

Naaman

My name is Naaman. In my own country I would not require an introduction. I am the Commander in Chief of the Army of Aram, serving the king reigning in Damascus. Everything had gone well for me, not only in my military career but also my personal life. I was never seriously wounded in battle. I accumulated wealth and servants. Yet one day, I noticed a strange spot on my arm that was numb. Even worse, my whole sword arm was numb and weak. My wife insisted that I have it checked.

Have you ever dreaded seeing a healer because of what he might tell you? I have faced overwhelming odds on the battlefield, but this frightened me. My worst fears came true; it was incurable leprosy. But there was an amazing coincidence – so I thought at the time. I later came to a very different conclusion about “fate.” My wife’s slave, a little Israelite girl taken in one of our raids on that country, heard us talking about it and said there was a prophet in her country who could cure this disease – something our physicians could never do.

I was skeptical to say the least. If they had that kind of magic, why were we able to constantly defeat them and capture slaves, including this very girl? I later realized that there was a bigger picture to all this, and it had all been arranged for my sake. My wife insisted that I go, and my king provided both a letter of introduction and “a king’s ransom” in money and goods for an appreciation gift.

I went to the Israelite king, of course. My king assumed that he would be aware of all his resources including magicians and prophets. I don’t know what the king of Israel was thinking when he saw my entourage coming, me in full military dress uniform and my entourage carrying all the gold, silver and luxury clothing. But when he read the letter, the look on his face went from puzzled to terrified. "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

He did not know about the prophet and, of course, thought this was a ruse to justify an invasion. I later discovered that he did not serve the same God whom the prophet served so it made sense that he did not know the prophet. But the prophet knew about everything that was going on and sent word to his distraught king, who gladly sent me on to him.

Finally, we were getting somewhere! But the next disappointment came when the servant of the prophet told me to wash seven times in the Jordan and I would be healed. No dramatic ceremony, no magic words. The prophet did not even come out to greet me with the courtesy appropriate to my rank. I was fuming and ready to forget the whole thing. The Jordan was a muddy brook and the whole thing was ridiculous. Again, I was more than fortunate. It was Divine providence that my servants were wiser than me. They risked my military temper and pointed out that if I were asked to do something really difficult, I would have done it. I had studied Israel’s history and remembered that when they conquered the land centuries before, their God had required them to march around Jericho many times before it fell – and He seemed to have some sort of affinity for the number 7.

Well, I did it and I have to tell you when after 6 times, when there was still absolutely no sign of improvement, I was again just about ready to quit in disgust. But coming up from the 7th time, my skin was perfect, my strength had returned, and my mood soared to jubilation. I danced like a young child! I returned to the prophet to give him the wealth I had brought. He met me face to face and said that he would not accept any payment. I think his payment was in hearing my exclamation, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel." I then asked for two mule-loads of earth on which I could build an altar to the Lord God of Israel. I also asked forgiveness in advance for a problem I foresaw because even if I worshipped the God who had healed me, my position as commander in Chief required me to accompany my king to the temple of his gods. The prophet told me to go in peace.

As I started down the road towards home, I was a changed man, physically, mentally and spiritually. I saw that it DOES make a difference who you worship. I also realized that my pride had nearly kept me from the comprehensive healing that the God of Israel had orchestrated for me. I even realized that the accomplishments that fueled that pride were not my own but a result of the ability and opportunity that the God who made me had given. He also arranged that the servant girl was there, heard me discuss my problem with my wife and knew of the prophet, something which her own king did not.

On the way home, the prophet's servant ran up to me with a request. Of course, I was suspicious – we have corruption in Damascus, too. He said that two student prophets had shown up and needed clothing and money. I sent back enough for that need, knowing that such an occurrence would not have surprised a prophet who knew of my arrival before he was notified. I did get follow up on that story when our informants told me that the servant was given my leprosy as a consequence for his greed and deception.

I understand military strategy and learned about human behavior from seeing my own reactions to this event, but I do not understand politics. My own king was grateful for my return to full duty but did not seem to tumble to the fact that we were talking about a serious spiritual fact – namely that I had been supernaturally healed by the LORD God of Israel.

Ben-Hadad continued his wars – I had to follow orders, but I was seeing the bigger picture. When a mole was suspected because every move was anticipated by Israel, I suspected it was the prophet who just knew from his God what we were going to do. When my men made a move to attack, they were struck blind and, incredibly, accepted guidance from unknown persons – the enemy soldiers! When they finally recovered their sight, they were trapped inside the capital city of Samaria. They then all escaped because the Israelites released them to tell their amazing story.

Did this make an impression on Ben-Hadad? Not a bit. He mobilized the entire army to besiege Samaria. I could not convince him that conventional wisdom would not apply. It was a disaster. During the night a sound of a great army was heard and there was panic! Military discipline and strategy fled like roaches from the light. A rumor spread like flame that vast numbers of Hittites and Egyptians had arrived. We fled, leaving all our supplies and dropping our weapons along the road. Our informants later told us that an army of angels was called down by the prophet. When the word got into starving Samaria that there was food outside the gate, their king was trampled to death.

My own king became ill and sent a messenger to the prophet, hoping for a cure, I am sure. The message that come back was that he would recover from the illness but be murdered. And that is exactly what happened, murdered by Hazael, his messenger who then became king. But Hazael also seemed to also be afflicted by “king's disease” and thought his accomplishments were his own doing. He too gave no credit to the LORD God of Israel, who was really in charge.

2 Kings chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8