

# ***Biblical Missionaries***

## ***The Unlikely Missionary***

Lesson #3 for July 18, 2015

Scriptures: 2 Kings 2:1-15; 5; Mark 1:40-45; John 15:5; Romans 6:1,4-11.

1. This lesson focuses on the story of the young Jewish slave girl captured from Israel by the Syrian military and how it resulted in the healing of Naaman, a Syrian military leader, of his leprosy. Elisha's ministry spanned about half a century from about 850 B.C. to 800 B.C.
2. There were three times in biblical history when a lot of miracles took place: 1) The days of the exodus, 2) The days of Elijah and Elisha, and 3) The days of Jesus and the apostles. What was unusual about those times that resulted in a lot of miracles? Were they times of great faith and great need? Or, little faith? Does greater faith produce more miracles? Some of the miracles of Jesus seemed to hinge on the faith of the recipient. What about the times of the exodus and the times of Elijah and Elisha? Were those times of great faith? Why do some so often suggest that if there were more faith, there would be more miracles?
3. Read 2 Kings 5:1 which says: "Through Naaman the LORD had given victory to the Syrian forces." (*GNB*)

This verse contains no fewer than four descriptions or titles that put Naaman in the top echelon of Syrian, or Aramean, society. He exerted major influence on the king of Aram, was held in high esteem, and was the king's right-hand man in religious, as well as military, matters (*vs. 18*). He was also extremely wealthy (*vs. 5*). (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, July 12)

4. But, there was one major problem in Naaman's life: He had leprosy. Modern medicine believes that leprosy is a disease caused by a bacteria which can only be acquired from long and frequent contact very early in one's life with a person who has the disease. Leprosy was so dreaded in ancient times that patients were supposed to remain some distance from all other people; and when anyone came near, they were supposed to cry: "Unclean, unclean."
5. Read Mark 1:40-45; Luke 8:41-56; and Mark 2:1-12. It is a well-known fact that people reach out for help when they are in trouble. When people recognize they have a serious problem, they look for the best help they can find. And in the days of Jesus, there was no question about where the best help was available! What about in Naaman's time?
6. It is a well-known fact sociologically that when there is a major disruption in someone's life, s/he is more ready to accept new ideas, even new paradigms. Is that why the Christian church down through history has grown much more rapidly and more successfully during times of severe persecution? Why is it that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"?
7. Try to imagine yourself in Naaman's shoes. On the one hand, you are recognized as a national leader, a military general, a political and spiritual leader; on the other hand, you have the dreaded disease!
8. Read 2 Kings 5:1-7. How do you explain the events in this passage? Clearly, this girl was a trusted servant, and no one else had even the hint of a cure for leprosy! Do you think she was aware of other people with leprosy who had been healed by the prophet? At least, she must have had some knowledge of his healing powers.
9. Try to imagine what went through the young girl's mind as she considered the possibility of mentioning Elisha to her mistress. Did she consider the fact that Elisha might not be willing to heal a Syrian? Did she think about the possibility that the family might just laugh at her suggestions? Why do you think the family took her suggestions seriously? Certainly, the actions of Naaman's wife and of Naaman himself suggest that he was willing to do almost anything for a possible cure. The idea of a cure for leprosy must have been a shocker!

The conduct of the captive maid, the way that she bore herself in that heathen

home, is a strong witness to the power of early home training.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 245.1.

The most powerful sermon that can be given the unbelieving world in recommendation of our faith is a well-disciplined family. Children that are educated to habits of self-denial and self-control, and are taught to be courteous, kind, and affectionate, will make an impression upon minds that nothing else can.—Ellen G. White, *Pamphlet 123*, p. 45.1.

10. Of course, we know nothing about the childhood or training of this young Hebrew girl. But, like the training of Moses in his first 12 years, her parents must have done a good job.
11. Try to imagine the retinue of people traveling with Naaman as he was carrying all that “cash” and all those valuables, leaving Damascus, crossing a border that was often at war, and entering the land of Israel. But, the king of Israel was an evil man. When the king heard that Naaman was coming, did he immediately think this was some kind of military campaign?
12. How do you think Elisha found out that Naaman was in town? Remember that Elisha’s primary responsibility was teaching in the schools of the prophets. In Elisha’s day, there were several of those schools located in different areas. What do you think was taught in the schools of the prophets? Those schools were started by Samuel.
13. Read 2 Kings 2:1-15. Obviously, God thought that Elisha was ready to take up the mantle and carry on the work of Elijah. Seeing the Jordan split, how would you have responded? What do you think Elisha had in mind when he asked for “a double portion” of Elijah’s spirit? Remember that “a double portion” was the usual portion given to the firstborn son in a family. Elisha clearly recognized his need for the ongoing presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
14. Try to imagine what it was like when Naaman and his retinue of attendants showed up at Elisha’s house. Was Elisha being disrespectful when he refused even to come out and talk to Naaman? Do you think everyone in the community around Elisha came out to see why that powerful Syrian general had come? Certainly, all the children must have been there.
15. Elisha simply sent a messenger telling Naaman to go to the Jordan River and dip himself seven times, and he would be cleansed. Was Naaman upset by the treatment that he received? He thought that the rivers in Syria were much nicer than the Jordan!
16. Read 2 Kings 5:11-14. Naaman needed to know that the prophet of Israel and Israel’s God were the healers and not the waters of the Jordan or any other river. Obedience to this clear instruction of the God of Israel was his only hope of cleansing. With his usual superiority attitude, Naaman was offended by Elisha’s instructions. But, fortunately for him, his attendants suggested that if Elisha had asked him to do something difficult, he would have done it. Naaman realized that the instructions were actually very simple and that he should try to follow them. The entire healing process was designed to demonstrate: 1) That there was a prophet of the true God in Israel, and 2) That God rewarded obedient compliance. Naaman had to swallow his pride. After having come on that long mission at the suggestion of a Hebrew slave girl, he had to listen to a foreign prophet and, finally, to his own servants. But, where else could he go for a potential healing from leprosy? And so, he went to the Jordan River and dipped in it seven times. What do you think Naaman thought after having dipped in the river six times and there was no change?
17. Read Romans 6:4-11. Is the Christian experience of baptism something like Naaman’s healing by dipping in the Jordan River? Isn’t baptism supposed to be like being born again into a new life? Certainly, healing from leprosy was a new life for Naaman.
18. Read 2 Kings 5:15. Having accepted the directions and carried out the instructions, Naaman was convinced that there was/is no God in all the world except Israel’s God. What lesson should we learn from that?
19. Read Revelation 14:12; 1 John 5:2-3; and Romans 6:1. It should be clear from these passages that continuing in sin is not an option. A humble willingness to obey is the key to our

relationship with God even though it may require a significant period of time and patient endurance.

20. Try to imagine the reaction of Naaman and his servants as he came up out of the water the seventh time and found himself healed of leprosy! Naaman could have just raced home to share the good news; but, he decided to return to thank Elisha.
21. There are several important lessons that we might learn from this story. Naaman received something through the ministry of Elisha that he could not have obtained in any other way. There is no way he could have bought it or earned it. Elisha refused the gifts that Naaman offered, suggesting also that salvation cannot be earned or bought. The fact that Naaman was willing to pay almost any price to get the needed healing suggests that we should be willing to sacrifice everything for the gift of salvation. Should we use Naaman as an example?

Let this point be fully settled in every mind: If we accept Christ as a Redeemer, we must accept Him as a Ruler. We cannot have the assurance and perfect confiding trust in Christ as our Saviour until we acknowledge Him as our King and are obedient to His commandments. Thus we evidence our allegiance to God. We have then the genuine ring in our faith, for it is a working faith. It works by love.—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 16.2; *TMK* 293.2.

22. Knowing that it would upset His audience at His hometown of Nazareth, why do you think Jesus mentioned Naaman and the widow of Zarephath in His sermon?

Centuries after Naaman returned to his Syrian home, healed in body and converted in spirit, his wonderful faith was referred to and commended by the Saviour as an object lesson for all who claim to serve God. “Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet,” the Saviour declared; “and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.” Luke 4:27. God passed over the many lepers in Israel because their unbelief closed the door of good to them. A heathen nobleman who had been true to his convictions of right, and who felt his need of help, was in the sight of God more worthy of His blessing than were the afflicted in Israel, who had slighted and despised their God-given privileges. God works for those who appreciate His favors and respond to the light given them from heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 252.4-253.0.

23. Read 2 Kings 5:17-19. What do you think about Naaman’s speech to Elisha? Naaman had never heard of such a “God” before. Does it give us any hints about how we should relate to people who are just becoming Christians? Naaman himself believed that he could only worship the true God of Israel. In Naaman’s day, it was believed that each area of the world had a “god” assigned to it. He believed that in order to serve the God of Israel, he had to carry home some soil from Israel so that he could kneel on that soil to worship the true God of Israel. But, Naaman went on to say that at times, he might be required to support the king of Syria when he went into the temple of Rimmon or Baal. How should we respond when people with whom we are working hold onto some of their former ways?
24. In the early years of our missionary work in the Middle East and Near East, some of our churches had signs over the door saying, “No Muslim allowed.” Why do you think we did that?
25. How rapidly should we expect change in new converts?

The widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian had lived up to all the light they had; hence they were accounted more righteous than God’s chosen people who had backslidden from Him and had sacrificed principle to convenience and worldly honor.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 416.3.

26. Do you think Naaman was healed because of his faith? Or, because of his works? It is clear that even if he had believed the words of the young Hebrew slave girl, staying at home and asking for healing would almost certainly not have accomplished anything. Would you call his

trip to visit Elisha and dipping in the Jordan River a kind of works?

27. Trying to witness for your Christianity across cultural boundaries is a special challenge. When attempting to do that, is our life example more important than our words? How do you think Naaman's family treated the Hebrew slave girl after he returned home?
28. Consider the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman as recorded in John 4 and Jesus and the demon-possessed man/men as recorded in Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; and Luke 8:26-39. As far as we know, these were the first Samaritan and the first Gentile missionaries! What was their message? They obviously were not trained in giving Bible studies or carrying any major theological message. They simply told what God had done for them.
29. Read 2 Kings 5:2-3,10,20-27. What should we learn from these passages? The young Hebrew slave girl witnessed in an environment where it probably was very difficult to do so. Naaman's healing depended on his carefully following God's instructions given through Elisha. Gehazi's greed was clearly not part of God's plan. We cannot earn or buy salvation.
30. There were a number of occasions in Scripture and even in modern experience when the best witness that one could give at a particular point was/is their/our own personal experience. What personal experiences do you have that you could use as witnessing tools? Should it take an enormous amount of courage to witness about your personal experience? Would you consider the young Hebrew slave girl to be a witnessing hero? What kind of relationship do you think she had with her mistress? Did she have any direct relationship with Naaman himself? Did she have any feelings of racial prejudice against her master and mistress? Do we have any prejudice that could prevent us from witnessing to people we might actually be able to win? There are many examples in the Bible of how God sought to reach out to groups outside of Israel. Next week, we will talk about Jonah. Why do you think the Israelites were so reluctant to reach out to those they considered to be Gentiles?
31. Can you think of others in the Bible who had to live and exist in foreign cultures where their habits and customs were probably looked down on? How well did they do living out their religion? Consider the stories of Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel, etc.
32. Think of the ways in which this young Hebrew girl could have responded to her situation. 1) She could have just said: "God has put me in this situation; so, let me just join them and follow their customs and religion." Or, 2) She could have said: "I will practice my own religion, but I will do so privately." She resisted both of those pathways.
33. How do you think she knew that Elisha with God's help could heal leprosy? Had Elisha done that earlier? Why do you think Naaman and his wife took her seriously? Remember that she was female, young, a foreigner from an enemy country, and a mere slave.
34. Try to imagine a "Naaman experience" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What unusual or even surprising things about the story stand out in your mind? The heroine was a nameless, powerless slave girl! God went to considerable effort to reach an outsider, someone whom the Jews would, no doubt, have considered to be undeserving in the extreme. To get a hint about how Jews thought about Gentiles, read Luke 4:27-29.
35. Try to imagine what happened in the home of Naaman after this story was over? Did they reward the young Hebrew slave girl? What did they say to her about her suggestions?
36. In our day, is there an important place for contextual ministry? When we reach out to people of different churches, different cultures, and different races, should we demand that they completely change their lifestyle before we can accept them as Christians? Or, should we accept their small steps?

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