

Old Testament History

The Divided Kingdom – Lesson 5

Background:

Introduction:

Naaman (pleasantness) was a successful Syrian general, and the commander of the armies of Benhadad II, king of Syria (c. 860-843 BC) during the time of Jehoram (Joram), king of Israel (852-841 BC). Naaman was afflicted with leprosy; and when the Hebrew slave-girl that waited on his wife told her of a prophet in Samaria who could cure her master, he obtained a letter from Benhadad and proceeded with it to Jehoram.

Relations between Damascus and Israel improved somewhat, enough that Benhadad II could send his chief captain, Naaman, to Israel to see if he could obtain relief through the famous prophet Elisha. The Syrian king also sent Naaman with ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. When Naaman arrived he delivered the letter to the king of Israel, which said, "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."

When Jehoram read this, he immediately concluded he was being set up as part of a conspiracy to justify Benhadad launching an attack and deposing Jehoram as king. The king reacted by tearing his clothes in anguish.¹ Upon hearing this, the prophet Elisha sent for Naaman.

We read of the dialogue between Naaman and the prophet in 2 Kings 5. The narrative contains all that is known of the Syrian commander.

Elijah sent word to Naaman that he must bathe himself seven times in the Jordan River. At first Naaman resented the humiliation and declined to do such a foolish thing. He was eventually persuaded to follow the prophet's advice, and was cured of his leprosy by dipping himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of Elisha. Naaman returned to Samaria, testifying of his gratitude by offering gifts to the prophet, and confessed his faith in Elisha's God. His cure is alluded to by Jesus (Luke 4:27).

¹ The king of Israel in the story of Naaman is most likely Jehoram (Joram), the younger son of Ahab, and the Syrian king was likely Benhadad II. Josephus (*Ant*, VIII, xv, 5) identifies Naaman as the man who drew his bow by chance, and fatally wounded Ahab (1 Kings 22:34). There is one reference to Naaman in the New Testament. In Luke 4:27, Jesus, rebuking Jewish exclusiveness, mentions "Naaman the Syrian."

Historical Notes:

Disease is a constant reminder of just how much things have changed since God pronounced a curse on the earth. At first, everything was "very good," but Adam's sin brought death and decay into the world.



One of the most well-known examples of debilitating disease is *Mycobacterium leprae*, the infectious bacterial agent of leprosy. Leprosy is discussed quite often in the Bible. While its definition in modern times is different from biblical times, there is no doubt that the definitions overlap.

The term "leprosy" (including leper, lepers, leprosy, leprous) occurs 68 times in the Bible – 55 times in the Old Testament (Hebrew = tsara'ath) and 13 times in the New Testament (Greek = lepros, lepra). In the Old Testament, the instances of leprosy most likely meant a variety of infectious skin diseases, and even mold and mildew on clothing and walls.

Leviticus chapter 13 provides detailed laws concerning leprosy and the handling of leprous clothing. The precise meaning of the leprosy in both the Old and New Testaments is still in dispute, but it probably includes the modern Hansen's disease (especially in the New Testament) and infectious skin diseases.

Outline:

- I. **Elisha and Naaman the Leper (2 Kings 5:1-27)**
 - A. Naaman's leprosy healed (2 Kings 5:1-19)
 - B. Gehazi's greed (2 Kings 5:20-27)
- II. **The Floating Ax Head and Divine Espionage (2 Kings 6:1-23)**
 - A. The floating ax head (2 Kings 6:1-7)
 - B. The blinded Syrians captured (2 Kings 6:8-23)
- III. **The Syrian Siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:24-33; 7:1-20)**
 - A. Syria besieges Samaria in famine (2 Kings 6:24-7:2)
 - B. The Syrians flee (2 Kings 7:3-20)

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The Exposition:

I. Elisha and Naaman the Leper (2 Kings 5:1-27)

A. Naaman's leprosy healed (2 Kings 5:1-19)

1. Who was Naaman and what was his affliction?
2. Who informed Naaman's wife of the prophet in Israel who could cure Naaman?
3. Why was the king of Israel (probably Jehoram/Joram) distressed when Naaman brought him a letter from the king of Syria (probably Benhadad II)?
4. Elisha informed the king of Israel to send Naaman to him. When Naaman arrived at Elisha's door, what message did Elisha send to him?
5. What was Naaman's reaction? Who persuaded him to follow Elisha's instructions?
6. After he was healed, what acknowledgement did Naaman make?
7. What did he offer Elisha? Did Elisha accept?

8. What did Naaman request?

B. Gehazi's greed (2 Kings 5:20-27)

1. Who was Elisha's servant and what sin did he commit?

2. How was he punished?

II. The floating ax head and divine espionage (2 Kings 6:1-23)

A. The floating ax head (2 Kings 6:1-7)

1. What miracle did Elisha perform at the Jordan River?

B. The blinded Syrians captured (2 Kings 6:8-23)

1. How did Elisha defeat the tactics of the king of Syria?

2. How did Elisha escape the Syrians sent to Dothan to capture him?

3. What did Elisha and the king of Israel do with the prisoners?

III. The Syrian Siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:24-33; 7:1-20)

A. Syria besieges Samaria in famine (2 Kings 6:24-7:2)

1. Who besieged Samaria?
2. What affliction did the Samaritans suffer as a result of the siege?
3. What abomination did the king of Israel encounter as he was on the wall of the city?
4. Who foretold this evil, and why would Israel suffer these afflictions (cf. Deuteronomy 28:15, 47-57) ²
5. Who did the king of Israel blame for these conditions?
6. While Elisha was in his house speaking with the elders, the king's messenger arrived at his door. What did Elisha prophesy regarding the famine that was caused by the siege?

² Ezekiel also prophesied this evil in reference to the final siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 5:5-12). According to Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, iii, 4), the same abomination occurred during the siege of Jerusalem prior to its destruction by the Romans in AD 70.

7. What did he prophesy to the doubting servant?

B. The Syrians flee (2 Kings 7:3-20)

1. What did four leprous men at the gate of Samaria reason among themselves?

2. What had the Lord done?

3. After partially plundering the Syrian camp, what did the four lepers do next?

4. What did the king of Israel order?

5. How was Elisha's prophecy regarding the king's servant fulfilled?

Application:

In your own words, explain the lessons we can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations?