

Lesson 8

2 Kings 5-6

1) Introduction

- a) Chapters 5 and 6 of 2 Kings contain four key events in the life of Elisha.
 - i) In the first, Elisha meets a powerful commander of the Syrian army, who happens to be a leper.
 - ii) In the second, Elisha discovers that his own servant is a liar and thief.
 - iii) In the third, Elisha asks God to briefly lift the curtain that hides the unseen world.
 - iv) In the fourth, Elisha is threatened with death by the king of Israel.
- b) In each of these events we will find important lessons for us today.

2) Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-18)

- a) The Events
 - i) Naaman is described in verse 1.
 - (1) He was a commander in the Syrian army, he was a great and honorable man in the eyes of the king, and he was a mighty man of valor.
 - (2) But...he was a leper.
 - (a) The word used here applies to a wide range of patchy disfigurements of skin, and may or may not have been what is commonly called leprosy today (Hansen's disease). Whatever it is, Naaman at this time is still able to do his job and travel.
 - (3) Notice that the text here tells us that "by him the Lord had given victory to Syria." Why was God working through Naaman to give victory to this foreign king?
 - (a) The sovereignty of God over the whole world is announced right at the beginning of the story, as we are told that (whatever Naaman or his king may think) his military successes were a gift from the God of the Israelites.

iv) The king of Israel gets the letter in verses 6-7.

(1) But somewhere between the slave girl, Naaman's wife, Naaman, the king, and the king's scribe the message has changed – the letter requests that the king (rather than the prophet) heal Naaman of his leprosy!

(a) Or perhaps, this king mistakenly thought that Elisha was under the control of the king of Israel as he no doubt was in control of the false prophets of Baal.

(2) The king of Israel, of course, knows he cannot heal anybody, and he tears his clothes, believing that the king of Syria is setting him up and seeking a quarrel.

(3) There was sufficient quiet for Naaman to travel to Israel, but there was sufficient tension for the Israelite king to be concerned that Syria is trying to pick a fight.

v) Elisha hears about these events in verses 8-9.

(1) Elisha asks the king why he is so upset, and he tells the king to send Naaman to him so that he will know there is a prophet in Israel.

(2) It is an indictment of the king that he did not think to ask Elisha in the first place.

(3) Naaman heads for Elisha's house with his entire entourage and all of his money and chariots. He has prepared for this meeting carefully, using diplomacy and bringing great wealth. He arrives expecting the full and immediate attention of the prophet. He no doubt wants everything to go according to plan – his plan!

vi) Elisha has a simple command for Naaman in verse 10. And he doesn't even deliver it himself! Instead Elisha sends a messenger to relay his command, which would send Naaman off to someplace else.

(1) Elisha sends a messenger to Naaman rather than meet with him personally. But, of course, Naaman, being a leper, was quite used to people not wanting to get very close, and Naaman understandably interprets Elisha's failure to appear as an insult.

(2) Why didn't Elisha meet him personally? Naaman quite obviously thought that the power to heal was Elisha's, and that Elisha was somehow in control of a local healing deity. Elisha wanted Naaman

to know that the power was with God. Elisha wanted the focus to be on God rather than on himself. It is God rather than the prophet who must be center stage. (This is what makes Gehazi's actions later in this chapter doubly reprehensible.)

(3) Elisha tells Naaman to "go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean."

(a) Seven days was the period of quarantine for the skin diseases described in Leviticus 13-14, and that period of time may have influenced the command here to wash seven times.

vii) We see Naaman's reaction in verses 11-12.

(1) Naaman becomes furious and goes away in a rage. Elisha evidently was not acting like any of the prophets of Baal that Naaman knew. Elisha was different, and Naaman didn't like it.

(a) Interestingly, this would not be the last time these events would evoke that reaction.

(b) Luke 4:27-28 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of [Elisha] the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. 28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath.

(2) Naaman says "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.'"

(3) He says "Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?"

(a) In his anger, impatient powerful Naaman has failed to listen carefully to what Elisha told him. Note that the phrase "your flesh will be restored" is missing in Naaman's recounting of what the prophet said.

(b) These rivers of Damascus flowed from the snow covered Amanus Mountains, and were much cleaner than the muddy Jordan river.

viii) But his servants (who are more accustomed to being treated in such humbling ways) change his mind in verses 13-14.

- (1) His servants ask him, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean.'?"
 - (2) Naaman relents and does what the prophet commanded, and his leprosy is healed so that his flesh is restored like the flesh of a little child. He is cleansed.
 - (3) Like Rahab, like Ruth, like the sailors and Ninevites in Jonah, the Gentile Naaman believes in the Lord. It was always God's plan to bless all nations through Israel, and although this was accomplished through his Son, we get glimpses and previews of those blessings all throughout the Old Testament.
 - (4) Although a Gentile, Naaman's belief condemns most of the Israelites of that day because they, unlike he, had rejected the one true God and had embraced false gods that could not heal. But Naaman now knew who the one true God is.
- ix) Naaman returns to Elisha in verses 15-16 with a change of heart.
- (1) He tells Elisha that he now knows that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.
 - (2) He asks Elisha to accept a gift, but Elisha refuses. Again, Elisha wants there to be no doubt in Naaman's mind about who healed him. Elisha wants to make certain that God gets all of the glory.
- x) Naaman makes two additional requests in verses 17-18.
- (1) First, Naaman asks for "two mule-loads of earth" because he will no longer offer sacrifices to other gods, but only to the Lord.
 - (a) Naaman plans to take dirt home with him so that he can build an altar to God. One commentator said that transporting "holy" dirt from one place to another was a fairly common ancient custom.
 - (2) Second, Naaman asks for pardon when he accompanies the king of Syria to the false temple of Rimmon and bows down there.
 - (a) Rimmon was a Syrian version of Baal, and the fact that Naaman asks for pardon in advance tells us that Naaman knows this activity is wrong. He simply asks for pardon for those unavoidable occasions when he is found in Rimmon's temple in the course of his official duties.

(b) The phrase "lean on the hand" does not imply physical support, but instead tells us that Naaman was the king's "right hand man."

(3) Elisha tells him to go in peace, and he does.

b) The Lesson

i) Despite what countless denominational commentators have had to say about these verses, the comparisons between these events and baptism are striking.

(1) Both involve water.

(2) Both involve immersion in water.

(3) Both involve cleansing. (Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.)

(4) Both involve being made new. (Romans 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.)

(5) Both involve becoming like a little child. (Matthew 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.)

(6) Both involve obedience to God's command. (Acts 2:38 Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.)

ii) The handout this week contains God's plan of salvation. But Naaman also had a plan of salvation. Let's take a look at Naaman's Plan of Salvation.

(1) Naaman's plan involves constant excitement. He thought Elisha should come out, wave his hand all around, and dramatically call on the name of the Lord. God's plan was much too dull for Naaman.

(2) Naaman's plan involves personal convenience. There were a lot of rivers back home in Syria. God's plan was much too inconvenient.

- (3) Under Naaman's plan, if you get your feelings hurt then you don't have to do anything at all. If one of God's servants hurts your feelings, then you should just get really mad and go away.
 - (4) Under Naaman's plan, you are in charge of determining what you need to do to be saved. If what you are commanded to do by God doesn't make sense to you or isn't what you expect, then you can just ignore it and do what you want to do instead.
 - (5) Under Naaman's plan, just showing up is all you really need to do. Was he really supposed to do something else?
 - (6) Under Naaman's plan, you get preferential treatment if you are rich and powerful.
 - (7) Under Naaman's plan, partial obedience is okay. After all, Naaman was willing to wash himself in a river, just not the river that Elisha had in mind.
- iii) And what would have been the result had Naaman persisted in following his own plan?
- (1) He would have died in his leprosy, just as those who today follow their own plan with regard to the Gospel will die in their sins.
 - (2) The Old Testament is here for our instruction, and we would be hard pressed to find a more instructive story than that of Naaman the leper.
- iv) Finally, it is interesting to notice that there are some misconceptions around today that not even Naaman fell for!
- (1) Naaman knew that belief alone was not enough. He believed the prophet could cure him even when he was back in Syria. (Otherwise, why did he travel this great distance.) But he knew belief alone was not enough. He never questioned that some action would be required either on his part or Elisha's part.
 - (2) Naaman knew that he had not been "predestined" to die of leprosy without regard to any action on his part. While it was true that he had leprosy, Naaman understood that his condition need not be permanent. He believed he could be healed.
 - (3) Naaman understood that he had not been a leper from his birth. In fact, what he wanted and eventually obtained was to return to the condition he was in at his physical birth.

- (4) Naaman most likely understood that he could catch leprosy again if he came in contact with lepers. He no doubt was very careful after his cleansing to avoid catching that terrible disease again.
- (5) Finally, Naaman's gratitude shows us that he did not believe he had earned his cleansing by his obedience to the prophet's command. His obedience was absolutely necessary to be healed, but his healing was nevertheless a gift from God – as Naaman knew very well.
- (a) I have never understand how someone could read the Bible and conclude that baptism is a work. God's plan of salvation involves 5 steps: You hear; You believe; You repent; You confess; You are baptized. There are four active verbs in that list along with one passive verb. With what reasoning does someone take the one passive verb out of that list and call it a work? Baptism is never called a work in the New Testament. Belief, by contrast, is referred to as a work. (See John 6:29.)

3) Gehazi (2 Kings 5:19-27)

a) The Events

- i) Gehazi, who we have met before, was Elisha's servant. He is not happy with how Elisha dealt with Naaman, and he puts his own plans into action in verses 19-24.
- (1) Gehazi is upset that Elisha has healed Naaman without accepting any of the gifts that Naaman offered.
- (2) Gehazi runs after Naaman and stops the caravan. He tells Naaman that they have just had unexpected company drop by and need a talent of silver and two changes of garments.
- (3) Naaman gives him two talents of silver and two changes of garments, and he has two of his servants carry it back for Gehazi. Gehazi stores it away in his house and sends the two servants back to Naaman.
- ii) Elisha confronts Gehazi in verses 25-27.
- (1) Elisha asks him where he went, and Gehazi says he did not go anywhere. This time Gehazi makes the mistake of lying to a man who knows he is lying!

(2) Elisha in verse 26 responds "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants?"

(3) He then tells Gehazi that the leprosy of Naaman will cling to Gehazi and his descendants forever, and Gehazi goes away leprous, "as white as snow." Naaman, the outsider, has become clean. Gehazi, the insider, has become unclean.

b) The Lesson

i) Gehazi had a very basic and common motivation – greed.

(1) We quite often try to explain away evil behavior with some noble, underlying motive, when the actual motive is staring us in the face all along. If you want to know why people are doing what they are doing, 9 times out of 10 you should just follow the money!

(2) Is that cynical? If so, then Paul was also cynical.

(a) For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:10)

(3) The Bible contains many examples of greed.

(a) Achan in Joshua 7 kept some of the spoil from the Canaanites.

(b) Judas betrayed Christ for money.

(c) Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 lied about money.

ii) Gehazi was also a liar. He lied three times in these 9 verses. Dishonesty and greed often appear together.

iii) But this event does tell us something good about Naaman – it confirms that he left Elisha a changed man on the inside as well as on the outside.

(1) Note in verse 21 that Naaman personally jumps down from his chariot to meet this servant of Elisha. No longer proud, arrogant, and impatient, Naaman has become grateful, humble, and caring.

(2) Naaman's attitude here is in stark contrast to his attitude when he first came to Elisha's house. That time, he was not glad at all to see Elisha's servant.

4) The Ax (2 Kings 6:1-7)

a) The Event

- i) In the first 7 verses of chapter 6, the sons of the prophets decide they need a bigger school, and so they go to the Jordan to cut down trees for building materials.
- ii) They ask Elisha to go with them, and he does. While there, one of the prophets loses his ax head in the water, and he cries out "Alas, master! For it was borrowed."

(1) Iron was very expensive at this time. This young prophet would almost certainly have had to go into debt to replace the item.

- iii) Elisha asks where it fell, he cuts off a stick, throws the stick in the water, and the iron ax head floats up to the surface.

b) The Lesson

- i) I like the attitude of this young prophet to the lost ax head, which was not even his. He had borrowed it, and the indication is that he would have been much less upset had the ax head belonged to him. We, like him, need to have a great respect for the property of others, and particularly so when that property has been placed in our care.
- ii) Another lesson from this event is a reminder that our ministry (like Elisha's) should embrace the humble as well as the great. We might pass by this story and consider it a trivial event compared to those great and notable events that surround it, but it was anything but trivial to this young prophet who had lost his borrowed ax. Elisha could have told him to quit crying and whining about that ax and to instead focus on what was really important, but he did not say that. Instead, what was important to that young prophet became important to Elisha.

5) The Curtain Raised (2 Kings 6:8-23)

a) The Events

- i) One of the most remarkable events in the Bible occurs in verses 8-23 of 2 Kings 6.

- ii) Relations between Syria and Israel have now deteriorated to the point that the kings are once again at war. In verses 8-10, Elisha warns the king of Israel about the secret plans of the king of Syria.
 - (1) It would seem that the relation between Elisha and King Jehoram has improved since Elisha is now voluntarily offering him prophetic insights, but as we proceed through the chapter we will see that such is not the case. Jehoram tries to kill him later in this chapter!
- iii) In verses 11-13, the king of Syria draws the logical conclusion that he has a traitor in his camp. He starts looking for the spy, but he is told instead that it is Elisha the prophet who is telling his secrets to the king of Israel. He is also told that Elisha is in Dothan (about 11 miles north of Samaria), and he sets off on yet another vain attempt by a monarch to silence a prophet of God.
 - (1) It is telling that the king does not know where Elisha is without asking, while Elisha knows exactly where the king is and what the king is saying! It is also telling that the king thinks he can resolve his difficulties over troop movements by moving troops!
- iv) In verses 14-15, the king of Syria sends a great army to Dothan by night and surrounds the city. Elisha's servant wakes up and, seeing the great army, says to Elisha, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"
- v) In verses 16-17 we see Elisha's answer.
 - (1) So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.
 - (2) The Syrians don't know it, but they are outnumbered! This blindness to the odds is about to become blindness to everything!
 - (3) But notice that Elisha did not pray for God to send these spiritual forces. Why? Because they were already there! Elisha simply prayed that his servant could see them.
- vi) In verses 18-20, Elisha asks God to strike the Syrians with blindness, and Elisha then leads them to Samaria, the capital of Israel. When they get there, Elisha asks God to open their eyes so they can see where they have been lead and where they have been captured.

- vii)** In verses 21-23, the king of Israel asks Elisha if he should kill the Syrians, and Elisha says no.
- (1)** Notice that the King recognizes Elisha's superior authority when he calls him "my father" in verse 21.
 - (2)** Perhaps Jehoram is trying to avoid the mistake his father Ahab made in 1 Kings 20 when he spared the life of the Syrian king.
 - (3)** Instead, Elisha tells the king to feed them and send them away, which he does. Not surprisingly, we are then told that there were no more raids into the land of Israel! The next time the Syrians come it will be in overwhelming numbers.

b) The Lesson

- i)** In verses 16-17, we see the lifting of a great curtain.
 - (1)** This same curtain was briefly lifted in Daniel 10:13 when an angelic messenger was delayed by the Prince of Persia. It was also briefly lifted in Jude 9, where we see a struggle for the body of Moses.
 - (2)** Ordinarily, the human eye cannot see the great spiritual forces that surround us. But the eye of faith can look into the word of God and discern the invisible armies at work behind the scenes.
 - (3)** There are four key words in verse 16 – they, us, they, and them. (“Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”)
 - (4)** Compare 1 John 4:4. (“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”) Again, we have four key words – he, you, he, world.
 - (5)** We need to pray that God will also open our eyes so that we can see this world as he sees it. We, like this servant, need to lift up our heads and open our spiritual eyes to see those permanent things that are not visible to our physical eyes.
 - (6)** 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

(7) “Open my eyes, that I may see Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me; Place in my hands the wonderful key That shall unclasp, and set me free. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see: Open me eyes, illumine me, Savior divine!”

ii) God still promises to encamp around those that fear him.

(1) Psalm 34:7 The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

6) The Famine (2 Kings 6:24-33)

a) The Events

i) Chapter 6 ends with the description of a full-blown invasion by the Syrians, a siege of the capital city of Samaria, and a terrible famine that results.

(1) Perhaps the miraculously arranged temporary lull had been intended to give Israel an opportunity to repent. But with no repentance, God has withdrawn his protective hand, and Israel faces a full scale Syrian invasion.

(2) Perhaps these events will be the time when the house of Ahab (now led by King Jehoram) finally meets the destruction prophesied in 1 Kings 21:21-24.

ii) In verses 24-25, Ben-Hadad gathers his army and besieges Samaria. The siege causes a famine that eventually becomes so bad that donkey heads and bird droppings were being sold for food, but worse than even that was about to occur.

(1) This is the second such siege, but it is much more serious than the first. (Compare 1 Kings 20.)

iii) In verses 26-29, the king is passing by and hears a woman cry for help. What he hears is similar to what an earlier king (Solomon) had once heard about a baby from two women, but this time there is a cruel twist. The woman explains that she made a deal with another woman to boil and eat her son today if they would do the same with the other woman's son tomorrow. But now the other woman has hidden her son.

(1) Cannibalism in time of siege is well attested both in the Bible and by outside sources.

- iv)** In verses 30-31, the king is very upset, and he tears his clothing showing the sackcloth that is beneath. (Recall that Ahab also wore sackcloth when he humbled himself before God. But Jehoram seems to be acting more like his bloodthirsty mother here.) He blames Elisha for their troubles, and he swears to kill him.
 - (1)** It is strange that the king invokes the name of God while threatening to kill the prophet of God.
- v)** In verse 32, the king and a messenger arrive at Elisha's house, where Elisha is meeting with the city elders. Elisha fears that the messenger is here to cut off his head, and he tells the elders to block the door.
- vi)** When the king arrives in verse 33, he says "Surely this calamity is from the LORD; why should I wait for the LORD any longer?" The king now believes that the Lord has caused his problems, so why is there any need for the prophet of the Lord to live?
- vii)** Come back next week for the exciting conclusion!

b) The Lesson

- i)** This is the second case of child murder we have seen in our series of lessons on Elijah and Elisha. You will recall that the first involved the ritual sacrifice of children in the rebuilding of Jericho. (1 Kings 16:34)
 - (1)** It is easy for us to look at these two women who were eating their own children and this man in 1 Kings 16 who sacrificed his children to a false god, and wonder how people could ever do that to their own children under any circumstances. And yet, what would Elisha have said about our own modern society? Would he, like Isaiah, tell us that our own hands are covered with blood? (Isaiah 1:15)
 - (2)** There are 1.6 million abortions each year in this country. That is 180 abortions each hour of each day of each year in this country. More than 40 million abortions have occurred in this country since 1973 when nine unelected justices declared abortion on demand to be a fundamental right.
 - (3)** More children are sacrificed each year in this country on the altar of our own convenience than were ever sacrificed on the altars of the false gods in the Old Testament.
 - (a)** Psalm 106:37-38 Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, 38 And shed innocent blood, even the

blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.

(b) 2 Kings 21:16 Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.

(4) We don't say much about abortion these days, perhaps because we have been shouted down into silence by its countless very vocal proponents. But nothing else has had as much to do with bringing about the culture of death in which we are presently living than has abortion on demand. We must not be silent in the face of such evil. We need to let people know that while abortion is certainly a choice, it is the wrong choice in the eyes of Almighty God.

(5) But, you say, these events from 2 Kings are worse because these women were consuming their children. But is it really worse? The debate today is not over whether we will have abortion in this country – that issue has been decided. The issue in the news today is whether we will use the aborted fetuses for spare body parts! It reminds me of God's statement in Jeremiah 19:5 regarding child sacrifices – he says it never entered his mind that people would do such a thing!

(6) Isaiah 5:20-21 speaks of those who call evil good and good evil. We are seeing that today on the issue of abortion. The best thing that we can do as Christians is to continue to call good good and evil evil – thereby letting the world know that we at least still know which is which.