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FIRST QUARTER.

STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF KINGS.

(Condensed from Peloubet's Notes.)

Lesson X. March 8. 2 Kings 5: 1-14.

NAAMAN HEALED.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases."—Ps. 103: 3.

RULERS.—Jehoram, son of Ahab, king of Israel; Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah; Benhadad II., the king of Syria.

There is scarcely any one of the narratives of the Bible more celebrated than this. The story of Naaman is a precious contribution to the evidence that the love and care of God are not restricted within any limits of country or race, but are wide as the world.

EXPLANATORY.

I. NAAMAN, THE SYRIAN GENERAL; ONE IN NEED OF SALVATION. 1. "Now Naaman (beautiful or pleasant to look upon), captain of the host." The commander-in-chief of the Syrian army. "Of the king of Syria." Benhadad II. "Was a great man with his master." He had great talents; he had done much for the king, and was therefore very highly esteemed, and exalted to the highest places of honor and power. "Because by him the Lord." Jehovah (as is always in the original when the word LORD is printed in capitals). Jehovah is God of all the earth; and events, even in heathen nations, are under His guiding providence. "Had given deliverance unto Syria." The Hebrew word rendered deliverance means not merely victory, but prosperity of every kind, in which no doubt victory was included. One naturally asks how Syria came to need deliverance, since, when last we heard of the Syrians, they were victorious over the combined forces of Israel and Judah (1 Kings 22: 1-36). To this question Scripture gives no reply, but the Assyrian monuments furnish a satisfactory one. An Assyrian monarch had pushed his conquests as far as Syria exactly at this period, bringing into subjection all the kings of these parts. But his conquest was not permanent. Syria revolted after a few years, and once more made herself independent, in which condition she is found at the accession of the monarch's son. It was probably in this war of independence that Naaman had distinguished himself. "He was also a mighty man in valor." A great general, a very courageous soldier. "But he was a leper." No life is perfectly happy. There is some discord in life's sweetest music; there is a tempter in its paradise; a drop of bitterness in its cup of delight; a black spot in its sunshine. And God would have it so for the discipline and salvation of men. It was his leprosy that led Naaman to the knowledge of the true God.

Prof. George E. Post, M. D., in Rice's Commentary on Matthew, Edward Clifford in the *Fortnightly Review*, and Sir Risdon Bennett in the Diseases of the Bible are sure that Naaman's leprosy was the *leucoderma* (or white skin, *the lepra vulgaris*), which still exists, but is comparatively rare. The whole body turns to a disagreeable white color, and has a scaly texture; but the disease does not seem to affect the general health or the power of getting a livelihood.

The far more general opinion is, that Naaman's was the true oriental leprosy, the *elephantiasis*, so called, either from its likeness to the rough hide of the elephant, or because it was a monstrous disease, as great among diseases as the elephant is among animals. Dr. Edward Clifford says, "I have found many who had been lepers for nearly thirty years." But usually death brings relief in five or ten years. Thus Naaman, even if afflicted with the true leprosy, might have been able to remain commander-in-chief for a time, though he knew that he was doomed. Lepers were not excluded from society in the other nations as they were in Israel.

LEPROSY AS A TYPE OF SIN. Sin is a deadly leprosy which has involved our whole race in one common ruin. (1) Sin, like leprosy, is the most loathsome, polluting, deforming, unclean thing in the universe. (2) Sin, like leprosy, separates from the pure and clean. (3) Sin, like leprosy, is in a sense infectious by intimate contact, as when the sin of others is received into the soul, by yielding to temptation, or following bad examples. (4) Sin, like leprosy, is constitutional. (5) The tendency to sin, like the tendency to leprosy, is hereditary. (6) Sin, like leprosy, is deceitful in its workings.

II. THE CAPTIVE MAID, DIRECTING TO A SAVIOUR. 2. "And the Syrians had gone out by companies." Plundering parties, who made forays upon the neighboring Israelites. The old border warfare of the Scotch Highlands will give some idea of these incursions. The nations were not at war, but doubtless the Syrian government connived at these raids. "Brought away captive . . . a little maid." Not necessarily a little child, but a young girl. "And she waited on Naaman's wife." Either Naaman's troops were among the marauders, or he bought her in the slave market.

3. "And she said unto her mistress." Like Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon, this captive girl becomes the instrument of making Jehovah known among the heathen

4. "And one went in." Either Naaman or some messenger. In the Hebrew the subject of the verb is not given. The Septuagint says *she. i. e.*, Naaman's wife, went in. "And told his lord." Naaman's lord, the king.

WHAT A CHILD CAN DO. Children cannot teach much about Christ; but they can invite others to church and Sunday-school, where those are who can teach. They cannot answer all arguments against the truth, but they can point to those who are able to do it. They cannot make others Christians, but they can lead to Jesus, who is able and willing. They cannot draw the train, but they can move the lever which lets on the steam.

III. NAAMAN APPLIES TO THE KING OF ISRAEL. SEEKING HELP IN THE WRONG PLACE. 5. "And the king of Syria." Benhadad II. *Son or worshipper* of the Syrian *god Hadad*. "Said, Go to, go." Go, depart. Set out at once. He was anxious to have his friend healed. "A letter unto the king of Israel." Probably Jehoram, the son of Ahab. "He took with him." To come before anyone without a gift when a favor was to be asked would have been inexcusable rudeness. "Ten talents of silver." Worth $16,400. "And six thousand pieces of gold." Worth $48,000. Geikie and Keil, and other writers each estimate the amount differently. "Pieces of gold." Coined money did not exist as yet, and was not introduced into Judea till the time of Cyrus. Gold was carried in bars, from which portions were cut when need arose, and the value was ascertained by weighing. "Ten changes of raiment." Costly robes, suitable for festive occasions. The oriental custom of including clothes among gifts of honor still continues.

6. "That thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." Of course through the prophet at his capital. He imagined that King Jehoram would of course know all about such a man.

7. "Rent his clothes." In token of his anxiety and trouble at such a request. For not knowing what the captive maid had told Naaman, he misunderstood the request. "Am I God, to kill and to make alive." This shows how utterly incurable leprosy was considered. It was the equivalent of death, and to cure would to make alive. "Wherefore consider." Probably said in private council. "How he seeketh a quarrel against me." A pretext for again invading the country. Jehoram was hardly in a position to renew the war, after the severe defeat of his father.

SEEKING SALVATION IN THE WRONG PLACE. There are still many earnest seekers after salvation who go to the king instead of the prophet, and are disappointed. Some seek salvation from their own good deeds, acts of kindness, or honesty. Some look to science and knowledge for salvation. But all these alone, while on the way, are powerless to save men.

IV. NAAMAN GOES TO THE PROPHET ELISHA. SALVATION IS FROM GOD ONLY. 8. "When Elisha . . . had heard." He probably had his home in Samaria, in another part of the city (2 Kings 6: 32). "Let him come now to me, etc." However sinful the king had been, and however powerless to help Naaman, yet true religion was not dead; and God would graciously show His power through His prophet.

9. "With his horses and with his chariot" (Rev. Ver., *chariots*.) Though the Hebrew word is singular, the sense is, chariotry, *i. e.*, a number of chariots. In attendance on so great a man as Naaman there would be many persons on horseback and in carriages, and the display would seem such as to draw even the prophet forth to behold. "And stood at the door." Waiting, in his chariot, for the prophet to come forth and humbly ask the great man what he desired. Why should not humble religion bow obsequiously to wealth and power and rank?

10. "And Elisha sent a messenger unto him." Why did not the prophet come forth himself? (1) We need not think of him as avoiding a leprous person, either from fear of infection or from legal scruples. (2) It was rather that he wished to prevent any thought of himself as the worker of the cure coming into Naaman's mind. The prophet was only the mouthpiece of Jehovah. (3) It was to teach Naaman humility; that God was no respecter of persons; that God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Only as children can men enter the Kingdom of God. All the means used by the prophet tended to influence the character, and change the heart, as well as cure the body. The latter would have been of small account without the former. Naaman came with the feeling that he was honoring Elisha by coming to his humble home. Elisha would have him understand that he was the ambassador of the Infinite God, before whom Naaman's king was as nought.

THE WAY OF SALVATION. "Saying, Go and wash in Jordon seven times." The reason for this prescription is evidently in the moral effect of the cure, that the healing of the body might lead to the salvation of the soul. (1) It would point Naaman to the true God. Naaman would be quite sure that the waters of the Jordan were not a cure for leprosy, otherwise there would have been no lepers in Israel. (2) It would test and strengthen his faith. The journey from Samaria to the river would be a great test of his faith. (3) It would be a test of his sincere and humble obedience. Without yielding the heart and will to God, there is no salvation. The same principles apply to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. "Seven times." Since the seven days of God's first week, the number "seven" has been held somewhat more sacred than other numbers. Hence its frequent mention in religious services and ceremonial. "And thy flesh shall come again to thee." Leprosy is characterized by raw flesh and running sores, which end in entire wasting away of the tissues. Hence the expression is peculiarly suitable.

V. GOD'S WAY OF HEALING REJECTED. 11. "But Naaman was wroth." Was not Elisha a little disrespectful, rather bluff, and deficient in true Christian politeness? And did he thus give occasion for Naaman's anger? (1) Elisha was directed by God as to what to do. (2) His first business was to teach God's truth, and do what was best for Naaman. It often requires far more self-denial to resist the great than to yield to them. Not all is pride which seems to the world to be such. That which Naaman believed to be the contempt and rudeness really proceeded, in the case of Elisha, from genuine love to him, and humility and obedience to God. "He will surely come out to me," and show due request for his rank and reputation. "And call on the name of the Lord his God." Literally, of Jehovah his God. Naaman is aware that *Jehovah* is the God of Elisha. "Strike his hand over the place." Or, as in the marginal rendering, move his hand up and down over the place,—not actually touching it, but passing the fingers up and down it at a short distance.

12. "Are not the Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus." The Abana is no doubt the modern Barada (which signifies "cool" in the Arabic, and "clear" in the Hebrew). It rises in the tablelands 23 miles from Damascus, and flows through the city in seven beautiful streams. The Pharpar, now called Nahr el Awâj, is a rapid stream, passing a little below the city. "Better than all the waters of Israel." In contrast with the Abana, the world-renowned Jordan is often a muddy and discolored stream. "May I not wash in them, and be clean?" No, because it was not the river that cleansed, but the power of God. Only the means of God's appointment could succeed. And yet, as we have seen, God had the wisest reasons for appointing the means that He did.

13. "And his servants came near," gently soothing Naaman's rage, and seeking to restore him to reason. They were naturally less blinded by excitement and anger. "My father." The respectful and affectionate salutation of a confidential servant. "Some great thing." Something difficult to carry out, which better accorded with his pride. They are thinking, perhaps, of some deed of prowess, befitting the mighty man of valor, or some fatiguing journey by way of pilgrimage. "How much rather then," etc. The ease and simplicity of the requirement was a reason not for objecting, but for obeying. It removed all excuses. Moreover, he had to cross the Jordan on his way home.

VI. NAAMAN CLEANSED, WITHOUT AND WITHIN. 14. "Then went he down." His stormy passion was calmed. Reason assumed her throne. He was in a fitter condition to receive the blessing. "And dipped himself seven times in Jordan." Not only in the journey to the river, but also in the repeated dippings was the faith of Naaman put to the test. For if we may judge from the fall of the walls of Jericho, which stood unmoved till the last time the ark was carried round them, it seems probable that the cure did not show itself till the whole of the ablutions were completed. "Like unto the flesh of a little child." In striking contrast to its former foul and diseased condition, it now became fresher and fairer than was natural in a full-grown man. "He was clean" from the festering corruption and defilement of the leprosy.

Naaman, as we learn from what follows, became a worshipper of the true God, in a very imperfect way indeed, but with gratitude for past favors, and a resolve to worship only Jehovah henceforth.

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