

Kings and Prophets 14-03-14b

We pick up our study now in 2 Kings chapter 5, and during the break there was some speculation that my remarks about parents only pertain to them making rookie mistakes with the first child or two, and then after that they've got it all figured out. And so some of the younger people in groups of siblings are now getting the big head and thinking that they were very well raised. And as I have observed, in my view, as an older child, I think that the parents, you know, have struggled through and become exhausted and can't really properly discipline the younger ones. And so they—I mean, you can tell just by the reaction they have here tonight—that they're as messed up as the rest of us.

So I say all of that to say that it is by God's grace that any of us live into adulthood, and that any of us as parents manage to raise our children without either killing them or them killing us. But it is certainly the case that the girl we're looking at in this story is extraordinary. And a final point on her before we move forward is, you notice the wish that she expresses. She says, "If only." If anybody could finish out that sentence in those circumstances, what would your "if only" be? If only I could get back home. If only the prophet of God would come and deliver me from captivity. If only I had never been captured. If only my circumstances were different, better. Why did I have to come work in the house of a leper? You know, with all the luxury and everything else, you know, I still don't know if I'm going to come down with it. Or there's people that are paranoid about, you know, any sort of affliction like that.

But she is objective, and she's looking outside herself, and she has empathy for Naaman's circumstance. And it is her expression of concern and desire for his well-being that sets this whole story in motion.

Point: Do not underestimate the importance of your behavior, your reaction, your response in a time of crisis. You may think it doesn't matter.

You may think that nobody observes, that nobody knows or cares, but it is the little things. This is a remark. She's thought about this.

She's put it together in her heart. She has realized that not only Elisha can invoke the power of God to cure Naaman, but as was pointed out on the break, Naaman is a Syrian, and she has figured out that Elisha will do that for someone who is not an Israelite. She says with no equivocation whatsoever, "He would heal him of his leprosy."

He would heal this enemy of Israel, Syrian general. The prophet would do so. How did she know this? Again, she has been thinking, and she is a girl of faith. She knows the God of Israel.

She knows who the man of God is in Israel, the prophet in Samaria, and she has figured out that this is not just something that might happen. This is something that would happen if only Naaman could go see Elisha, and it's amazing. But she had no inkling at the time that her remark would end up as a chapter in God's Word that lives and abides forever.

She had no thought for that. She's an enslaved girl taken captive. Don't underestimate what God can do in your life when you are faithful, when you are trusting, when you are objective, when you look outside yourself and do the best you can in whatever circumstances you find yourself.

Never underestimate the power of God. It's not the power of me. It's not the power of I myself.

It's not the power of circumstances or the people that surround me in my immediate circumstances. It is the power of God that you shortchange when you wallow in self-pity, when you get self-centered, when you get apathetic, when you give up, when you just dissolve and become ineffective. Of course, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

God can't use us in those conditions. God uses people of faith. God uses people who are faithful when it doesn't look like it pays in human terms to be faithful.

That's exactly the time when it is important to be most faithful. That's what this girl does. And she is one of the great believers of her age.

So she makes this remark. So Naaman went in and told his master. It doesn't actually say Naaman.

You'll notice it's in italics. I've actually seen Bible versions that say, "And one went and told his lord, saying." It's not explicit that Naaman is the one who overheard this remark.

She makes the remark to her mistress. Somebody tells the king what the girl said. You can make sort of a surface argument that it's Naaman because someone went in and told his master, Naaman's master, the king, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel," that the king of Syria said to Naaman.

But you know how there's compression, especially in the Hebrew language. And it isn't clear that Naaman sort of went and asked permission of the king. Someone heard what the girl said.

We don't know who it was. He, lowercase h, told his master, the king, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." And "thus and thus said."

You know how sometimes it's repeated for emphasis exactly what the message was? Here it isn't. It's thus and thus. Slightly different in Hebrew, but this is close enough.

The girl from the land of Israel. This isn't the girl from yesterday. This isn't the girl from Ipanema. This isn't—this is the girl from the land of Israel.

And she's identified this way for a reason. Why don't we know her name? Why isn't her name some famous name in biblical history? Because it is where she is from that is repeated. They took captive a young girl from the land of Israel. Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel.

She's not in the land of Israel. She's from there. She is a witness outside the land to things that are inside the land.

And this becomes important when we start parsing the prophetic value of these circumstances, these details. So the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." Now let's think about this.

You're the king of Syria. Here's the king of Israel. You've got a bigger, better army than he does.

And you know it and he knows it. So you raid across his border and take stuff because you know you can. And you've been successful.

You think it's because of your general Naaman, but it's actually because the Lord is giving you victory. But it's successful. Hey, you know, let's make a raid.

We'll grab the crops and bring it back across. We'll grab some people and get some fresh slaves. We'll grab whatever we want and bring it back because we can.

And they are motivated and encouraged and blessed in this by the Lord God because this is discipline and punishment for Israel. Now you want the king of Israel to do something for you. So you write a letter to the king whose you've been abusing his people, hauling them off as captives, you know, pillaging and plundering the border.

And you write a letter and you say—and this is the first recorded instance of one of the most ubiquitous phrases in all of military history—"Be advised." You wonder where "be advised" came from? Good writers, good commanders, in my opinion, in the military, never say "be advised."

It's a wasted phrase. Just say what you got to say. "Be advised, the training exercise that was scheduled for 0900 will not take place until 1100 hours."

That's all you have to say. You don't have to say, "Be advised that it will take place." Just say, "The training exercise that was scheduled at 0900 is going to happen at 11."

Oh, no, "be advised." Well, this is where it comes from. You can blame the author of Kings.

This is where that hated phrase comes from. Blame the king of Syria. "Be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman, my servant, to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy."

So you're Jehoram. He's the king, by the way. Remember, his brother only lasted a short time. "Am I going to live or die?" "You're going to die."

And you asked the wrong prophets about the prognosis anyway. And so then his younger brother comes to the throne. He's reigning 12 years.

This is during the 12-year reign of Jehoram. We're still in that time frame. So this is Jehoram we're talking about here.

Well, Jehoram, by the way, guess who else is still around after the death of Ahab? Who has not died yet? Frankie Laine sang it: Jezebel. She's still around.

She's the queen mother. She's lurking like a bat in the wings. And she's there.

But things are not going well. They've had some setbacks, some serious setbacks. But she's still around.

She won't die for several more years. Jezebel outlasts Ahab by like 13 years. She's not going to get her comeuppance for a long time.

And by the way, this is also part of God's judgment and discipline on the northern kingdom, that she's not gone. The letter comes, and it happened when the king of Israel read the letter that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God to kill and make alive?" Notice: to kill and make alive.

They understood leprosy was very much like life and death. This was an equation. The maid taken captive knows it.

The king in his palace on his throne knows it. Leprosy, this is like the power of life and death, to cure this. "Am I God to kill and make alive? This man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy. Therefore, please consider and see how he seeks a quarrel with me."

He sends me this man of great reputation from Syria, says, "Cure his leprosy." When I can't do it, he's going to say, "All right, we're going to come down and sack your entire land because you didn't do what I wanted you to." He set me an impossible task.

When I can't fulfill it, we're all going to die. We're all going to pay. So he tears his clothing.

This is the universal sign of distress. Clothing is a big deal in these ancient days. More about that shortly.

So it was when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes. He didn't hear that the king of Syria had sent a letter. He didn't hear that a leper had showed up from afar.

He didn't hear that a slave girl had said what his abilities were. What does Elisha hear? He hears that the king has torn his clothes. He sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes?"

This does not just remind you of the Lord Jesus. People are running amok, and what does the Lord always do? He asks a question. "Why are you doing what you're doing?" Trying to kind of get the rusty wheels turning a little bit.

"Why are you tearing your clothes? Please let him"—Elisha already knows this—"and he says, why are you in distress? Why are you at your wits' end? You're getting everybody in the whole town upset. Let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Interesting, he doesn't say, "He shall know that there is a God in Israel."

He says he'll know that there's a prophet in Israel. Because it's a two-step process. You've got to know that the evidence, that the witness, is valid.

Then you can take the message of the witness as true. He'll know there's a prophet in Israel. So Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house.

Now, let's zoom out a little bit. Click the plus on your Google map here. We're going to go wide.

Map of Israel. Where has Naaman come from? Where is the capital of Syria? What is the capital of Syria? Damascus, way up north. Naaman and his chariots and his servants and all of this booty, his payment for his healing, have come all the way from Damascus.

It's like a hundred-odd miles from Damascus, all the way down. Where has he come to? To see the king. Samaria, long journey.

Where does Elisha live? He does some itinerant prophet stuff, we know. He gets up as far as Shunam. He gets down to Jericho, goes to Gilgal.

He does some traveling. Where's his home? Where's Elisha's home? His home is in Dothan. Dothan is up the road a piece.

It's maybe 10 miles up the road from Samaria, kind of north and a little bit east. Dothan. So Naaman, having come all the way down to Samaria and having seen the king, and word has traveled from Samaria to Dothan that the king's ripping his clothes, somebody's got to go back 10 miles the other way.

Tell the king, "Send him to me." Naaman goes back up the road to Dothan. He's going to find Elisha in his residence.

How do I know this? Read verse 9. Naaman went with his horses and chariot and stood at the door of Elisha's house.

Not the Shunamite woman's upper room, not the sons of the prophets' camp. This is his house. He's in Dothan.

So he shows up. Ten-mile journey, horses, chariots, figure six, seven miles an hour. Takes him a couple hours to get up there.

So here, this Syrian general, the guy that has been raiding successfully, taking, pillaging, plundering, right-hand guy to the king of Syria, comes to Elisha's house. So Elisha comes out and says, "Hey, hello, mighty general." No.

Elisha sent a messenger to him. Didn't even come out of the house. Naaman, with this entourage and all of this loot, is outside the door of his house.

Elisha didn't even come to the door. Elisha sends his servant, sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you, and you should be clean." Doesn't even show his face.

Now, turn to the very back of your Bible, to the maps. Turn back to the maps and find your map of the divided kingdom. Everybody's got one.

You got the 12 tribes in Canaan. You got the kingdom of David and Solomon. And then you should have somewhere back there the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah.

Anybody not have a map, or not one they can look at? Find the divided kingdom. Find anything where you can see the Dead Sea and the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee and pretty much the rest of the Holy Land, Palestine, whatever.

Got it? Look west. And if you go straight northwest from the northern tip of the Dead Sea, it's almost exactly northwest. Go a little over halfway to the Mediterranean Sea.

You should find Samaria up there. You see Samaria, town of Samaria? Dothan's too small to even be on one of these maps, probably.

But if you have it, that's much better. But you see where Samaria is. It is a little over—if you drew a straight northwest line from the tip of the Dead Sea, the north tip of the Dead Sea, northwest straight to the Mediterranean coast, slightly over halfway up is going to be Samaria.

Everybody got it or somewhere close? Now, look how far that is from the Jordan River. This is not like over the next hill and I'm at the Jordan. I always picture that in Sunday school.

Oh, you see over that hill? That's the Jordan. Just walk over there. This is a long trip to the Jordan.

This is halfway across the Holy Land to get to the Jordan, right? If you can see far enough on that map, on my map, way up high here is Damascus. You see Damascus way up north? He came from Damascus down to Samaria, went to Dothan.

I mean, have you ever felt like you were getting the runaround? I came all the way down here. I'm all dusty from this long journey. The king sends me to Dothan.

The guy doesn't even come out and see me, and he says, "Go to the Jordan." This is like a pretty long trip. He says, "Go to the Jordan."

So by this time, Naaman is pretty much out of patience. Naaman, in fact, became furious. Now, here's my question.

Why couldn't Elisha set a pot of water outside his door and say, "Dip in this water seven times"? Why couldn't he look at the well for Dothan and say, "Draw water from the well of Dothan and splash yourself seven times"? Why couldn't he send Naaman to some nearby creek or river and say, "Dip yourself"? Why does it have to be the Jordan?

I ask myself, it's not close. Why the Jordan? What do you think? Something magic about the water of the Jordan? People think so.

People go to the Holy Land, get baptized in the Jordan. They've got a spot there, and pastors just take turns getting down in the water, bringing all the congregation that spent the money, got the trip. Baptize in the Jordan.

Down and up, down and up. Just run them through, down and up, down and up. Muddy old water of the Jordan.

Pastors soaking wet, dripping all day long. Down and up. Baptized in the Jordan.

Got a certificate. Baptized in the Jordan, such-and-such a day. Is there anything special about the Jordan as a body of water? Yes.

It is its symbolic value. It is its historical value. It's not just any old river.

It's the Jordan River. How did the people of Israel become Israel? How did they go from being the children of Israel to the nation of Israel? When and how did that happen? Joshua commanded the priests to carry the ark, and they went to the edge of what body of water? The Jordan.

Are there other routes into the Holy Land? What we call, you know, northern and southern Israel. Are there other ways to get there? If they were leaving Egypt, why didn't they take the way of the sea? Go along the coast.

Abundant fish available out of the Med. You got all kinds of crops on the plains there. Easy travel.

Go right up there. Instead, they take the long way around. Not only geographically, but chronologically, four decades later.

And they come in the hard way. They come in crossing the Jordan. But that is what turned the children of Israel into the nation of Israel.

That is when they begin the conquest with Joshua. And they take the land of promise. They come across the Jordan.

And the Jordan, you know, in Hebrews, it talks about how all of the children of Israel were baptized with Moses in the Red Sea. Then they're baptized with Joshua in the Jordan, so to speak, as they go across. They went across the Red Sea on dry ground, but they're still said to be baptized with Moses.

When they come across the Jordan, they are identified with that crossing. Remember the taking out of the 12 stones and the putting in of the 12 stones? There's a memorial.

Here's where we crossed. You got Jericho right there. Elisha is closely associated with this.

He sends Naaman to the Jordan. And he says, "You've got to dip in the Jordan seven times," not three times, not five times, not 12 times, not 10 times, seven times. Seven is the number of divine completeness.

It is the divine number three, perfection in heaven, combined with the number four, which is completeness and perfection on earth. You add heaven and earth together and you get the number seven. This is why seven is so pertinent in Scripture.

Dip yourself seven times. You are a Gentile. You are a Syrian.

You are afar off. And for God to grant the kinds of blessings that are part of the covenant with His people, Israel—"I will heal your diseases. I am Yahweh Ropheka. I am the God who heals you."—what will Jesus tell the Syrophoenician woman? "I am sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

"Yes, but can there not be some crumbs that fall, and the dogs can't eat them when they fall from the children's table?" Jesus says, "Woman, great is your faith." If Naaman will express faith in the God of Israel by traveling to the Jordan River, the Jordan River is identified now in this time with Israel.

It's Israel's river. It's Israel's watercourse. Gilead is on the other side.

By the way, who's from the other side of the Jordan? Elijah. Elijah comes from over there. It's an Israel river.

And you dip yourself. And this is his rage. Look at what he says.

He became furious and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will come out to me and will stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the place.'" He's got a patch of this leprosy. He's not just, you know, ears and toes falling off.

It's a patch. It's one place on his body. Maybe it's on his shoulder.

Maybe it's on his back. Maybe it's on his abdomen. Maybe it's something like shingles.

You know, leprosy is basically the ubiquitous Old Testament word for any skin disease. But it's a patch. "He will come out."

Now, he has an expectation of how God is going to heal, how the man of God is going to heal. And he is expecting it on his terms. And it doesn't happen that way.

Verse 12: "Are not the Abana and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" See, he knows the Jordan is the water of Israel. It's Israel water.

And he's got to dip himself in it seven times. What is this doing? It's effectively making him a naturalized citizen of Israel in symbolic terms. "Could I not wash in them and be clean?" No, you can't.

Because that's not the water that belongs to the covenant people of God. You've got to basically join those people. You've got to become symbolically identified with Israel because this is where people come for God in the Old Testament age.

If you want to come to God, you come to Israel. That's why the Jordan is so critically important and why he's got to make this long journey. He can't just dip in any old water of Israel.

It's the symbolic river that the people cross to become the nation, to enter into the fulfillment of the covenant promises of God. So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants, verse 13, came near and spoke to him.

When it says they came near, this means when he was in a rage, they weren't near anymore. Did you ever do this? Your folks are fighting, so you go in the back of the house, wait for the argument to cease.

You get away from the strife. He's in a rage. Who knows what he might do? He might condemn someone.

He might give somebody some awful task. So the servants have sort of fled to a safe distance while Naaman is throwing his fit. When he calms down, they came near.

They approached back and spoke to him and said, "My father." Why are they saying "my father"? Two reasons. One, they don't want to be victims of his rage.

But secondly, this tells you something about Naaman. Not just any servants would have the kind of relationship with Naaman that his household servants have, his personal servants have. He is like a father to them.

And that's the treatment that the girl from Israel received. And there is something about Naaman that commends him to the attention of his maid servant. And there's something about Naaman that causes his servants to come near and call him father.

This is God's way of telling us he is a good guy. He is a man who could potentially be a man of faith. And I think that maybe the maid servant noticed this.

Certainly his servants, when they say, "My father," if the prophet had told you—I mean, why do these servants care what happens to Naaman? They love him like a father. And they say, "Look, we're so close. If this will work, why not try it?"

And they sort of endanger themselves to make this suggestion. "If he had given you some great task, would you not have done it? How much more then when he says to you, 'Wash and be clean'?" And Naaman, again, one of the signs that he is a man of character and a potential man of faith is that he listens.

So he went down. Now, when it says he went down, there's a lot in that. He has to pack up, leave Dothan, go across Israel to get to the Jordan.

But he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God. This is the Word of God. And he is complying.

It takes humility. It takes self-control. It takes recognition that this is what the man of God says.

If this is the way it's done, then this is the way I'll do it. And his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. There are several references here to servants and to children.

You remember what Jesus said: "Except you become as a little child, you're not going to see the kingdom. You're not going to enter the kingdom." Except you become. It takes humility.

Notice the role of servants in this from beginning to end. It is a servant who offers the ray of hope, that if he would see Elisha, Elisha would heal him. It is the servants who rescue him from his rage and make the suggestion that he go ahead and try it.

And he does. There's a servant at the beginning of this. There's a servant at the critical moment to speak this word of encouragement, to do as the man of God says.

And he does it. And this is the master basically heeding the voice of the servant. He heeds the voice of the servant at the beginning.

He heeds the voice of a servant here in doing what he says. There are people who are way too proud to do that. Would never do it because of the source.

Remember the Pharisees talking to the blind man? "You were altogether born in sin. Are you going to teach us?" And they cast him out. Naaman is not such a man.

And this is the key to his deliverance, is his humility. He recognizes that these servants speak the truth. And he has made this long journey.

And he makes another long journey on the advice of, at the word of servants. This is one of the keys to his greatness. Probably one of the reasons he was such a great general.

He probably listened to his enlisted guys and his senior advisors. He listened. He made sense, and he made good decisions based on that input.

And his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child. He has responded to the word of the prophet, which is the Word of God, like a child. And he is healed.

Now you think about the big picture. You think about the prophetic value of this. He is a Gentile.

The witness comes to him from Israel. He comes to the source of truth in Israel and is delivered and is made new, is like a little child. He's reborn in that sense.

And this is what happens for the church. Who is the witness to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ? It's Israel. It's the Old Testament.

Remember what Paul says in Romans when you get to 9, 10, and 11? "I could give away all of my blessings for the sake of my brethren in Israel because Israel has been given the stewardship. They have been given the presence of God and all of these great things, and now they are missing it." But it is their witness and their testimony.

It is their Scriptures. These Scriptures, with few exceptions like the Gospel of Luke, are written by Jews. The Lord Jesus is a Jew.

It is through Israel that God has chosen to bring salvation to the world. And Naaman is the picture of the Gentile receiving salvation through the witness of Israel. But which Israelites? They've been deported.

They've been taken away from their land. They've lost their covenant blessings. That's what this servant girl represents.

She's got a true witness, but she is an Israelite that has lost everything because of the disobedience of the nation. And that is the witness of the New Testament apostles, all 12 of whom are Jews. The first generation of the church is the Jewish church, the Jerusalem church.

And so you see a foreshadowing here. And the apostles, the men on the road to Emmaus, the Lord Jesus Himself would have come to passages like this. You don't think the Lord Jesus didn't have this passage well memorized? He gives the details of these passages in Luke chapter 4.

So Naaman returns to the man of God. He doesn't just say, "Wow, that's great. Healed my leprosy," and go straight from the Jordan back up to Damascus.

He makes a return trip all the way back to Dothan to see the man of God. And it's a fair journey. He returned to the man of God, he and all his aides.

Notice he's got a pretty large retinue. He came and stood before him. And he said, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. Now, therefore, please take a gift from your servant." From your servant.

He's the biggest general in Syria, and he calls Elisha Lord. He says, "I am your servant." But Elisha says, "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing." Naaman urges him to take, but he refused.

This is where our study is going to pick up next time. There is a theme in Scripture having to do with this situation. I'm sure you can think of past occasions.

You think of Genesis. You think of Exodus. You can think there are occasions where someone is grateful because of something that God has done.

And they want to remunerate. They want to give a gift. And the wise man of God refuses.

The not-so-wise accepts. And there are consequences, grievous consequences. And that's what we're going to look at next time.

Because there is a reason why that's in Scripture, why it is repeated more than once, why it is one of those threads that weaves through. And we need to understand this because this is a principle that is still operative today. And it's one that we need to know.

So we will pick up at verse 16 next time.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for how powerfully it communicates to us the tremendous blessings we have in the Lord Jesus, the vastness of Your grace and Your faithfulness and Your blessing toward us. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will make us mindful of how important it is to pay attention to our opportunities to serve, to be faithful, to speak the truth to one another in love.

Because we never know those points at which it becomes pivotal and becomes something useful to You and Your plan and purpose that is much larger than us, that rings down through the ages and reflects Your glory, gives us a fresh appreciation for the Lord Jesus, and prepares us for an eternal future in Your presence. We pray that You will bless us as we reflect on these truths. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.