

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL PROPHETS AND KINGS GOD THE REVEALER

God Reveals the Way to be Healed

Throughout the Old Testament God spoke through his prophets who proclaimed “*Thus saith the Lord!*” In the New Testament, God spoke in a different way. The writer of Hebrews explains in **Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)** ¹ *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,* ² *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...* Whether in the Old Testament or the New, our God is the Revealer. In the Old Testament story of Elisha and the supernatural healing of Naaman, we find a revealing picture of the humility that is required to receive God’s matchless grace!

Last week’s study ended with Elijah returning to the LORD’s work after a period of discouragement. Part of Elijah’s discouragement stemmed from feeling so alone in his ministry. That was about to change. Elijah’s assignment from the LORD included anointing a new prophet named Elisha who would eventually take his place and become his confidante and encourager.

The mantle or cloak symbolized the call of a prophet by God. When Elijah first saw Elisha, he threw his mantle upon him. **1 Kings 2:19** Later when Elijah was about to be taken to heaven, we read in **2 Kings 2:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *When they had crossed, [meaning the Jordan River] Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.”* Elijah said that if Elisha actually saw when Elijah was taken up, he would receive his request for a double portion of the Spirit. Elijah himself had no authority to fulfill this spiritual request. Elisha did see Elijah caught up to heaven in a chariot of fire and as he was caught away his mantle was left behind. Elisha picked up that mantle, stuck the waters of the Jordan, they parted and he crossed over on dry land. This showed that Elisha was now the prophet wrapped in God’s mantle of authority.

Elisha and Elijah each represented different generations and opposite personalities. Instead of following Elijah's example as a loner and outsider, Elisha chose to work within the established system. He assumed his rightful place as the head of the prophetic order in Israel. We will only examine one event in his life. It all began because of the witness of an Israelite slave girl who was a captive in Syria. God reveals the way to be healed but we must first recognize the seriousness of the disease.

Read 2 Kings 5:1-5 (ESV) ¹ *Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.* ² *Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman’s wife.* ³ *She said to her mistress, “Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”* ⁴ *So Naaman went in and told his lord, “Thus*

and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel.”⁵ And the king of Syria said, “Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

Naaman was a Gentile. He had a lot going for him in his work in the Syrian army but he had a problem. It was the disease of leprosy. Lepers were not excluded from society in pagan nations. It is interesting that God gave Israel a law about segregating lepers because it kept the disease from spreading. Naaman was the number two man in the nation. But even with everything he possessed, Naaman was doomed because under his uniform was the body of a leper. It appears that the infection was currently limited to one place, but leprosy has a tendency to spread and if left unchecked, it ultimately kills. Only the power of the God of Israel could heal him.

A young slave girl knew the Truth that would later be revealed more fully in the New Testament. **John 8:32 (ESV)**³² *and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*” Because she trusted the God of Israel, she was free although a physical prisoner. She was a humble witness for her God even in her lowly position. She was so convincing and bold in her faith that her mistress told her husband about one in Israel who could heal him and he went to the king due to the boldness of the young girl’s word. As we as a church family have been instructed by our pastor to pray for the movement of the Holy Spirit and boldness to speak God’s Word, we should be encouraged by how the bold words of this unnamed girl set off a powerful chain reaction that still bears witness to the power of God today.

The young girl had said nothing about going to the king or taking presents. She spoke only of the prophet in Samaria (aka Elisha). However, Naaman couldn’t just leave his post in Syria without the King’s permission and since Syria and Israel were enemies, they might have concluded it was best to go through what they considered to be the ‘chain of command’ – Israel’s king. Otherwise, Naaman’s arrival could be misunderstood. The king’s reaction is a bit funny when Naaman came to him requesting a leprosy cure.

Read 2 Kings 5:6-9 (ESV)⁶ *And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy.”⁷ And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me.”⁸ But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.”⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha’s house.*

Tearing one’s robe was a sign of grief or agitation. We know they did not have text messaging in the days of Elisha – not even a telephone! So, how did Elisha find out that the king was distressed? Through gossip? I hardly think so. We are told of the prophets in **Amos 3:7 (ESV)**⁷ *“For the Lord GOD does nothing without **revealing** his secret to his servants the prophets.* The king was helpless but the prophet Elisha who was moving in the Spirit and power of God was not! Elisha did not claim to be the healer. However, he did have direct access to Jehovah-Rophe (the LORD Your Healer). Just think! We who have accepted God’s great salvation

have direct access to the Great Physician ourselves. **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

The King wisely sent Naaman to the prophet's house. The way to be healed is to respond to God's instruction with humble faith.

Read 2 Kings 5:10-12 (ESV) ¹⁰ *And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."* ¹¹ *But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, **I thought** that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper."* ¹² *Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?"* So he turned and went away in a rage.

Elisha tells Naaman to wash himself in the Jordan River seven times in order to be cured. The number seven symbolizes completeness and perfection. Seven is directly tied in the beginning to God's creation.

Notice the prophet didn't even come out. He sent his servant out with the directions. That seems disrespectful, and discourteous, but it isn't. Naaman came from a pagan land that was filled with priestly hocus-pocus but the true God does things in a simple way, and Elisha stayed in the background. Naaman was peeved because he was accustomed to the fawning of his subjects. Elisha wanted to show that God is no respecter of persons. The whole dipping in the Jordan idea was an insult to the pride of Naaman.

Now about that Jordan River that Naaman, the gentleman, found so detestable! Under the godly leadership of Joshua, the nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground. When going into the Promised Land and it was the same river that Elijah and then Elisha had parted. Of course, no one knew it then but the Jordan River would be same place that Jesus the Son of God would be baptized and begin His ministry.

People come to God with all kinds of preconceived notions. **I thought** Naaman said. What Naaman thought was of no significance in the matter of his healing. Notice, Naaman wants to pick his 'own river'. This complaint is a picture of sinners trying to 'get to heaven' their own way. Peter would say of Jesus in **Acts 4:12 (ESV)** ¹² *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* For Naaman, there would be no other river that would cleanse his disease. It was the only way. **John 14:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* And, once again, it is the servants of all people who point out the Truth!

Read 2 Kings 5:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ *But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"* ¹⁴ *So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*

Think about those servants coming together as one voice to confirm Elisha's message to Naaman: *will you not do it?* Today, as we speak to the lost as servants of God Most High, we speak together under the power of the Holy Spirit. This is our message to those dying without Christ of how to be released from the disease of sin.

Romans 10:9 (ESV) ⁹ *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* It is simple even though humbling ourselves can be hard but the results are worth it. Look at what happened when Naaman humbled himself and was obedient. His flesh became like the flesh of a little child. **Mark 10:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ *Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.* Elisha in his ministry was pointing forward to the healing power of the cross of Jesus Christ. Reflect glory back to God through praise.

Read 2 Kings 5:15-19a (ESV) ¹⁵ *Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant."* ¹⁶ *But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none."* *And he urged him to take it, but he refused.* ¹⁷ *Then Naaman said, "If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD."* ¹⁸ *In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter."* ¹⁹ *He said to him, "Go in peace."* ...

Like the Samaritan leper healed by Jesus, Naaman came back to give glory to God even going though Samaria would have been out of his way on his return to Damascus. W.A. Criswell says of Naaman, "When he came to Elisha, he was a different man; no longer proud and conceited, no longer the generalissimo, no longer the nobleman, but humble, and yielded, and penitent, and grateful. God saved his soul as well as to heal him of his leprosy... For this is always the gospel: believe and be saved, wash and be clean. Look and live."

Elisha would not accept a gift from Naaman because he did not want to give him the false impression that healing from the LORD could be bought any more than we can buy our salvation today with our 'good works.' The free gift of God cannot be purchased. Although Naaman's body had been cured, the cure of his soul was more gradual. People from pagan backgrounds believed that the gods of a nation resided in that land, and if you left the land, you left that god behind. He meant to use the soil as the foundation of his altar, as if some of the ground on which Jehovah had manifested Himself was sacred enough for such a purpose. It does not appear that Naaman was thinking of Jehovah as a local deity.

Naaman's second request involved compromising his faith by continuing public worship in the temple of Rimmon, the Syrian equivalent of Baal. Elisha only said *go in peace*. Elisha is not asked for his sanction, and he neither gives nor refuses it. Further conviction must come from the Spirit of God and not Elisha.

The healing of Naaman was a miracle just like the miracle that comes to us when Jesus saves our soul!