

THE SYRIAN ARMY COMMANDER NAAMAN MIRACULOUSLY HEALED: A LESSON ON GOD’S POWER TO CONVERT AND HEAL A PERSON 2 KINGS 05:01–27

Introduction

Think of this fact: God’s power is so forceful, so energizing that it can heal a person of any disease or any affliction. But that is not all: God has the power to convert a person, to change a life totally. No matter how depraved or sad a life has become, God can turn that life around and give the person a new beginning, a new start, a brand new life. God’s power is omnipotent and unlimited. No matter how high a person is exalted in this life or how low a person has been debased, if he or she senses emptiness or loneliness or purposelessness or faces one of the many crises, trials or temptations of this life — if the person craves a new beginning, a fresh start — God’s power can meet the need of that person’s heart. This is the practical message of the present story.

Actually, this Scripture is one of the most well-known stories in the Old Testament. It is the story of Naaman, the chief commander of the Syrian army who was stricken with the dreaded disease of leprosy. In a story that reaches the height of drama, Naaman confronts the prophet Elisha and is both healed of his leprosy and converted to the LORD. This is the compelling story of a military commander who reached the summit of power in one of the greatest nations of his day and time, the story of a man who was second only to his king. This is: *The Syrian Army Commander Naaman Miraculously Healed: A Lesson on God’s Power to Convert and Heal a Person, 2 Kings 5:1-27*

- I. The hope aroused in the brilliant but sick army commander: he listened to a strong witness for the LORD (vv. 1-7).
- II. The healing and conversion of Naaman: he laid aside his pride and obeyed God’s Word (vv. 8-19).
- III. The greed of Elisha’s servant Gehazi: he exposed a heart filled with worldly lusts and covetousness (vv. 20-27).

I. *2 Kings 05:01–07 The Hope for Healing Aroused in the Brilliant but Sick Army Commander*

Hope was aroused in the brilliant but sick commander of the Syrian army, Naaman. Somehow Naaman had caught leprosy, a very serious skin disease that would eventually disable him. But great hope was aroused within Naaman. And note why: because he listened to a strong witness for the LORD. The story is compelling and dramatic:

1. Naaman was a man of noble character, an honourable commander who had won victory after victory on the battlefield for the Syrians. He was a courageous and heroic soldier. Furthermore, in the eyes of the king and the Syrian citizens, he was a great man held in the highest esteem.
2. But Naaman had leprosy. The Hebrew word “leprosy” (tsara or sara) refers to some form of skin disease that was incurable and that eventually incapacitated the victim. Because of his wealth and his royal position as commander, Naaman had access to the best medical help and technology of that day; but he could find no cure. Apparently the disease would ultimately be fatal. Sadly, this man of noble character was caught in a helpless and hopeless situation due to his incurable disease.
3. Yet suddenly, from the most unexpected source, Naaman’s hope was aroused (v. 2). Several small groups of Syrian soldiers had raided some of the border towns of Israel and taken captive a young girl. When the combat troops returned to Syria, they gave the young girl to Naaman, who assigned her the task of serving his wife. On one occasion when Naaman was home from fighting, the young slave girl strongly urged her mistress to encourage Naaman to visit the prophet Elisha who lived in Samaria (v. 3). She believed the LORD would heal Naaman through Elisha.
4. Naaman believed the young girl’s testimony, at least enough to seek out Elisha (vv. 4-7). Appealing to the Syrian king, he secured permission to go to Samaria. The king, who was probably Ben-Hadad II, gave Naaman a letter of introduction to the king of Israel and a large gift to pay for the services of the prophet. Note that the Syrian king assumed that the prophet served in the royal court of Israel’s king Joram and that the gift he sent was huge: 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and 10 sets of royal clothing which no doubt were very expensive (v. 5).

With a heart full of great hope and expectation, Naaman travelled to Samaria and presented the letter of introduction to King Joram (vv. 6-7). The letter requested Joram to heal Naaman of his leprosy, no doubt by assigning the task to Elisha, whom he thought served as one of the royal prophets. But as soon as Joram read the letter, he was gripped by a dreadful fear, for he knew that neither he nor any of the royal prophets had the power to heal the Syrian commander. And he feared when the commander returned unhealed from Samaria, Syria would have an excuse to invade Israel. In fact, Joram thought this was the very purpose of the letter: to give Syria an excuse to attack. So much fear and anxiety gripped Joram’s heart that he never even thought of seeking the help of the prophet Elisha.

Thought 1. Hope was aroused within Naaman, the hope of being healed of an incurable, disabling disease. But Naaman’s hope was aroused for one reason and one reason only: he listened to the testimony, the witness of a young slave girl, and he accepted what she said. He believed that the LORD, the God of the prophet Elisha,

could heal him. Believing the message of the LORD'S power was what aroused hope within Naaman. The same hope can be ours if we will simply believe in the LORD, trusting His power to take effect in our lives. No matter what circumstances or crises we may face, we too can have hope. If we will just believe the witness, the testimony about the LORD, then we will be saved and delivered from the bondages and enslavements of this world. No matter what may attack us or grip our lives, God will infuse His power within us to conquer and to deliver us. But the condition is faith: we must believe, trust the message, the witness about the LORD.

Luke 8:15 *“But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”*

John 3:15-16 *That everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

John 5:24 *“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*

John 6:28-29 *Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

John 20:31 *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Ga1 3:6 *Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

Eph 6:16 *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows [temptations, trials] of the evil one.*

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

2 Chr 20:20 *Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”*

Prov 15:31 *He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.*

II. *2 Kings 05:08–19 The Healing and Conversion of Naaman*

Naaman's hope was fully realized and completely fulfilled: he was healed and converted. The event is drama at its best, and most exciting:

1. Elisha heard about Naaman's visit and the king's fearful reaction, so he sent an offer to help the king in his distress (v. 8). Somewhat rebuking the king, Elisha encouraged him to send Naaman to him and he would prove there was a true prophet in Israel, a prophet who could call upon the LORD to heal this Syrian commander. In referring to himself as a real prophet, Elisha was claiming that the LORD whom he serves is the only living and true God. Elisha saw a unique opportunity to bear strong witness to this commander of the Syrian forces. If he could lead Naaman to a saving knowledge of the LORD, the commander would become a strong witness to many throughout Syria.
2. Naaman's arrival at Elisha's house was an impressive entourage of power and wealth (v. 9). He obviously rode up in a caravan of chariots with all the pomp and ceremony of a commander, stopping at the very door of Elisha's house.
3. But Elisha's response was that of a man unimpressed with worldly glory and display (v. 10). In fact, he did not personally go out to meet the commander. Instead, he sent a messenger out instructing Naaman to go and wash seven times in the Jordan River (v. 10). If Naaman would follow these instructions, he would be healed and cleansed of his leprosy.
4. In contrast, note Naaman's disrespectful and arrogant reaction. He was filled with rage, feeling that Elisha had slighted him. He had expected Elisha to personally come out, wave his hand over his leprosy, pray and heal him (v. 11). In his mind he considered the suggestions of Elisha to be those of a quack. He was more likely to be healed by washing in the cleaner rivers of Damascus than in the dirtier waters of the Jordan. Filled with fury, the commander turned and rode off.
5. However, God was at work in the hearts of both Naaman and his servants, and the commander was still to be healed and converted (vv. 13-14). As soon as Naaman's servants felt it was safe to approach the commander, they began encouraging him to calm down and to get control of his emotions. Then they began to suggest that he would have paid any price and undertaken any difficult task demanded by the prophet. Why, then, would he not do the simple thing suggested?

Finally being convinced by his servants, the prideful and self-centred commander reluctantly obeyed the instructions of Elisha, the man of God (v. 14). He went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, exactly as Elisha had instructed. Immediately after the seventh dip, he was healed. Surprisingly, his flesh became as healthy and looked as young as that of a child.

6. Excited and filled with a heart of thanksgiving, Naaman quickly returned to Elisha and made a strong confession of faith in the LORD (vv. 15-18). He now knew there

is only one true and living God, that there is no God other than the LORD God worshipped in Israel. He and He alone is the true and living LORD.

In appreciation for the help Elisha had been, Naaman attempted to pay the prophet (vv. 15-16). But Elisha informed the commander that payment could not be accepted. Salvation — both deliverance and healing — was free, by God's grace alone. Salvation could not be purchased. After some urging, Naaman finally accepted Elisha's refusal for payment.

Before he left, though, Naaman asked two favours of Elisha. First, he requested enough dirt from Elisha's property to take back home so he could build an altar (v. 17). He needed the altar to offer sacrifices to the LORD, for he would never again sacrifice to a false god. Second, Naaman wanted Elisha to pray and ask the LORD to continually forgive him for this one thing: in his official duties as commander of the Syrian army, he was required to join his king in religious services in the temple of the false god Rimmon (v. 18). At such times, he would ask for forgiveness, but he also wanted Elisha to pray for the LORD to forgive him. Naaman was confessing that he would be present with the king only in an official capacity, not in heart. He would not personally be worshipping, not at all, for he knew that the LORD is the only living and true God. And it was the LORD alone whom he would personally worship. Note that his dilemma was somewhat the same as that faced by Obadiah during the days of Ahab (see note, 1 Kng 18:2-16).

7. Assuring Naaman of his prayers, Elisha announced his blessing upon Naaman. He told the commander to go in peace of conscience and mind.

No doubt, Elisha charged Naaman to make every opportunity he could to be a strong witness for the LORD. Keep in mind that Naaman's conversion and witness for the LORD were already far stronger than the vast majority of professing believers in Israel itself. The day of the kings was a period when people lived sinful and wicked lives. Contrary to the false profession of most people, Naaman experienced a true conversion and would be a far stronger witness for the LORD.

Thought 1. Before this commander of the Syrian army could be converted, he had to lay aside his pride, arrogance and self-exaltation. No doubt, this was difficult to do, for Naaman was second only to the king of Syria. He was not only the chief commander of the armed forces, but he was also the second leader over the entire nation, one of the most powerful nations of the earth during that time. Power, authority, honour, praise, recognition, esteem, adoration — all that lifts a person up in the minds of people and causes a person to feel prideful and exalted — all this had become the daily experience of Naaman. As a result, he had become prideful, self-centred and self-exalting. But when he confronted the LORD, he had to empty himself of pride and humble himself before the LORD. So it is with us. Before God can save us or meet our needs, we must lay aside our pride, selfishness and self-exaltation.

Pride is excessive, uncontrolled self-esteem. It is exalting oneself over others, exalting our...

- appearance
- ability or skill
- health
- authority
- achievement
- friends or social circle
- position
- knowledge or intellect

We can take anything that concerns us and exalt it above others. We should take pride in how God has made, blessed and gifted us. We should esteem ourselves highly, but we should never exalt ourselves over other people. Pride becomes sin when we become arrogant and exalt ourselves over others. Listen to what the Word of God says about pride, arrogance and self-exaltation.

Mat 23:12 *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

James 4:6 *But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

1 John 2:15 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

Prov 6:16-17 *There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*

Prov 11:2 *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*

Prov 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Prov 17:19 *He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction.*

Prov 21:4 *Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!*

Prov 29:23 *A man’s pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honour.*

Oba 1:4 *“Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD.*

Thought 2. J. Vernon McGee has an excellent application dealing with pride that is worth quoting in its entirety.

God declares that He hates the pride in man’s heart. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists seven things that God hates. First on His list are these: “A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. ” Do you see what is number one on God’s hate parade? It is a proud look. God says he hates that. He hates that as much as He hates murder.

=> *James 4:6* says, “But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

=> *Pride is the undoing of man. It is a great sin. In Proverbs 16:18* we read, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

=> *Proverbs 11:2* says, “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”

=> *Finally, Proverbs 29:23* says, “A man’s pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honour.”

Why does God hate pride? The definition of pride is “excessive self-esteem.” It is inordinate self-esteem. It is more than reasonable delight in one’s position and achievement. Paul put it like this:

Rom 12:4 *Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*

Pride is placing an excessive price on self. It is demanding more than you are worth. Have you ever heard it said, “I wish I could buy that man for what he is worth?”

Pride is the difference between what you are and what you think you are. It was the pride of Satan that brought him down. That was his sin. Pride was also the sin of Edom. Of Edom God said:

Oba 1:4 *“Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD.*

Man’s pride runs counter to God’s plan; and, whenever they meet, there is friction. There is no compromise. It is always a head-on collision. You see, God’s plan of salvation is the supreme answer to man’s pride. God lays man low. God takes nothing from man. Paul could say of himself when he met Jesus Christ:

Phil 3:7 *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*

*Paul gave up religion. Paul gave up everything he had been; he rated it as dung — he said, “I just flushed it down.” Christ and pride do not go together. You cannot be proud and at the same time trust Christ as your Saviour. If you trust Him, my friend, you will lay all of your pride in the dust. (J. Vernon McGee. *Thru the Bible, Vol. II.* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), p. 312).*

III. **2 Kings 05:20–27 The Greed of Elisha’s Servant Gehazi**

Although Elisha had turned down Naaman’s offer of payment, Elisha’s servant Gehazi was filled with greed. And his greed exposed a heart flooded with worldly lusts and covetousness.

1. Standing nearby during the conversation between Naaman and Elisha, Gehazi’s mind was racing. He wanted some of the wealth that Naaman had offered Elisha (v. 20). So

while the two men were still talking, he was already working out a deceitful plan by which he could secure some of the money for himself.

2. As soon as Naaman had ridden off in the distance, Gehazi put into motion his greedy scheme and rushed to catch Naaman (vv. 21-24). Soon thereafter, Naaman spotted the servant rushing after him. Stopping the caravan, Naaman got out of his chariot to meet him. Once face-to-face, the commander asked the servant if everything was all right.

Gehazi quickly and convincingly lied to Naaman by saying that Elisha had sent him (v. 22). He declared that Elisha had remembered two young student prophets who did need some financial aid, and he would appreciate the commander making a contribution of 75 pounds of silver and two sets of clothing to the students. Grateful for the help Elisha had been to him, Naaman doubled the requested money and gave the clothing to the servant Gehazi. Moreover, since Gehazi was traveling alone, Naaman assigned two soldiers to accompany him back in the event he was attacked by thieves. But Gehazi took the gifts from the soldiers before they reached Elisha's house and sent the guards back to Naaman. He then hid the money and the clothing (v. 24).

3. But soon thereafter, when the servant again faced his master Elisha, his greed was uncovered and judgment was pronounced upon him (vv. 25-27). Elisha asked him where he had been, and Gehazi lied, stating that he had not gone anywhere. But Elisha revealed to the servant that he knew the truth, that Gehazi had taken the money and clothing from Naaman (v. 26). Rebuking his servant, Elisha stated that this was not the time to receive payment for having ministered to a person, for salvation and healing were to be free. Salvation and healing were not to be offered for profit.

Elisha then pronounced the judgment of God upon Gehazi: the deceitful servant and all his descendants (through their genes) would be stricken with severe cases of leprosy, the very leprosy from which Naaman had just been delivered. Apparently quicker than the eye can blink, Gehazi was afflicted with leprosy. For when he departed from Elisha's presence, his skin was already diseased and as white as snow (v. 27).

Thought 1. Greed and covetousness are terrible evils. A grudging and self-indulgent person becomes so consumed with money and wealth that he hoards what he has. Regardless of the needs around him, he piles up more and more, giving little if any to help meet the needs of this world.

In addition, a covetous person will, at times, steal, scheme or manipulate to get more and more, sometimes even twisting the rules or law to get more of what he wants. Even if it means bankrupting other persons, taking all they have and causing them to become destitute and unemployed, a greedy person will do whatever it takes to secure every dime or piece of property he can. God warns the covetous and greedy. Listen to what God says:

Luke 12:15-21 Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Rom 1:18, 29, 32 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity....They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,....Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

1 Cor 6:9-10 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Eph 5:3-6 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Col 3:5-6 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Heb 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Rev 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death. ■