



Notes for Adult discussion groups at
On-Line@9 Worship Service
12 February 2006

Making A Difference

2 Kings 5 1:14 - Background

The books of Samuel and Kings are considered to be one book covering the whole history of the monarchy in Israel, from its rise under the ministry of Samuel to its fall at the hands of the Babylonians. The guiding theme is that the welfare of Israel and her kings depended on their obedience to the laws of Moses: the kings who receive the most attention are those during whose reigns there was either notable deviation from or affirmation of the covenant, or significant interaction between the king and God's prophet.

The books of Kings describes the history from the closing days of the rule of David, through the rule of Solomon, the dividing of the kingdom (~930BC) and the histories of the two kingdoms. The northern kingdom was plagued with instability and violence, with 20 rulers from 9 dynasties covering 210 years until the fall of Samaria (~720BC). In the southern kingdom, there were also 20 rulers, but they were all, except one, descendants of David, reigning for 345 years until the fall of Jerusalem and exile.

The Naaman story must have occurred during one of the temporary lulls in hostilities between Israel and Syria. Elisha is very like Samuel, with gifts of knowledge and foresight and a capacity to work miracles. He is in frequent demand because of his singular gifts. Naaman was a highly successful man despite his skin condition. In Israel, he would have been an outcast of human society because of his leprosy.

The disease of leprosy could, and probably did, include other skin diseases, particularly infectious ones (described in Leviticus 14:55 onwards). The word used (sara-at) is also used in reference to being ceremonially unclean. When a leper was "cleansed" it is likely that the condition had naturally cleared up, and not what we now know as an illness caused by a specific bacterium.

True leprosy was certainly present in the near east in NT times.

Paraphrased from: The New International Version Study Bible © 1987 Hodder & Stoughton The New Bible Dictionary © 1962 Inter-Varsity Press

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You may want to briefly draw out some key points from the story, or even give an abridged version, but you should find that earlier reading will be sufficient, and the questions lead you through.
The background information is for interest. Perhaps it is worth noting that "leprosy" was not necessarily the bacterium-caused disease we know today.

It was a small child who started this whole chain of events.

Do we ever speak out in a context where we might be the "little child"?

This opening question invites the group to recall personal anecdotes, which could be difficult.

Or, it could explore the generalised situation and our reactions to it.

Was there a situation where it made a difference?

Did the "speaking out" have an influence?

Naaman comes in search of healing, but his pride causes him to reject Elisha's order.

Why?

Offended, humiliated even, that a servant was sent; expected more attention; expected the man himself; had his own ideas about what would happen.

Does our pride ever get in the way - in our daily lives as Christians; in our relationship with God?

How can we overcome this?

In the end it was Naaman's servants (through their striking common sense) who persuaded him to do as asked.

Why did they make such a bold statement?

Loyalty; common sense; we've come all this way so let's at least give it a try,

Do we listen to the voice of a child, or those "beneath" us, to help show us the way?

Do we listen? Some may have a more simple view . . .

Has there been a situation where you did listen, and it made a difference?

Think back to the bowl and pebble illustration. Although one pebble made the difference in causing the water to overflow, in fact they ALL made a difference, each one being needed.

What does this suggest about how we view other people?

Are we able to take the views of others into account? Do we value everyone?

Are we "pebbles for Jesus"?

Do we ensure that our "little child" comments are made? Everything we say (or do) can be part of the "making a difference" for someone or something.

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