

## INTRODUCTION

Of all the stories we shall consider that feature lesser-known saints—this narrative about Elisha and Naaman is overflowing with so-called *lesser* characters. In this story from 2 Kings 5 we have one well-known major character, the prophet Elisha. But even Elisha was secondary compared to his mentor and teacher, the prophet Elijah. We read in 2 Kings 2 that Elijah was taken up into heaven and bestowed upon Elisha a double portion of his spirit. Elisha the prophet carried on a ministry of prophecy and miracles during the reign of Jehoram in the northern kingdom (Israel). Read the rest of the Elisha stories in 2 Kings—they are fascinating!

In our story the other main character is a Syrian general (Aram) named **Naaman**. He is described as a great man, a victorious commander and a mighty warrior---and what? **Naaman** was a **leper**. Although he had a prominent position and enjoyed the favor of the Syrian king he suffered from leprosy. The story actually begins on this note of pathos. Fortunately for Naaman the Syrians did not have quite the same notion of “**uncleanness**” as the Jews had so he had not been removed from his command or “cast out”, at least NOT YET!

**Example:** *leprosy* and *un-cleanness*

In this story **leprosy** is simply a disease. But you and I must read this story in light of Jewish sensibilities. We must not fail to see that leprosy for the OT and the NT Jew was worse than smallpox or polio or cancer or AIDS because of its social implications (AIDS is somewhat similar). How Elisha dealt with leprosy and how Jesus overcame leprosy teaches us a major religious lesson.

All of us are “**unclean.**” I don’t refer to physical hygiene or physical disease. I mean we are all “*morally unclean.*” We are all dirty on the inside. We all are tainted and stained by **sin**.

And **sin** does exactly what **leprosy** did. It separates us from God and from each other. If a friend is selfish, ignores you, says an unkind word to you---does that draw you closer or does it put distance between you? If you ignore God or disobey Him, does that bring you closer to the Almighty **or** does it separate you?

Our spiritual ancestors, the Jews, emphasized cleanliness in a way that also defined spiritual access to God. You know about the OT dietary regulations? Do you remember the Pharisees of Jesus’ day? Always “washing” and making rules about what was “kosher” or “holy” and what did not measure up. The OT Jews learned to avoid three things: **DIRT, DECAY** and **DISEASE**. These three would render you or your house “ritually unclean.”

**Leprosy** in Israel was the worst disease imaginable. By the way, “*biblical leprosy*” was in all likelihood NOT our modern version of leprosy called “**Hansen’s Disease.**” Leprosy in biblical times referred to a number of skin ailments. Unfortunately, a skin disorder is not hidden but



Naaman's responses: Requests *earth*—signals new devotion (altar);  
And asks *pardon* about his civil religion duties back in Syria.

## ACT V “Gehazi’s Crime & Punishment”

verses 20-27

Gehazi is greedy and takes treasure  
Gehazi is judged and punished.

## CONCLUSIONS

Contrasts between characters:

1. Powerful **Naaman** and weak servant **girl** (who had the *knowledge*?)
2. Well-to-do **general** and humble **prophet** (who wielded true *power*?)
3. Healthy **outsider** and the diseased **insider** (who experienced the *cure*?)

Faith, for Naaman, required humility and obedience. He lacked knowledge and a little servant girl showed him the way. He lacked humility and health and the prophet showed him the way. God's little people showed this powerful military leader where to get help and how to get straight with God. Naaman, cleansed and converted, learned what Gehazi, the prophet's servant, conveniently decided to forget. Grace and faith are what God uses to draw us to Himself.

Like Naaman we need help to become morally and spiritually clean. We need **outside** help to clean up our **inside** life. Naaman, an unbelieving foreigner from Syria, learned just this lesson. A prophet from Israel helped him on his way. And God affected the cleansing. Who can cleanse **you** from sin? From moral dirt, decay and disease? Who can restore your moral integrity? Who is able to forgive you and to forget your sin? God alone. God is the hero of the story.

Faith enables us first to be **grateful** and secondly to be **generous**. Gratitude and generosity are defining characteristics of Christian discipleship. Remember the great commandments? Love God—we love because He loved us first. We love in gratitude. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your brother or sister with generosity. Without these two characteristics you might doubt the presence of genuine faith.

Note the attitudes of our three named characters:

**Naaman**—*grateful*

**Elisha**—*generous*

**Gehazi**--*greedy*

Attitude. It's important, yes? By attitude I don't mean self-confidence or arrogance or sassiness. I mean the old-fashioned notion of attitude—an inclination of the heart and mind. In this story

from ancient Israel we have seen glimpses of humility, generosity, gratitude—the kind of attitudes that mark a Christian under the influence of God’s Spirit.

Robert Schuller—the *be-happy attitudes*

Zig Ziglar—“*attitude determines altitude.*”

These are not my favorite theologians. But they have a point. Attitude is important.

## CONCLUSION

In Luke 17 we read of another leper—actually ten lepers. Jesus encountered them near a village between Galilee and Samaria and he offered them healing. Like Elisha Jesus simply said the word and sent them to the priests to be certified as clean. And then one of the ten came back and thanked Jesus. Do you remember? Do you remember anything about the man who came back to say thank you? Who came back?

*A Samaritan.*

*An outsider.*

One who was *healed*. One who had a *grateful* heart.

One who realized his *inadequacy* & God’s *sufficiency*.

One who recognized the radical gift that is God’s *grace*.

In the year **1776**, a man by the name of **Augustus Toplady** wrote simple words which became an immortal hymn...

“*Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,*” Hymn \_\_\_\_\_ Read **verses 2 and 3**

Could my tears forever flow, Could my zeal no languor know,  
These for sin could not atone--Thou must save, and Thou alone:  
In my hand no price I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling.