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**THE HEALING OF
NAAMAN**

Lessons from 2 Kings 5

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“Go and wash...and be clean”

2 Kings 5:10,13

“He who is bathed...is completely clean”

John 13:10

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PREFACE

The healing of Naaman is not simply a miraculous story from the distant past. It is also of great interest for us who live at the beginning of the twenty-first century after the birth of Christ. In this booklet, we look at Naaman from a New Testament perspective. His cleansing is a wonderful illustration of the way of salvation, of our purification from sin, of the complete inner renewal that results from faith in Christ. Naaman was fully cleansed and, from that moment on, he dedicated his life to the living and true God. The unfortunate end of Gehazi, on the other hand, is a serious warning not to neglect so great a salvation.

1. NAAMAN'S LEPROSY

2 Kings 5:1

In this booklet, we shall consider Naaman's leprosy and its cure from a New Testament perspective. His cleansing provides a clear illustration of the purification of the sinner from sin. After first becoming briefly acquainted with the main characters of this Bible chapter, we shall deal with the question why leprosy is a figure of sin.

The main characters

Actually, this well-known story is a masterpiece of narrative power. A number of persons are portrayed here in a way that is sharper and clearer than in the most fascinating novel. That is not amazing since it is the Word of God, which is living and powerful. Let us first introduce the principal persons:

- (1) Naaman, commander of the Syrian army: a very esteemed and loved man, in the eyes of both his master and his servants (vv. 1, 13). Yet he had an unsolvable problem: he was a leper.
- (2) A young girl from the land of Israel. She lived as an exile in a foreign country, but remained faithful to the God of Israel. She had a great faith and she loved her enemies (v. 3). This young girl remains anonymous, but she is quite remarkable because of her spiritual qualities.
- (3) The king of Israel. His name is not mentioned either, but we suppose it was Jehoram, the son of the wicked Ahab. He was characterised by unbelief, despair, and suspicion (v. 7).
- (4) The prophet Elisha, the spokesman of the living God. He is the central character in this chapter and is

noted for his simplicity and decisiveness towards both the earthly rulers and his own servant Gehazi.

- (5) Gehazi, the servant of the prophet. He stands here in sharp contrast to his master because of his greed, ignorance, and worldliness. The deepest stirrings of his heart are laid bare, just as later a Judas was to be exposed by the Lord Himself. The chapter finishes as it begins: with a leper! Naaman's leprosy would cling for ever to Gehazi and his descendants (v. 27).

Naaman, commander of the Syrian army

Naaman was a very esteemed and popular man. His name also means "pleasantness" or "friendliness". The respect others had for him may have been due to his high-principled character. Both his master and his servants seem to have been sincerely sympathetic towards him (vv. 4-5, 13). However, in verse 1, the favour he had is connected with his military success, "because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria".

This last statement is a revealing one. It says, in fact, the Lord reigns! God governs not only his own people, but also the nations of the earth. And that is still the case, although His government is often unsearchable and His ways past finding out. This is the first lesson we learn here. God is not a local god, a mountain god or a god of the plains, or of one of the elements. That is what the Gentiles thought; that is what the Syrians also thought (1 Ki. 20:23ff.). But that was a mistake. God is the living God, the Lord of heaven and earth. He holds the whole world in His hands.

Secondly, however, He uses the nations, if necessary, to judge His own people. Aram (Syria) was such a disciplinary rod in the days of the wicked Ahab and his successors. And Assyria, the world power that was then emerging, would be that to an even greater extent (Isa. 10:5). Aram had already been threatening Israel from the north since the time of Solomon (1 Ki. 11:25). There were not always wars going on between the

two small states, for sometimes they would make peace treaties (compare the treaty between Ahab and Ben-Hadad in 1 Ki. 20:34). The relation between Syria and Israel at that time looked more like an armed peace. The same was the case here, since the king of Israel saw a pretext for a new war in this letter from the king of Syria (v. 7).

God, therefore, used this northern enemy as the rod of His anger. Aram means “high”, or “elevated”. In Aram we see a picture of the world as the proud adversary of God’s people, an enemy that is convinced of his own excellence and that speaks in a self-satisfied way about his own possibilities (compare Naaman’s attitude in v. 12). If the people of God find themselves in a bad condition, they must taste defeat in their confrontation with the world. And today, that is still the case. Are we aware of that? We assume that the victory of Naaman was indeed gained over Israel, although that is not said in so many words. There is an interesting Jewish tradition that says that Naaman was the archer that wounded King Ahab in the battle near Ramoth in Gilead (1 Ki. 22:34). Others think of a victory of Aram over Assyria. The second book of Kings, however, makes it clear that Elisha played an important part in the wars between Aram and Israel. The prophet even appeared in Damascus and was involved in the appointment of Hazael as king of Aram (2 Ki. 8:7ff.). All this belonged to God’s plan to chastise His people that had gone astray, and to call them to repentance.

Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, was therefore a great man. Everyone was favourably disposed towards him. He had even been an instrument in the hands of the Lord. We would say that he was successful in everything. Yet, it was all show, it was only the outward side of his life. Naaman had a hidden problem.

His leprosy

The beautiful portrait of verse 1 is marred by a serious “but”. It is said in such a striking way, “but he was a leper”. He

had an incurable disease, and nobody could help him. It is possible that the disease was still in its early phase, for verse 11 speaks of the affected “place” on his body. But the illness would spread insidiously and increasingly affect various parts of his body. That was a terrible prospect. What lay ahead for him? How could he go on living with this problem?

What does the Bible mean by leprosy? It seems to have been a comprehensive term, which also applied to clothing and houses (Lev. 13-14). According to some expositors, it comprised all sorts of rash and skin diseases. But the law concerning leprosy itself already makes a distinction between “the leprous plague” and “a harmless rash” (Lev. 13:39 NIV). When it concerns people, we will have to think specifically of leprosy, certainly so in the case of Naaman and Gehazi and in that of Miriam (Num. 12). We see other examples of it in the lives of Moses (Ex. 4:6), King Azariah or Uzziah (2 Ki. 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:16ff.).

We know that sickness and death, sorrow and sadness are all the consequences of sin (cf. Gen. 3:16ff.). Death entered the world through sin (Rom. 5:12). The connection between sin and sickness is, however, a very complex matter. But concerning leprosy, it can be said that this illness gives a very striking picture of sin and its deadly, destructive consequences. The following arguments can be mentioned to support this:

- (1) Leprosy was an infectious disease, that continued to spread insidiously and affect the entire body. Similarly, we know that nothing good dwells in our sinful flesh (Rom. 7:18).
- (2) The leper was regarded as living dead. Aaron spoke about his sister “as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed” (Num. 12:12). As sinners, we are dead in our trespasses and sins, and alienated from the life of God (Eph. 2:1; 4:18). Only God can make us alive (cf. 2 Ki. 5:7).

- (3) The leper was considered unclean. He had to tear his clothes as a sign of mourning, and to cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" (Lev. 13:45). In the same way, the uncleanness and the shamefulness of sin cling to us, by nature.
- (4) The leper stayed outside the camp because of his uncleanness, outside the place where a Holy God dwelled in the midst of His people (Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2; 12:14; 2 Ki. 7:3; 2 Chron. 26:21). We once lived without God in the world, being alienated from Him.
- (5) The leper was not cured by a physician, but was cleansed in the presence of the priest. The ceremonial cleansing on the basis of the prescribed sacrifices (among them a trespass and a sin offering, to make atonement for the healed leper), prefigured the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only His redemptive work was able to take away the defilement of sin. Furthermore, as people who have been cleansed by His death, we are to walk in newness of life by the power of His resurrection. The anointing with the Holy Spirit (the "oil") will enable us to do so.

Therefore, when we look at Naaman the leper, we really see a picture of ourselves. We may have all kinds of talents. We may be successful. People may appreciate us. Yet, in everyone's life there is a serious "but", i.e. the problem of sin. The "sickness of sin" affects us all and ruins us. We ourselves cannot solve the deadly problem that ruins our lives. But what is impossible with men is possible with God.

Questions

1. In which of the five main characters of this story do you recognize something of yourself?
2. Are you perhaps a proud worldly person like Naaman?

3. Do you admit that, because of your sin, you are incurably ill? Do you realize that you are undone and lost, and that you are unable to save yourself?

2. AN UNEXPECTED ADVICE

2 Kings 5:2-9

We saw in the first chapter that leprosy is a figure of sin. We now see how a young girl from the land of Israel showed the way of salvation to the leprous commander of the Syrian army. It also appears here that no man could help Naaman: neither the king of Aram, nor the king of Israel. The gods of Damascus could not bring relief either. Salvation could only be found with the God of Israel. That is why Naaman had to go to Elisha, the representative of the living and true God.

A young girl from the land of Israel

Humanly speaking, Naaman's problem was unsolvable. But, fortunately, his healing makes it very clear that salvation was to be found with the God of Israel. He alone could cleanse Naaman from his leprosy. Yes, He even saves us from the sores of sin. But then we have to come to Him in faith, and not expect our salvation from the "magicians" of this world (cf. v. 11). It is the living and true God who can help us.

It is so touching that a young girl from the land of Israel showed the way of salvation to the powerful commander of the Syrian army. In the face of her mistress, she testified very simply to her faith: "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy" (v. 3). Bands of Syrian raiders had kidnapped and sold her at the slave market in Damascus. In fact, that was one of the curses that had come upon God's people. Moses had already predicted this: "Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all day long; and there shall be no strength in your hand" (Deut. 28:32). In this way, this young girl had come to find herself in the household of the commander of the Syrian

army (v. 2). Naaman's wife had become her mistress. God had permitted this and He had also led it this way, for He had His own reasons for it.

Fortunately, this girl did not allow herself to be led by feelings of hatred in her new surroundings. Despite her young age and despite the difficult circumstances in which she found herself in the foreign country, she testified to the God of Israel and even loved her enemies. Likewise, we as believers are representatives, ambassadors for Christ and we should be pleased to give an account for the hope that is in us (2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Pet. 3:15). Are we aware of this high calling?

This young girl had great faith in her God and in His prophet. How did she know that Elisha was willing and able to heal Commander Naaman of his leprosy? It was only her faith that whispered this into her ear. Elisha had performed all kinds of miracles, but not yet healed a leper. We can read that in the New Testament. Although there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, none of them was cleansed (Luke 4:27). After all, God had to punish His people because they served idols. Not one of the Israelites was cleansed in those days, except Naaman the Syrian. God's grace thus extended to the Gentiles.

On the way to the king of Israel

Naaman's wife believed the words of her little female slave, and she passed them on to her husband. And Naaman passed them on to his lord, the king of Syria (v. 4). The illness of the commander of the army had meanwhile become known publicly. One thing led to another, and the matter was dealt with in a diplomatic way (even in medical matters, this was not uncommon in the ancient world). The aim of this was that the king of Israel would subsequently approach "the prophet in Samaria" who, after all, was his subordinate according to worldly standards.

Naaman had a letter from his king, as well as a generous gift. The king of Syria was willing to personally share from his own wealth in order to help out one of his best subjects. The gift consisted of a quantity of as much as three hundred and forty kilograms of silver, seventy kilograms of gold and ten sets of clothing (v. 5). That represented an enormous fortune. The gold and silver had a value of millions of pounds.

Naaman arrived in Samaria, with the letter 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" (v. 6). His arrival caused quite an upheaval at the court of the king of Israel, since he saw this letter as some kind of pretext, a provocation of war (v. 7). In despair, he tore his clothes. Such a pessimistic reaction could be expected from king Jehoram (cf. 3:13). The king knew very well that he was not a son of the gods to whom healing power could be attributed (that is how the heathen nations all too often looked at their kings). But he took God's name in vain by saying: "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy?" Actually this marked the seriousness of the situation: only God who had sent the mortal ailment could give relief and make the dead one alive.

To Elisha

It seemed that king Jehoram did not think of Elisha at all, although in those days the prophet was the channel of God's blessing. God reached out His saving hand to Israel by means of His servant. But Elisha was not honoured in his home town. Apparently, he lived again in the capital (cf. 2:25; 6:32). He had to take the initiative himself. So he sent the following message to the king: "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (v. 8b).

So Naaman finally came to Elisha the prophet, who is presented here as "the man of God" (v. 8a). Now he had come to the right person, for "the man of God" was the representative

of the living God, who indeed had the power to kill and to make alive. There was still, however, another problem. Naaman was conscious of his high position. He came in his own dignity, “with his horses and chariot” (v. 9). Full of pride he stood at the door of the house of Elisha. But we cannot come to God in that way. Naaman could not be helped on his own conditions, but only on the conditions that God offered to him. He had to learn that, as we shall see. But that is precisely what every sinner has to learn: to approach God, in the awareness of one’s own unworthiness. There is no sense in trying to improve myself or to earn salvation by my own merits. I must come as I am, as a lost sinner, and that is how God will accept me. He does so by free grace.

Questions

1. Are you also, like this young girl, a representative, a witness of the true and living God among your acquaintances?
2. Do you expect help and salvation from man, from the rulers of this world?
3. Or are you convinced that only the great Prophet, the true Man of God, i.e. Christ, can bring salvation?

3. NAAMAN'S BAPTISM IN THE RIVER JORDAN

2 Kings 5:10-14

We now see that Naaman humbled himself and immersed himself seven times in the river Jordan. He did not stay, however, in the water grave, but came out as a new person. That is a splendid example for us as Christians, for we also have experienced a complete renewal by putting on the new man.

Go and wash in the Jordan

Elisha did not find it necessary to speak to Naaman personally. He had his wise intentions for acting in that way, as would quickly become evident. For Naaman had to learn to humble himself. His pride had to be broken. So the prophet himself did not come out of the house, but simply sent a messenger to him with the order: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times" (v. 10a). At the same time, he added the clear promise: "(...) and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean" (v. 10b). Literally, it says: "(...) and your flesh shall come back to you" (cf. JND; KJV). After all, one of the terrible consequences of leprosy is that the sick person's flesh is eaten away, as it were.

The powerful commander of the Syrian army, however, did not like this command. He interpreted the message of the prophet as a personal insult. He had expected a completely different treatment, a complicated ritual, as he was probably used to with the heathen magicians in his own country (v. 11). Surely he was deserving of an honourable treatment. After all, he was not just somebody. Surely he was able to reward Elisha nicely for his services, wasn't he? What an order: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times!" What a humiliation! Were not the

clear and watery rivers of Damascus, the Abanah (or, Amanah) and the Pharpar, better than that narrow and muddy Jordan? Couldn't he have taken a bath at home?

Naaman could have thought up that remedy himself (v. 12). However, he did not want to give up the rivers, nor the gods of Damascus. Only later would he recognize that there was no God in all the earth, except in Israel (v. 15). Naaman was angry and felt deeply hurt. There his command to the charioteer could be heard: Turn the reins! Go back home! It must have been a quiet procession that started back in a northerly direction and descended from the mountains of Samaria.

Maybe it happened at a resting place not far from the Jordan that Naaman's servants had the courage to address their master (v. 13). They did it very tactfully and with the necessary respect. They honoured their commander as a father. They gave advice that was not asked for, but it was very sober and sound. If Naaman had been commissioned to do something difficult, he would have done so! He would have employed every possible means to become healthy again. Now, however, the prophet had given a simple order: "Wash, and be clean." Why not then listen to those simple words of the man of God?

New life in Christ

It is to Naaman's credit that he was prepared to listen to the words of his servants. He did not act in a superior way. "So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God" (v. 14a). Yet it must have been very difficult for him to humble himself so much in the presence of his inferiors. He had to come down from his high chariot, put off his clothes, and to sink into the Jordan, so to speak. But he did it, although nothing was left of his pride and nobility. Furthermore, he did not do it just to please his servants. He not only listened to them, but he complied with the saying of the man of God, as our verse says. He obeyed God.

This is a beautiful illustration of the way of salvation. We must become conscious of our fallen state, our sinfulness, our leprous condition before God. We must humble ourselves before Him and descend from the “high chariot” of our natural pride and own importance. We must follow the path that He points out to us in His Word. The divine remedy is that we confess our sins, put off the old man and descend into the “river of death”. In other words, we must identify ourselves by faith with a Christ who died for our sins. There is no other way to be saved and cleansed, to receive new life. “No one comes to the Father except through Me”, says the Lord Jesus (John 14:6).

Naaman was obedient and immersed himself seven times in the river Jordan. The name Jordan means “going down” or “flowing down”. This river rises between the Lebanon and Mount Hermon and flows to the Dead Sea, situated far below sea level. This is a wonderful type of the death of Christ, for He descended from the heights of heaven and made Himself of no reputation. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death. The number seven speaks of perfection. Naaman had to immerse himself seven times in the Jordan. He had to go down completely. Nothing of the old man should remain visible. Likewise, we as believers were buried with Christ through baptism into death. We have been united together in the likeness of His death (Rom. 6:4-5).

But Naaman did not remain in the water grave. He came out a new creature: “(...) and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (v. 14b). That is a picture of the new life that we have received as Christians. We have not only died with Christ, but have also risen with Him to a new life.

A sevenfold blessing

This part of the text (v. 14b) sheds light on a number of important truths from the New Testament. More or less by coincidence, I have come up with seven points. Naaman’s baptism in the Jordan illustrates that:

- (1) We have been cleansed from the sins and iniquities that clung to us, and defiled us in the eyes of a holy God (John 13:10; Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 1:22).
- (2) We have been delivered from the power of sin that ruined us and spread insidiously in our lives (Rom. 8:2).
- (3) We have been born again (John 3:3,5).
- (4) We have been made alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13).
- (5) We have entered a new world. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away (2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 3:5).
- (6) We have put off the old man and have put on the new man (Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10).
- (7) From now on we should live in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

Here too, it appears that Scripture usually speaks of the cleansing of the leper, and hardly ever of his cure. Likewise, sin makes us unclean before God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil. The promise of the prophet was: "(...) and you shall be clean" (v. 10b). In keeping with this, we read here: "(...) and he was clean" (v. 14b). We too, as disciples of Christ are "completely clean" because of the word which He has spoken to us (John 13:10; 15:3).

Questions

1. Are you willing to humble yourself before God?
2. Have you by faith been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, and have you expressed that in baptism?
3. Do you also walk in newness of life?

4. WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

2 Kings 5:15-19

In this fourth chapter, we see how Naaman, after being cleansed, only wanted to serve the God of Israel. This is an important lesson for us, for as Christians we also desire to serve and worship the living and true God.

Naaman's new life of gratitude

What was Naaman's reaction to his healing and cleansing? He returned to Elisha in order to express his gratitude (v. 15a). In this respect, he showed great resemblance to the Samaritan in Luke 17, a stranger who also returned to thank God after being cleansed from his leprosy. We should also do that as the redeemed of the Lord. We should fall at our Saviour's feet and honour Him for our salvation.

After our conversion we should also show a new obedience. And we see a type of this here. There was not a trace of pride left in Naaman when he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides. He did not remain sitting in his chariot, as he had done at their first meeting, but he went into the prophet's house. Very humbly, he spoke about himself as Elisha's servant: "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift (lit. "blessing") from your servant" (v. 15b).

Naaman had come to know the true God, the God of Israel, Creator of heaven and earth. He recognized that all other gods were idols, and were entirely powerless to save (cf. Isa. 45:20). He wanted to show his thankfulness to the true God, and therefore offered a gift to the man of God. It was done with good intentions, but he had to learn the lesson of free grace. That principle holds true for us as well. We cannot pay anything for our salvation. Salvation in Christ is entirely free. Divine

blessing is only from above, it comes down from the Father of lights.

That is why the prophet decisively turned down a reward. He was just a servant of the living God and could not accept anything for the miracle of Naaman's cleansing. Although the latter insisted that he must accept something, he kept on refusing (v. 16). This principle also holds good for us: "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). It is a corrupt way of thinking to suppose that godliness, i.e. the service of God, is a means of gain (1 Tim. 6:5). Gehazi, however, was such a person who had lost the way of truth, as we will yet see.

Living in God's presence

But Naaman's heart was in the right place. No matter what, he wanted to

serve the God of Israel. Although he could not pay anything to the prophet for his cleansing, he could ask him for something. For Naaman really wanted to start a new life. That is also true for us. After we have been raised with Christ to a new life, we should walk in the good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

The commander of the Syrian army had the following wish: "Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD" (v. 17). Here we have a clear proof of his conversion, a beautiful fruit of the new life that he had received. When we have turned to God from idols, we only desire, from that moment on, to serve the living and true God (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9).

And we should serve Him according to His revealed will, on a basis that answers to His holiness — just as Naaman wished to serve Him on holy ground. Probably he made from these loads of earth "an altar of earth" for the Lord and sacrificed on it his burnt offerings and peace offerings (cf. Ex. 20:24). The patriarchs of Israel had acted in the same way.

They frequently made an altar of earth, as we see in the book of Genesis. The service of the true God takes shape in our personal worship, our personal conduct, but also in our public worship.

Do we have such an altar at which we call on the name of the Lord? As Christians we do have an altar, as Hebrews 13:10 clearly tells us. Not a literal altar of earth, or a bronze or gold altar, but an altar in the metaphorical sense of the word. We have a place to meet God, or to express it even better, a Person through whom we draw near. Christ Himself is the true Centre of our worship, and by Him we have access to God and freedom to enter the Holiest (Heb. 10:19; 13:15). Do we serve our God with a thankful heart, personally and together with others? Do we draw near to Him as priests? Do we offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name? Do we pay tribute to Him for His great salvation? Do we realize that we owe our cleansing to Him alone?

Living without worldly compromise

But we see something else here. Such a life in the presence of God will certainly bring difficulties, for we cannot serve both God and the world. The people who surround us will insist on making a compromise. Naaman also had such a problem. He was immediately aware of it, and mentioned it in all honesty to Elisha (v. 18). His master, the king of Syria, would probably remain a servant of idols. Should he enter the idol temple as the servant on whose hand the king leaned (cf. 2 Kings 7:2)? Would the LORD forgive him if, as part of his duties, he were to bow down before Rimmon?*

He did not get a complicated answer. The prophet simply said, "Go in peace" (v. 19). That does not imply that Elisha approved of such ambiguity. It was impossible to serve both God and Rimmon, even if the latter only happened for tradition's sake. God does not allow a believer to have communion with idols (1 Cor. 10:14ff.). But He would solve this

difficulty in His time and in His way. Elisha was convinced of that, and therefore he could ease Naaman's mind.

Naaman could go on his way rejoicing, as it is so beautifully said of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39). Nobody could take from him the peace that he had found. Thus it was also a very wise response. People who have only recently been converted must not be confronted with a long list of rules and regulations. They must learn to walk by faith. God Himself will lead them in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, and He will help them to solve their problems.

* Rimmon was the god of the Syrians, and the Assyrian god of thunder. He was the same as Hadad, from whom the name of Ben-Hadad has been derived. Sometimes both names occur combined in the order Hadad Rimmon (Zech. 12:11).

Questions

1. Are you cleansed from your sins, and are you thankful for your salvation?
2. Are you a worshipper? Do you have "an altar" to serve the Lord (cf. Heb. 13:10)?
3. Is your new life as a Christian without worldly compromise?

5. THE END OF GEHAZI

2 Kings 5:20-27

After we have seen how Naaman was cleansed and how he dedicated his life to God, we now turn our attention to the unfortunate end of Gehazi. This is a serious warning for nominal Christians.

Gehazi's greed

The end of this Bible chapter forms the dark counterpart of the account of Naaman's cleansing. Gehazi's greed contrasted sharply with Elisha's unselfishness. The servant's lies accentuated the sincerity of his master even more sharply. We see here too that God tests the hearts and minds (Ps. 7:9; Jer. 11:20). He discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12). He even brings to light the hidden things of darkness and reveals the counsels of the hearts (1 Cor. 4:5).

God has the power to expose hypocrites, for He knows everything. So here we hear what Gehazi thought, and the plan he conceived (v. 20). He assumed that his secret would remain hidden. He did not take the living God into account. What a miscalculation, what a mistake to think that he could misuse his position and the authority of the man of God without serious consequences!

Gehazi, who was driven by his desire for money and wealth, went from one sin to another. It was a sad list of sinful lies and cheating, of contempt for his master and misuse of the latter's authority. Indeed, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). And covetousness is nothing less than idolatry (Col. 3:5). Gehazi even had the nerve to swear to God that he would run after Naaman and take something from him: "(...) but as the LORD lives." It was a blatantly false oath! Gehazi appeared to be pious, but he was soon to be exposed.

The servant of the prophet had little respect for his master's dealings. It was incomprehensible to him that his master had helped that Syrian, that enemy of Israel, with no strings attached. Apparently he attached little importance to the fact that because of it, Naaman had come to know the God of Israel and had learned to live by grace. It would be a pity to miss such an opportunity! Quickly he ran after him to make up for this oversight!

Naaman saw someone running after him. He jumped from his chariot and said with concern, "Is all well?" (v. 21). Gehazi had his lies ready. Two (poor) prophets had come to Elisha. Now the question was whether they could have a talent of silver and two changes of garments. Of course, Naaman replied. He was glad to be able to show his gratitude in this way, and gave double the amount of silver asked for. With the help of Naaman's servants, Gehazi carried everything to the hill near Elisha's house. There he said goodbye to the men. He hid the treasure in a safe place (vv. 22-24).

His confrontation with Elisha

As if nothing at all had happened, Gehazi went in and stood before his master. He posed as a faithful servant. But Elisha asked a searching question: "Where did you go, Gehazi?" (v. 25a). Such penetrating questions are characteristic of Scripture. In the book of Genesis, for example, there are three essential questions: "Where are you?" "What have you done?" "Where have you come from, and where are you going?" (Gen. 3:9; 4:10; 16:8).

With a final lie, Gehazi tried to cover up his deceit: "Your servant did not go anywhere" (v. 25b). Literally, it says that he did not go this way or that way. Thereupon followed his unmasking, for God had revealed the truth to Elisha. He had seen what had occurred: "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you?" (v. 26a).

Elisha posed yet one last serious question: “Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants?” (v. 26b). Gehazi thought indeed that this was a special opportunity to build a new life for himself. But even today, believers are easily attracted by material prosperity! But if we make use of this question in a somewhat freer way, we see here that Gehazi did not recognize the true nature of the days he lived in. He did not realize it was a time in which judgment was at hand (cf. Luke 12:56). He did not understand that it was better to bear disgrace with the man of God than to live in material prosperity. But what about ourselves? Do we realize that we live in the last days? Do we have understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do (cf. 1 Chron. 12:32)? Do we wish to be faithful servants of the Lord, who look for His appearing?

His punishment

Gehazi was justly punished with the same illness Naaman had been cured of. Now that he had wrongfully appropriated Naaman’s silver, he also received his illness. Furthermore, it was a collective punishment (cf. Josh. 7:24; Dan. 6:24). The leprosy of Naaman would cling to him and his descendants for ever (v. 27a).

Then Gehazi had to leave his master: “And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow” (v. 27b; cf. Ex. 4:6; Num. 12:10). Completely marked by the illness, “he went out from his presence”. It was a moral impossibility for him to stay close to Elisha, although he could have been pronounced clean according to the law concerning leprosy (Lev. 13:13). This severe punishment was in accordance with the gravity of his sins:

- (1) He did not take into account that the love of money was a root of all kinds of evil.
- (2) He yielded to his fleshly desires for money and wealth.

- (3) He misused the authority of the man of God before Naaman.
- (4) He lied to the prophet.
- (5) He cast a slur on God's graciousness towards a non-Israelite.
- (6) He did not show a correct understanding of the end time in which he lived.

But how terrible for someone who had lived so close to Elisha, to have to depart in this manner from the presence of the prophet! We do not know whether he ever saw him again. This is a serious warning for professing Christians, for all those who are familiar with Christ, the Man of God, yet do not know Him with their hearts.

The end of Gehazi makes us think of what Paul, an important New Testament prophet, wrote to the Corinthians who professed to know the Lord. He gave them a serious warning: "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22). Such a person must face eternal punishment, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thess. 1:9).

Questions

1. Have you ever examined yourself to see whether you are a true believer (cf. 2 Cor. 13:5)?
2. Do you realize that, like Gehazi, you are guilty when you have not really turned to God from idols?
3. Do you seek the presence of Christ, the true Man of God, with an honest heart?