

Lesson 95

Elisha and the Syrians

God healed Naaman's leprosy and protected Elisha from the Syrians.

Overview

Lesson Focus

God showed his power and mercy to the people of Syria. God brought Naaman, a Syrian commander, to Elisha to be healed of leprosy. Because Naaman humbled himself to wash in the Jordan River as Elisha instructed, he was completely cleansed. Then God protected Elisha from an army of Syrians sent to capture him.

Key Passages

2 Kings 5:1, 6:15–19

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Identify why Naaman was healed of leprosy while Gehazi was punished with leprosy.

Describe how God protected Elisha from the Syrians.

Memory Verse

Philippians 3:13–14 But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Elisha prophesied during a dark time in Israel's history, and God revealed his power, validated Elisha's position as prophet, and gave him the authority to perform many miracles in his name. The Creator God used his prophet Elisha as a means of accomplishing his perfect plans on earth.

Elisha not only ministered to Israel but was also called upon to spread God's fame throughout the earth. We see this in the account of Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, a powerful Gentile nation. The Bible tells us that Naaman served as the chief commander to Ben-hadad and had won many battles by the hand of the Lord. But Naaman was a leper (2 Kings 5:1). If not for his status as commander, his power, and his wealth, this disease would have caused him to be shunned by many.

Upon hearing through an Israelite servant girl about the prophet of God in Samaria, Naaman sought permission from his king to pursue the prophet's healing power (2 Kings 5:4–6). When Naaman approached Elisha's house, the prophet sent a messenger to tell him to wash in the Jordan River seven times to be restored. Naaman became furious at the advice, too proud to oblige these humble, uncomplicated instructions (2 Kings 5:10–12). After some persuasion from his servants to follow the simple command of the prophet, Naaman conceded. He dipped seven times in the Jordan, and his flesh was restored and made clean (2 Kings 5:14). God had healed the leprosy and had changed the heart of this foreigner to acknowledge the true God (2 Kings 5:15).

God used many people to influence Naaman and bring him to a realization of the true God who had the power to heal through such an apparently silly, simple act. God still uses imperfect people to accomplish his perfect plans. The New Testament confirms this when James speaks of the humanity of Elijah in relation to the work God did through him (James 5:17–18). You can trust that in your obedience the sovereign and omnipotent One is using you (despite your failings) in the lives of people around you to proclaim his glory and to further the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The next chapters continue with the Syrians tormenting Israel. As the king of Syria made his plans, the Lord revealed the plans to Elisha, who revealed them to the king of Israel. Because of this, Jehoram was able to avoid the Syrians' attacks on multiple occasions (2 Kings 6:10). The Syrian king declared he must have spies in the camp, but a servant revealed to him that Elisha was the problem. So the king gathered an army and surrounded the city of Dothan in order to capture Elisha. What the king of Syria did not know was that Elisha was protected by an invisible army. When his servant expressed fear, Elisha prayed that God would open his eyes. The servant suddenly could see the mountains covered with horses and chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:17).

Next, Elisha prayed that the Syrians be blinded, and then he led the blinded army to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. After delivering the great Syrian army directly into the capital of enemy territory, Elisha prayed for them to see then instructed Jehoram to feed them and let them go. The Syrian raids stopped (2 Kings 6:23). After some time, the Syrians came back in full force to besiege Samaria. This siege caused a famine so severe that a woman even boiled her son to eat (2 Kings 6:28–29). The king blamed Elisha and set out to kill him, but God had a plan.

While the Syrians were camping around the city, God caused them to hear an approaching army. They thought that Jehoram must have hired the help of the Hittite and Egyptian armies. They fled in fear. Four lepers went out to the camp, hoping to find food. When they arrived at the camp, the Syrians weren't there. They informed the king and the Israelites plundered the vacant camp, ending the famine and reducing the price of flour and barley, just as Elisha had prophesied. Again, God had delivered Israel in a way that could only be attributed to him.

Historical/Apologetics Background

The miracles of Elisha are often cited by skeptics to discredit the Bible as a source of authority. They question why God would send bears to kill a mob of young men mocking a prophet (2 Kings 2:23–24). They don't believe that throwing a stick in the water would make an axe head float (2 Kings 6:1–7), or that a poisonous pot of stew could be purified with a bit of flour (2 Kings 4:38–41), much less that a dead child could be raised to life by lying on top of him (2 Kings 4:8–37). But these doubters don't know and fear the Creator and Sustainer of all things—the one true God. God used his prophets and their miracles to accomplish his purposes and to glorify his name among his people.

As we look at the laws delivered to Israel by Moses, various forms of skin disease were referred to as leprosy, not just the Hansen's disease, which we call leprosy today (Leviticus 13–14). Consequently, we don't know exactly what afflicted Naaman. We know it was clearly a skin disease classified broadly as leprosy. Naaman's leprosy appears to have been localized (2 Kings 5:11), and he had surely sought many cures in Syria. Upon his healing, Naaman knew that he had experienced a miracle at the hand of God. He was now clean.

If we are honest and look closely, we can easily connect Naaman's leprosy to the leprosy that fills the heart of every human—sin. This disease has separated us from God. We are unclean and can't stand in his presence . . . unless he washes us. Those who receive Jesus Christ, believing in the cleansing and forgiveness offered to sinners through the death of Jesus, can rejoice at the freedom Christ offers. Like Naaman, those forgiven through Christ no longer have to worry about the disease that had tainted them since birth—but can stand before God, knowing they are clean from sin for all eternity.

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