

Third after Trinity – 2 Kings chapter 5, verses 1 – 27:-

In the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, the country of Naaman in the first verse of today's Reading is referred to as Aram. In other versions it is referred to as Syria, the chief city / capital of the two at that time being Damascus. The background to this event in biblical history is the relationship between the Jewish peoples and those of Aramea. The family of Abraham came from the same area and Jacob was referred to as "*a wandering Aramean*" see Deuteronomy chapter 26, verse 5. The language "Aramaic" was used widely by both peoples and was in common use down to new Testament times so there was long-standing relationship between the two peoples, sometimes of friendship, often of enmity which sadly has occurred down to the present day!

It is advisable to read the whole of chapter 5. The punch line to the whole story is in the last verse!

Verses 1 – 7:- Note that the "*little maid*" was concerned for her master. Not only that but she was witnessing to the power of the prophet of the Lord God of Israel.

Authorities are used to dealing with others of the same rank – the king of Syria wrote to the king of Israel who immediately thought that the old enemy was after an excuse for war. Note that Naaman took with him sufficient funds for a hefty bribe! He was used to dealing with intermediaries in order to expedite his request. Leprosy was considered incurable and the king of Israel was helpless in the face of the Syrian demand.

Verses 8 – 12:- The healing of Naaman was to be a public announcement "*that there is a prophet in Israel.*" Elisha would be publicly confirmed as the successor of Elijah. Naaman is rightly offended at his offhand treatment by Elisha! (verse 11). He was expecting 'first-class' treatment; remember he was prepared to pay generously for the ministry of healing by this 'prophet'. The fact that he had to wash "*seven times*" in what he regarded as a muddy stream was asking for an act of obedience. Neither wealth nor position would 'buy' healing, only obedience to the word of God given by His prophet!

Verses 13 – 14:- Naaman almost lost his desire through pride! Humility and faith leading to obedience in following the simple instruction was effective. If we don't obey God in small things how can we expect Him to bless us with great things?

Verses 15 – 19a:- These verses show the depth of Naaman's conversion! He learned that there was a God in Israel and he returns to Elisha to give thanks and to pay for his services. The Lord wants no payment for the healing of body and soul! Note that Naaman now recognises the authority of Elisha, referring to himself as "*your servant*" (verses 15, 17 and 18). When his offer of payment "*a present*" (verse 15) is refused he asks for "*two mules' burden of earth*" to take back with him. Is this a reflection of the pagan idea that a god was territorial? He only had authority and could only be worshipped on his own territory - see 1 Kings chapter 20, verse 23. Naaman wanted to make sure that his sacrifice was acceptable to the God of Israel and that he would be forgiven for accompanying the king when taking part in state worship of Rimmon the god of Syria.

Verses 19b – 27:- Gehazi, Elisha's servant '*said in his heart*'. Because Elisha had refused a gift Gehazi thought he could 'make something on the side' from this rich Syrian. He had prepared a realistic story of the immediate need for assistance in the prophetic ministry. Naaman was happy to give him more than he requested (verse 23). Note that it took two of Naaman's servants to carry the loot back for Gehazi. When Gehazi faces his master Elisha he persists with his lies to hide his sin. The request for 'payment' detracted from the witness to the free gift of the Lord God given to Naaman.

The judgement given is a consequence of the greed of Gehazi. In his desire for the riches of Naaman he also acquired the leprosy of Naaman.