt gratitude for his cleansing; and came back to acknowledge, in the most public way, his obligation to God and his servant.

Stood before him - He was now truly humbled, and left all his state behind him. It is often the case that those who have least to value themselves on are proud and haughty; whereas the most excellent of the earth are the most humble, knowing that they have nothing but what they have received. Naaman, the leper, was more proud and dictatorial than he was when cleansed of his leprosy.

There is no God in all the earth - Those termed gods are no gods; the God of Israel is sole God in all the earth. See my sermon on this subject.

Take a blessing - Accept a present. Take an expiatory gift. - Arabic. He desired to offer something for his cleansing. He thought it right thus to acknowledge the hand from which he had received his healing, and thus honor the Lord by giving something to his servant.

2KINGS 5: 16 But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none." He urged him to take it; but he refused.

Verse 16

I will receive none - It was very common to give presents to all great and official men; and among these, prophets were always included: but as it might have appeared to the Syrians that he had taken the offered presents as a remuneration for the cure performed, he refused; for as God alone did the work, he alone should have all the glory.

2KINGS 5: 17 Naaman said, "If not, then, please let two mules' burden of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will from now on offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD.

 Verse 17

Shall there not then, I pray thee - This verse is understood two different ways. I will give them both in a paraphrase: -

1. Shall there not then be given unto thy servant [viz., Naaman] two mules' burden of this Israelitish earth, that I may build an altar with it, on which I may offer sacrifices to the God of Israel? For thy servant, etc.

2. Shall there not be given to thy [Elisha's] servant [Gehazi] two mules' burden of this earth? i.e., the gold and silver which he brought with him; and which he esteemed as earth, or dust, in comparison of the cure he received. For thy servant [Naaman] will henceforth, etc.

Each of these interpretations has its difficulties. Why Naaman should ask for two mules' burden of earth, which he might have taken up any where on the confines of the land, without any such liberty, is not easy to see. As to the prophet's permission, though the boon was ever so small, it was not his to give; only the king of Israel could give such a permission: and what sort of an altar could he build with two mules' burden of earth, carried from Samaria to Damascus? If this be really the meaning of the place, the request was exceedingly foolish, and never could have come from a person enjoying the right use of his reason. The second opinion, not without its difficulties, seems less embarrassed than the former. It was natural for Naaman to wish to give something to the prophet's servant, as the master had refused his present. Again, impressed with the vast importance of the cure he had received, to take away all feeling of obligation, he might call two or ten talents of silver by the name of earth, as well as Habakkuk, Hab 2:6, calls silver and gold thick clay; and by terms of this kind it has been frequently denominated, both by prophets and heathen writers: "Tyrus heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets;" Zac 9:3. And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as stones; 2Chr 1:15. Which is agreeable to the sentiments of the heathen: Χρυσος τις κονις εστι, και αργυρος, Gold and silver are only a certain kind of earth. - Arist. Eth. Nicomach.

Should it be said, The gold and silver could not be two mules' burden; I answer, Let the quantity that Naaman brought with him be only considered, and it will be found to be as much, when put into two bags, as could be well lifted upon the backs of two mules, or as those beasts could conveniently carry. The silver itself would weigh 233lbs. 9oz. 15 1/2dwts., and the gold 1,140lbs. 7oz. 10dwts.; in the whole 1,374lbs. 50Z. 5 1/2dwts. Troy weight. Should it be objected that, taken in this sense, there is no visible connection between the former and latter clauses of the verse, I answer that there is as much connection between the words taken in this sense as in the other, for something must be brought in to supply both; besides, this makes a more complete sense than the other: "Shall there not, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of this silver and gold, [to apply it as he may think proper; I regard it not], for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, [for the cure he has now received; or by way of worship at any time]; but unto Jehovah." The reader may choose which of these interpretations he pleases.

2KINGS 5: 18 In this thing may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon. When I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant in this thing."

Verse 18

In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant - It is useless to enter into the controversy concerning this verse. By no rule of right reasoning, nor by any legitimate mode of interpretation, can it be stated that Naaman is asking pardon for offenses which he may commit, or that he could ask or the prophet grant indulgence to bow himself in the temple of Rimmon, thus performing a decided act of homage, the very essence of that worship which immediately before he solemnly assured the prophet he would never practice. The original may legitimately be read, and ought to be read, in the past, and not in the future tense. "For this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, for that when my master Hath Gone into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he Hath Leaned upon mine hand, that I also Have Bowed myself in the house of Rimmon; for my worshipping in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." This is the translation of Dr. Lightfoot, the most able Hebraist of his time in Christendom.

To admit the common interpretation is to admit, in effect, the doctrine of indulgences; and that we may do evil that good may come of it; that the end sanctifies the means; and that for political purposes we may do unlawful acts.

2KINGS 5: 19 He said to him, "Go in peace." So he departed from him a little way.

Verse 19

And he said unto him - There is a most singular and important reading in one of De Rossi's MSS., which he numbers 191. It has in the margin ק אל that is, "read אל lo, not, instead of לו lo, to him." Now this reading supposes that Naaman did ask permission from the prophet to worship in Rimmon's temple; to which the prophet answers, No; go in peace: that is, maintain thy holy resolutions, be a consistent worshipper of the true God, and avoid all idolatrous practices. Another MS., No. 383, appears first to have written לו to him, but to have corrected it immediately by inserting an א aleph after the ו vau; and thus, instead of making it אל no, it has made it לוּ lu, which is no word.

2KINGS 5: 20 But Gehazi the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Behold, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him, and take something from him."

Verse 20

My master hath spared - this Syrian - He has neither taken any thing from him for himself, nor permitted him to give any thing to me.

2KINGS 5: 21 So Gehazi followed after Naaman. When Naaman saw one running after him, he came down from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?"

Verse 21

He lighted down from the chariot - He treats even the prophet's servant with the profoundest respect, alights from his chariot, and goes to meet him.

Is all well? - **השלום** hashalom; Is it peace, or prosperity?

2KINGS 5: 22 He said, "All is well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Behold, even now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.'"

Verse 22

And he said - **שלום** shalom. It is peace; all is right. This was a common mode of address and answer.

There be come to me from mount Ephraim - There was probably a school of the prophets at this mount.

2KINGS 5: 23 Naaman said, "Be pleased to take two talents." He urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and laid them on two of his servants; and they carried them before him.

Verse 23

He - bound two talents of silver - It required two servants to carry these two talents, for, according to the computation above, each talent was about 120lbs. weight.

2KINGS 5: 24 When he came to the hill, he took them from their hand, and stored them in the house. Then he let the men go, and they departed.

Verse 24

When he came to the tower - The Chaldee, Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic understand the word **עפל** ophel, which we translate tower, as signifying a secret, dark, or hiding place. He was doing a deed of darkness, and he sought darkness to conceal it. He no doubt put them in a place little frequented, or one to which few had access besides himself. But the prophet's discerning spirit found him out.

2KINGS 5: 25 But he went in, and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, "Where did you come from, Gehazi?" He said, "Your servant went nowhere."

2KINGS 5: 26 He said to him, "Didn't my heart go with you, when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive groves and vineyards, and sheep and cattle, and male servants and female servants?"

 Verse 26

Went not mine heart with thee - The Chaldee gives this a good turn: By the prophetic spirit it was shown unto me, when the man returned from his chariot to meet thee.

Is it a time to receive money - He gave him farther proof of this all-discerning prophetic spirit in telling him what he designed to do with the money; he intended to set up a splendid establishment, to have men-servants and maid-servants, to have oliveyards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, This, as the Chaldee says, he had thought in his heart to do.

2KINGS 5: 27 Therefore the leprosy of Naaman will cling to you and to your seed forever." He went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow.

Verse 27

The leprosy of Naaman - shall cleave unto thee - Thou hast got much money, and thou shalt have much to do with it. Thou hast got Naaman's silver, and thou shalt have Naaman's leprosy. Gehazi is not the last who has got money in an unlawful way, and has got God's curse with it.

A leper as white as snow - The moment the curse was pronounced, that moment the signs of the leprosy began to appear. The white shining spot was the sign that the infection had taken place. See on Lev 13:2 (note), and the notes at Lev 13:58 (note).

1. Some have thought, because of the prophet's curse, The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and thy seed for ever, that there are persons still alive who are this man's real descendants, and afflicted with this horrible disease. Mr. Maundrell when he was in Judea made diligent inquiry concerning this, but could not ascertain the truth of the supposition. To me it appears absurd; the denunciation took place in the posterity of Gehazi till it should become extinct, and under the influence of this disorder this must soon have taken place. The for ever implies as long as any of his posterity should remain. This is the import of the word לעולם leolam. It takes in the whole extent or duration of the thing to which it is applied. The for ever of Gehazi was till his posterity became extinct.

2. The god Rimmon, mentioned 2Kgs 5:18, we meet with nowhere else in the Scriptures, unless it be the same which Stephen calls Remphan. See Act 7:43 (note), and the note there. Selden thinks that Rimmon is the same with Elion, a god of the Phoenicians, borrowed undoubtedly from the עליון Elion, the Most High, of the Hebrews, one of the names of the supreme God, which attribute became a god of the Phoenicians. Hesychius has the word Ράμας Ramas, which he translates ὁ ὑψιστος Θεος, the Most High God, which agrees very well with the Hebrew רמון Rimmon, from רמה ramah, to make high or exalt. And all these agree with the sun, as being the highest or most exalted in what is called the solar system. Some think Saturn is intended, and others Venus. Much may be seen on this subject in Selden De Diis Syris.

3. Let us not suppose that the offense of Gehazi was too severely punished.

1. Look at the principle, covetousness.

2. Pride and vanity; he wished to become a great man. 3, His lying, in order to impose on Naaman: Behold even now there be come to me, etc.

4. He in effect sells the cure of Naaman for so much money; for if Naaman had not been cured, could he have pretended to ask the silver and raiment?

5. It was an act of theft; he applied that to his own use which Naaman gave him for his master.

6. He dishonored his master by getting the money and raiment in his name, who had before so solemnly refused it.

7. He closed the whole by lying to his master, denying that he had gone after Naaman, or that he had received any thing from him. But was it not severe to extend the punishment of his crime to his innocent posterity? I answer, it does not appear that any of Gehazi's children, if he had any prior to this, were smitten with the leprosy; and as to those whom he might beget after this time, their leprosy must be the necessary consequence of their being engendered by a leprous father.

Reader, see the end of avarice and ambition; and see the truth of those words, "He that Will be rich, shall fall into temptation, and a snare, and into divers hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." - St. Paul.

4. We have already remarked the apparently severe and manifestly kind providence of God in this business.

1. A marauding party was permitted to spoil the confines of the land of Israel.

2. They brought away, to reduce to captivity, a little maid, probably the hope of her father's house.

3. She became Naaman's property, and waited on his wife.

4. She announced God and his prophet.

5. Naaman, on the faith of her account, took a journey to Samaria.

6. Gets healed of his leprosy.

7. Is converted to the Lord; and, doubtless, brought at least his whole family to believe to the saving of their souls. What was severe to the parents of the little maid was most kind to Naaman and his family; and the parents lost their child only a little time, that they might again receive her with honor and glory for ever. How true are the words of the poet! "Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face."

And see the benefits of a religious education! Had not this little maid been brought up in the knowledge of the true God, she had not been the instrument of so great a salvation. See my sermon on this subject 2Kgs 5:12 (note).