

James Crichton

Gehazi

The servant of Elisha

2 Kings 4:8-37; 5:20-27; 8:1-6

1. His Ready Service

Mention is made of him on three different occasions¹. He is first brought under notice in the story of the wealthy Shunammite (2 Kings 4:8-37) who provided in her house special accommodation for Elisha, which suited his simple tastes, and of which he availed himself as often as he passed that way. By command of his master, Gehazi called the Shunammite, that she might be rewarded by the prophet for her liberal hospitality. Failing to elicit from the lady a desire for any particular favor, and being himself at a loss to know how to repay her kindness, Elisha consulted with his servant, whose quick perception enabled him to indicate to his master the gift that would satisfy the great woman's heart.

When on the death of her child the Shunammite sought out the man of God at Carmel, and in the intensity of her grief laid hold of the prophet's feet, "Gehazi came near to thrust her away" (2 Kings 4:27) – perhaps not so much from want of

¹ ge-ha'-zi (except in 2 Kings 4:31; 5:25; 8:4,5, where it is gechazi, perhaps "valley of vision"). He was the confidential servant of Elisha. Various words are used to denote his relation to his master. He is generally called Elisha's "boy" (na`ar), servant or personal attendant; he calls himself (5:25) his master's servant or slave (‘ebhedh), and if the reference be to him in 4:43 the Revised Version, margin, he receives the designation "minister" (meshareth), or chief servant of Elisha.

sympathy with the woman as from a desire to protect his master from what he considered a rude importunity. Then Elisha, who had discovered of himself (2 Kings 4:27), from what the woman had said (2 Kings 4:28), the cause of her sorrow, directed Gehazi, as a preliminary measure, to go at once to Shunem and lay his staff upon the face of the dead child. Gehazi did so, but the child was "not awaked."

In this narrative Gehazi appears in a favourable light, as a willing, efficient servant, jealous of his master's honour; a man of quick observation, whose advice was worth asking in practical affairs.

2. His Grievous Sin

Gehazi, however, reveals himself in a different character in connection with the healing of Naaman (2 Kings 5:20-27). As soon as the Syrian general had taken his departure with his retinue from the house of Elisha, the covetous spirit of Gehazi, which had been awakened by the sight of the costly presents the prophet had refused, was no longer able to restrain itself. Running after Naaman, Gehazi begged in the prophet's name a talent of silver (400 pounds = ,000) and two changes of raiment, alleging, as a specious reason for Elisha's change of mind, the arrival at his master's house of two poor scholars of the prophet, who would require help and maintenance. Naaman, glad to have the opportunity he desired of showing his gratitude to Elisha, urged Gehazi to take two talents and sent two servants with him to carry the money and the garments.

When they came to the hill in the neighbourhood of the prophet's house, Gehazi dismissed the men and concealed the treasure. Thereafter, with a bold front, as if he had been attending to his ordinary duties, he appeared before his master who at once inquired, "Whence, Gehazi?" (Hebrew). On receiving the ready answer that he had not been anywhere, Elisha, who felt sure that the suspicion he entertained regarding his beloved servant, his very "heart" (2 Kings 5:26), was well grounded, sternly rebuked him for the dishonour he had brought upon God's cause, and called down upon him and his family forever the loathsome disease of the man whose treasures he had obtained by his shameful lie. "And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."

By this narrative confidence in Gehazi is somewhat unexpectedly and rudely shaken. The active, zealous servant stands confessed a liar and a thief. Gehazi's sin branched out in different directions. By his falsehood he deceived Naaman and

misrepresented Elisha; he not only told a lie, but told a lie about another man, and that man his master and friend. Further, he brought true religion into disrepute; for it was not a time (2 Kings 5:26) for a servant of God to allow any commercial idea to be associated with the prophet's work in the mind of the Syrian general to whom God's power had been so strikingly manifested and when many for worldly gain pretended to be prophets. But while Gehazi's sin had its various ramifications, its one root was covetousness, "the love of money (which) is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10).

3. His Probable Repentance

Once more Gehazi is mentioned (2 Kings 8:1-6) as having been summoned, leper though he was, by King Jehoram to give him an account of all the great things Elisha had done. And when he came to the story of the restoration of the Shunammite's child to life, the woman herself appeared before the king along with her son, craving to be reinstated in her house and land of which she had been dispossessed during her seven years' absence from her native country in a time of famine. Gehazi testified to the identity of both mother and son, with the result that the king at once ordered the restoration not only of all her former possessions, but also of all the profits her land had yielded during her sojourn in Philistia.

The appearance and conduct of Gehazi on this occasion give some ground for the hope that he had repented of his sin and could now be trusted to speak the truth; and the pleasure he seemed to take in rehearsing the wonderful deeds of a master who, though kind and indulgent to a stranger, was hard upon him, may even warrant the belief that in his earlier days there was some good thing in him toward his master's God. If also, as has been indicated above, the word used in 2 Kings 4:43 (meshareth) applies to him – the same as is applied to Elisha (1 Kings 19:21) – we may be the more readily inclined to see in the history of Gehazi how one besetting sin may prevent a man from taking his natural place in the succession of God's prophets. Let us hope, however, that though Gehazi became a "lost leader," "just for a handful of silver," he was yet saved by a true repentance from becoming a lost soul.

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Bibliography information: Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'GEHAZI'". "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia". 1915.

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