

Elisha's Double Portion

Lesson #4 Starting Over

II Kings 5:1-27 and 6:1-7

Background

Elisha continues to minister in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And, Israel's neighbors across the river Jordan include: Syria (Aram-Damascus), Ammon, Moab and Edom. Our first story this week involves Aram-Damascus (King Ben-hadad-see II Kings 6:24, 8:7). These two stories occur around 850 BC.

Story #1: Naaman is healed (II Kings 5:1-27)

Naaman (vs. 1)

"Commander of the Army" and "valiant soldier" (a term restricted for mighty men of valor like Gideon, Jephthah and David) :a military hero

"Great Man in the sight of his master"-a rich man

"Highly regarded"-honorable and highly respected

Leprosy

This term covered a range of diseases from mild skin issues to the incurable disease of Leprosy. It started with small red spots, they would turn white, then scales appeared, hair would fall out, gums would recede, joints would rot and limbs fall off. Eventually it would eat away at a person's face until they died. See Lev. 13, noting verses 45-46.

The Young Girl's Advice (vs. 2-7)

Apparently, she was a spoil of war. The Arameans frequently attacked the northern part of Israel. She was carried away as a captive and now served in Naaman's household. But she was very familiar with Elisha and his ministry. And she cared deeply for Naaman (she calls him "master" or "father.")

Naaman brings a great deal of tribute to give Elisha: 10 talents of silver (750 lbs of silver) and 6000 shekels of gold (150 lbs of gold). The silver and gold would have been worth approximately \$1.2 million. He also brought 10 king-like festive dresses that would be worth thousands of dollars.

Ben-hadad sent an introductory letter to Jehoram (King in Israel) who responded in distress (tore his robes) and acknowledges that he has little power ("Am I God?"). He questions the motive of Ben-hadad.

Elisha and Naaman's Responses (vs. 8-14)

Elisha wants to make sure that Aram knows that Yahweh has powerful prophets in Israel. He invites Naaman to come to his home. Naaman arrives with quite an entourage of horses and chariots.

Naaman is humbled (vs. 14-19)

1. There was no big-time prophet at the King's palace to meet him
2. Elisha just sent a messenger, didn't come himself
3. Naaman was told to wash in a dirty river
4. Had to "dip" in the river (it means to plunge or dive in)
5. Returned back to Elisha with a humble heart "Now I know there is no God in the all the world except in Israel."

Naaman asks for two things:

1. He wants to take back some soil from Israel
The soil might just be a tangible reminder of the healing
He may have wanted to build an earthen altar (see Ex. 20:24)
Or, he may be following some kind of cultish tradition
2. He asks for a pardon for his part in the worship of a false god (Rimmon: this is probably the sun god of Aram). Elisha responds with "go in peace." Likely Elisha is not condoning the practice but just sending Naaman on his way, anticipating that God will mature Naaman's understanding of the appropriate way to worship Yahweh alone.

Naaman offers a gift/reward for his healing (vs. 20-27)

Elisha refuses, but his servant Gehazi shows his true character and connives a gift of two talents of silver and two sets of the kingly clothing from Naaman. Gehazi lies to Elisha and ultimately is struck with leprosy himself.

Story #2: The Ax-head is Found (II Kings 6:1-7)

The setting:

Apparently, the School of Prophets in Jericho had grown and there wasn't enough living space for the young prophets in training. These were hardworking, simple men who lived in humble houses (likely group homes) and they needed to expand the facilities. They did not use cedar logs from Lebanon or marble from expensive quarries. They borrowed equipment and went down by the river Jordan looking for willow or poplar trees to chop down.

Elisha was asked to join them. They needed his involvement and encouragement.

The problem: During the chopping, an ax-head came loose and fell into the deep and fast-moving River Jordan. During the Bronze Age, iron was an important possession. An ax-head would have been very valuable and its loss a big deal.

The miracle: Elisha cut a stick, threw it into the river where the ax-head fell and it floated to the surface. The men were told to retrieve it and the work continued.

So What?

In both these stories, men lost something of value. Naaman lost his health and the young prophets lost an expensive tool. They needed to start over. The Biblical steps to Recovery that are found in these stories are definitely applicable to us.

When we lose our spiritual fervor, when the passion to follow hard after Christ wanes, when sin enters our hearts and dilutes our spiritual eagerness, we need to reflect on these stories of miracles from Elisha and start over too. And, we need to do these four things:

1. Accept Responsibility. Own it. Recognize that something has changed. Don't blame someone else. Stop excusing things. Step up and declare: Something is missing and I want it back!
2. Remember that the spiritual energy, focus and peace that you once had comes from the Lord. Acknowledge that we can't take credit for His peace and power. It is extremely valuable and alas, it was borrowed.
3. Identify exactly where and when you "lost" your spiritual zeal and joy. Do a detailed spiritual inventory and see what has changed. Most people just keep on chopping, even though their ax is dull and desperately needs attention. You just hear "thud, thud" as they whack at a tree with a dull ax.
4. Take some action. Once you know where/when/how you lost your fervor, get busy and fix it. Start up those spiritual disciplines that you know are essential for a healthy spiritual life.
 - Concentrated time in God's Word (read, meditate, memorize, journal and share His Word)
 - Dedicated prayer time (include worship, confession, adoration, requests and tons of thanksgiving)
 - Personal involvement with Godly friends (someone to disciple you, someone for you to mentor, friends to encourage and confront you, folks to serve)

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