

Who was Naaman in the Bible?

Naaman in the Bible was the commander of the Syrian army who was healed of his leprosy by Elisha the prophet. Naaman was highly esteemed by the king of Syria (or Aram) because of the many victories won by the Syrian army. The Bible calls Naaman “a valiant soldier.” His story is recorded in 2 Kings 5:1-19.

It so happened that Naaman’s wife had a servant—a little Israelite girl who had been captured during a Syrian raid. One day the little girl told her mistress, “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy” (2 Kings 5:3). Naaman relayed this information to the king of Syria, who sent Naaman to Samaria with a letter to the king of Israel regarding the matter and a gift of silver, gold, and clothing. In the letter, the Syrian king asked the king of Israel to cure Naaman’s leprosy.

Upon reading the letter, the king of Israel was frightened, believing the king of Syria was trying to pick a fight with him. He tore his clothes (a sign of grieving) and said, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy?” (2 Kings 5:7). The king of Israel obviously forgot there was a miracle-working prophet in his kingdom—the Syrians knew more about God’s work in Israel than did Israel’s own king.

Elisha heard about the letter, and he calmed the king’s fear, telling him to send Naaman to him (2 Kings 5:8). When Naaman arrived at Elisha’s home, Elisha sent a messenger to tell him to wash in the Jordan River seven times, and that his flesh would be restored to normal after the seventh wash (verse 10). Naaman’s response to Elisha’s word was not good. The Syrian commander was furious: Elisha had not come out to meet him personally;

there had been no incantations, no ceremony, no spectacle at all (verse 11). Also, Naaman disliked the idea of bathing in the Jordan, which he considered inferior to the waters of his homeland (verse 12). He could have stayed home and washed in any one of the rivers near him, and it would have done him more good than the Jordan would ever do.

As the proud Naaman was storming off, his servants spoke to him: “If the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed’!” (2 Kings 5:13). Their logic was solid: Naaman had been prepared to do something monumental—something difficult or expensive or dangerous, even. But the prophet had asked for something simple. Shouldn’t Naaman at least give it a try? Bathing in the Jordan was easy. They persuaded their master that he should try the prescribed cure. So Naaman relented and washed seven times. To his amazement, Elisha’s cure worked—“His flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy” (verse 14). Naaman was cured of his leprosy.

After this, Naaman and his retinue returned to Elisha and offered a gift—ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, ten sets of clothing—Elisha could take whatever he wanted. But the prophet of God would take nothing, despite Naaman’s urging (2 Kings 5:16). Elisha made it clear that God’s healing was free and that miracles were not for sale (see Acts 8:20).

Before he left for home, Naaman gave evidence that his heart had changed, as well as his body. He said to Elisha, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel” (2 Kings 5:15). Naaman gave up his pagan idols then and there. He asked that he be allowed to take back two mule-loads of dirt from Israel on which he could offer sacrifices to Israel’s God, promising that he would “never again make burnt offerings

and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord” (verse 17).

One thing still bothered Naaman’s conscience. Part of his responsibility as commander of the Syrian army was to accompany the king to the temple of Rimmon, a pagan god of Syria. As the king worshiped, Naaman was to be at his side (2 Kings 5:18). Naaman asked the Lord for forgiveness in advance, since he now knew that Rimmon was a false god (who could not heal leprosy). Elisha assured Naaman that all would be well and that God saw his heart (verse 19). Naaman returned to Syria rejoicing in his newfound faith and in his restored physical health.