

GLEANINGS FROM THE HISTORY OF NAAMAN

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A collection of articles and writings by G.S. Byford from Gleanings From the History of Naaman, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

7 Chapters

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Gleanings From the History of Naaman

Gleanings From the History of Naaman: Part 1

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valor, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

"And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha." 2 Kings 5:1-9.

A remarkable illustration of the principle of grace is here set before us in great precision and minuteness of detail. Divine purpose makes itself evident in every line of the chapter. The ministry of Elijah had not succeeded in effecting any radical improvement in Israel's condition (1 Kings 18:37; 19:

14). Elijah, in the great scene on Carmel, had summed up the whole case for Jehovah as against Baal; and the people had there confessed the supremacy of Jehovah. But their more deliberate and formal answer we see disclosed in the message of Jezebel to the prophet. The heart of the nation was not really turned back again; it was unchanged. But in the chapter now before us the question is, Had the grace which found its expression in Elisha's ministry softened their heart and turned it again to the Jehovah of hosts, the God of their fathers? Clearly it was not so. Yet it pleased God in His infinite wisdom to furnish this magnificent exposition of the way in which grace delights to act, with its characteristic methods, and its fruits, as also of its own essential principles. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," etc. (Titus 2:11-14). In 2 Kings 4 we have seen how this grace is inexhaustible. "So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD." v. 44.

But a more serious question than that of poverty comes now into view; namely, of sin in all its guilt and uncleanness, for "many lepers were in Israel"; yet were they indifferent to this manifestation of it in their midst. The Lord Jesus in the day of His visitation of His people witnessed to the

excellence and efficacy of that grace in which He came to them as the sent One of God, when, coming to Nazareth and entering their synagogue, He read from the prophecy of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord Goo is upon Me," etc., and said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). Yet their hearts were closed against Him, their consciences were not awakened, they refused to acknowledge their guilty and defiled condition and their own deep need. "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus [Elijah] the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath." (Luke 4:16-29.) They stumbled at the sovereign grace of God. So it was in our Lord's days, and so it is now. "For as ye [Gentiles] in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [the Jews] unbelief: even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." Rom. 11:30, 31. The meaning of the latter clause is that the Jews refused the mercy shown to Gentiles, so that in the end they may come in also on the basis of pure mercy.

Grace displays itself to the unworthy where there is the confession of our sins and the submission to the righteousness of God instead of the establishment of our own (Rom. 10:3), and the acknowledgment of the Lordship of Christ. The fact that there were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's time was a testimony to the uncleanness of the nation in God's sight. But instead of exercise of heart before God about it, there was none. Had Jehovah not said: "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD Thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee"? Exod. 15:26.

From the time that sin found an entrance into this world, God has never ceased to plead with man, testifying to divine goodness in Himself, but to ingratitude and rebellion in the creature. The many uncleansed lepers in Israel in Elisha's day; the great multitude, in the days of our Lord, of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the waters of Bethesda's pool; the ten lepers of Luke 17; all alike bore unequivocal testimony to the real state and condition of the nation, and the insufficiency of ceremonial which, while contenting the people, did not meet the gravity of sin before God. So with Elisha, as we have seen, there was a similar testimony to the low estate of the people; yet was there the sovereign and waiting goodness of God for any truly confessing their need. The great in Israel discerned it not; yet, nevertheless, it could be known in its freeness and efficacy by the "stranger" who came in the expectancy of blessing.

This blessing was in the land of Israel - there to be found - for it did not travel outside of its own proper sphere as yet. God was not then making generous overtures to the Gentiles outside the land, however sorely Israel might provoke Him to do so. The Lord Jesus, of whom Elisha was but a type, would not allow Himself, as sent to the lost sheep of Israel, to depart from the path of obedience; nor would He distribute (without a protest) the children's food to dogs. For "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name. And again He saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust." Rom. 15:8-12.

God, in blessing Jew or Gentile, is ever true to Himself. The foolish conceit of the Gentile no more will be allowed a place than the unbelieving pride of Israel. We get both in this our chapter; and we find the prophet so instructed in the ways of Jehovah that he rebukes• the one (v. 8), and refuses to acknowledge the other (v. 10).

A few words as to the leprosy itself may not be out of place here. Its moral significance is plainly enough set before us in Scripture. No doubt leprosy was more or less prevalent in Egypt and the East, and perhaps particularly so in Syria. But God could not tolerate its presence in the camp of Israel, as we learn from Numb. 5:1-4. God had taken the people at their word and had consented to dwell among them (Exod. 15:2; 25:8). His presence could not but judge all that was opposed to His holy nature. He would not be a consenting party to His own dishonor. So too, when the ark of God was taken into Dagon's temple, Dagon was judged (1 Sam. 5:4). They are commanded therefore to "put out of the camp every leper," etc. Everything unsuited to His presence as in their midst was to be put out of their camp, "for the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp."

Before very long, the children of Israel were called upon to put this word into operation in regard to a very specific case of leprosy which appeared in one of their three leaders (Mic. 6:4). "And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.... And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again." Numb. 12:10-15. She who had led the women of Israel in song after the passage of the Red Sea (Exod. 15) is stricken by the just judgment of Jehovah with leprosy, and is shut out from the camp. We know that Aaron the priest was himself guilty likewise, although for obvious reasons not dealt with in the same way. Still more awful was the divine visitation upon Uzziah, king of Judah, recorded in 2 Chron. 26

These scriptures are sufficient to show that the infliction of leprosy was the expression of God's righteous judgment of sin, and also of His rejection of man - religious man - in his fleshly pretensions and assumed competency to draw near to God, and in the refusal of the truth of his actual condition. Sin, in its inward workings as known to God, made to appear outwardly in all its repulsive, revolting character, is what is shown by leprosy. Its manifestation in the flesh of the leper occupies the greater part of Lev. 13, while the next chapter sets before us "the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing." What is within displays itself in outward acts; yet it is not these but the principle, or working, of sin itself that is signified by leprosy. "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin;.." and "the judgment was by one to condemnation," yet the law dealt with sinful acts and condemned them. It failed to condemn sin in the flesh. Had it done so, it would have had nothing more to say, for man is that and nothing else. But when the holy One was upon the cross a sacrifice for sin, then sin itself was condemned. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness [righteous requirement] of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Rom. 8:3, 4. The believer now knows to his comfort and deliverance that as surely as Christ "was delivered for our offenses," so too He "was raised again for our justification." Death and resurrection are God's remedy for sin, and He requires submission to Christ (see Rom. 4:25; 14:9 Cor. 5:14-21).

It must be evident that when it is a question of what sin is before God, there can be no distinction between Israel and the Gentiles. "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him."

"He is a leprous man, he is unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague is in his head. And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in

him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be." Lev. 13:44-46. What God now calls for is the soul's bowing to His judgment of our state, and of our sins, in

Christ's death. Heart belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the abiding efficacy of His precious blood that cleanses from every sin, gives eternal forgiveness and peace.

Gleanings From the History of Naaman: Part 2

The cleansing of this Syrian leper was indeed a wonderful witness to the sovereign grace of the God of Israel - a witness not without blessing to the Gentile, even if disregarded by His people. "The law of the leper in the day of his cleansing," as set out in Lev. 14, was no longer known in Israel; for though there were many lepers in the land, none of them was cleansed. And where was either priest or sacrifice that God could own? The ministry of Elisha was outside the nation's ritual, such as it then was. The altar of Elijah had testified in its day (1 Kings 18), but where afterward do we read of it? It is a serious thing when the ordinary channel of blessing, because of its defilement, can no longer be made use of; for grace must maintain its own character of holiness, and will be neither hindered nor defiled by human interference. So, as we review the miracle now before us, we cannot but feel that for this reason it was that Elisha avoided reference to the Mosaic rite.

Let us now examine for a little the details of our chapter as affording a representative case. "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valor, but he was a leper." 2 Kings 5:1. Here we have an experienced soldier, an able general, a successful man, justly esteemed, honored, and rewarded, by his master. His name signifies "agreeableness," and Jehovah had used him to bring victory to Syria in chastisement of His own guilty people.

We read, again and again, how in the time of the judges God was grieved for the misery of His people, and raised up one and another to deliver them from their oppressors. Not because Israel deserved deliverance, but because He pitied them. So here the distressed condition of the Syrians had appealed to the tender mercy of Jehovah. God had permitted Israel in the reign

of Ahab to defeat the Syrians repeatedly (1 Kings 20). "And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD." v. 28. Three years later, however, when Ahab attempted to recover Ramoth-gilead out of the hand of the king of Syria, Israel was scattered and Ahab slain. Jehoshaphat, in guilty league with Israel's wicked king, was nevertheless delivered, "so as by fire." Subsequently recovered, Ramothgilead appears again in the possession of Israel, who used it as a military center.

Coming back to our chapter, however, we read that Jehovah had granted deliverance to Syria by one that was a leper. However great the victory, yet Naaman could not get away from the bitterness and sorrow of his being "a leper." This marred everything. Man in his best estate betrays the sin of his nature, and the dreaded, inevitable end is constantly in his thoughts, and casts its shadow on all earth's glory. Death!

And after death, the judgment! The greatest measure of worldly success and prosperity cannot shut out the gloomy prospect from the soul. Indeed, they only increase its terror; for, while death

itself may come as a relief to the wretched and the poor, the wealthy and honored naturally cling to what vainly satisfies them here, with nothing beyond but eternal judgment!

The soldiers of Naaman had brought into their lord's house one who was indeed a messenger of mercy. A captive out of the land of Israel, this little maid waited on Naaman's wife. "And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy."

Seldom indeed is the heart of a proud rebel against God softened or improved by adversity. Much less is found a nation, or any great part of a community, truly humbled by reverses. Of such it can be said, "They cry not when He bindeth them." Job. 36:13. And again at a later day it is written, specially of Israel when suffering defeat at the hands of the same enemy, where we have doubtless a prophecy of the yet more acute tribulation of the last days: "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. Therefore the LORD shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join His enemies together; the Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth.... For the people turneth not unto Him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts." Isa. 9:8-13.

The gracious ministry of Elisha, overlooked and despised by the great ones in Israel, had found a response in the heart of one of Jehovah's "little ones" - the unmistakable evidence that God had been at work. The "still small voice" bore witness that "His mercy endureth forever," and had found its way to the heart of the little maid that was "of the land of Israel." Grace with her had borne fruit, both for God's glory and man's blessing. Naturally she might have brooded over her wrongs, over the loneliness and misery of her now daily life. For although in the midst of affluence and splendor, she might naturally have regarded her lord with aversion, as being the direct expression of the power of the enemy in the havoc wrought in Israel, separating her too from her home and friends.

Would it have been surprising if, instead, she had presented an impassioned appeal for mercy that would give her back to the land of her birth, to her friends, and to her home? Yet, on the contrary, her earnest desire was that her master, and not herself, were with the prophet that is in Samaria! How perfectly does grace deliver the soul from selfishness or self-occupation. How it enlarges the heart and elevates the downtrodden and oppressed! Who can doubt that there shone more true nobility of spirit in her than in her master, or in the king of Syria? Grace, in that early day, foreimpressed its own character upon the heart of the receiver (Titus 2:9-14). Surely, she had either witnessed with others, or proved in herself, the power of grace to change the heart. For it was not a studied part which she was acting, with selfish desires for her own ultimate good, nor yet a mere submission to the inevitable, but a truly simple, yea, almost passionate expression of what occupied her heart. Even for how long previously, we cannot say. But we may say of her likewise, "She hath done what she could."

For whom was it done, as regards her feelings and intelligence? was it for Naaman only? Was not the glory of God before her, however little she might be conscious of it? Whatever brings true blessing to the soul, has God for its source and its object. God's greatest and best gift has been His beloved Son. When that Blessed One was about to leave the world, having finished the work

(as to His service of grace) given Him to do, we find the Spirit of God bringing together and connecting the beginning with the end of His course, thus giving us the object, the method of realization, and the results of His presence in the world in relation to God, to man, and to Satan. "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper," etc. John 13:1-4.

Blessing from God received by man in faith, returns to God in worship. So too the Apostle Paul, after tracing and expounding the ways of God with Israel and the Gentiles, brings us to the same conclusion. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." Rom. 11:33-36.

There was then a purpose of blessing for Naaman in the heart of Jehovah. The leper was to be cleansed, but his heart was also to be renewed by grace, so that he might be brought to God as a worshiper. The first link in the chain of blessing seemed weak indeed, and all who were used in the work seemed to have been chosen of God with a view to humbling the pride of the Gentile. Man is slow to admit that there is any barrier between God and himself but what he can set aside. The faithfulness and simplicity of the little maid were admirable. The principles which guided her were in effect those upon which the great Apostle of the Gentiles took his stand.

The same power and grace were active in each case. "And I, when I came to you, brethren, came not in excellency of word, or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God. For I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my word and my preaching, not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith might not stand in men's wisdom, but in God's power." 1 Cor. 2:1-5; J.N.D. Trans.

Gleanings From the History of Naaman: Part 3

It might be deemed only natural that the king of Syria, on hearing of a possible cure in the land of Israel for the leprosy of his servant, should address himself to the king of Israel; but he need not have ignored the prophet so entirely as to frustrate the mission, but for the overruling providence of God. Would not the king of Israel (if anybody) know all about it? And considering how recently Naaman had harassed Israel's land and people, he must have thought a little diplomacy was, doubtless, called for. "A man's gift maketh room for him." Pro. 18:16. Certainly he did his best to get on good terms with the one whom he thought most likely to help him in the matter, and we cannot be surprised at this. The infidel spirit, however, shown by the king of Israel, was inexcusable; but God is pitiful and was working in spite of hindrances. How many there are today who, in touch with the people of God and familiar, it may be, with truth in its outward expression, are found to be the greatest strangers to its power and reality. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him," and are enemies of the cross of Christ. Here, in the case before us, is evidently set forth the present unbelieving state of the Jewish nation. God is owned in a way-"Am I God, to kill and to make alive?"- but the witness and vessel of grace is ignored-Elisha was forgotten. The "poor man," who by his wisdom delivered the city, was not remembered by any one (Eccles. 9:14, 16). The prophet's ministry stayed the hand of God in judgment, yet Israel's king ignored the prophet.

Although the king of Israel's words did not go so far as the attempt of Elymas "to turn away the deputy from the faith" (Acts 13:8-10), they were yet the outcome of the ceaseless activity of the devil in seeking to hinder souls from getting blessing. But Jehovah interfered by His servant Elisha who "sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." 2 Kings 5:8-10.

With the real or imaginary grievances of Israel, Elisha had nothing to do. But he could not allow it to be said that Naaman the leper had come into the land of Israel asking blessing and cleansing, and had returned disappointed. It was not, however, the testimony for the moment that God dwelt in Israel; for Jeroboam, its first king after the division, had cast the God of Israel behind his back and discarded the priests of Jehovah. It remains for a yet future day for the testimony to go forth (to the terror of all enemies) that the name of the city shall be, from that day forth, "Jehovah is there." Naaman should indeed own that (v. 15), but the measured utterance of the prophet was, strictly speaking, more correct than the language of the one who had but just learned what it was to have to do with God in grace.

Jehovah had been cast out of Israel, and had not returned to the nation. He had not, however, cast away His people on that account. On the contrary, He had sent His servant in grace that it might be manifest that there was a prophet in Israel. Man's way had proved distinctly disappointing, but

God graciously opened up a prospect of deliverance and blessing, just as despair had, for the moment, taken possession of Naaman. A like experience we see in the case of God's redeemed people at the beginning of their history (Exod. 14), and indeed all the way through, as they will own in a future day in words especially prepared for their use in Psalm 107 (see Hos. 14:1, 2). The word of God through the prophet to the king, arrests Naaman in his perplexity, and-in its form of invitation, "let him come now to me"-is suggestive of the present invitations of grace: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11:28. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." John 7:37. "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22:17.

It is the more necessary to press these generous invitations at the present time, since the god of this world is blinding the minds of them that believe not, lest the glory of Him who invites, and their own deep need should be discerned. For the time is near when the leper will be left in all his uncleanness in the outside place, and the sinner who dies in his sins will be raised in order to appear before the great white throne for eternal judgment. "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:10-12. "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Rev. 20:11-15.

Naaman responded to the gracious invitation in a very ungracious spirit, only to find that pride must be humbled. He might make a display of glory and self-importance at the king's palace, but it was altogether out of place at the door of the house of Elisha. He might be a "great man with his master, and honorable," but Elisha was not affected by the display of this world's glory. He saw in him who stood at his gate an enemy of the people of Jehovah, an unclean leper to whom he could not come out, seeing he was not a priest (Lev. 14:3). And he had a sense of what was due to God, of what alone could be efficacious for the leper. It is only in God's presence and in subjection to His Word that we realize how completely sin separates us from God and from His people. The thoughts of man are all wrong, both in regard to sin and its remedy. The brief message of the prophet to Naaman was a disclosure of what his real condition was in God's eyes. "And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Unclean, he needed to be cleansed. Up to this point everybody had spoken of "recovery" (vv. 3, 6, 7, 11; compare with Lev. 13:45). The thoughts of men today, and especially of religious men, are set upon recovery, improvement, reformation, whether by moral or scientific means. But the Christian has learned that the flesh cannot be improved. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." John 3:6. "The carnal mind is enmity against

God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. 8:7. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Gal. 5:6. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Cor. 5:17. How humiliating for the proud Syrian to hear the words, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times." The remedy was simplicity itself-"Go and wash." Yet did it imply that he was in his leprous condition unclean, so that the man of God could not tolerate him in his presence.

Gleanings From the History of Naaman: Part 4

"But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." 2 Kings 5:11-14. It was not alone the simplicity or the brevity of the message sent out to Naaman which stumbled that "great" and "honorable" man; but Elisha refused to acknowledge the glory which distinguished him among men as of any account before God. His gifts, too, which would have made way for him in his own sphere, were altogether valueless in the presence of God.

It is a great and fundamental truth of the gospel, and that which staggers the pride of man, that "there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." As long as man keeps away from God, differences can be made and maintained for whatever they are worth; but God has decreed that no flesh shall glory in His presence; and where a soul is consciously in the presence of God, there is as little inclination as there is power to maintain the conventional distinctions of men. The light of God entering the soul gives it to bow to the truth of God's Word and to own its authority. "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." Job 40:3-5. "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Chap 42:1-6.

Only in one of two positions can man stand in God's presence-either as a repentant sinner bowing to God's righteous judgment of him, or as a worshiping saint justified by faith. All attempts to establish a character or a righteousness to satisfy even oneself must break down. The instructions as to leprosy in Israel (Lev. 14) illustrate this, as we have seen before; but what is so exceedingly important and interesting to notice in the cleansing of Naaman is that in the absence of all ritual God yet required that which signified the entire submission of the soul to death, and the obedience of faith. Israel has long ceased to be the executive of God's righteous government of man in the world, and it refuses the mercy and grace in which the blessed Son of God came to them. The present testimony is one of sovereign grace, and addresses itself to the whole world. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (which He had promised afore by His prophets in the holy Scriptures,) concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord,

which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: by whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name." Rom. 1:1-5.

But if God has rejected the fleshly confidences of Israel (Jer. 2:37), still less could He regard with favor the boldness of religious profession which would ignore the difference between Israel and the Gentiles, and, taking advantage of the unbelief of the former, would at least claim equality with, if not superiority to, anything of which Israel could boast. Nothing among Gentiles has ever had the shadow of divine authority to plead in justification. The objection of Naaman witnessed that the carnal mind is indeed enmity against God, that it entertains nothing but contempt for what God may have established or for what meets with His approval upon earth. Naaman was disposed to prefer the waters of Syria to those of Israel. We may be sure there were no inherent qualities in either for cleansing from leprosy. All such virtue rested in the word of God, and this demands the obedience of faith.

The river of Jordan doubtless had its typical import, but then was not the time to reveal it. We who now know something of the precious truth that in the death of Christ we have also our death to sin might be disposed to dwell somewhat on this part of the history; but, as the 6th of Romans has its typical counterpart, not here but in Josh. 3 and 4, we pass on and would seek to learn the purpose of God in dealing thus with this Syrian leper. Do not the words of the leper himself supply the answer? "Behold. I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." We see here how ready the human mind is to reason about the divinely simple but efficacious way of blessing for man's deep need, instead of bowing thereto in simple trust in God's unerring wisdom and gracious means. Naaman attached importance to his thoughts-how vain are the thoughts of man (Psalm 94:11) -and (lid not disguise his contempt for the people and land of Israel. He betrayed the very same spirit which in an earlier day had brought the judgment of God upon his nation (see 1 Kings 20).

The mind of the flesh is enmity against God, and displays itself in this way-that, where obedience of faith is required, intellectualism is ready to question. But "He [God] giveth not account of any of His matters" (Job 33:13). The gospel is preached among all nations "for the obedience of faith," and the simple and lowly receive it and get the blessing. So in the case before us it was the servants of Naaman who, by their remonstrance with him as he turned away, helped their master; and so also had the little captive maid been used of God at an earlier stage.

The simple, cogent reasoning of the servants proved its superiority to the vain thoughts of Naaman, disclosing at the same time their affectionate solicitude for their master's welfare which was truly touching. They put before him how he had nothing to lose, but everything to gain, by complying with the prophet's instructions. The very simplicity of the gospel is what first stumbles the soul. The "Wash, and be clean" of this chapter strikingly points to the "Believe... and thou shalt be saved" of the New Testament. There is a kind of desperation of soul, the result of trying human schemes of reformation, only to be disappointed, in which the Spirit of God works for the bringing of the soul to give up its own thoughts and way, and unreservedly cast itself upon the mercy of

God. If not, indeed, faith of an exalted order, yet still it is faith. "If I perish, I perish," said Esther; so similarly, the answer of the twelve apostles to the Lord's challenge exhibited the same character of faith. "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." John 6:66-69. Peter confessed his faith in Christ, and his love for Christ; but it was not knowledge or intelligence which held the disciples. They could not better themselves elsewhere. "To whom shall we go?"

By whatever means the sinner is brought to believe in God and to cast himself upon Christ for salvation, the result is ever the same. It was not the healing virtue of the waters of Jordan which Naaman proved, but the virtue of the prophet's word, and that Israel's God was indeed a Savior God. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: bath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Numb. 23:19. "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth." Job 33:25. That which washed away the leprosy of Naaman cleansed his soul from its unbelieving utterance. Dipping "seven times in Jordan," his lowly submission was complete; so was his cleansing. "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Gleanings From the History of Naaman: Part 5

"And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way." 2 Kings 5:15-19.

It is not to be supposed that the man of God was ignorant of or indifferent to the struggle that had been going on in the heart of Naaman, between faith and unbelief. It was in reality a conflict between God and Satan for the possession of a soul. The Spirit of God had brought it to a happy termination. Human instrumentality, insignificant and unpretentious in this case, had been largely made use of; but the chief actors had not, up to this point, discovered themselves. We cannot but admire the wisdom and propriety with which Elisha carried himself all the way through, standing aside while the conflict was in progress, as a servant that "knoweth not what his lord doeth." He has but to deliver Jehovah's message without addition or diminution, as becomes one entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation. But the mind of man reveals its disappointment and dissatisfaction with the gospel of the grace of God, and manifests, as in Naaman's case, its open rebellion against the means prescribed by God to induce the sinner to give up his own thoughts and the reasoning of unbelief. The ambassador has faithfully to deliver the message committed to him, and to leave the result with God. It is not his to try and make it palatable by giving up what arouses opposition. He knows that at all times God is well pleased when His beloved Son is well spoken of, and the gospel faithfully preached. "For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." 2 Cor. 2:15-17.

A spirit of earnest sincerity, witness of a love that seeks in order to save and bless, underlies the gospel, which in itself rarely fails to attract. "Let him come now to me," awakened hope in the heart of Naaman; but the more peremptory command, "Go and wash," destroyed those hopes which had been wrongly placed. "Behold. I thought," revealed the pride of a corrupt heart which in the matter of salvation would dictate terms to God; but the light of God had nevertheless truly dawned upon him, and so eventually we hear his confession of it in the words, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." What an amazing discovery! And in what a way of grace to make it! The only God in all the earth had been found of a poor Gentile leper-found too in Israel's land, while certainly Israel's king acknowledged Him not. "But Esaias is very bold, and

saith, I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me. But to Israel He saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Rom. 10:20, 21.

Well might the great Apostle of the Gentiles, with a heart full of love for his brethren after the flesh, seek to use such a marvelous fact for the blessing of some of them. "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them." Rom. 11:13, 14.. And will not God use it effectually in a day which is yet future, in answer to the prayer of an afflicted and repentant remnant (Isa. 64:12; 65:1)? Then will assurance and certainty, as the result of God's work in the soul, take the place of "vain thoughts," fruits of a darkened understanding which had repelled grace and insulted Jehovah and His servant. "Better things... and things which accompany salvation," we may say, were now to appear in the case before us; and these were wonderfully similar in character to those fruits which rejoiced the heart of the Apostle Paul as he marked their development in his beloved Thessalonians. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." 1 Thess. 1:2, 3. The Thessalonian converts had believed the gospel which Paul preached, responding heartily and in all simplicity to the grace presented. They had borne fruit in like character to that divine grace which had visited them. And, in its measure, it was so with Naaman. One hardly knows which to admire most—the generous devotion of the cleansed leper pressing his gifts upon Elisha, or the faithfulness in which the latter refused all that was offered, declining to enrich himself by compromising the testimony of that free yet sovereign grace of which he had been the channel.

The tribute of the Gentiles has been rendered to God's earthly people in the past, and will yet again be rendered to Israel in the future (compare 2 Chron. 9:23, 24. with Psalm 72). These gifts shall come with acceptance to the earthly dwelling place and altar of Jehovah. But at this time Israel was unbelieving and contemptuous of the grace represented by the ministry of Elisha, so that no glory could in truth accrue to Israel, or indeed to any but to Jehovah Himself. It would be better and more excellent for the Syrian to return to his own land, and build an altar to Jehovah there, as in coming millennial days when God shall have accomplished all that He has ever promised for Israel, it shall be said, "In that day there shall be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD." "In that day there shall be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance." Isa. 19:19, 23-25. Truly God has given in His Word many a pledge and guarantee of blessing which awaits not only Israel, but the world, when there shall be the universal acknowledgment of Jehovah, and subjection to His order then established in power on the earth.

How perfect is divine workmanship! He who had but a little before spoken disparagingly of "the waters of Israel," now begs for two mules' burden of earth! Had it been suggested to him earlier as an essential condition to his cleansing, he might have regarded it as an unnecessary incumbrance; but in his altered state of mind, the very soil of the land of Israel was sacred to him,

where he had come to know God as Jehovah Rophi-"that healeth thee" (Exod. 15:26). When God is known thus as a Savior God, to build an altar to Him (in a manner of speaking) is the suited thing to do. Now ' that Christ has come, God can only be truly owned and worshiped as a "just God and a Savior" when He is known as One who, in the death of His Son, has laid a righteous and adequate basis for the everlasting deliverance and blessing of man. So also did Jacob, at an earlier day, when bidden by God to "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee." "So Jacob came to Luz,... that is Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-bethel; because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother." Gen. 35:1, 6, 7.

Grace manifested in Christ removes man's abilities, sets before him an object to be worshiped, and supplies both motives and methods such as God can acknowledge and accept. To have learned only that "there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" could but bring sorrow to Naaman; for he dwelt not there, but in Syria. But this was not all that he had learned. He had learned the true character of God Himself, who had established him in the position of a worshiper, cleansed, accepted, and welcome to draw near, even as the heirs of promise. Naaman was to go back to his own land with all the riches he had brought. They had been refused, but he had been cleansed and accepted. The same God who had delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt and set Himself before them as the one object of worship, had been revealed to Naaman with the same result. To Israel, He had given the ten words which proclaimed His holy jealousy against all false gods; and then he adds, "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Exod. 20:24.

"And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor, 'Sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon,... the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing." vv. 17, 18. The revelation of God as He has declared Himself, the association of His name with the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, is that which gives the character of truth to worship; while the passing away of all forms and ceremonies now rendered obsolete by the death of Christ requires that worship rendered to a God as now revealed in Christianity should be spiritual. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." John 4:21.24.

.t, The question then arises, Who are they who are thus

Elisha could but stand aside and refrain from hindering where he had no authority to sanction. For such a work was quite outside the revealed ways of God with Israel, and apart from all that had hitherto been made known, whether of leprosy and its cleansing, or of worship and its essential requisites. Yet surely Elisha was here a type of God's righteous Servant who, when here on earth, in the same place and in similar circumstances, acknowledged the faith which God had wrought in

the heart of a stranger and accepted the worship (as unconventional as that of Naaman) which was rendered to Him by the cleansed Samaritan of Luke 17:11-19.

Gleanings From the History of Naaman: Part 6

While grace thus manifested its presence and character by positive fruits in a way acceptable to God and cheering to the heart of His servant, the evidence of an exercised conscience bore convincing testimony to the reality of the change which Naaman had experienced. The circumstances before us are not the portrayal of the case of one breaking with old associations, or departing from evil habits, but of one returning a changed man to his responsible position in the service of the king of Syria. Worship of Jehovah, and obedience to Him, would not be easy in the midst of idolatrous surroundings; and already, before his return to Syria, Naaman contemplated in a very different way to formerly the circumstances and requirements of his honorable position. To be closely associated with his royal master on all state occasions, and to take part in the worship of Rimmon, had hitherto been congenial to his feelings, and indeed flattering to him as a distinguished courtier. But the very thing which formerly ministered to his pride is now distasteful, and becomes an act of sin calling for judgment if not pardoned. "And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way." 2 Kings 5:19.

What had changed? Only the heart of Naaman. What made the difference? The light had broken in upon his soul. A new moral standard was set up within him. "The entrance of Thy word giveth light," and all outward action must conform to the purity of that which had established its own authority within him. It was not a law from without, requiring obedience under promise of blessing, or putting a restraint upon him with pain and penalties in case of disobedience. Nor was it only the divine authority of that word to which he had reluctantly submitted, but the revelation had been one of grace. Jehovah, the only God in all the earth, had interested Himself on his behalf-himself, a miserable, unclean Gentile leper-and when the great ones of Israel would have sent him away, Jehovah had sent His servant with the message, "Let him come now to me." Obedience of faith receives the blessing, and grace impresses its own character upon the receiver. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus 2:11-14.

In Naaman's case there was but a limited display of grace, and personal to himself, having reference solely to his own bodily condition. It was not calculated to lift him out of himself, and did not set before him a "blessed hope." But the grace which came by Jesus Christ, and is now in the presentation of the gospel, has appeared in all its fullness, bringing salvation for all men, and opening up a prospect of glory and blessing of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the center and effulgence. It is impossible that such grace should visit the soul and leave it unchanged. Once received, it teaches; and so it was with Naaman. Divine wisdom characterized Elisha's reply. He neither sanctioned a relapse into idolatrous practices, nor imposed the law of Moses upon a Gentile. "Go in peace," left him free to follow the leading of that light and grace which had entered his soul. The display of grace was perfect according to God's own character and way. But now we

are given to see the counter working of the adversary of God and man.

"But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." 2 Kings 5:20-27.

A solemn picture indeed! needing but little in the way of explanation. We have seen that the same malignant power of Satan was actively working in many ways to prevent the reception of the blessing. Defeated in that, he uses the most suited instrument to his hand to give God the lie, and to rob Him of His glory. That instrument was found in the service of the man of God—one who dwelt in his house and had doubtless seen many other displays of grace, but who was himself absolutely indifferent to Jehovah's glory, and unaffected in heart by all that he had been privileged to witness. He only saw in this recent example an opportunity of enriching himself at the expense of the testimony. See how contemptuously he speaks of the one whom God had blessed! and how profanely he makes use of Jehovah's name to sanction the infamy which he proposed! "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him."

As we have before seen, grace received imparts its own character to the receiver; and not only so, but having its source and spring in God's love as now manifested in Christ, it takes its course of blessing through the saints, making them channels of blessing to others, and returns to God in worship. This is true now of saints individually (see John 7:37-39), as it will also be manifested corporately in the Church's relations to the millennial earth, as we see in Rev. 22:1-3.

The reverse of this is to be seen in the case of such as have become familiar with truth as to its outward expression and the present ways of God in grace, while themselves strangers in heart to the power and reality of either. Just as Naaman had exhibited the fruits of grace received in tenderness of conscience and devotedness of heart, so did the unrenewed heart of Gehazi display itself in all the horrible repulsiveness of nature. Satan works most readily and effectively upon the religiously instructed mind. It is those who have learned about God or the Lord Jesus Christ. and who have thus some knowledge of the truth, that are more efficient servants of the devil than are those who have not such knowledge.

The sin of Gehazi has been the sin of Christendom. In the early days of the Church's history, the new testimony to the name of Jesus was maintained with such power and earnestness, and so abundantly blessed by the Holy Ghost in this same city of Samaria, that there was great joy in that city. Grace was there again asserting itself, and also maintaining its own proper character. But just as the covetousness of Gehazi betrayed him into the hands of Satan for the corrupting of the testimony, so in that early day the same evil principle manifested itself in New Testament times in one who had the reputation of being called "the great power of God," who also "believed" and was baptized, and was admitted into the Christian profession. Such was Simon Magus (Acts 8), a professed believer, but who was proved to have "neither part nor lot in this matter," for his heart was not right in the sight of God.

These tactics of the devil are more effective than open opposition-interfering with the action of grace, and corrupting the motives and testimony of such as proclaim it. But there was in the early history of the Church the spiritual power and energy of the apostles, which exposed and judged these evil ways, and for the moment restrained its fuller development as manifested in later days. The natural man is ever ready to turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and to use the Christian profession as a means of exalting and enriching himself, holding godliness to be a means of gain; and the lordship of Christ is practically, if not formally, denied. With Gehazi it was not alone the cupidity disclosed, nor the falsehood and deception practiced, that exposed the offender to the withering rebuke of the prophet and the swift and solemn judgment of God, but the occasion-"Is it a time to receive," etc. God had drawn near to His revolted people in grace, which could neither be monopolized by Israel, nor patronized or purchased by the Gentile. Elisha as a spiritual man entered fully into the mind of God and refused the gifts Naaman would have pressed upon him. Yet his servant had thought it a time to enrich himself by grasping at that which his master had refused.

The moral application to the present day is obvious. It is not here unbelieving Israel forbidding that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, but the corrupt professor, the wicked servant, doing his utmost, and using his knowledge and position as a servant in the house, to counteract the work of God in the soul, and mar the testimony of grace so as to belie its true character. No sin is more heinous and deadly than sin against the grace of God, as seen in those who deny the Lord that bought them, and who bring upon themselves swift destruction. There were many lepers in Israel when Naman was cleansed. One more was added to the many. "And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."

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