

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

God of All the Earth II Kings 5:1-27

Intro: In the NT, the prophet Elijah is mentioned some 29 times but Elisha is mentioned only once. This singular mention of Elisha was made by Jesus in [Luke 4:27](#) and referred to the event that takes place in our text here in [ch5](#). Jesus referred to Elisha in a sermon He was preaching in the synagogue of His own home town, in Nazareth. You would think that an OT reference within a sermon that Jesus Himself was giving would have brought spiritual enlightenment and comfort to His hearers but that was not the case. Instead, Luke tells us that His audience was filled with wrath, thrust Him out of the city and attempted to murder Him by throwing Him off a cliff. Not the response He was looking for, I'm sure, but it was the response He received nevertheless. Clearly, the events of [ch5](#) were important to Jesus, so they are important for us to look into and understand today as well.

There are several ways we could approach a study of [ch5](#) not the least of which is the fact that God's grace goes international but while we will attempt to cover as much theological territory in the text as time will allow, our main focus will be on the sovereignty of God. And this will not just be on the fact that God is sovereign over the big issues of life as well as the minor details but more specifically, how that God is even sovereign over our own expectations.

1 – Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army and as such, he would have been the #2 man in Syrian, 2nd only to King Ben Hadad II. The author is presenting Naaman as a picture of a man who has everything: position, esteem, authority, wealth, success and – leprosy. Now, many Bible handbooks are quick to tell us that this is not the same as Hansen's disease (modern leprosy) but, whatever it was, it was bad enough to elicit sympathy from those around him and stir up and eagerness to seek a healing for it from his own king.

Naaman's leprosy comes like a thud at the end of [v1](#) but that's not the most shocking thing in the text. Of course, if you biblical theology is working properly, it won't be a big surprise but there it is – the reason Naaman had such a wonderful reputation is because by him the Lord had given victory to

Syria. Here is God's sovereignty as seen in the big events. Yahweh is Israel's God and yet, He also directs what happens in, to and for Syria. He is the God that grants success to the Syrian military. The text implies that Yahweh controls Syrian politics and foreign affairs. Here is the God of **Ps 24:1**. He's the God of the church and the Lord of the world. Yahweh draws near to His people but that doesn't mean He allows pagans to run around unsupervised.

2-4 – This is the other side of the sovereign coin. Yahweh's not only sovereign in the big events but also in the small circumstances – in 1 single, young life. Her situation is unconscionable to our modern ears even as it is reported matter-of-factly in **v2**. This entire story hangs on the humble heart and faithful attitude of this little girl and we don't even know her name. One day, as she goes about her household work, she happens to mention how burdened at heart she was over her poor master's condition. There was a prophet in Samaria who could effect a healing for him. Naaman, in his desperation, decided it was worth a try and the rest, as they say, is history.

But let's not gloss over the personal tragedy revealed in **v2**. Were this girl's parents killed in the Syrian raid? I'm not sure which would be worse, dying in a raid or surviving and not knowing where your young daughter has ended up. Just consider her situation: kidnapped by raiders, never to return home again, never to see loved ones again, living the rest of her life in servitude in a foreign country. Her picture would never appear on any Israelite milk cartons with the date of her disappearance. She had been removed from her home, community, culture and country and she was gone for good – all this after the worse trauma of her young life.

Whatever expectations she had of marriage and raising a family, of just living her life among her family and village had been smashed. All her hopes and dreams were dashed by those raiders. Apparently, she had come from a godly home, from a remnant family because she knew about Elisha and had a personal confidence that God's power operated through the prophet. And yet, despite all that, in this story everything hangs on this little girl. In fact, it hangs on her tragic servitude. Without her being in this unconscionable situation, Naaman would never have been healed. People are often brought into the kingdom of God at great cost to other people. Sometimes it takes great sacrifice on the part of some to bring the free gift of the gospel to others. Church history is filled with the testimonies of

martyrs & missionaries, of pastors & prayer warriors, of those willing to give it all so others will hear the gospel.

God's sovereignty is both fascinating and complete, it's total. We see it in the first 2 verses that both international politics and personal circumstances, both world affairs and personal dilemmas are under God's control, to be used for His purposes. His sway extends from parliaments and war departments to the incidentals of everyday life. For God, there is no tension or discrepancy between [Is 66:1](#) and [Mt 10:29](#).

5-8 – We can't fault the king of Syria for his assumption in sending this letter. I'm sure, by his way of thinking, any prophet in Israel that was worth his salt would surely be attached to the king's court, right? I mean, if he's that good, wouldn't the Israelite king want to have a royal monopoly on all that prophetic power? The Syrian king assumes here that the Israelite king would be honored, even excited, to provide such a blessing for his ailing servant but sadly, that is not the case. Instead, Israel's king is devastated, immobilized and fairly alarmed. He immediately assumes the Syrian king is trying to pick a fight because he has no other options available to him at that moment.

We see quite a contrast when we compare these 4 verses with the previous 4 verses. Mrs. Naaman's servant girl is full of expectation and confidence while Israel's king is full of dread and dismay. Elisha has to take the initiative with the king; the king is so far from the reality of Yahweh that he doesn't even think to seek out Elisha. For the servant girl, the loss of her personal expectations hasn't perverted her knowledge of or dampened her confidence in Yahweh. The king's life is so focused on fulfilling his own desires and expectations that he no longer knows the power of God. Theoretically, he knows God can do those things ([7](#)) but for him it's just a formula. He sees nothing beyond politics.

You could say that the king here is the epitome of the unbelieving, un-seeking attitude of Israel. He should be setting the spiritual tone for the nation but instead, he reflects their pagan attitude. He lives without consideration for or relationship with Israel's covenant God. He's king of a people who are part of the covenant nation; he should be seeking Yahweh in this dilemma. But, just like his nation, he has the name of Israel but not the faith of Israel.

Clearly, you can be part of, or over, the people of the covenant and not have the faith of the covenant. Similarly, you may be numbered among God's outward people and yet live life without God. Your name may be on a church roll and yet you do not seek after Him, long for Him or thirst for Him. You don't cast your cares upon Him. You may be a long-standing church member and still have no real faith in Jesus Christ at all. It is possible to profess knowledge of God and yet live life without Him.

9-14 – So the king is sweating out this new “attack” and his advisors are at a loss to help him. Then a message comes in from Elisha, “What’s the problem? Send the general over to my place.” This must’ve been hilarious since I doubt Elisha lived in a nice crib and yet, there’s this distinguished foreign entourage pulling up outside his door. No doubt the neighbors were wondering “what’s up” and why are Syrian chariots parked in my front lawn? But, despite the ruckus out on the street, the text reveals to us that God’s ways in dealing with us are often offensive.

How so? Well, first off, God’s ways humble our pride. Maybe Elisha was lacking in “people skills” or maybe he was trying to make a point. Either way, he began his relationship with Naaman in a manner guaranteed to insult him. He didn’t even grant Naaman the dignity of a personal welcome; he sent his lackey out to talk to the general. Who does this 2-bit, dirt prophet think he is sending his toady out to me...to me! His grammar in v11 shows he is aggravated with Elisha. Naaman is somebody and he knows it and he expects others to recognize it as well. But all he gets is a bare word from the prophet’s nameless servant. Elisha treated Naaman like a leper who needed to be healed and Naaman didn’t like that. So brace yourself: God may not make a fuss over you.

Also, God’s ways reverse our expectations. It all comes out in **v11**. Naaman gets mad and leaves in a huff. It seems he’d already written God’s script for Him. He expected a regular show of ancient Near-Eastern faith-healing complete with all the shouting and razzle-dazzle (hocus-pocus). He wanted something more entertaining than just a mere word of promise. Naaman expected Israel’s God to be just like what he had known at home: itching palms and magic shows. That’s why he brought the 750 lbs of silver and 150 lbs of gold. He’d brought plenty of cash so he expected Elisha to deliver on the magic. Naaman wanted vending machine grace: put your money in

and take your blessing. The prophet was supposed to appear, accept the money and wave his hand over the spot and cure his leprosy.

How often are we like Naaman? How many times do we already have our idea of how God should operate? Then, when He doesn't comply with our expectations, we become disappointed with God. When this is the case, we are worshipping a false concept of God – or a false god. Here is a god I trusted and he let me down with the prayer that went unanswered or the undeserved disaster that came my way. People like this set up in their minds what they think God should or should not do and when he fails to toe their particular line of expectation, they have a grievance. Naaman fits that mold, maybe we do too at times. We not only want God's benefit but want to specify the way in which He must bring it. So the sovereign God has become our errand boy. .

Finally, God's ways trample our love of options. Elisha's word contained no options, there was no wiggle room. Wash in the Jordan and be healed or...don't. Why did it have to be the Jordan? Why did it need to be this way and no other? Why so particular? Why couldn't there be several approaches to the matter? Why can't I wash in a Syrian river? Of course, we find this same dogmatism in the gospel. Paul didn't do a demographic survey in Corinth of the theological expectations of the Jews and Greeks living there. No, he went there preaching Christ crucified, knowing full well it was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. He evangelized Corinth with an appalling absence of seeker-sensitivity.

Naaman's complaints are the very same objections many people make to the gospel. Naaman didn't like the humiliation of the gospel, nor the simplicity of the gospel, nor the narrowmindedness of the gospel. It was all too much for a man who thought he was somebody. His anger would have carried him back to Syria with his self-esteem and his leprosy still intact. But for another nameless servant who lovingly spoke logic to him. "If it'd been something difficult you would have done it in a heartbeat." Of course, Elisha didn't give him a difficult task because that would have just increased his pride. He asked him to obey a simple command and perform a humbling act and it would have been unreasonable for him not to submit. Faith that doesn't lead to obedience isn't saving faith at all!

15-19 – Naaman is not the same! This is the focus of the story, not the

healing of Naaman but his transformation. The healing only gets half a verse (14b) while the evidence of his changed life gets 5 verses. Naaman's complete transformation is seen in his attitude. 5 times, while speaking to Elisha, he calls himself your servant. This is quite a shift from his arrogant ranting in 11-12. It's also clear in his confession (15b). Elisha wished more Israelites would confess that! King Ahaziah in ch1 could never get that concept into his thick head and yet, here's a Syrian declaring that the only true God exists in Israel. It's clear from his resolution in 17b; he's going back to Syria where he will worship Yahweh exclusively. It's also clear in his sensitivity (18). He believes in Yahweh but he still has official duties to perform in Syria that he can't avoid. He's pleading for pardon in advance for it.

We need to understand that it wasn't just that fact of the healing that brought this transformation but the way the healing came about is the key. Elisha told him to go wash in the Jordan River, some 35 miles away from Samaria. When the healing occurred in this manner, it became clear to Naaman that Elisha's God wasn't just a metaphorical name for unnatural prophetic power but a living person. Healing had not come by the magical wave of the prophet's hand but was delivered by the living Lord at some distance from the prophet. It was the directness of God's action that convinced Naaman of God's reality and it was necessary for him to go to the Jordan if he was to experience that directness. If Elisha had been involved, his direct, personal knowledge of God would have been obscured.

Yahweh's grace didn't just heal Naaman of his leprosy but made him a faithful, fearful worshipper. Naaman not only lost his leprosy that day at the Jordan: he lost his paganism too. This is clear from his attitude, confession, resolution and sensitivity. God's work leaves clear evidence in the lives of believers.

20-27 – Here is another major contrast of ch5 between Naaman, the converted pagan and Ghazi, the perverted Israelite. To fully understand Ghazi's offense, we must go back to Naaman's conversation with Elisha in v16. Why was Elisha so adamant about refusing Naaman's gifts? No doubt, he wanted to impress on Naaman that Yahweh is a God of grace who can't be bribed, manipulated or cajoled like pagans do their gods. Yahweh doesn't forever have His hand out looking for a payoff. He is simply a giving God.

Had Elisha taken the offered gift, he would have inadvertently taken credit for the healing to himself and robbed God of glory. He also would've given Naaman the false impression that his gift had something to do with his salvation. Elisha's actions here are not unprecedented. Abraham refused to accept gifts from the king of Sodom so he wouldn't compromise his testimony before the people of Sodom who needed to know the Lord. Daniel refused gifts from King Belshazzar because his ability to read the handwriting on the wall came from God, not him. Peter and John refused Simon's offer lest they give the Samaritans the impression that God's gift of the Holy Spirit could be purchased with money. Paul even refused financial support from the church in Corinth lest they think he was just another traveling philosopher, out to take their money.

Now we begin to see the depths of Gehazi's offense, but there were others. He breaks the 3rd commandment in 20 by taking the Lord's name in vain. His lie in 22 tramples the 9th; and his covetousness (10th) drives him from the start.

But, his most disturbing offense was his distorting the truth about Yahweh. Gehazi destroyed in a moment all that Elisha had tried to teach Naaman about Yahweh in 16. His lie about the 2 unexpected guests doesn't just twist the truth but it twists the truth about god and does so by obscuring God's grace.

Gehazi's greed implied that Yahweh was a taker like all the other lesser deities that littered the Near East. So his offense is no small trifle. This explains why his punishment is so severe, why God deals so harshly with him. He was undoing what God had done. God wanted Naaman to know His free grace but Gehazi was trying to put a price on the goodness of God. The God of Israel didn't accept bribes, He wouldn't be manipulated by money or make room for human pride. His grace was free. Gehazi was implying otherwise, and it would cost him dearly. The covetousness that ate away at his heart became leprosy eating away at his body. The disease on the outside typified the decay that was already present on the inside.

Naaman's story receives a lot of press because it's important; it's important because it is bad news for Israel. Why? Everything Naaman says in 15-18 condemns Israel. Where in Israel would you hear a confession like his, apart from the small believing remnant? Who in Israel was that determined to worship only Yahweh? Naaman's faith is miles beyond anything found in

Israel at the time. He condemns Israel because he receives the blessing of Israel's God while Israel is being passed by. At least, that's what Jesus said – and it nearly got Him killed (Lk 4:27)! This threw the fine folks in the Nazareth synagogue into a rage. They weren't upset that Jesus said God showed mercy to a gentile but that God cleansed Naaman while bypassing Israel. Israelite lepers stayed lepers; God healed a pagan one. What Jesus is saying is that God turned away from Israel when He extended grace to Naaman.

The congregation at Nazareth became angry with Jesus because they knew nothing about the sovereignty of God, or at least they cared nothing about His sovereignty over their lives and especially over their expectation. They expected the Messiah to arrive in power, driving out the roman and installing Jews back into power before bringing the rest of the world to heel under His complete and unwavering authority. But their long-awaited Messiah was standing right in front of them but because He didn't meet their expectations, they rejected Him. Like Naaman, they became angry, but unlike Naaman, they refused to humble themselves and trust the Lord. Grace is both marvelous and dangerous, dangerous when it is obscured. Just ask Gehazi, standing there with leprosy.

“Naaman lost his temper, then he lost his pride, then he lost his leprosy; that is generally the order in which proud, rebellious sinners are converted.” D.L. Moody 😊