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NAAMAN HEALED, GEHAZI SMITTEN.

– 2 KINGS 5:1-14. – *OCT. 23.* –

Golden Text: – "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved." – Jer. 17:14.

THE KINGDOM of Syria bordered the land of Israel on the north and east, and at the time of our lesson was quite influential amongst the nations of the earth. Sometimes it was in conflict with Israel, while at other times these two and other nations combined in their opposition to the Assyrian empire, a still more influential neighbor farther east. Naaman was the general in chief of Syria, noted for his personal ability as a soldier, and especially recognized by the King of Syria because at his hand the Lord had granted deliverance to Syria and Israel in combination against Shalmaneser II.

Naaman's victory is credited by this verse to Jehovah. (Jehovah is the original word wherever "Lord" is spelled in small capital letters throughout the common version of the Old Testament). We are not to gather from this that God has supervision of every war and every battle of earth, and that those who win have his favor and those who lose his disfavor. The Lord's favors were with the one particular nation, Israel, from the time of their adoption as the children of Abraham down to the time that, in our Lord's words, their house was left unto them desolate – divine favor withdrawn from them. The Scriptures, however, explain to us that the Lord did interfere with the affairs of outside nations to some extent – to use them as servants or tools for the accomplishment of his purposes. For instance, we are particularly informed in the Scriptures that on several occasions the Lord brought nations against Israel for the chastisement of his peculiar people, leading them captive into foreign lands, etc., as in the Babylonian captivity.

These interferences on the Lord's part were not by way of bringing salvation or the Gospel message to the heathen lands, but merely part and parcel of his dealings with Israel – the preparing of Israel to be his peculiar people, to be ready for the coming of Messiah. Again we see from the Scriptures that the Lord, while granting a certain lease of dominion to the kingdoms of this world, in the interim between the overthrow of the typical kingdom of Israel and the time for the establishment of the antitypical kingdom of spiritual Israel under the headship of Christ in Millennial glory, has, nevertheless, had a general supervision and figuratively has held operations under control – "Thus far shalt thou go but no farther" – the remainder will he restrain. When the Lord's time shall come for a full interference with the rule of this world, for the full putting down of all antagonistic authority and for the enforcement of righteousness in the world, it will be on a very different scale from anything that has ever yet transpired: Messiah, clothed with all power and authority, and having associated with him the overcomers of this Gospel age, will be the great King who, as Jehovah's Vicegerent, shall rule the nations with a rod of iron, laying righteousness to the line and justice to the plummet.

THE LITTLE BOND-MAID.

On the occasion of one of the conflicts between Syria and Israel, the Syrians, being successful, carried away some spoil and loot, including young Israelites, who thus became bond-servants to the Syrians. One of these, a maid, became a servant in the home of Naaman, Syria's greatest general. Seeing him afflicted with leprosy – an incurable disease then as now – she suggested that in Israel was a great Prophet of God, Elisha, of whom she had heard wonderful things, miracles, and who she was sure could heal her master, Naaman. We are not informed how serious Naaman's ailment was, but we do know that lepers, even under unfavorable conditions, often live long, – they have been known to live as long as forty-five years under the affliction. It is a repulsive disease, a wasting away or

rotting of the part affected, an eating of the flesh, somewhat like a cancer, yet it is not generally painful until in the latter stages. It was just such a disease as a man of ability and activity like Naaman would be specially anxious to get rid of. His grasping at the suggestion of a little girl was possibly of the Lord's oversight, for ordinarily a man of his ability would pay little heed to such a suggestion of miraculous power in a neighboring country less in extent and influence than his own. Naaman evidently brought the matter to the attention of the king, who quite enthusiastically grasped the hope for the recovery of his favorite general. So a royal letter was written to the king of Israel, saying, "Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have herewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." We are to remember that the King of Israel, while professedly making some acknowledgment of Jehovah, was really an idolator, fostering in the kingdom false worship such as the Lord had not commanded. We are to remember that under these conditions he had no dealings with, and we may say scarcely any knowledge of, the Prophet Elisha, who made his home in the capital city of Samaria.

When King Jehoram read the letter he saw that it was expected of him that a miracle should be performed, **[R3438 : page 300]** and, rending his garments as an indication of despairing trouble, he declared that the King of Syria was merely making a pretext of this letter, seeking another occasion for war and to invade Jehoram's weaker dominions, to carry off more spoils and captives.

The news of this incident spread throughout the city, but possibly aside from this Elisha had a divine revelation respecting the status of the matter. Evidently conscious of God's power with him for such an emergency – perhaps directly instructed to this effect – Elisha sent word to the king, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothing? – wherefore be in despair? Let the Syrian stranger come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet of the Lord in Israel. King Jehoram was glad in such an emergency to direct General Naaman to the Prophet, and doubtless did **[R3439 : page 300]** so with many

assurances that the healing of lepers was not in the power of kings or princes or ordinary beings; but here was the man the little captive maid had evidently referred to, and that he wished for Naaman the best results. So General Naaman's cortege of horses and chariots drove over to the door of Elisha's house and there received a message from the Prophet, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean of thy leprosy."

We cannot wonder that Naaman was angry and indignant that a person of his rank should thus be lightly dismissed. It would be just like any worldly-minded person to be indignant under such circumstances: it requires the grace of humility to accept slights and indignities without appearing to notice them. We feel sure that it would not be the Lord's will that we, as his followers, should in any sense of the word duplicate or copy the manner Elisha displayed on this occasion. On the contrary, the very essence of Christian grace is declared to be love, which is kind, long suffering, patient, gentle, and which renders honor to those to whom honor is due, etc. The better the Lord's people can keep this in mind as a rule for daily life the larger generally will be their success in serving the Truth. Meekness, gentleness, patience, kindness, are all elements of Christian character, and must be cultivated if we would by present experiences be made fit for the heavenly Kingdom.

We are not in this criticising Elisha and his course, for Elisha was not a Christian, having lived several centuries before the great Head came, before the redemptive work was accomplished, before the new and living way was opened up for us to walk in his steps. Elisha, as a Prophet, occupied a special position, and we do not know but that his conduct in this case was specially directed of the Lord and was particularly wise and suited to the conditions. Naaman did not comprehend that in calling upon Elisha he was really calling upon God, of whom Elisha was merely the servant. It was appropriate, therefore, that Naaman should learn the lesson, and he probably did learn it by the experiences referred to. In fact Elisha's course

declared, "I am greater than you, because while you are the servant of the king of Syria, I am a servant of the King of kings, the Almighty; while, therefore, in harmony with my King's wishes, I shall grant the boon requested, I will do it in such a manner that you shall learn the lesson that you receive it as a favor and not, as you expect, in exchange for the expensive presents and rewards which you have brought with you."

As a general we might suppose that Naaman had considerable combativeness, and it manifested itself in his indignation at Elisha's course. To his companions and servants he expressed that indignation, declaring that he need not have come on a long journey to be told to go and wash himself, and that anyway the rivers of Syria were superior in sparkling purity to the Jordan. The latter was true, for the river Abana is noted for its crystalline, pellucid purity. Of its waters a writer says: "The Abana is no doubt the modern Barrada, the river to which the delightful oasis of Damascus owes its beauty and very existence; the Greeks called it the 'Golden Flowing.' It has the clearest waters possible, and singularly bright in color; in the morning a full, deep, emerald green, in the evening a sapphire blue. It was impossible not to think of the two jewels, so exactly did it resemble their clear gem-like lines at times."

The offended Naaman offered none of the presents he had brought for the Prophet, but indignantly started with his chariots homeward. Naaman's servants were able to take a calmer and more deliberate view of the situation than himself, because not so acutely interested. To them it seemed as though the Prophet had indeed exercised a great deal of dignity, as though he were the servant of a very great king indeed; to them this seemed all the more to support his claim of ability to heal the disease. Doubtless they reasoned, too, that the Prophet's home was not an extravagant one and he evidently was not greedy of filthy lucre, and asked no compensation for the receipt given. As the chariots rode homeward these matters were discussed, and Naaman greatly cooled off and began to take the more

reasonable view of the situation, and was finally persuaded that while they had to pass the river Jordan anyway in the homeward journey he would follow the Prophet's directions, which could do no harm if they did no good. He did this, dipping himself seven times as directed, and with the seventh dip his flesh was healed of the leprosy, and his flesh and skin not only became healthy but fresh as that of a child – better than ever before. He was clean, his leprosy was gone.

LEPROSY A SYMBOL OF SIN.

Leprosy is used in the Scriptures to symbolize sin, and was sometimes inflicted by the Lord as a punishment for sin, as, for instance, in the case of Miriam, Moses' sister, who was smitten with leprosy because of her improper attitude and disrespectful language to and about her brother Moses, in answer to whose prayer she was healed. Sin is an incurable disease, and therefore well represented by leprosy; like leprosy it doth eat like a canker and all having it are "unclean." There are many suggestions as to how sin can be gotten rid of: there are philosophies which deny its existence, others which tell us that a moral life atones for sin. But these various philosophies, theories, suggestions, resemble the waters of Syria, which Naaman well knew could not make him clean, could not restore his health. The Word of God has pointed out to us the only cure for this malady of sin, the only channel through which forgiveness can be had – "There is none other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved, but by the name of Jesus." However man may philosophize about the matter, sin is undeniable and its cure impossible except as the Lord will grant relief.

Another thought in connection with this: the likeness of the healing of Naaman's leprosy to the healing of sin is that the former required seven dippings into Jordan. We may well presume that each time Naaman dipped himself he looked for results, to see whether or not the leprosy was departing; but we may be sure there were no results until the seventh dip, and had he desisted with the fifth or

sixth, saying, "It is useless, there is no improvement manifest," he would have failed of the blessing. The seven may well represent to us perfection: not that we are to either believe into Jesus seven times, not to be converted seven times, nor to consecrate ourselves by baptism into death seven times; but that as seven represents perfection, [R3439 : page 301] the thought would be that our belief must be perfect or complete, our obedience must be perfect or complete, our baptism into death in Christ must be perfect or complete, otherwise there is no remission of sins, otherwise we would fail to get the blessings desired and promised. Let us impress this upon our hearts and minds and upon all with whom we have influence – that half-hearted consecration and obedience are not what the Lord is pleased to honor and to bless.

Several things connected with Naaman's experiences show us that the Lord's blessing of healing was conferred upon a man of naturally noble traits. First amongst these was the fact that his wife's maid, a servant, was interested in him and solicitous for his welfare. The love of the young, the innocent, the pure, is not always a sure test of character; but it should be given its weight when thinking of persons of whom we have not the fullest knowledge. Secondly, when Naaman found that his disease was gone he might have said to himself, "Well, I have received a great blessing and I have gotten it cheaply. If the Prophet had come down to me in a courteous manner and assured me of these results, or proffered to come with me, I fully intended that he should have a liberal gift, if not all the rich treasures which I have brought with me; but now, seeing that he did not put himself about so much as to come down to my chariot, I certainly need not put myself about to return many miles to Samaria and proffer him a gift. Perhaps, indeed, he would refuse it. I will go upon my journey and keep the stuff." Such a course would have shown us that Naaman was not a noble man, however successful he had been in winning the confidence of his king, and however much the Lord had used him in delivering Syria and Israel from the power of the Assyrians. Noble minds are not seeking selfishly to get all they can

of this present life and give as little as possible to others. The truly great take pleasure in being just, yea in being generous. We may be sure that a generous heart is appreciated in the Lord's sight as well as in the estimation of truly noble men and women. In proportion as we see this let us each watch his own heart and mind and conduct, that each may thus bring himself nearer and nearer to the noble standard which the Lord and the best of his children approve.

We remember that during our Lord's ministry ten lepers cried to him as he passed, "Have mercy upon us, thou Son of David." They by this expression acknowledged him as the Messiah, the Root and Offspring of David, and they desired of the Lord healing from leprosy – very much Naaman's situation, only that in the former case most of them were Jews. We remember that the Lord sent them on a journey during which they were all healed, but that only one of them returned to give thanks, to acknowledge his blessing. Our Lord commented on the fact and seemed to be deeply grieved with the ingratitude of the nine, and even pointed out that the one who did return and praise the Lord was not a Jew but a Samaritan – not an heir with Israel in the promises, but one of those outside the covenant favors of the Lord. Similarly Naaman was outside the covenant promises, a fact which is mentioned in the New Testament also as an evidence of God's mercy. We are told that there were many lepers in Israel at the same time that this noble Syrian was, by the Lord's favor, healed.

Let us, dear friends, see to it, being Israelites indeed, "heirs according to the promise," and having received of the Lord healing, forgiveness and blessing, that we are full of thankfulness, full of gratitude, and that we **[R3440 : page 301]** spare no pains to express this, and that we do not seek to have it at no cost to ourselves, but rejoice to be able to render unto the Lord a fruit of his blessing and mercy and thank-offering – even as Naaman desired to do on this occasion, returning to Samaria to the Prophet and tendering him the gifts that he brought for the purpose. They were consecrated

beforehand when he was hoping for blessing. Would he, after receiving the blessing, withhold any part? To have done so would have proven him unworthy of the blessing. Similarly the Lord's people, fleeing from sin and desiring forgiveness, reconciliation, etc., are generally disposed to make full consecration of everything to the Lord; but after receiving of his grace, if they attempt to keep back any or all of the consecrated earthly things, how would their course appear to the Lord and to all who had his light and the spirit of Truth. Let us each measure our own hearts by this rule.

The silver and gold taken by Naaman as a present is estimated to have been the equivalent of \$77,540.00, and additionally ten costly or state-occasion robes of considerable value. This was not considered too large a gift for the object desired and for the station or rank of the giver. The gift was proffered to Elisha with the words, "Behold, now I know there is no God in all the earth but in Israel: now, therefore, I pray thee, take a present of thy servant." But Elisha answered, "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused." Had Elisha accepted the money he doubtless could have used it in connection with his mission as the Lord's Prophet, or amongst the poor of Israel; nevertheless he evidently did better in refusing it. Thus also it is with those servants of the Lord who give of their time and talents to his service. It cannot be said that it would be wrong of them to receive compensation, salary: it could not be said that as servants of the Lord they were worthy of no compensation; yet we believe that as a rule the Lord will be more glorified if those serving him were more particular to keep the ministries of the Truth entirely separate and distinct from all mercenary considerations. The Lord, who owns all the gold and silver and the cattle on a thousand hills, is able to provide for his work and for all of his servants, and we believe that he is more honored in their looking to him and trusting in his providences than in accepting anything in the nature of pay for the dispensing of his grace.

Naaman's acknowledgment of the God of Israel as the only true God was evidently not merely bombast, for forthwith he requested enough of the consecrated soil of Palestine for the building of an altar to the Lord, that he thus might in Syria present an offering on consecrated earth. Moreover, his mind had grasped the situation that now as a follower of the Lord, whose understanding had been opened, he could no longer with propriety do the things formerly done by him in false worship in association with his king. He inquired of the Prophet how the Lord would regard it if he went with the king of Syria into the Temple of Syria's heathen god, Rimmon, the king leaning on his shoulder, and he be expected to bow himself with the king; – would the Lord pardon such conduct on his part or must he take still more decided grounds, utterly refusing to accompany the king?

The intimation seems to be given through the Prophet that Naaman would be justified in taking the usual course, as formerly, while in his own heart he would be serving the Lord and offering worship to him only. The point at issue seems to be that Naaman was not in all this an Israelite but still a Syrian – still a stranger to the covenant and promises of Israel, still without God and having no hope in the world. He might, therefore, do things with the king that would have been improper for an Israelite to have done, because the latter was under special **[R3440 : page 302]** covenant relationship to the Lord. We are here reminded of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, mentioned in Acts 10. He was a man who feared God, gave much alms, sought to live righteously, soberly, and still – not being a Jew – he was an alien and a stranger so far as the covenant of Israel was concerned, as he could not be received into fellowship with the Lord until after the atonement sacrifice, until the end of the "seventy weeks" favor upon Israel, and even then only by hearing and believing the "words" of life and being begotten of the Spirit: so Naaman the Syrian, not living in so favored a time, could not be received at all into covenant relationship.

The noble conduct of this man, his candor, his apparent willingness to sacrifice everything for the Lord, puts to shame the course of many who by God's grace have become "Israelites indeed" and have been adopted into the divine family as sons. Many of them have very much less conscience on such subjects – many are much less careful about sailing under false colors, misrepresenting the Lord and the Truth. Many, for the sake of earthly fame or position or present prosperity, are willing to sacrifice practically everything. Let us, dear readers, see to it that we place the Lord first in all our calculations, and that if we acknowledge and admire such honesty and sincerity in the heathen general, Naaman, much more should we find it in our own hearts, in our own conduct, and much more should the Lord expect of us in the way of obedience even unto death, obedience to right, to principle, to truth, to Him.

GEHAZI'S DUPLICITY PUNISHED.

On the other hand note the ignoble Gehazi, Elisha's servant, who though a witness to God's power through the Prophet had not been really and truly blessed by a proper character development. His heart was full of selfishness, and he grieved that the presents had not been received. He hastened after Naaman's chariot, and, by misrepresentations and lies in his master's name, received presents of considerable value – but he received more. The Prophet of the Lord, discerning the entire matter, pronounced against him as a penalty for his wrong course the leprosy of Naaman. So, we are sorry to say, there are some in daily contact with the Truth and with the Lord's consecrated servants who do not partake of the spirit of the Truth, nor of the spirit of the servants, – in whom selfishness is the ruling passion and who will, therefore, eventually not only fail to receive the great blessings, such as came to Naaman, but additionally will receive the divine disfavor, the second death.

Our Golden Text is not particularly related to the lesson, but, nevertheless, is very appropriate in connection with some of the

inferences we have drawn from it. Those afflicted with the moral leprosy, sin, are here represented as calling to the Lord for the necessary healing, for the necessary salvation. The Lord heard our calling before we uttered it. Before we were born, yea, before the foundation of the world he had prepared an answer for our crying; he had prepared to answer the cry of all those who truly seek through him release from sin and its penalty, for Christ Jesus our Lord is declared to have been the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. Our salvation begins in the moment of our full acceptance of the forgiveness, but it continues through the remainder of the present life and will be completed with our participation in the glorious resurrection of the Millennial morning. Whoever, meantime, goes back voluntarily to sin, to "wallowing in the mire," or whoever meantime rejects the great Mediator, the only avenue of salvation, loses all – for there is no other name given under heaven or amongst men whereby we must be saved, no other way than by hearkening to his voice, his Word.

