

II KINGS 5:1–27

CAPTAIN NAAMAN AND THE PROPHET IN ISRAEL

(SBS Bk 3 Story Nos. 25 & 26)

Story Notes

The Arameans were enemies of Israel as far back as David's day and had continued their hostility to the Northern tribes. They continued their worrying attacks and captured a young girl who was now servant to their chief military commander. The writer of *II Kings* acknowledges that it was the Lord who had given this commander his victories for Aram.

With remarkable simplicity and grace, the young girl was confident of the power of Elisha to heal this enemy of Israel and her own captor, and longed that it would happen. Perhaps unwittingly, she revealed the desire of God to be known as the living God of grace among all nations.

Naaman took the girl's desire for his healing with all the simplicity it deserved and approached his king. For the sake of this man, the king was willing to take the political risks involved in asking a favour of his enemy. He sent Naaman off with liberal gifts. King Jehoram received the request from his enemy with all the threat that is sensed by those who build their own kingdom. If he had embraced the ministry of Elisha, perhaps he could have anticipated that God meant to glorify himself by this request. Elisha, always a man of the kingdom of God, saw no reason for panic and asked for the man to be sent on to him.

Elisha's non-appearance to Naaman to prescribe his lowly remedy should be understood in the light of his words to Naaman after he was healed. Elisha wanted Naaman to understand, not merely that there was a prophet in Israel, but that there was a living God before whom he stood and who had power and grace to heal. Elisha would take no reward for a task he had not performed. Naaman went back to Aram a convert to Israel's Lord.

We do not know what affect this healing had on King Jehoram, but we know that when Jesus referred to it many years later (Luke 4:27), Israel was furious. Israel, for the most part, remained closed off to God's saving deeds. God had wanted to so bless his people so they could be a witness to the nations. Here, God went about his gracious work anyway, through a young girl and a faithful prophet.

Gehazi, in effect, had a different 'god' before whom he stood, a god who gave grudgingly or for payment. He could not see why they, or at least he, should not be enriched by this service, and did not understand the grace of this act that had awakened faith in a foreigner. Without the greatness of the true God before him, he gave way to covetousness and deceit. He spent the remaining days of his service with the power and fear of God powerfully at work in his own flesh.