

## ELISHA AND NAAMAN

### *II Kings 5*

The teachers should review I Kings 12, in which the story of the division of the kingdom is told and also the setting up of the two golden calves which led Israel into idolatry and consequent steady decline. Mention Elijah and Elisha and their mission, and then introduce the story for today by speaking of Syria as one of the enemies harassing Israel.

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#### **Doctrinal Points**

*The Lord alone can heal.*

*Truth comes only from the Lord by means of the Word.*

*Natural knowledge cannot cure our inner evils.*

*Genuine love does not look for reward.*

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#### **Notes for Parents**

We all know from our own experience what it is to have a divided mind. Sometimes we mean well but find that we do harm rather than good because we have in our minds wrong ideas of what ought to be done. And still more often perhaps we know in our minds what is right but do not want to do it. When heart and mind, i.e., will and understanding, are at variance in this way, our strength and peace both diminish. This is what is pictured by the division of Solomon's kingdom after he died—the division of the Holy Land of a heavenly character. The warmer southern kingdom represents the heart or will, and the northern kingdom the understanding. The southern kingdom, which was called Judah, remained faithful to the line of Solomon and kept its capital at Jerusalem, with the temple as its center of worship. But in the northern kingdom, which was called Israel, the very first king, Jeroboam, set up two golden calves for the people to worship, and all the succeeding

kings continued in this idolatry. Our hearts are likely to cling for a long time to the worship of the Lord in which we have been brought up, but our minds tend to be led astray by worldly and selfish reasoning.

The Lord sent two great prophets to rebuke and warn the kings of Israel—first Elijah and after him Elisha. Our “prophet” is the Word of the Lord, and sometimes unfortunately we pay as little attention to it as the kings of Israel did to Elijah and Elisha. Often people outside the Christian church are more willing to hear the Word than we are. It is these good Gentiles who are pictured by Naaman the Syrian. He wanted very much to be healed of his leprosy, as the good Gentiles long to be spiritually clean. At first he could not believe that a simple thing like washing in the Jordan could cure him, and felt that the rivers of his own land must be just as good. This is a natural first reaction when one is told that faithful keeping of the commandments is the essential, and is better than all worldly reasoning. But once he was healed, he accepted Elisha’s God wholeheartedly.

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### Primary

After reading the story for today dwell on the figure of the little maid who, even in captivity, was sorry for her master and wanted to help him. Tell the children what leprosy is. Drill them on the names *Elijah* and *Elisha*. The rest of the story will carry itself.

The two greatest prophets sent to warn Israel were Elijah and Elisha. They did many wonderful things, helping the good people and punishing the bad ones. Because they obeyed the Lord, He could give them great power.

In our story today, what enemy has been troubling Israel?

Who was the leader of the Syrian army?

What disease did he have?

Who suggested a way to cure him?

Naaman himself must have been a kind man or the little maid of Israel would not have been so eager to help him.

What did the king of Syria do for Naaman?

What did Elisha tell him to do?

How did he at first take Elisha's advice?

What happened when he had washed in Jordan seven times?

Elisha would not take any reward from Naaman.

But his cure convinced Naaman that the God of Israel was the true God, and he vowed that he would never worship any other.

What did he ask Elisha to give him?

What happened to Elisha's servant Gehazi, and why?

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### Junior

Use a map of the divided kingdom as the basis of discussing the introductory material. If your class has at hand a map of the Holy Land as divided among the tribes, the two maps may be compared. Point out Syria and Damascus. In the story of Naaman the Juniors can be given something of the spiritual meaning, as suggested in the last part of their notes. Water as truth is one of the easiest correspondences to make clear, and the difference between the Jordan and the rivers of Damascus follows. Explain also what leprosy is and what it represents.

At the very beginning of his reign Jeroboam made a disastrous mistake. He was afraid that if his people went to the temple at Jerusalem to worship and to take part in the great feasts every year, they might be persuaded to return to the rule of Rehoboam. So he set up two golden calves, one at Bethel in the southern part of his kingdom and the other at Dan in the far north; and he established regular worship of these idols with sacrifices and feasts to satisfy the people. As a result the people of Israel were turned away from the Lord, and all sorts of wickedness prevailed. The kingship in Israel did not stay long in one family. Several of the kings were murdered by their own servants, and many of the reigns were very short. Again and again we read of the new king: "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin." There was not a single king of Israel who was called good. And the enemies of Israel soon began to take advantage of this condition.

We have had three lessons about the great prophet Elijah, whom

the Lord sent to rebuke and warn the people of Israel, including the story of how Elijah was finally taken up into heaven by a chariot and horses of fire, and how his mantle fell from him upon Elisha, who had been his follower and had been promised a double portion of his spirit. Elisha continued Elijah's work.

Our lesson for today is part of the story of Elisha. At this time Syria, a strong nation to the northeast of Israel, was getting the upper hand, making raids and carrying off the treasures of the kingdom and even some of the people. The capital of Syria was the great city of Damascus. Study a map to see how the Holy Land was divided, where the two capitals were, where the two golden calves were set up, and where this new enemy was located.

Who was the captain of the army of the king of Syria?

What disease did he have?

Who told him how he might be cured?

What did the king of Syria do for him?

What did the king of Israel do when he read the letter?

You see, the king never thought of Elisha. People today, when they find themselves in trouble, often forget that the Lord has given us his Word to heal our ills. They try everything and even despair before it occurs to them to ask the Lord's help.

What did Elisha tell Naaman to do?

The Jordan, which people had to cross to enter the Holy Land, pictures the truths which the Lord tells us are necessary if we are to enter the heavenly life. Look up Matthew 19:17. The Jordan as the entrance to the Holy Land pictures the ten commandments. So Elisha's advice to Naaman means that if we want our souls to be healthy, we must first of all keep the commandments. And it is not enough to keep them once: we must form the habit of keeping them. This is what is meant by Naaman's washing in Jordan seven times.

The nations which were Israel's enemies did not recognize the Lord. They represent the people who think only of succeeding in the world. The Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, picture

maxims developed by worldly thought, such as, “You have to look after yourself first,” and “You can’t mix business and religion.” These sound sensible, and many people like them much better than the ten commandments. Naaman thought the Abana and Pharpar were better rivers than the Jordan.

Who persuaded him to try Elisha’s remedy?

What happened?

Of what did this convince Naaman?

Did Elisha accept the reward Naaman offered him?

What did Naaman ask him for?

What did Elisha’s servant try to do?

What was his punishment?

Gehazi’s sin of taking pay for Naaman’s healing teaches us that we must never take credit to ourselves for any good we do. It is always the Lord, working through us, who does the good. Gehazi became a leper because the disease of leprosy pictures trying to appear good when we are really selfish, that is, doing right for what we can get out of it.

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### Intermediate

The lesson for this class is the correspondence of Israel and Judah and their separation, and the correspondence of the Jordan and the rivers of Damascus. Explain that profanation is knowing the truth and turning it to selfish purposes instead of obeying it.

The kings of Israel were all wicked kings. Most of their reigns were short, and some of them were murdered by their own followers. No one family could keep the kingship long. And enemies from without were constantly threatening. This is a picture of the restlessness and dissatisfaction which prevail in the worldly mind.

The Lord sent great prophets to Israel to rebuke and warn both the kings and the people. You recall the wonderful stories about Elijah which we have recently had; and you remember how, when Elijah was taken up into heaven by a chariot and horses of fire, his mantle and power fell to his follower, Elisha. The story of Elisha runs from chapter 2 through chapter 13 of II Kings. Our chapter

for today is just one incident in this story.

The Syrians at this time were a wealthy and powerful people bent on conquering the world. Their capital was the great city of Damascus. Syria pictures the knowledge of truth and good, but when it is an enemy of Israel it means that this knowledge has been turned to selfish purposes. The rivers of Damascus are the ideas which are current in such a state of mind, ideas of how best to get along in the world. Naaman was a principal servant of the king of Syria, captain of his army. He is pictured as a good man, but a leper. Our natural powers are the good servants who work for us, whatever our character may be. Leprosy was a terrible disease, characterized by lifelessness of the skin. The skin at first appeared extremely white, but as the disease progressed, decay set in so that sometimes the hands and feet and even the features of the face would rot and drop off. Leprosy pictures a state in which there is no spiritual life—no real goodness—in what we do. We may put on an appearance of doing good, but it is only superficial and does not last. Sometimes, however, people in this state, like Naaman, realize their condition and long to change, to become really good all through. Naaman, coming from outside the Holy Land, pictures the good Gentiles who have never had an opportunity to learn about the Lord.

The Lord always helps those who sincerely want to know what is right. They are led to the Word—often, it seems, as if by chance. The little maid brought captive out of the land of Israel was such a seeming chance. She had been in contact in her early childhood with the knowledge of the prophet in Israel and cared enough for her master to tell him where he might find a cure for his leprosy. You remember that the prophets always represent the Word. Naaman went first to the king of Israel, as people turn to the teachings of some church which seems to be the leading one, expecting to find guidance there. But if the church has become worldly and has lost its touch with the Word and its dependence upon the Word, as the king of Israel had forgotten the very existence of Elisha, it is powerless to help. Elisha had to remind the king. Then Naaman

went to Elisha.

Elisha told Naaman to go and wash in Jordan seven times. We remember that the Jordan, the boundary of the Holy Land, pictures the truths we must know and obey if we are to enter into heavenly states of living—particularly the ten commandments. Naaman at first thought that the Abana and the Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, were better than the Jordan; that is, that the worldly ideas he had had before were more important than keeping the commandments. But, when his servants urged him to try the simple advice, he decided to make the experiment, and he was healed. Elisha's taking no reward for the healing is a picture of our recognition of the fact that it is the Lord always who does the good, not ourselves.

The result of wishing to be praised and rewarded for the good we do is pictured in the story of Gehazi. He became a leper because the desire for reward and praise takes all spiritual life out of our good works.

*Basic Correspondences*

Israel	=	the mind or understanding
Judah	=	the heart or will
Syria	=	knowledges of good and truth
leprosy	=	profanation of truth
rivers of Damascus	=	worldly ideas of good

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**Senior**

Stress the insidious nature of worldly reasoning and the deterioration of the character when once we admit into our minds doubt of the binding nature of the commandments. Steady obedience to the Word is the essence of the lesson, and young people preparing to go out into the world especially need this lesson.

In the fourth chapter of Luke, when the people of Nazareth asked the Lord to prove His power by performing miracles there in the town where He had grown up, He cited to them two Old Testament stories to show that in the Lord's sight the good Gentiles might be more capable of being healed than the "chosen" people.

One was the miracle which Elijah performed for the widow of Zarephath and the other was our story for today—the story of the healing of Naaman the Syrian by Elisha. Elijah and Elisha, as prophets of the Lord, both represent the Word.

In the Word Syria pictures knowledges of good and truth, but in our story Syria has become the enemy of Israel. When such knowledge as we have is turned to selfish and worldly purposes, it can do us harm rather than good. This is indicated by Naaman's leprosy. Leprosy pictures the state in which good is done for the sake of getting along better in the world. There is no spiritual life in such good.

But many people grow up in environments where this idea prevails and, like the Gentiles who know nothing of the Word, accept it from ignorance of anything better. Naaman was in good repute with his master, and he was evidently kind to his servants, or the little maid would not have felt free to offer advice. He was prepared to pay generously for his cure. And, once convinced, he was willing to change his allegiance from his former gods to the Lord. In other words, he was a good Gentile and so could be healed.

In contrast to him was the king of Israel, who did not even remember the existence of the Lord's prophet at a time when he most needed him. He represents the worldly principle prevailing in the mind of a person brought up in the church, whereas the little maid who had been taken captive to Syria represents the remains of childhood affection for the Word preserved by the Lord for this same time of need.

Elisha's command to wash in Jordan seven times is the command to cleanse our lives by obeying the commandments persistently until they become our habitual rule of life. The hard part for us, as for Naaman, is to admit that the commandments are greater than the precepts of the world, and to humble ourselves to obey them. But only by so doing can we make our lives really clean and sound.

There are more interesting details in this story than can possibly be taken up in one lesson. The little maid carried off from Israel

into Syria and surviving there to save her master is a beautiful picture of our innocent childhood states stored up within us to lead us later in the way of repentance and regeneration. Elisha's permission to Naaman to go with his master when he went into the temple of the God Rimmon pictures the Lord's mercy in recognizing our human frailty. It reminds us of the parable of the unjust steward. Gehazi's sin and its punishment remind us that we must never take credit to ourselves for the good the Lord is able to do through us, for just to the extent that we do accept credit we ourselves are spiritual lepers.

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### Adult

Naaman's leprosy and its cure are the best discussion topic. They picture a common state and need in our modern life. Elisha's first treatment of Naaman points up the fact that the Word remains closed until we choose to obey its simplest precepts.

The story of Naaman the Syrian is a striking one. It is explained in some detail in AE 475<sup>18</sup> (see the quotation below). In Luke 4:27 the Lord Himself refers to this story, suggesting that it was easier for Naaman the Gentile to be healed than for the many lepers that were in Israel; this is a part of His condemnation of the people of Nazareth for not receiving Him. We know that the good Gentiles in the Word represent those who wish to be good but do not know how, from no fault of their own. When Syria is an enemy of Israel it pictures falsification of the knowledges of truth and good through dependence upon human instead of upon divine wisdom.

Naaman was a leper. In AC 6963 we read that leprosy pictures "the profanation of truth" and that "to believe in truths and to live contrary to them is to profane them." According to that definition, we are all lepers, for not one of us lives up to all the truth he knows and believes in. Yet we may all be like Naaman, desiring to be clean and willing to go to the Word for the means. The "lepers of Israel" picture those who do not wish to amend their lives. Chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus enumerate many forms of leprosy, some curable and some incurable, and give the laws relating to

them in detail. So there are many kinds and degrees of profanation, forms which may be corrected, and deeper forms, even to the “unforgivable sin” (Luke 12:10). DP 231 gives us a very interesting account of seven types of profanation.

Naaman’s leprosy was presumably one of the milder forms, since it apparently did not interfere with his office as captain of the king’s army or with his family life. The means of his being led to go to Elisha is interesting—the little maid who had been carried captive out of Israel. When, like the Syrians, we are confident of our own knowledge of what is right and of our ability to direct our own lives, we often attack Israel—that is, we argue against the authority of the teachings of the church—and we feel that we are victorious. Sometimes in the process we acquire some little affection for some of the things of the church which we can make serve our own purposes. And we all have some remains of innocent affection left from our early childhood. The Lord uses these, when we wake to our spiritual need, to direct us to the Word.

Naaman went first to the king of Israel, offering to purchase healing from him. In the same way, people in need are likely to go first to the most obvious representative of religion in their community, with the idea of “getting into church work” without searching out “the prophet”—that is, without trying to find out what the Word really teaches. They are not only disappointed themselves, but they often make trouble for the organization to which they have turned, as Naaman frightened the king by demands which the king could not satisfy.

The Jordan pictures the simple precepts which introduce people into the Holy Land of spiritual living—especially the commandments. We cannot enter this land without obeying the commandments. Naaman expected Elisha to come out and show him some special manifestation of power, but Elisha merely sent him a message. The Word is no respecter of persons. It does not have one method for the rich and another for the poor. It offers no one instantaneous regeneration. It says to every person alike, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times”—that is, “Go, learn the commandments

and keep them faithfully until they shall have had time to do their work in your life—until your life is clean in the sight of God.” But Naaman was angry and said, “Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean?” We do not like to submit simply to the commandments. We like to think that our own ideas of right and wrong are better. Men think the world has outgrown the commandments, that new conditions demand new standards. Abana and Pharpar picture man-made ideas of right and wrong. But Naaman’s servants persuaded him to try the prophet’s prescription. So, when we reach the point where we realize that we must have some new knowledge, some new way of life, that we need the help of the Lord, our common sense should tell us at least to try the simple method which has cured men and women for ages. “My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?” How prone we are to demand some new, startling, heroic mode of life! But steady, persistent obedience to the Lord’s laws is the only road to a clean life, the only road to any real life. We simply do not know better than the Lord. “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”

When Naaman had been healed, he went back to thank the prophet and offered to reward him, but Elisha would accept nothing. This is one of the many passages in the Word which teach that we can never pay our debt to the Lord. Whatever righteousness we may attain is not ours, but the Lord’s in us. The Lord gives us His gifts freely and our part is merely to keep ourselves in a state in which we are capable of receiving them and transmitting them to our neighbor. So Naaman went away promising to serve the Lord. But presently Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, caught up with him and accepted a reward from him on the pretext that it was needed by someone else. Sometimes we go through a spiritual experience which leaves us in a state of humility and gratitude to the Lord, but when we have gone “a little way,” our natural selfishness catches up with us, demanding that we give ourselves some

credit for our good behavior and supporting its claim with various pretenses. Naaman “lighted down from the chariot” to meet Gehazi, as we too often are ready to abandon the teaching which is carrying us forward in a new resolution because of the prompting of a selfish thought. But Elisha was not deceived by Gehazi’s lies. The Word penetrates the excuses with which we seek to cover our selfishness. “The Lord looketh upon the heart.” And then Gehazi was punished with Naaman’s leprosy. In the light of the Word self-interest is seen for what it really is, a disease which, if not rooted out, will spread throughout the system until it deprives us of spiritual life.

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#### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Apocalypse Explained*, n. 475<sup>18</sup>: “‘Naaman a leper of Syria’ represented and signified those who falsify the knowledges of truth and good from the Word, for ‘leprosy’ signifies falsifications, and ‘Syria’ the knowledges of truth and good. ‘The waters of Jordan’ signified the truths that introduce into the church, which are the knowledges of truth and good from the Word, for the river Jordan was the first boundary across which the land of Canaan was entered, and ‘the land of Canaan’ signified the church; this is why ‘the waters of Jordan’ signified introductory truths, which are the first knowledges of truth and good from the Word. Because of this signification of ‘the waters of Jordan,’ Naaman was commanded to wash himself in them seven times, which signified purification from falsified truths; ‘seven times’ signifies fully, and is predicated of things holy, such as truths Divine are. Because ‘seven times’ has this signification, it is said that ‘his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little lad,’ the flesh coming again signifying spiritual life, such as those have who are regenerated through Divine truths.”

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#### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What evil did Jeroboam commit? *set up two gold calves*
- J. Why did he set up the golden calves? *afraid people would return to Rehoboam*
- J. Where were they set up? *Bethel and Dan*
- P. What two great prophets did the Lord send to Israel? *Elijah and Elisha*
- P. In our lesson for today what nation is troubling Israel? *Syria*

- P. Who was the captain of the army of the king of Syria? *Naaman*
- P. What disease did he have? *leprosy*
- P. Who told him how he might be cured? *captive Hebrew girl*
- P. What did Elisha tell Naaman to do? *wash in Jordan seven times*
- J. What did Naaman at first say? *rivers of Damascus were better*
- P. What happened when he obeyed Elisha? *he was cured*
- J. What did he ask Elisha to give him? *two loads of dirt*
- J. What did Elisha's servant do? *took a reward*
- J. What was his punishment? *leprosy*
- I. What do Israel and Judah represent? *mind and body separated*
- S. What does washing in Jordan seven times represent? *consistently obeying the commandments*