

Naaman's servants

2 Kings 5:9-15

5:9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. **5:10** And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. **5:11** But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. **5:12** Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. **5:13** And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? **5:14** Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. **5:15** And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: . . .

servants to the rescue

The healing of Naaman, a powerful but leprous general, is a popular Old Testament story which is often used to illustrate salvation by grace as emphasized in the New Testament. There was nothing the needy Gentile could do to heal himself other than to heed Elisha's simple message. Likewise, there is nothing a sinner can do today to be cleansed from his or her sin other than to submit to the gospel of Christ.

This is all wonderfully true, but what about Naaman's servants? What if they had been afraid to confront their master or had done so in a less skillful way? Would this great miracle have still taken place? Of course, the Lord could have used someone else instead of them, but taking the story as it is, Naaman's unnamed servants played a key role in his healing and salvation.

Earlier in the chapter (5:1-3), an unnamed Jewish girl who served Naaman's wife was used of the Lord to get things started, and many messages for children focus on her faith and testimony. Meanwhile, Naaman's servants who were just as necessary have been overlooked. Though their faith is less obvious, their words of counsel were no less wise and exemplary. This study is centered on them.

negatives

Elisha, the king of Israel, Naaman, and even Gehazi said more in chapter five than Naaman's servants. All that they said is reported in a single verse. Of course, it was good that they spoke up, but they did not say very much.

All that the servants did in 5:13 was ask a couple of questions. They probably were afraid to speak to their angry commander (5:11-12) using direct statements. So they asked some questions instead. This was wise, of course, but it also shows how weak their position was. The Syrian general could have executed them on the spot for challenging him.

Naaman's servants appear in a few other verses as well, but not in important roles. There was a company (a military camp like collection) of them in 5:15. And two individuals were assigned to help carry Gehazi's ill-begotten gain in 5:23-24.

The main negative points about the servants have to do with their beliefs. As Syrians they probably worshipped Rimmon rather than the God of Israel. (See 5:18.) Therefore though their advice in 5:13 was logical enough, it may not have been based on biblical faith. (*Notice that they did not directly criticize Naaman for his nationalistic pride.*)

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Naaman's servants were only helpers.
A-1	() They feared Naaman (5:13).
A-2	() We do not know their names (5:13, 23).
A-3	() They did not do or say very much (5:13, 23).
A-4	() We do not know how many there were (5:13, 18).
A-5	() They are only mentioned in a few verses (5:13, 15, 23-24).
A-6	() They were probably all just common laborers (5:13, 15, 23-24).
A-7	() Naaman's questioners in 5:13 were probably younger than he was.
B	() Naaman's servants were not godly Jews.
B-1	() They probably did not know the Lord (5:18).
B-2	() They thought that Elisha was very rude (5:11-13).
B-3	() They did not quote from the Hebrew Scriptures (5:13).
B-4	() They spoke about the prophet rather than the God of Israel.
B-5	() They urged Naaman to do something great in order to be healed.

positives

Though many of the negative points on the previous page are correct, there are many positive things that should be said about Naaman's servants. In judging each line below, let's be careful not to overly praise them, however.

The points on this page are mostly about the questioners in 5:13 rather than the men who carried the gifts for Gehazi in 5:23-24. Here we are assuming that the men who spoke up in 5:13 are not the same as the two baggage carriers. The questioning required wisdom, while carrying the gifts only required physical strength.

Why were the questioners so helpful? It had to do with: 1.) what they said, 2.) how they said it, and 3.) what they did not say. Thankfully, Naaman wisely repented (5:14) in response to their carefully chosen words.

Most of the lines in the C section below are correct, but at least one of them is not. In the D section, the two lines which compare the servants with Naaman (D-2, and D-3) are interesting but difficult. The final two lines, D-4 and D-5 about the servants' faith or lack thereof, are perhaps the most important. Were they true believers or just pragmatists?

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() Naaman's servants were very helpful.
C-1	() They reminded Naaman of what his wife's maid said (5:3,13).
C-2	() They were more helpful than the king of Syria (5:5-8).
C-3	() They helped change Naaman's thinking (5:11-14).
C-4	() They were not too afraid to ask questions (5:13).
C-5	() They were more helpful than Gehazi (5:20-27).
C-6	() They said all that needed to be said.
C-7	() They were logical and wise (5:13).
D	() Naaman's servants were humble and hopeful.
D-1	() They were submissive, caring, and hopeful (5:13).
D-2	() They probably were not as proud as Naaman (5:11-13).
D-3	() They seemed to be more hopeful than Naaman (5:11-14).
D-4	() They encouraged Naaman to humble himself before God.
D-5	() They were convinced that Elisha would heal their leader.

conclusions

worksheet answers

There are five or six lines which are incorrect. First, Naaman's servants were probably mostly military men rather than laborers (A-6). Second, unlike their master, the servants did not take offense at Elisha's instructions (B-2). Third, the servants encouraged Naaman to do an easy thing (to wash in the Jordan) rather than to do something great in order to be healed (B-5). Fourth, they did not remind Naaman of what his wife's servant girl had said about Elisha (C-1). (To do so could have seemed rude or insulting.) And fifth, the servants who spoke up in verse 13 hoped that the prophet would heal their leader, but it is probably wrong to say that they were convinced that he would do so (D-5). In addition, we do not know if Naaman's questioners were younger or older (A-7). The term "father" in 5:13 may have been more about respect and love than age. Often those who give advice and counsel are older.

Finally, two other lines are partly incorrect. What the servants said was very important even though it was brief (A-3). Even so, at best, they only indirectly encouraged their master to humble himself before God; they did not mention God directly (D-4).

So what?

The servants' questions and the passage as a whole show that it is foolish to quickly reject the God of the Bible because of preconceived ideas, even if those ideas are correct. Naaman was right about the rivers of his homeland being better than the muddy Jordan. But he would never have been healed if he refused to humble himself and obey Elisha. By doing so, he learned that the God of Israel is the God of all the earth (5:15).

Naaman's servants also show that it is sometimes helpful to ask simple, practical questions to expose erroneous worldviews. Naaman probably wrongly believed that he had an autonomous ability to do great things (5:1, 13), but his servants' questions encouraged him to obey God in something small. (We are saved through mercy rather than by works that we have done, Tit. 3:5.)

The greatest lesson to be learned from the servants may be the importance of having hope. Naaman's pride briefly got in the way (5:11-12), but the servant's questions quickly turned the focus back to "the prophet." How much they believed in the Lord at first is debatable (D-3), but they at least had some hope in the man of God and acted accordingly.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most useful.
