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THE HEALING OF NAAMAN (2 KGS 5:1-27): ELISHA'S SELFLESS ATTITUDE VIS-à-VIS THE GREED OF MANY MODERN-DAY HEALERS

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Abstract

The account of the healing of Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1-27) underlines YHWH's lordship over all the earth and his power over all sicknesses and infirmities. It also presents Elisha as the prophet of YHWH, endowed with the power to cure sicknesses. Elisha cured Naaman of his leprosy but refused to accept any monetary reward. The story presents a powerful narrative contrasting the selflessness of Elisha with the greed displayed by his servant, Gehazi, as well as the materialism of some modern-day healers. Induced by greed and personal gain, Gehazi employed falsehood and deceit to secretly collect from Naaman the money that his master had rejected. Gehazi's sharp practice is comparable to the gimmicks of many modern-day healers who set up healing ministries for financial enrichment. Gehazi's act of deceit and his subsequent punishment emphasize the moral consequences of greed.

Keywords: Elisha, Naaman, Gehazi, Leprosy, Healing, Miracle

Introduction

The narrative of Naaman's healing in 2 Kings 5 is one of the most compelling miracle stories in the Hebrew Bible. The story intertwines themes of faith, humility, divine sovereignty, and prophetic selflessness. At the center of this narrative stands the prophet Elisha, who refuses wealth and recognition, embodying the prophetic ideal of service to God rather than personal gain. Naaman, a respected Syrian

army commander, suffered from leprosy, a dreaded disease. Upon hearing of a prophet in Israel who could heal him, he approached Elisha with gifts and riches as tokens of gratitude for the healing he expected. Elisha instructed Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times so that he might be healed. Despite initial skepticism, Naaman followed the prophet's instructions and was miraculously healed. This act of faith and obedience not only brought physical healing but also led Naaman to acknowledge the God of Israel.

Having been restored to health, Naaman returned to the prophet with material gifts as a demonstration of gratitude, which Elisha declined. Elisha's refusal of Naaman's gifts highlights his selfless attitude. He sought no personal gain from the miracle, emphasizing that the true power and glory belonged to God alone. His actions stood in stark contrast to Gehazi, Elisha's servant, who succumbed to greed, pursued Naaman, and deceitfully accepted gifts in Elisha's name, for which he was subsequently punished with Naaman's leprosy. The story of Elisha's healing of Naaman takes place in a complex historical and cultural context, highlighting themes of faith, obedience, and divine intervention. The story also serves as a poignant reminder of the virtues of humility and selflessness, particularly for those in positions of spiritual leadership. The story highlights the stark contrast between the prophet Elisha, who embodied humility and selflessness in his ministry, and certain modern-day healers whose actions reveal a troubling pursuit of personal gain. Elisha's example of serving without expectation of reward stands as a timeless reminder of integrity, while the greed seen in some contemporary religious figures underscores how easily spiritual authority can be misused. Sadly, the greed of some modern-day healers, who exploit people, starkly contrasts with Elisha's example. They often demand payments for miracles or sell so-called "holy" products, prioritizing material wealth over genuine spiritual service. This work studies Elisha's selflessness vis-à-vis the greed of his servant, Gehazi, and the selfishness and materialism of many so-called modern-day healers. The work employs the theological method of biblical analysis. The text juxtaposes two miracles—Naaman's cleansing and Gehazi's punishment—forming a literary unit that contrasts obedience and disobedience.

Historical and Cultural Context of the Text

2 Kgs 5:1–27 reflects Israel’s cultural, historical, and theological engagement with surrounding nations, showing God’s sovereignty beyond Israel and contrasting humility with greed. The narrative situates Elisha’s prophetic authority within the broader Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context of healing traditions, while also emphasizing Yahweh’s universal grace. The story occurs during the divided monarchy, when Israel interacted militarily and diplomatically with neighboring states like Aram (Syria). Naaman, the Syrian commander, represents Israel’s political rivals yet becomes the recipient of God’s healing.

In the Old Testament times, leprosy was often regarded as a sign of divine judgment or disfavor. Leprosy was a dreaded disease. It was not just a physical ailment but carried deep symbolic meaning. The disease was associated with impurity, sin, and separation from the community. Usually, lepers were quarantined. Sufferers were typically ostracized from society due to the fear of contagion and ritual impurity. The text reflects Israel’s theology of Yahweh’s universal power. Healing is not confined to Israelite borders; God’s grace extends even to a foreign commander. This universalism anticipates later biblical themes of inclusion.

The Healing of Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1-27)

In the story of the healing of Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1-27), no less than ten characters, or group of characters, appear in the cast. There are Naaman, his wife, her maid (an Israelite), the King of Syria, the King of Israel, the prophet Elisha, Gehazi, Naaman’s servants, Elisha’s unnamed messenger, the unidentified servants who carry Gehazi’s loot for him. With the marked increase in characters comes an increase in

the number of subplots and “scene changes” which enhance the main incident of the encounter between Naaman and Elisha.¹

There are two main stories in the text, dealing with separate but related issues. The story concerns the healing of Naaman and his offer of a gift to the prophet (vv. 1-19); the second deals with the duplicity of Gehazi, Elisha’s servant (vv.20-27). The latter story is clearly dependent upon the former, which sets the stage for the activity of Gehazi. The link between the two is Naaman’s attempt to pay for his healing (vv.15-19).²

Verse 1 introduces the first character of the story, Naaman, the Syrian Army Commander (modern-day Syria), a neighboring nation often in conflict with Israel. The name **Naaman** comes from the Hebrew root word “**na’āmān**”, which means “**pleasant,**” “**gracious,**” or “**delightful.**” Naaman was commander of the Syrian Army (*sar-ṣeḥā’ melek-’ārām*), highly esteemed, but was afflicted with leprosy (2 Kgs 5:1). Leprosy was a severe and socially isolating skin disease. Leprosy in the ancient world symbolized impurity and exclusion. Naaman’s condition symbolizes human frailty despite worldly success. In the OT, lepers were usually quarantined, but probably only in advanced stages of the malady (cf. 7:3ff; Lev 15:5).³ Naaman’s leprosy (*ṣāra’at*) probably was not of the kind that debarred him from society.⁴ Despite his health condition, Naaman was not removed from his position. Apparently, Naaman’s affliction was such that he was not forced to live in quarantine. There is no indication that he was ritually unclean in his native country.⁵

In vv. 2-3, the first subsidiary characters are introduced: a young Israelite slave girl and Naaman’s wife (both unnamed). They appear

¹ T. R. Hobbs. *2 Kings. Word Biblical Commentary (WBC)*, 13. D. A. Hubbard (Ed). (Waco, Texas: Word Books. 1985) 59.

² Hobbs. *2 Kings. WBC*, 1985, 59.

³ P. E. Ellis. *1-2 Kings*. R. E. Brown (Ed.). *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. 1968) 199.

⁴ J. Gray. *1 & 2 Kings*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press. 1970) 504.

⁵ Hobbs. *2 Kings. WBC*, 13. 1985, p.63; cf. A. Dada. “Rereading the Naaman Story (2 Kings 5:1-7) in the Context of Stigmatization of People Living with HIV and Aids in Africa.” *OTE* 20/3 (2007), 586-600 593. <https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC85905>.

here, help move the plot along, and then disappear. The Israelite maid is simply described as “*a young girl from Israel*” who had been taken captive and was serving Naaman’s household. Apparently, the girl had been captured by the Arameans on one of their raids and served as a maid to Naaman’s wife, informing her mistress about the Israelite prophet who could cure Naaman of his leprosy (2 Kgs 5:2-3). Despite being unnamed, her faith and courage set the stage for Naaman’s healing and his eventual acknowledgment of the God of Israel. She informed her mistress concerning the “prophet in Samaria” who could heal Naaman of his leprosy (v.3). With her information, a glimmer of hope for the resolution of the problem is seen.⁶ In many commentaries, she’s highlighted as an example of how even the seemingly least powerful individuals can play a pivotal role in God’s work.

Towards the Resolution of the Problem

2 Kgs 5:4-6 constitutes the first step taken towards a resolution. The report of the young Israelite slave-girl is brought to the King of Aram. With the mention of the King of Aram, an additional subsidiary character is introduced. The king of Syria wrote a letter to the king of Israel⁷ requesting the healing of his servant, Naaman. This raises hope for the resolution of the problem. The letter reads, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.” This is a diplomatic letter, which conforms to the norms of international protocol of the ancient Near East (ANE).⁸ The exchange of letters and gifts between the king of Aram and Israel’s king reflects diplomatic practices of the time,

⁶ Hobbs. *2 Kings. WBC*, 13. 1985, 59.

⁷ Neither the kings of Syria nor the king of Israel is named here. Elisha was active during the reigns of **Jehoram (Joram), son of Ahab** (c. 852–841 BC), **Jehu** (c. 841–814 BC), **Jehoahaz** (c. 814–798 BCE), **Joash (Jehoash)** (c. 798–782 BC). Hobbs suggests that the Syrian king here is Ben Hadad (presumably Ben Hadad 1), who was assassinated in approximately 842 BC. This suggests that the king of Israel here would be Jehoram (c. 852–841 BC). Hobbs. *2 Kings. WBC*, 13. 1985, 63.

⁸ Gray. *1 & 2 Kings*. 1970, 505.

highlighting the tension between political rivalry and dependence on Israel's prophetic tradition. The incident recorded in this chapter must have happened during a rare time of peace between Syria and Israel, which were often in conflict. When the King of Aram had fulfilled this obligation, he too disappeared from the story.

Together with the letter from the King of Aram, Naaman also took with him a large sum of money: ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments (2 Kgs 5:5). The volume of gifts Naaman brought along was exceptionally large. According to Hobbs, "one talent is approximately thirty-two kilograms; a shekel weighs approximately thirty milligrams. Naaman's total gift would then amount to approximately three hundred and forty kilograms of silver and ninety kilograms of gold. By any standard, this is an enormous amount."⁹ Such an enormous volume of gifts indicates the strength of Naaman's desire to rid himself of his illness.

When the King of Israel (the next subsidiary character) received the letter, he reacted to it with suspicion and fright: he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy..." (2 Kgs 5:7). The indignant question of the King of Israel "Am I God to give death and life?" indicates that, as the letter conveys, the request had been made directly to him with no actual mention of the prophet. It is possible that the King of Syria took it for granted that a prophet with such powers to heal people from leprosy would be a member of the royal household, hence his letter.¹⁰ On the other hand, the king of Israel seemed to be quite ignorant of Elisha's powers. For the King of Israel, the letter was a prelude to war (2 Kgs 5:7c). The statement, 'Am I God?' would imply that such

⁹ Hobbs. *2 Kings. WBC, 13*. 1985, 64.

¹⁰ J. Robinson. *The Second Book of Kings. The Cambridge Bible Commentary*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1976) p.53; Gray. *1 & 2 Kings*. 1970, 505.

powers belong to Yahweh alone. Thus, the move towards the resolution of Naaman's problem is stalled.¹¹

The Role of the Prophet Elisha

Verses 8-12 constitute the second act. Here, a second attempt is made to find healing for Naaman. Here, Elisha is introduced. When Elisha heard of the king's indignation, he sent a message to him, bidding the leper to come to him: "...Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kgs 5:8). This suggests that Elisha was still at Gilgal (the capital city) when the incident occurred. The phrase, "a prophet in Israel" (*nāḥī' bəyiśrā'ēl*), refers to one with access to the very powers that would cleanse Naaman of his leprosy.

Elisha's statement in v.8 is loaded with theological and narrative significance. The prophet redirects the situation from political tension to divine revelation. Elisha emphasizes that healing power resides not in kings or political figures but in God, mediated through His prophet. This shifts the focus from human diplomacy to divine sovereignty. The phrase "that he may learn" shows Elisha's intent: Naaman's healing is not just about physical restoration but about recognizing the living God of Israel.

The next scene took place in Elisha's house. Naaman proceeded to Elisha's house with all the pomp of his status, accompanied by all his retinue and guards. When Naaman arrived at Elisha's house, he stopped at the doorpost. Naaman's action here may be interpreted as a sign of respect for the prophet.¹² Naaman, however, encountered the exclusivist attitude that pervaded Israel's socio-religious space when he arrived at the prophet's house to seek healing. Having been brought up under the strict provisions of the Mosaic laws, and fully aware of those provisions barring direct contact with a person with leprous conditions, Elisha did not go out to meet Naaman but instead sent a messenger to him, with the instruction, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times (*rāḥaṣṭā šēḥa'-pe'āmîm bayyardēn*), and your flesh shall be restored and you

¹¹ Hobbs. *2 Kings. WBC*, 13. 1985, 60.

¹² Hobbs. *2 Kings, WBC*, 13. 1985, 64.

shall be clean” (2 Kgs 5:10). Here, additional characters appear in the persons of Naaman’s servants, who repeat Elisha’s command (v.13).

In ancient Israel, washing (*rāḥaṣ*) played a significant role in the ritual cleansing of lepers. The process is detailed in **Lev.14**, where a person who had been healed from leprosy underwent a purification ritual that included washing, sacrifices, and anointing. It has been suggested that ritual cleansing in rivers such as the Jordan had its origin in the primitive worship of river gods. But there is no connection between this primitive worship and Elisha’s story.¹³ The number seven is found regularly in the regulations, but there is no indication that a leper must bathe seven times. Rather, it is a period of quarantine (Lev 13:4, 5).

Elisha’s instructions to Naaman were simple and direct - wash in the Jordan River seven times. The simplicity of Elisha’s healing methods emphasizes the power of faith and obedience over-elaborate rituals that Naaman expected. This act of obedience required faith and humility, both from Naaman and from Elisha, who trusted in God’s power rather than performing elaborate rituals. Here, Elisha acts as God’s representative; his action emphasizes that healing comes from God, not the prophet’s charisma.

Naaman’s Reaction to Elisha’s Instruction

Initially, Naaman was angry (*wayyiqṣōph*) and offended by the seemingly simple and undignified command by the prophet. Naaman initially resisted the simple act of washing in the Jordan. He expected a grand gesture or ritual from the prophet. Naaman’s anger is occasioned by what he thought was the perfunctory treatment he received from Elisha. His preparation for the journey – the diplomatic involvement of the king, the gifts he had brought, all seemed rejected in the most offhand way by the prophet. He expected to be treated with deference, considering his position.

Naaman’s anger was on two counts. First, the prophet did not come out to heal him in some spectacular public way. Naaman expected some physical gesture and an invocation of the name of YHWH, a simple

¹³ Hobbs. *2 Kings. WBC*, 13. 1985, 64.

ritual or ‘myth’, similar to what he was familiar with.¹⁴ He also expected that the prophet would apply the kind of ritual that healers in his era used: “come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God” (*qārā’ bešēm-yhwh ’ēlōhāyw*), and “wave his hand (*hēnīph yāḏō*) over the spot, and cure the leprosy.”¹⁵ Second, Naaman was angry that Elisha had ordered him to “Go, wash in the Jordan.” He questioned why he should go and wash in the Jordan River, and not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, which he imagined were better than all the waters of Israel. Naaman’s question reveals his pride. Naaman, a powerful and wealthy man, is asked to accept gratuitous healing simply by washing himself.¹⁶ However, the prophet maintained his word that Naaman should wash seven times in the Jordan River, since the whole cure highlights the power of Israel’s God and demonstrates that there is a prophet in Israel.¹⁷ In anger, Naaman wanted to go (2 Kgs 5:11-12). Naaman’s initial resistance to Elisha’s simple instructions—washing in the Jordan River seven times—highlights a struggle between pride and humility.

Here again, the Israelite maid played an important role; she encouraged Naaman to do as the prophet had directed, no matter how simple they seemed. Listening to the maid, Naaman finally humbled himself, followed Elisha’s instructions, and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, as the prophet had instructed. Naaman’s healing required humility (washing in the Jordan), showing that faith, not rank, unlocks God’s blessing.

Restoration of Naaman’s Health (Vv. 13-14)

Naaman initially resisted the simplicity of Elisha’s command, expecting grandeur. His eventual obedience led to healing, illustrating that faith requires humility. Having been persuaded

¹⁴ Gray. *1 & 2 Kings*. 1970, 506.

¹⁵ Healing narratives in Babylonian and Assyrian texts often involved ritual acts and divine intervention. The Jordan River washing echoes ritual cleansing but emphasizes obedience to Yahweh rather than magical formulas

¹⁶ Hobbs. *2 Kings*. *WBC*, 13. 65.

¹⁷ N. H. Snaith et al. *The First and Second Books of Kings*. *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Vol. 3. (New York: Abingdon. 1954) 211-212.

by his Israelite maid, Naaman “went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan” as Elisha instructed. Although earlier, Naaman had demonstrated arrogance by questioning the prophet’s *modus operandi*, by going down and immersing himself in the Jordan as he was instructed, Naaman demonstrated obedience and humility. And the result was more than amazing: “his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean” (2 Kgs 5:13-14). The healing of Naaman reveals that God’s power is not confined to Israel’s borders but reaches outward to embrace even those considered outsiders. By extending healing to a foreign commander, the narrative anticipates the unfolding of God’s larger plan — one in which the nations themselves are drawn into His mercy and covenantal blessing. Naaman’s cleansing becomes a signpost pointing toward the universal scope of divine grace, foreshadowing the inclusion of all peoples in God’s redemptive work. Jesus later cites this story in Luke 4:27 to emphasize God’s inclusive mercy. Elisha’s role highlights the prophet as mediator of divine healing power. Naaman’s eventual healing and confession (“*Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel*”) fulfill Elisha’s words in v.8: “...that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.”

Naaman’s Confession of Faith (Vv. 15-19a)

2 Kgs 5:15-19a presents the discussion that took place between Elisha and Naaman. Having been cleansed of his leprosy, Naaman returned (*wayyāšāb*) to the man of God (*’iš hā’ēlōhīm*) to give thanks. Naaman’s physical cure becomes the basis of faith in Israel’s God. Naaman made a striking confession of faith in strongly monotheistic terms: “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel” (*hinnē^h-nā’ yāda’ tī kī ’ên ’ēlōhīm bākōl-hā’āreṣ kī ’im-bəḡisrā’ēl* ; 2 Kgs 5:15). Here Naaman, a Gentile and military leader from Aram, acknowledges the uniqueness of Israel’s God. His statement is not merely gratitude for healing but a theological declaration: Yahweh alone is God, and all other deities are false. This marks a shift from polytheism to

monotheism, highlighting God's sovereignty over all nations, not just Israel.¹⁸ He recognized Yahweh as Lord of the earth but recognized that he is God of Israel in a special way. Naaman realized that only in Israel, and through Israel's God, was healing to be found. Naaman now confessed that Yahweh is the true God and vowed to be his worshipper: "for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord" (2 Kgs 5:17). Naaman's words are categorical—he vows never again to sacrifice to any other god but Yahweh, God of Israel.

Given his confession of faith (v.15), Naaman requested that he might go back with two mule-loads of soil from the land of Israel (2 Kgs 5:17) upon which to build his altar, and so he could worship the Lord while in Syria. The request is based on the ancient Near Eastern belief that deities were tied to specific lands. By taking Israelite soil back to Syria, Naaman symbolically carried a piece of Yahweh's sacred territory with him, intending to build an altar and worship the Lord exclusively—even while living in a foreign land. This is supported by an ancient belief that a God could be worshipped only on his soil.¹⁹ Naaman's actions support his newfound faith. Secondly, the soil from Israel would be a visible reminder of his visit to Elisha, much as pilgrims today return from their pilgrimage with visible mementos of the place they have visited. Naaman's confession ("there is no God in all the earth except in Israel") underscores Yahweh's supremacy, while his

¹⁸ Naaman's confession is a pivotal moment in Scripture: a Gentile acknowledges the exclusivity of Israel's God, signalling that divine grace is not bound by ethnicity or geography. It anticipates the New Testament's proclamation that the gospel is for all nations, and it reminds us that God's saving power often breaks through boundaries we assume are fixed

¹⁹ J. W. Wevers. *The Second Book of the Kings. The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. C. M. Laymon (Ed). (Nashville: Abingdon. 1971) 199; In the ancient Near Eastern mindset, each god was thought to have authority over a particular land. To worship a deity outside its territory, people often carried soil or stones from that land as a sacred link. Since Israel's God had placed His name in Israel (Deuteronomy 12:5), Naaman asked for Israelite soil so he could honor Yahweh faithfully while living in Syria. By taking the soil, he symbolically transplanted the covenant ground, declaring his loyalty to Yahweh rather than to Rimmon, the Syrian god.

request to worship Yahweh in Syria reflects the tension of faith in foreign lands. He also sought pardon for the times he must accompany his master into a pagan temple and bow there out of duty. Elisha granted his request and sent him away in peace.

Naaman's Display of Gratitude (Vv. 15-16)

In 2 Kings 5:15–16, Naaman's response after being healed of leprosy is a striking display of gratitude and humility. Having been healed of his leprosy, Naaman came back and tried to offer gifts to Elisha as a token of his gratitude (**2 Kgs 5:15-16**). However, Elisha refused to accept any reward. Elisha's refusal of Naaman's gift is proof of his disinterested service of Yahweh, emphasizing that the miracle was an act of God, not a service to be compensated. By declining Naaman's gifts, Elisha redirects the honour to God, teaching that divine grace cannot be bought.

The healing of Naaman illustrates the universal expanse of Yahweh's benevolence, whose favours extend beyond the boundaries of nationality and religion.²⁰ Elisha's actions highlight several key aspects of his character and the principles he upheld. His refusal of Naaman's gifts demonstrates prophetic integrity. His selflessness contrasts sharply with Gehazi, his servant, who later succumbed to greed and was punished with leprosy (vv. 20–27). Elisha embodies the prophetic vocation as service without self-interest. His refusal of wealth highlights that divine grace cannot be bought. This stance reinforces the theological message: salvation and healing are gifts of God, not commodities to be bought.

Gehazi's Greed and Deception (vv. 20–24)

In vv. 20-23, Gehazi self-consciously established himself as the opposite of his master. Whereas Elisha had refused a gift from Naaman, Gehazi, Elisha's servant (cf. 4:12ff), took advantage of Naaman's feeling of gratitude to line his own pockets. His avarice and petty cunning (vv. 23-24) are in striking contrast to the disinterested nobility

²⁰ J. K. West, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Macmillan Co., 1971) 233-234.

of Elisha's attitude (v.16).²¹ Elisha refused to accept the gifts from Naaman. However, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, saw an opportunity to gain wealth from Naaman's gratitude. Induced by greed and personal gain, Gehazi secretly followed Naaman. Gehazi's greed is enhanced by the narrator's use of *wayyirdōp*, "so he pursued" him in v.21. When he caught up with Naaman, Gehazi falsely claimed that Elisha had sent him to ask for a talent of silver and two sets of clothing for two young men from the company of prophets. Gehazi's actions were marked by deceit. Naaman, still grateful for his healing, willingly gave Gehazi double what he had asked for—two talents of silver and two sets of clothing (Kgs 5:23). Naaman even sent servants to carry the gifts back with Gehazi. At first, all seemed to go well for Gehazi (vv. 23-24), but he had not reckoned with his master's gift of second sight (v.26; cf. 6:8ff). Gehazi's sharp practice did not go unnoticed by Elisha, who, through his prophetic sight, was already aware of what had happened.

Gehazi's sin offers multiple layers of moral and theological insights. The first is greed. Gehazi's desire for material wealth led him to pursue Naaman and falsely claim that Elisha had changed his mind about accepting gifts. This greed not only violated the spirit of Elisha's ministry but also contrasted sharply with Elisha's selflessness and refusal to accept payment for a miracle from God. The second is deceit. He lied to Naaman to obtain the gifts, telling him that Elisha had sent him to ask for silver and clothing for two young men from the company of prophets. Then, he lied to Elisha in a bid to cover up the crime. This dishonesty showed a lack of integrity and a disregard for the truth. Gehazi's actions were not just a personal failing but a significant violation of the trust and responsibility that came with being a servant of a prophet. Gehazi's greed contrasts with Elisha's selflessness. His greed and deceit threatened to undermine the integrity of Elisha's ministry and the reputation of God's work.

Gehazi's Punishment (vv. 25–27)

The dialogue between Gehazi and his master brings the story to a climax. The exchange exposes Gehazi's action. Gehazi sought

²¹ C. Conroy. *1-2 Samuel; 1-2 Kings. Old Testament Message*, vol. 6. (Wilmington: Michael Glazier. 1983) 204

to profit from God's miraculous work by receiving payment after Elisha had refused it. Gehazi's sin led to immediate and severe consequences. As a result of Gehazi's greed, Elisha pronounced a severe judgment on him. The leprosy that had left Naaman was transferred to Gehazi. This judgment is detailed in 2 Kgs 5:27: "Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you, and to your descendants forever." As a result, Gehazi left Elisha's presence, afflicted with leprosy, his body as white as snow. This physical punishment reflects the severity of his spiritual and moral failing. This punishment served as a stark reminder of divine justice and the serious repercussions of greed and dishonesty.

In line with the ancient conception of corporate involvement in guilt, this leprosy is to be suffered by his descendants forever (2 Kgs 5:27). That the curse was extended to Gehazi's descendants highlights the long-lasting impact of his actions. The extension of Gehazi's punishment to his descendants can be understood within the cultural and theological context of collective responsibility in ancient Israel. In ancient Israel, the family and clan were the basic units of society. The action of one member could affect the entire household or lineage. While the judgment pronounced by Elisha might seem harsh and severe by modern standards, it reflects the gravity of Gehazi's actions and serves as a stark warning about the consequences of dishonesty and trying to exploit God's work for personal gain.

Elisha's selflessness in the healing of Naaman serves as a powerful example for modern spiritual leaders and believers. It reminds us that spiritual gifts and acts of healing are expressions of divine grace that should be freely given. Gehazi's greed serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of succumbing to selfish desires and the importance of integrity, especially for those in positions of spiritual or moral authority. Gehazi's punishment raises questions about divine justice—why such severity? It reflects covenantal ethics where greed undermines prophetic witness. Gehazi's downfall warns against exploiting

sacred ministry for personal gain, a timeless lesson for religious leaders.

Between Elisha's Selflessness and the Materialism of Many Modern-Day Healers

The story of Naaman's healing in 2 Kgs 5 offers a timeless lesson on the contrast between genuine spiritual service and the lure of material gain. After Naaman was cleansed of leprosy, he returned to Elisha with gratitude and offered gifts in appreciation. Yet Elisha refused, declaring that the miracle was the work of God alone. His refusal was not a rejection of gratitude but a deliberate act of selflessness, ensuring that divine grace was not cheapened by human transaction. Elisha's stance highlights a critical principle: spiritual authority must never be commodified. His selflessness preserved the purity of God's work, reminding both Naaman and future generations that healing, deliverance, and blessings are gifts of grace, not services for sale.

The juxtaposition of Elisha's selflessness with contemporary materialism raises urgent questions about integrity in spiritual leadership. While it is not wrong for ministers to receive support, the danger lies in turning ministry into commerce. Elisha's example calls contemporary healers to re-examine their motives: is the pursuit of wealth overshadowing the call to serve? Ultimately, the lesson is clear. True healing and spiritual service must point people back to God, not to the pockets of the healer. Elisha's refusal of Naaman's gifts remains a prophetic rebuke to materialism in ministry. It challenges modern religious leaders to embrace humility, resist greed, and embody the selflessness that keeps God's grace untainted.

Just as Gehazi sought to profit from Naaman's gratitude, some modern-day healers exploit the faith and desperation of individuals for financial gain. They demand donations, sell "miraculous" products, or charge fees for healing services, prioritizing wealth over genuine spiritual service, thus turning

spiritual healing into a commercial enterprise. As a result, some religious leaders and healers live in opulence, funded by their congregants' contributions. Elisha's selflessness contrasts sharply with the commercialization of healing by some modern-day spiritual leaders, who sometimes demand payments for miracles or exploit vulnerable individuals. Elisha healed Naaman without accepting material gifts or rewards. He emphasized that the miracle was an act of God's grace, not a transaction. This underlines the principle that divine healing should be freely given (Matt 10:8), reflecting God's generosity and compassion. Elisha's actions were driven by a desire to glorify God, not to enhance his own status or wealth.

In sharp contrast, many modern-day healers often intertwine spiritual acts with materialism. Healing services are sometimes packaged with mandatory offerings, "seed sowing," or the sale of miracle items. Gratitude is monetized, and faith is subtly manipulated into financial obligation. This trend risks distorting the essence of divine grace, shifting focus from God's power to human profit. When religious leaders prioritize wealth over their spiritual duties, it can erode the trust and faith of their followers.

Miracle Hawkers and the Nigerian Church

The Nigerian church has long been a vibrant space of faith, hope, and community. Yet in recent decades, the Nigerian church today (Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal) has been besieged by "miracle hawkers" and "prosperity gospel" preachers, masquerading as modern-day prophets and prophetesses, who mutilate the Gospel of Christ, reduce God's blessing to material prosperity, and mislead weak Christians with their spurious dreams, deceptive revelations, and false predictions.²² They commercialize the sacred, turning divine acts into commodities for sale. Their activities not only distort the essence of

²² Bishop L. Ugorji, *Homily delivered at the Inauguration of the 2008/2009 Academic Year* of the Claretian Institute of Philosophy, Nekede, Owerri-Nigeria, November 21st, 2008.

Christianity but also exploit the desperation of believers seeking relief from poverty, sickness, or uncertainty.

The power to heal is one of Christ's gifts to his Church. Healing in the Church is a sign of Christ's continued presence in the Church. It is something which the disciples received freely (*dōrean*), therefore they are not to profit from the Gospel, even though their basic needs are to be met. On sending out his disciples on mission, Jesus instructed them: **"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give" (Matt 10:8).** This emphasizes *the divine generosity* — since the disciples received divine power and blessings freely, they are to utilize them in the service of the people without expecting payment. Sustenance, not profit, is the rightful expectation of those who preach the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor 9: 18).²³ Jesus, therefore, warns against a self-seeking use of this charisma (Matt. 10:8; Lk. 10:20).²⁴ Thus we see the basis in Jesus' instruction to his disciples: *freely you have received, freely give* (Matt 10:8b). Jesus demands of his disciples an unconditional unself-seeking (Matt. 10:8).²⁵

Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, and comforted the broken without demanding payment. In stark contrast, miracle hawkers often attach financial strings to spiritual promises. Congregants are urged to sow "seed money" for healing, purchase "anointed oils," or pay for access to deliverance services. This transactional approach undermines the authenticity of faith and shifts the focus from God's power to human profit. The consequences are profound. First, it erodes trust in the Church as an institution of integrity. When miracles are marketed, genuine spiritual leaders are overshadowed by charlatans who prey on vulnerability. Second, it perpetuates materialism within the Church, where success is measured not by holiness or service but by wealth and spectacle. Third, it risks alienating younger generations, who increasingly view religion as manipulative rather than transformative.

²³ D. A. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, *WBC* 33A. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 1993) 274

²⁴ A. Oepke. "αιωμα." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*

3. G. Kittel (Ed.). (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1965) 213.

²⁵ A. Oepke. "αιωμα." *TDNT* 3. 1965, 208.

Critically, miracle hawking thrives in the context of socio-economic hardship. Nigeria's widespread poverty and limited access to healthcare make promises of instant healing and prosperity deeply attractive. Yet instead of addressing systemic issues or offering pastoral care, miracle hawkers exploit these realities for gain. The Church, therefore, faces a moral responsibility: to confront this distortion and reclaim its prophetic voice. Miracle hawkers represent a dangerous commercialization of faith.

Conclusion

The healing of Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1-27) is a remarkable story of faith, humility, and God's miraculous power. The healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5 is more than a miracle story; it is a theological drama that reveals God's universal grace, the necessity of humility, and the prophetic ideal of selflessness. God's power extends beyond Israel, offering healing to a foreigner. This anticipates the inclusivity of the gospel in the New Testament. Naaman's healing is not merely physical; it leads to spiritual conversion, as he acknowledges Yahweh as the only true God.

2 Kings 5:1-27 situates Israel's prophetic tradition within a broader cultural and historical framework, showing Yahweh's sovereignty over nations and contrasting faithful obedience with corrupt ambition. The healing of Naaman demonstrates the power of Yahweh, the God of Israel, over the gods of other nations. It also highlights the inclusive character of God's love. Elisha's refusal of gifts models selfless leadership, contrasting with corrupt religious figures who exploit divine power for gain. Elisha's selflessness in refusing material reward serves as a powerful example for modern spiritual leaders that spiritual gifts and acts of healing are not to be commercialized. Gehazi's sharp practice and greed, which contrast with Elisha's selfless approach, reflect the attitudes of some modern-day miracle workers. His punishment is a timeless reminder of the dangers of exploiting spiritual authority for personal gain and the importance of maintaining integrity in all actions. Gehazi's downfall serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of letting greed and self-interest overshadow one's moral and spiritual responsibilities. Elisha's actions remind readers that true spiritual authority lies in serving God without seeking personal reward.