

2ND KINGS

Week 7, chapter 5

As we continue in 2nd Kings Chapter 5 it absolutely glows with Biblical principles that we also find in the New Testament, and especially those associated with the life and works of Yeshua HaMashiach.

The main figure in this narrative is a gentile army commander named Na'aman. Na'aman works for Ben-Hadad King of Aram (which in modern terms is Syria). As a side note: we've encountered the name Ben-Hadad in earlier chapters and will encounter that name again. It is not the same person each time. Ben-Hadad means something like "son of the sun-god"; it was a title that Aramean kings commonly held, as opposed to a king's formal name.

Na'aman was a relatively good and decent man who was held in high esteem by the Syrian King and apparently by his household because we're told that a young Hebrew girl who was a house slave in Na'aman's household told his wife that she wished Na'aman could go have his **tzara'at** cured by "the prophet in Shomron" (she was speaking of Elisha who lived in Samaria). **Tzara'at** is usually translated in English bibles as leprosy and that is simply a poor translation. Indeed **tzara'at** is a skin disease, however it is not any specific medically defined skin disease and certainly it is not leprosy. But the point that is missed by most Bible commentators and teachers is that the type and extent of the skin disease is not the issue; what matters is the cause of it. **Tzara'at** is caused by God; it is God inflicting a highly visible and often disfiguring disease upon someone as an outward sign of a sinful or unclean inner spiritual condition that would otherwise be hidden except to the Lord who sees us for who we really are. The Israelites fully understood that. However what is interesting is that since YHWH is God of the Hebrews, why would this gentile army commander (who by definition worships different gods) have it? Theoretically all gentiles had an unclean and sinful inner spiritual condition since they did not worship the God of Israel and thus **tzara'at** should only affect Hebrews who were unfaithful to Yehoveh. In fact, the various Jewish writers of the Talmud generally conclude that even though the word **tzara'at** is specifically used in the Scriptures to describe Na'aman's skin disease that it had to have been something else because **tzara'at** only affects Jews; I disagree with their conclusion. This question is not answered for us specifically, however perhaps the result of the story gives us a hint as to why this occurred to Na'aman the gentile: the Lord had prepared his heart to accept Him.

In any case this skin disease was no doubt embarrassing and uncomfortable and Na'aman was willing to try most anything to have it cured. And surely he had exhausted every avenue

the prophets and priests of his gods had suggested and the Aramean physicians had prescribed but to no avail. So upon hearing of another possibility (no matter how remote) he went to his king who was more than happy to let Na'aman go to Israel to seek a cure and even sent him with an entourage and a vast sum of monetary gifts to the very king he had been battling against: King Y'horam of Israel. Along with the gifts was a letter of introduction and instruction, expecting for Y'horam to heal Na'aman.

Let's pick up our story by re-reading part of chapter 5.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 5:7 – 14

I think that King Jehoram, a weak, self-centered and thoroughly corrupt man, somewhat misinterpreted the letter he received from the King of Syria. The letter seemed to plainly say that Ben-Hadad fully expected Y'horam to personally cure Na'aman. Yet if one reasonably assumes that the little Hebrew slave girl's suggestion that the PROPHET of Samaria (not the king) could cure Na'aman was what Ben-Hadad had acted upon, then all Ben-Hadad meant by his letter was that King Jehoram should take the proper steps to see to it that his prophet, Elisha, affect a cure for this valued Aramean military commander. From the Oriental viewpoint prophets worked directly for kings and the job of a prophet was to convince or even coerce the gods they worship into doing their bidding. So, the king tells the prophet what he wants and the prophet goes to the god he represents and somehow or another gets that god to act accordingly.

But Jehoram smells a rat. Verse 7 tells us that the King of Israel interprets Ben-Hadad's message as a set-up for an excuse to start a war. That is, Jehoram complains that he isn't God, so how can he possibly cure a disease that God caused? Therefore he suspects that when Na'aman isn't cured (something that Ben-Hadad already knows Jehoram can't do), this will provide Ben-Hadad with a phony excuse to attack, supposedly in retribution for being dishonored especially after he has sent such a bountiful gift of respect to Y'horam. And in a shame-honor based society that represented the entirety of the Middle East, such an excuse for war would be fully understood and accepted by all parties involved. But, that was not Ben-Hadad's intent.

However there was also another problem. No doubt King Y'horam knew that only a prophet of God could have any hope of curing Na'aman's *tzara'at* and thus stave off war with Aram. But the King of Israel had no relationship with Elisha; he detested Elisha and would kill him in a heartbeat if he thought he could get away with it. The feeling was mutual; Elisha had no regard or respect for Jehoram and no doubt saw him as an adversary to beware of.

Somehow word got to Elisha that the King of Israel was so depressed and anxiety ridden that he had virtually entered a state of mourning because of the letter from Ben-Hadad (the king had torn his garments, which can be taken literally or as merely an idiom that means he was grief stricken). And Elisha responded by asking why the king would behave in such a way. Because what Jehoram displayed was a cowardly despair before the actual problem had arisen. The king was reacting upon a FEAR of what COULD happen, not upon any real or imminent danger. And that reality makes me wonder: how many good and God-directed works have we, as Believers, turned aside from even attempting not because it was impossible to do but only because of our fears? Fears of failure; fears of humiliation; fears of facing something new or unknown; fears of being personally harmed. Fear is a powerful force in the psyche of a human being, and the Lord knows it, which is why in the Bible we will often find God's admonition to his people to "fear not".

So when Elisha sent a message to King Y'horam, "Why did you tear your clothes?", it is a rhetorical question that is actually chastising him for his lack of faith and courage. The message from Elisha is basically saying that if you would just accept that Yehoveh has a prophet in Israel who can handle this problem and cure this man of his *tzara'at*, you wouldn't be so full of grief. The truth is that God always gave his kings of Israel and Judah prophets so that His oracle could guide them in their rulings and decisions and thus the people of Israel and Judah could be blessed. Every king had a prophet of Yehoveh available, but the kings of the northern kingdom usually didn't want them. Why? Because although they wanted prophets, they wanted prophets who represented the other gods, not Yehoveh's prophets. That's because these false prophets were malleable and quite willing to tell the king whatever he wanted to hear. But God's prophets were there to tell the king what God said, whether it sounded good or bad to the king.

Here again we have another blaring God-principle erupt; as worshippers of Yehoveh and followers of Christ, we have a helper and deliverer available to us anytime, anywhere, who is far greater than Elisha or Elijah. And yet, because our evil inclination remains alive and operating within us, and because of our inherent humanness that didn't flee from us when we were saved, much like King Jehoram more often than not our instinct is NOT to consult God but instead to act on our own when decisions and challenges confront us. Instead of instantly entering into earnest prayer we will often merely descend into fear and anxiety. We act rashly, and then regret it. We become paralyzed when some kind of action must be taken but we're too fearful to move. Or we assume that the outcome is already determined and no amount of prayer or action will have any effect so why bother. That is what King Jehoram did and why we find the Prophet Elisha riding to the rescue. But Elisha was not coming to rescue Y'horam, but rather the situation. The entire purpose of healing Na'aman would not be for Jehoram's sake but for God's glory so that all who witness this will bow down to the power of the God of Israel.

We're not told by what means Na'aman was instructed to go to Elisha's home instead of seeking out the king; but when he arrived it was not with humility but rather with all the pomp

and circumstance that was customary for a man of Na'aman's station. And, in a pattern similar to how Elisha had dealt with the aristocratic woman of Shunem, Elisha does not speak directly to his visitor but rather speaks through his servant-messenger to Na'aman. And the message is that Na'aman is to go down to the Jordan River, and to immerse himself 7 times. And when he exits the River he will be cleansed (in Hebrew *taher*). Please notice: he does NOT say that Na'aman will be healed. Indeed *taher* means to become ritually cleansed, not cured or healed. The Jordan waters had no healing effect on his skin. That is, since Na'aman's problem is that God sees him as spiritually unclean, and that uncleanness has caused God to give him an outward skin disease as a result, then as a natural result of Na'aman becoming spiritually clean on the inside, the skin disease on the outside goes away.

Na'aman is completely taken aback by the entire scene; not only is the prophet not even speaking to him directly but also it seems absurd that to take a bath in a river is the solution to his problem. So he wants to know why Israel's river is any better than the beautiful rivers up in Syria, the Amanah and the Pharpar Rivers. Besides, he bathes in river water regularly and that has never had any effect before.

To Na'aman's way of thinking the prophet needed to appear before him, speak some kind of mysterious incantation that invoked the name of Elisha's God, wave his hand over the infected area, and then it would be healed; at least that's the customary way it was done by the magicians and healers that he had ever known. So he became furious at having wasted his time only to be insulted and told a bunch of nonsense about bathing in the Jordan River, and he left. But his attendants proved to be much more wise and discerning than their master. They approached him in an affectionate and respectful manner by calling him "father", and then said words that ought to resonate with every Believer in Yeshua. They asked him a profound question: had the prophet asked him to do something much more complicated and difficult (than merely bathing in the Jordan 7 times) wouldn't he have done it, if it meant that he might have finally been rid of this horrible skin disease? Had the prophet told him to climb a dangerous mountain, or to fight a couple of lions, or to fast for a month.....something that required great personal effort, courage or accomplishment on Na'aman's part, wouldn't he have undertaken such a challenge with zest? Na'aman was a brave man of action and discipline; doing something to earn his healing he would have undertaken no matter how difficult.

He reconsidered and did as Elisha told him to, and miraculously he was cleansed of his *tzara'at*. His flesh became virtually new again, just as like the skin of a young boy. The scars of battle and age, the leathery wrinkles from frying in the hot sun, and the hideous outward disfiguration from his inner unclean spiritual condition were all reversed as if he had been reborn. But he had to pass through the living waters of Israel for that to happen. I hope the intended image is starting to grow in your minds. Here is as vivid a picture of the Gospel in the Old Testament as we might ever find.

God, through His prophet Elisha, told Na'aman what he had to do to be cleansed of his unclean spiritual condition. But it was so easy and simple that it became Na'aman's stumbling block. God offered this to Na'aman with no merit and no work needed on Na'aman's part other than enough faith to trust in it. But Na'aman's natural instinct was that he must earn his deliverance from uncleanness. Or that some powerful religious holy-man had to perform special and costly rituals over him that he might be released from his condition. Or that he could see no reason that deliverance couldn't happen by being immersed in the living water from some other source than Israel; some gentile source.

To make it as plain as possible to those who might not be making the connection: the way to our souls being made clean and acceptable to God is by merely being washed in the living waters of Israel: Yeshua. But that is a stumbling block for so many who cannot accept that faith and faith alone in Messiah is the answer. Surely our behavior, our punctilious following of rules, our good deeds, our giving to charity, our hard work to be good; all of this and more **MUST** be needed for so grand and complete a deliverance. But in fact, all of these things do nothing but demean the free gift of salvation that God offers us through Christ.

When we, in faith, accept God's way to deliverance, we are divinely cleansed. But it must be faith in God's Messiah, not in another of our choice. It must be in the living waters of our Israelite Savior that we are immersed, under the Israelite covenants. And when we submit to this, we exit those living waters as though we were newborns exiting the water of our mother's womb. We are reborn. We are as new again. We don't need a prophet to do it for us, but merely to show us the way. No holy man need be present, and no ritual need be performed. It is personal and private between each individual and the Lord. And yet the requirement is the same for everyone, rich or poor, slave or free: Complete surrender to the God of Israel without condition.

It is interesting that in verse 13 Na'aman's servant suggest that it's such a small thing to be told to "bathe and be clean", why not do it?

Bathe and be clean is the principle of the Mikvah (Hebrew water immersion). No ritual is performed in the process. No one performs it upon you; you self-immersed. You go into the water alone and unclean, and come up alone and cleansed. The water of the Mikvah has no magical effect. Rather all results are due to your trust and obedience to God's commandments; it is entirely an act of faith. Oh, there are witnesses, but they are not part of the immersion process. In fact, despite the many paintings and the mental image we have of Jesus being baptized by John, I have no doubt that is not how it happened. John was there as a witness, but he didn't "dunk" Yeshua. All Hebrew immersion was self-immersion and Jesus and John didn't give us a whole new Christian ritual method of baptizing. And, by the way, to baptize is but the English translation of the Greek word baptizmo, which is a generic word that means to immerse. It carries no meaning whatsoever of ritual or of method. The modern way the Evangelical Church has of assisting people in baptism by one or two people pronouncing

words over the person as they literally “dunk” them under the water is totally unlike what happened with Christ in the Jordan; and while not wrong, it is far from the Biblical procedure and pattern.

Let’s read some more of chapter 5.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 5:15 – end

And then we get this surprising expression of faith from Na’aman as he says, “Well, I’ve learned that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel”. Wow. Here is a gentile man, a loyal and dedicated soldier of highest rank, who can only respond to what has happened to him by admitting that there is no God in all the earth except Yehoveh. His inner spirit has been totally transformed. And he knows that this God dwells among Israel. Again the significance of his statement is like having Yeshua speak it to us. First, this is an absolute statement of monotheism; in a world of hundreds and hundreds of gods, Na’aman realizes that they don’t exist; and second that there is only one God, the God of Israel.

Even more he asks for permission to literally transport some of the soil from Israel back to Syria so that he can build an altar upon it and sacrifice it to Yehoveh. It is hard to find sufficient words to say just how much I wish the gentile Church could adopt this attitude that I believe is not so much a choice as a duty. Far from building a wall of separation between his gentile-ness and the Hebrew people, he attached himself, as a gentile, to even the land of Israel. Of course it is in a spiritual way, by means of how and to whom he pays homage. But he fully understands that this God is Israel’s God, and calls Israel His earthly dwelling place.

So does Na’aman renounce his nation and his gentile-ness and become a Hebrew? No, at least not physically. But he does spiritually. He pronounces that he will no longer burn incense to other gods (that is, he will not worship the gods of his nation). But in verse 18 he asks Elisha for forgiveness because part of his duties as Aram’s military commander is to go to religious services with the King of Aram, at the temple of Rimmon, and bow down at the temple. Rimmon is the god of thunder and lightening and flood in Aram. It is not something he wants to do, but he feels he has little choice in the matter. Elisha responds to him by simply saying **shalom**. This is not permission, and it is not tolerance. It is simply leaving the matter open ended. Frankly, I see it as wisdom because when one first comes to faith, you can’t climb the mountain to maturity in but one day. We find in the Book of Acts that Jesus’s brother, James the Just, takes the same approach during Paul’s visit to him as concerns what to do about all the gentiles who have recently turned to Israel’s God and Messiah, but from a practical matter still live in a heathen gentile society.

^{CJB} **Acts 21:25** *"However, in regard to the Goyim who have come to trust in Yeshua, we all joined in writing them a letter with our decision that they should abstain from what had been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled and from fornication."*

In no way were these gentiles of faith relieved from being obedient to God's commandments; but just as with young children who first come to faith, you take baby steps to bring them along realizing that their understanding and thus their practices are necessarily primitive and limited.

Backing up a couple of verses to we find that Na'aman offered to pay Elisha for what he did in his deliverance. But Elisha makes it clear that he cannot accept such payment. He did not sanctify Na'aman in order to earn money but rather only to glorify God. To have accepted anything for this would be to fraudulently accept a gratuity and credit for something the Lord did.

Here, beginning in verse 20, we find an irony. We have just read about the simple faithfulness of a gentile towards God; a gentile who had essentially adopted the spirit and soul of a Hebrew. But now we have a Hebrew, the great Prophet Elisha's own personal assistant **Geichazi**, who has obviously adopted the spirit and soul of a gentile heathen. **Geichazi** can't stand it that this gentile would come to Israel, accept Israel's God, offer a fortune to Elisha and Elisha refuses it. No doubt on one hand, **Geichazi** could imagine all the good it could do for the prophet guild communities that lived in near poverty. But on the other he saw an opportunity for personal gain.

So as Na'aman is homeward bound **Geichazi** chases after him. Na'aman recognizes him and wonders if something has happened. **Geichazi** proceeds to fabricate a story about some prophets who came to him for clothing and money, and so asks for 2 changes of clothing and what today would amount to 66 pounds of silver. The grateful Na'aman offered **Geichazi** essentially double what he had asked for. And what echoes this narrative brings us of instructions by our Messiah in His Sermon on the Mount!

^{CJB} **Matt. 5:40-42**

⁴⁰ *If someone wants to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well!*

⁴¹ *And if a soldier forces you to carry his pack for one mile, carry it for two!*

⁴² *When someone asks you for something, give it to him; when someone wants to borrow something from you, lend it to him.*

But the street-wise Na'aman decides he's going to send two of his men to accompany **Geichazi** back to Samaria. No doubt this had a dual intention. First was that **Geichazi** was going to be transporting over 130 pounds of silver with him, a small fortune, and would be subjected to bandits. Second, the Rabbis say that Na'aman was suspicious and didn't necessarily trust **Geichazi**. After all, Elisha had made it abundantly clear that he would not accept anything from Na'aman. In fact, the wording of that passage makes it clear that this esteemed Man of God, who had just proven himself to be exactly that, had made a vow in Yehoveh's name NOT to accept anything. And now suddenly, here comes this servant of Elisha's, all by himself, claiming that this same Elisha had sent him to get some money from Na'aman. A little lesson: just because someone says they represent God, or actually is a Believer, or even has a vocation that is in service to God doesn't automatically make them trustworthy or even incapable of doing something sinful or harmful to another person. It is not good stewardship to be naïve and just blindly give your money to a Church or Synagogue authority or even a Christian acquaintance merely because of their position or their story. Especially if you have a check in your spirit, you must be wise and do a little investigating.

But when **Geichazi** returned he was confronted by Elisha, and of our course **Geichazi** continues the deception. Elisha asks him where he has been, and **Geichazi** answers that he hasn't been anywhere. Elisha knew everything but he wanted to give **Geichazi** an opportunity to come clean and repent, but the lure of so much money to be gained so easily; an opportunity that might never occur again in his lifetime, was just too tempting and so the foolish servant just kept lying.

It is amazing how when we determine to deceive others, we can also easily deceive ourselves. Did **Geichazi** not understand who he was dealing with, on earth and in heaven? His master was one of the two greatest prophets ever to live. **Geichazi** had personally witnessed many of Elisha's miracles. Elisha had been given the gift to see things and have visions whenever God decided to give it to him and of this his servant was acutely aware. And even if Elisha hadn't seen, the Lord had. Did **Geichazi** think that he would escape the watchful gaze of God Almighty? It is amazing what some temptations will do to humans. How many pastors have sadly succumbed to theft and to pornography? Perhaps their congregations and their families had been fooled, but did they think Christ didn't know? How many laypersons who show up at their church or synagogue without fail and yet cheat on their spouses or are unfair in their business practices; they seem to think that because their pastor or their fellow church members aren't aware of it that their sin will go unnoticed by the Lord or perhaps they'll merely receive a kindly wink and a nod from Him. It is utterly irrational that **Geichazi** would think he could get away with such a heinous crime. But Elisha makes it clear that he knows all about it.

Geichazi's punishment is directly proportional to his sin and to the context of it's occasion. Following the Torah principle of Lex Talionis, an eye for an eye, he will now wear the outer

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mark of his inner spiritual condition that Na'aman has just been relieved from. **Geichazi** will be given **tzara'at**, and as often happens when one commits such a serious crime against God it has long lasting and unintended consequences on those we love and care about most. So not just **Geichazi** but his descendants will bear this uncleanness indefinitely.

Next week we'll explore 2nd Kings Chapter 6.