



# GREAT MIRACLES

OLD TESTAMENT

2 KINGS 5



PERSONAL APPLICATION

THE ANGEL OF DEATH – 2 KINGS 18–19; ISAIAH 36–37

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*“We dare the Lord to prove He is real, but sometimes  
He dares us to demonstrate our faith first.”*

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## NAAMAN’S NEED

Our consideration of the Bible’s great miracles now proceeds to the prophet Elisha. For those of us who have ever suffered from inadequate belief in the Lord’s promises of care and guidance, or for those of us who have shaken our heads in bewilderment at the Lord’s intended direction for our lives, this one’s for us! This lesson’s miraculous healing begins with a military hero by the name of Naaman. Naaman was not one of “God’s people.” He came from the nation of Aram, or Syria, and his military prowess had been rewarded by his king. He had been appointed commander of Syria’s army. The Bible makes clear that Naaman was highly regarded by the king because the Lord had given Naaman victory over the Assyrian army which had been threatening Syria’s border.

When we are tempted to consider God’s Old Testament jurisdiction as limited only to the Israelites, we need to remember how His providence and direction covered the entire earth, presiding over the Syrians even though they knew Him only as a foreign God. In this same way, the Lord would one day raise a king in Persia named Cyrus who, although not a follower of the Lord, would be used by God to liberate Israel from her Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1). And in the same way, we trust that our God reigns over all peoples of the earth, including the nations of Islam or the peoples of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Now, Naaman was the kind of man we are tempted to envy. He had it all. Not only had he become a military hero, he also enjoyed all the perks of being the king’s favorite. He possessed extraordinary ability, and gifts of leadership which had brought him to the top echelon of society. And yet, Naaman, with all of his precious blessings, fell victim to a horrible fate. Somewhere along his journeys he contracted leprosy. Of course,



leprosy was considered the worst of all possible diseases in Naaman's day because it condemned its victims to a slow and agonizing death, cutting them off from society and loved ones because of the fear of contagion.

How often have we marveled at the rich and powerful, coveting their good fortune and envying their power and prestige, only to discover some grave fault or illness which transforms their lives from what had seemed sparkling and glamorous into lives which appear cursed and barren! Who can forget Howard Hughes, the richest man in the world, facing his last days so burdened by an obsessive-compulsive neurosis that he lived in unrelenting fear of germs. Despite his massive amounts of money, he lived a virtual prisoner of his phobias. Or consider the many tragedies which have accompanied the Kennedy family. If any one family seemed to possess all the charm, riches, and good looks one could possibly hope for, if any one family seemed to enjoy all the good fortune this world could offer, it was the Kennedys. But, year by year, assassination and scandal have so affected the household that all of us have at one time silently lifted a prayer to the Lord, "Thank you for not being related to them!"

During one of their excursions against Israel, the Syrians captured a young Israelite girl and made her Naaman's wife's maid. After Naaman discovered his leprosy, this humble Hebrew maid played a major role in changing Naaman's life and affording us another glimpse into the marvelous working of God's miracles. Being an Israelite, she was well acquainted with the prophet Elisha. She had heard of his divine powers and prophetic utterances, and she knew Elisha possessed God's power to cure her master. She did not hide her faith in God's power, but proclaimed it to her pagan friends and thereby won converts.

Naaman was impressed by his maid's claims. Going to his king, Naaman asked for a leave of absence to visit with the Hebrew prophet, and the king of Syria, so admiring of his military general, not only encouraged him to make the attempt, but also wrote a letter to the king of Israel requesting him to assist in Naaman's healing. This was no half-hearted request. Since the people of Israel were to some degree subject to the more powerful nation of Syria at this time, the letter was not so much a request as it was a demand. When the king of Israel received the letter, he was so horrified that he tore his clothes apart; believing the king of Syria was only trying to ask the impossible as an excuse for invading the kingdom.

So Naaman went in search of Elisha, carrying with him about 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold (you may wish to figure out how much that's worth in today's currency), not to mention ten sets of clothing. It was enough, Naaman believed, to buy a healing.

Elisha learned from the king of Israel, that Naaman was on his way. It wasn't difficult to detect how upset the king was, considering his royal clothes lay in shreds on the palace floor. Elisha chided the king for his fear, and consoled him by reminding the king that God had the power to heal. And so, Naaman came, bringing with him his horses and chariots, all his emblems of power and prestige. None of these could heal Naaman, however. All the money in the world can't heal a man of a sick soul, and all Naaman's accomplishments could do nothing to cure his leprosy.

The thing that really irritated Naaman is that Elisha didn't even greet him. Naaman went to Elisha's door, and the prophet refused to meet him face to face! Instead, Elisha sent a lowly messenger to tell Naaman, he should

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go and wash himself in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman was angered by the seemingly flippant way in which the prophet treated him. This was the general of the Syrian army being snubbed by some poor Hebrew! How dare the Hebrew prophet expect Naaman to follow the prophet's command when the prophet showed so little respect! Naaman had brought his horses and chariots and untold wealth to Elisha, and the prophet seemed to discount it all as superfluous and irrelevant. It was all too easy, too pat, and too humiliating for Naaman's taste. He strode angrily away.

Through the miracle about to occur, we can learn something profound about our Lord and Savior. You see, Naaman wanted to pay for his healing. We can understand his wish, because this world's business depends on people bargaining for goods and services. People must earn their reputation and fortune by their hard and meritorious work. But, Elisha seemed unwilling to play by the rules. And Elisha went out of his way to incense the man who believed he could pay richly for his healing.

The same is true for the ultimate healing God has given us through Jesus' death and resurrection. We are often deluded into thinking we can pay for our salvation, whether through our good and decent works, or through the amount of our offerings to the Lord, or by other means through which we hope to bargain a favorable judgment from the Lord. And the Lord will have none of it. He scorns such motives with the same disdain Elisha showed Naaman. People who perform the most glorious acts of beneficence and charity for the purpose of enticing the Lord's salutary favor are curtly and decisively ignored.

Because God is holy, no matter how many wonderful works we perform, the obstacle of sin remains so steep and insurmountable, no works can surmount the barrier between God and us. But the Lord Jesus, by sacrificing His life for ours, by taking our sins onto the cross and blessing us with His perfection, blew up the wall between God and man. Nothing could surmount the great wall of sin, so it had to be dismantled. When we delude ourselves into thinking we can climb the wall of sin by the good deeds we perform,

we will fail every time because we're attacking the problem of sin from the wrong direction. We cannot balance the debt of our sins with the credit of good works. The debt of our sins must be erased and forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice. That's the only way it works.

And that's the lesson Elisha wanted to give Naaman, and the message God wants to give us through Naaman's miraculous healing. It all seemed too easy to Naaman. He wanted Elisha to perform some dramatic acts of medicinal sorcery like waving his hand over Naaman's leprous spots and calling on the name of the Lord. And if Naaman were to wash himself in some river, surely the Jordan wasn't his first choice. There were other more formidable and scenic rivers, like the Abana and Pharpar in his home country which would have been much more impressive to bathe in. The method by which God would use Elisha to heal Naaman didn't meet with Naaman's approval or expectations, so rather than follow Elisha's command, Naaman stalked away in rage and frustration.

How many people have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ and walked away from its words of salvation — by grace through faith — because it simply seemed too easy? People would rather live under strict requirements of Law for their salvation, like the Jehovah Witnesses who feel they must visit as many people as possible in order to earn their way into a reconstruction of the new earth. Did you think they came to your door because they cared about you? Hardly! They're hoping to earn salvation, pure and simple. After all, it seems much more logical that way.

But, any religion which emphasizes salvation

as a result of personal goodness or deeds is soundly and irrefutably denounced by the miracle of Naaman's healing. Naaman would only be healed, after all, if he had faith in the promise of Elisha's God, and demonstrated that faith by following Elisha's command. If faith failed, healing would fail. If people disbelieve the Gospel promise, salvation will fail.

Fortunately, even though Naaman's pride was hurt, his servants convinced him to follow Elisha's command and wash in the Jordan seven times. This required quite a bit of humbling for the general of the Syrian army, but when he submitted to the prophet's will, he found himself healed and restored. His flesh, the Bible says, became clean like that of a young boy.

Recognize that only after stepping forward in faith was Naaman given the proof by which he would trust the God of Israel, as the one and only God. "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel," Naaman proclaimed. Isn't it interesting, though, that the Lord wanted Naaman to demonstrate his faith before he would be given the conviction of God's reality? So many people through the ages have professed a willingness to believe in the Lord if He would first demonstrate incontrovertible proof of His presence. And throughout history, the Lord begins to convict us of His reality only after His Spirit has first led us forward in faith. We dare the Lord to prove He is real, but sometimes He dares us to demonstrate our faith first.

Naaman had tremendous riches he wished to give Elisha. After all, if some individual healed you of an incurable disease, wouldn't you be willing to give him all you owned? Elisha

would have none of it. The lesson of grace was something Naaman had to learn, and if Elisha accepted the payment, the lesson would be lost. Finally, Naaman requested some Israelite soil to carry back with him. In ancient times it was believed a god could only be worshipped on the soil of the land over which he reigned. So, Naaman wanted to take the soil and use it in his native land as a place on which he could worship the God of Israel. He declared he would never again worship a foreign god.

But Naaman's faith had some areas of weakness. He asked permission to fake his allegiance to the Syrian god, Rimmon (the god of thunder), before his king. After all, Naaman had so much to lose if the king should be dissatisfied with him. It was, of course, a dangerous and dishonest compromise, placing Naaman in danger of succumbing once again to the worship of false gods. Elisha's response was not necessarily one of approval. He simply commended Naaman to the grace of God as he returned to his native, pagan land. Like a child who has grown to the age when we can no longer restrict or control him, but for whom we can continue to pray, Naaman was released to his homeland. And the prayers of Elisha would go with him.

The story of Naaman's healing has a rather sordid ending. One of Elisha's servants by the name of Gehazi was disgusted by Elisha's unwillingness to take Naaman's money. Naaman had brought so much wealth! And he was so willing to give it away! It was all too much for one so greedy as Gehazi. Perhaps Gehazi fooled himself into believing he would store Naaman's money until a time when the prophet Elisha could use it. He may have deceived himself with the most noble of motivations, but the act he committed was still sinful. Unbeknownst to Elisha, Gehazi chased after Naaman and asked for 75 pounds of the silver and two sets of clothes, claiming Elisha needed them to support two prophets who had recently arrived from the hill country of Ephraim. Naaman was only too glad to oblige. And one can't help but wonder whether Naaman's worst suspicions weren't confirmed by Gehazi's act. The message that God acts freely and without bargaining may now have been lost on Naaman. Perhaps this was judgment against Naaman for his willingness to compromise with his pagan king.

Because Elisha had been empowered by God with extraordinary spiritual insight, Gehazi's trickery didn't pass unnoticed. Elisha hauled the servant onto the carpet, so to speak, and condemned the servant for wanting to buy clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, menservants and maidservants with the money. Elisha's list demonstrates how much purchasing power Gehazi had acquired. In punishment for his wicked deed, Elisha condemned Gehazi to the leprosy which Naaman had brought, and promised Gehazi's descendants would be afflicted as well. As the Lord once spoke through Moses: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:5-6).

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We cannot but revel in the many lessons our Lord illustrates through this miracle, particularly His lessons of grace and undeserved love. The Lord directed Naaman's rise to power. He provided Naaman with persuasive servants when he first rejected Elisha's advice. He blessed Naaman with the priceless gift of healing from a dreadful and fatal disease. In many ways, God smiled on this fortunate man. Did Naaman remain true to his promise? Did he follow the God of Israel from that time forward? These are questions which will not be answered until we dwell with the Lord in His eternal presence.

But, if my opinion is worth much, I must admit to some doubts about the lasting conviction of Naaman. In my years of ministry, I've noticed how difficult it is to follow the one true God when there is no Word on which to support one's faith, and no fellowship with a community of believers by which one's faith can be affirmed. I've watched Christians drift from their faith and be seduced by the teachings of the world. It can and does happen.

On the other hand, the young girl who was a maid to Naaman's wife was a faithful Hebrew. Perhaps with the help of her conviction and faith, Naaman remained true to his word. The answer will remain lodged in the filmy world of conjecture, but it suggests to us the need to fortify our faith in the study of God's Word and find spiritual strength in the fellowship of our brothers and sister in Christ.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION**

*THE ANGEL OF DEATH – 2 KINGS 18–19; ISAIAH 36–37*

*Father in heaven, I pray for Your divine protection before the challenges of the day. Lead me always according to Your gracious will, and protect me from all physical, emotional, and spiritual evil. Help me through the words of Scripture to trust in Your power and providence. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

1. How old was Hezekiah, when he assumed the throne of Judah (2 Kings 18:2)? What were you doing at that age?  
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2. By Hezekiah's time, God's people had divided into two kingdoms — Judah and Israel (Samaria). What happened to Israel and what appeared to be the imminent fate of Judah? (2 Kings 18:9–13)  
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3. What God-pleasing deeds did King Hezekiah accomplish? (2 Chronicles 29:18–26, 30:1, 31:1)  
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4. How did Hezekiah attempt to defend Jerusalem from the Assyrians and other enemies? (2 Chronicles 32:1–8; 2 Kings 20:20)  
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5. In what way is the Assyrian field commander speaking the truth when he suggests the God of Israel gave Sennacherib authority to destroy Judah? (2 Kings 18:25, 19:25–26; Isaiah 3:1–15)  
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How does Sennacherib's letter to Hezekiah suggest Sennacherib never really believed his power and authority had been given by the God of Israel? (2 Kings 19:9–13)  
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6. What does King Hezekiah do with Sennacherib's letter? (2 Kings 19:14–19)  
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What do you think this suggests about Hezekiah's relationship with the Lord?  
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In what ways does your prayer life reflect your relationship with the Lord?  
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7. What tactics are the Assyrians using in their attempt to make Jerusalem surrender? (2 Kings 18:26–35)  
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8. How had Jerusalem become the "remnant of Israel"? (2 Kings 18:9–13, 19:1–5)  
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Who was the “remnant” after the Babylonian Captivity? (Ezra 1:1–5; Nehemiah 1:1–3)

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After the coming of Christ, who was the “remnant”? (Romans 11:1–8)

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9. Compare the fate of the Assyrian armies as described in 2 Kings 19:35–36 and 2 Chronicles 32:20–21.

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10. How many angels did it take to wipe out the Assyrian army? (2 Kings 19:35)

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What does this say about the power at Jesus’ disposal when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane? (Matthew 26:51–54)

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What comfort do you gain from the promise of Psalm 91:9–16?

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11. Although King Hezekiah was spared the Assyrian assault, what did Isaiah promise would happen in the future? (Isaiah 39:1–7)

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And what was Hezekiah’s reaction? (Isaiah 39:8)

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What common political attitude does this suggest to you?

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