

Times Change; People Do Not!

Over the years there has been one spiritual question that continues to arise, i.e., “Why did God require some action?” Or, statements, such as, “I do not understand why God commanded, this or that.” Or, I do not believe a command of God is actually required.”

Well, let us take a look at one particular event that answers these all-inclusive questions, as recorded in 2 Kings 5:1-14, and a man named Naaman.

Naaman is described as being “captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him Jehovah had given victory unto Syria: he was also a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.”

In one of Naaman’s raids he, “brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maiden; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! then would he recover him of his leprosy.”

Having obtained this information Naaman received permission from the king of Syria to journey to Israel, Naaman took a letter from the king with silver, gold, and changes of raiment, and brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, “I have sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy:” the king of Israel supposed the king of Syria was seeking a quarrel against him.

When Elisha the man of God 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 chariots and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

Simple, yes? Naaman had a terminal disease, and Elisha gave him a cure. How would you have responded? Let’s see what Naaman thought of the cure: 1) Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, 2) I thought, 3) He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

It took faith for Naaman to approach his king and to travel from Syria to Israel. However, before Naaman received the words of Elisha he had already determined how his cleansing would be

accomplished, i.e., “He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper.” Solomon spoke, concerning this type of attitude, saying, “There is a way which seemeth right unto man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

As the instructions given did not suit Naaman he was wroth, i.e., “*burst* our in rage angry” (Strong’s). He was so angry that he “went away.” Not only did Naaman question the method he also began to offer alternatives to the command, i.e., “Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the 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,” i.e., “burning anger” (BDB).

Sounds foolish, yes? Well, it is not unusual: The apostle Paul asked the Galatians, “So then am I become your enemy, by telling you the truth?” (4:16). There have been, and shall be occasions when individuals read the word of God, understand what they have read, and are then angry because it does not agree with what they “thought” it should be, or how it should be accomplished.

Time for a level head: “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?”

Although the command was not “some great thing” in the eyes of man it was huge in the eyes of God! “Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah.” (Isa. 55:6-8). The command issued to Naaman was not “a way” it was the “only way.” Man forgets that it is not God that needs to be reconciled to man, but man to God. Therefore, God gets to set the plan of reconciliation: “But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

When Naaman humbled himself before God, and accepted God’s terms of cleansing, “Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in the 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.”

The cleansing did not occur the moment of Naaman's repentance. The cleansing did not occur as Naaman entered the water. The cleansing occurred after Naaman "dipped himself seven times in the Jordan."

Were there magical properties in the Jordan river? No. Was the purpose to cleanse Naaman's soiled flesh? No. Naaman, himself, recognized that "the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?" When Naaman heard the word of God, as spoken through Elisha, and obeyed the command, God was faithful in cleansing Naaman from his death sentence, i.e., leprosy.

Let's turn our attention to God's instructions concerning reconciliation. The message was clear to the first hearers of the gospel, on the day of Pentecost: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified." Therefore, an action must ensue: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:36-37). To which, Peter said, "And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

So, what is the import of "repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins"? The answer is given when Ananias (speaking the words of God, as Elisha had done when instructing Naaman), said, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name."

Whether or not a man can rationalize, attempt to redefine, predetermine (as Naaman had done) how God will save, or that God's definition does not apply, it just might behoove a man to consider: "For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the discernment of the discerning will I bring to nought. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:18-21). ret