

## **“Leprosy” of the Worst Kind**

There is a fascinating account in the Old Testament (2 Kings 5, NLT) about Syria’s top military commander (circa 895 BC). Naaman was successful in his career and highly esteemed. But, he suffered from leprosy. On the suggestion of his wife’s Hebrew maid, he traveled southwest to the land of Israel to find healing.

The maid had the prophet Elisha in mind as the person to contact, but the king of Syria (or maybe Naaman himself) naturally thought he should contact the *king* of Israel. So he went armed with a letter of introduction from his king. He also brought impressive gifts: 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of *haute couture* clothing. (He was prepared to pay handsomely for his healing.)

*“The letter to the king of Israel stated: ‘With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy.’ When the king of Israel read it, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, ‘This man sends me a leper to heal! Am I God that I can kill and give life? He is only trying to find an excuse to invade us again.’ But when Elisha, the man of God, heard about the king’s reaction, he sent this message to him: ‘Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel.’*

*“So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha’s house. But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: ‘Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of leprosy.’ But Naaman became angry and stalked away. ‘I thought he would surely come out to meet me!’ he said. ‘I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the LORD his God and heal me! Aren’t the Abana River and Pharpar River of Damascus better than all the rivers of Israel put together? Why shouldn’t I wash in them and be healed?’ So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.*

*“But his officers tried to reason with him and said, ‘Sir, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, wouldn’t you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply to go and wash and be cured!’ So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his flesh became as healthy as a young child’s, and he was healed!*

*“Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, ‘I know at last that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Now please accept my gifts.’ But Elisha replied, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts. And though Naaman urged him to take the gifts, Elisha refused. Then Naaman said, ‘All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer any burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the LORD.’”*

I can understand why Naaman felt insulted by Elisha’s seeming lack of good manners or diplomatic skills and his distasteful instructions for healing. It was demeaning, if not a bit ridiculous, for a proud, highly-placed, distinguished man. Yet, *it worked* – and without “important” human or material “influence.” It was a no-strings-attached gift from God. It was absolutely free. It was unpretentious. Low key. No photo-op. No embedded news media – neither Syrian nor Israeli.

Because of his earlier misconceptions and his feelings of self-importance, Naaman almost didn’t get healed of his horrible disease. Can’t you just visualize him ranting,

raving and protesting, ready to return home still covered with the deadly leprosy!

*Oh, the power of personal pride!* But, essentially, he was desperate enough and wise enough to follow through on the odd but precise instructions of God's earthly representative.

You, too, will make a wise move if you begin to appreciate the wisdom of God's simplicity, even "foolishness," in the most important matter of your soul's salvation. ◇◇