

THE NAMELESS CHILD FROM ISRAEL

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Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty' man in valour, 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 (2 Kings 5:1-2).

If I were the pastor of a church, I would prepare a series of sermons about the nameless characters mentioned in the Bible. It is interesting to note that some of the most important events in Jewish history featured people whose names remain unknown. Among the many that could be studied is the maid who was captured during one of the raids on Israel. This insignificant child became a servant in the household of Naaman, the commander in chief of the Syrian armies. She resembled a very small spring that gave birth to a river of divine benediction. The story begins with the statement.

The northern border of Israel was always a place of danger. Even today raiders from Lebanon and Syria attack the villages occupied by Jewish settlers, and the young Hebrews plow fields and carry guns at the same time. Great efforts are being made to establish peace in the area, but the retaliation of Arab extremists continues to cause international concern. Little has changed since the times when ancient Syrians terrorized the inhabitants of northern Palestine. The story of this unnamed Jewish girl began in that depressing period. The writer of this narrative was content to say: "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."

The Hebrews were formidable defenders, and the attack by their enemies was probably made under cover of darkness. Maybe the girl was awakened by the screams of dying neighbors, and while she sat paralyzed by fear, a stranger burst into her bedroom and dragged her from the house. All around was evidence of the brutality of the attack and perhaps

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her parents lay dead on the ground. That night the child lost everything she valued. Within a few minutes her parents, friends, and all she loved disappeared forever. Devastated by shock and grief, the maiden was compelled to accompany her captor as the Syrian invaders returned to their own land. It is unlikely that Naaman, the commander in chief, had taken part in actual combat. Since the record states "The Syrians" had carried away the captive, Dr. Herbert Lockyer may be correct when he suggests she was seized by a soldier and later offered for sale in the slave market in Damascus. Perhaps Naaman saw the girl as they returned from the raid and purchased her then or even accepted her as a trophy of his victory. Some details were not supplied by the ancient author who was content to say: "She waited on Naaman's wife."

It is not difficult to imagine the terror with which the child began her new life. She was among strangers whom she had every reason to hate. If she were offered for sale in the Damascus slave market, the possibility of a life of shame threatened her future. The girl was without hope in an alien land. The home of Syria's greatest soldier was probably a preten-

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tious palace and very different from the primitive hut in which she had been reared. The smiles of her mistress may have reassured the child, and the new clothing in which she was soon attired restored calm to her troubled mind. It is edifying to consider this little-big girl from Israel.

Her Scintillating Fortitude... Astonishing

The fact that this maiden lost everything except her faith in God suggests she was reared in a devout family who instructed her in the laws of Jehovah. It is a cause for amazement that the terrible tragedy that overwhelmed the village failed to destroy her faith. The instruction received from childhood survived the storm that changed her life. In common with the stars of heaven, her light was seen more clearly in darkness. When the maid became aware of Naaman's illness and saw the concern on the face of her mistress, she said, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3).

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I lived through two world wars when bombs fell upon innumerable homes in Wales. Unfortunately, people could not understand why God did nothing to protect them from adversity. Many homes were destroyed, and distressed people criticized the Lord for not preventing the tragedy. When danger threatened, the churches were filled with praying people. It was disappointing when at the end of the war multitudes celebrated the victory by getting drunk. Churches had smaller congregations, while taverns were too small to accommodate customers. It is refreshing to see this child from Israel against the disappointing background of human ingratitude. The girl from a bygone age lost everything except her indestructible faith in God.

Her Sublime Faith... Abiding

There is no evidence to prove the captive ever saw the prophet Elisha and no reason to believe she had witnessed the cleansing of a leper. Her faith was probably the product of early instruction. The young Hebrew had reason to hate the general who organized the raid on her village. Many Jews would have rejoiced that sickness had undermined the health of their adversary and would have welcomed his death. The idea of loving enemies was unknown. The Syrian deserved to die; he was responsible for the death of many innocent people. The law said: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a

tooth," and that same precept confirmed the Jews' opinion—"A life for a life." Every person in Israel rejoiced over the misfortune of their archenemy. There was also another reason why they disliked the foreigner; he was a Gentile who had no place in their religion and was an enemy of Jehovah.

The captive maid refused to accept such ideas, and it is therefore difficult to overestimate the worth of her character. Her master needed help, and she believed it was the duty of everyone to render assistance when and where it was needed. The girl refused to permit prejudice to taint her soul; she believed the God of Israel would welcome anyone who came to Him. Faith and compassion should destroy all barriers dividing the nations of the world. It has always been better to

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lift a man up and make a friend, than to strike a man down and create an enemy. If the modern world emulated the example set by the ancient maiden, wars would be unknown; pain and sickness, removed eternally; and the earth would become an extension of heaven. Did Isaiah have this thought in mind when he wrote: "And a little child shall lead them?" (see Isa. 11:6).

Her Sincere Friendship... Admirable

When the girl from Israel began her service in Naaman's household, she became concerned about the health of her master. When she saw worry showing on the face of her mistress she was troubled even more. Evidently Naaman's leprosy was either in its early stages, or was one of the less dangerous varieties of the disease. The future was ominous, and each time the great soldier went to war his wife wondered which would kill her husband-leprosy or his foes. He was famous for his bravery, but this sickness was an invincible foe. Everybody in Syria admired his tremendous courage but all expected his imminent death. The problem was a cloud of apprehension hovering over the entire country.

One day her mistress probably asked, "Are you ill?" "No, Mistress." "Well, something is bothering you. Are you not happy among us?" "Oh, yes, you have been very kind to me." "Then why are you sad?" The girl hesitated for a moment, and then replied, "I am worried about the master." "Yes, we are all troubled." The maid then said, "If only he were with the prophet in Samaria; the man of God would cleanse him from this leprosy. I know he would." When the Syrian lady asked for an explanation, she was told of the exploits of Elisha, who could perform miracles. He was not a physician but was God's servant capable of doing anything he desired. The mistress became excited and shared her information with an unknown friend from the royal household.

Hearing the good news, the king of Syria summoned Naaman and commended him to leave immediately for Samaria. He promised to write a letter to the ruler of Israel commanding him to assist his special friend. When the king of Israel

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read that message, he became terrified, suspecting it to be an excuse for another raid upon his people. Angrily he exclaimed:

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, how he seeketh a quarrel against me (2 Kings 5:7).

The frightened man became so enraged that he panicked and tore his garments to shreds. Even now it is strange to contrast the faith of a young girl with the fear of the king who ruled the nation! Evidently, the child was closer to God than the king she was expected to honor. She resembled David, who scoffed at Goliath while Saul and his army remained paralyzed by fear. That young lady would have made an excellent queen for David, but alas, she belonged to a different age. The servant exhibited the characteristics described by Paul to be the fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22 and Eph. 4:31-32). If we may describe the circumstances that led to the cleansing of Naaman as a chain, then this compassionate child from Israel was its first link. Her mistress, the person who repeated the news to the king, and the soldier who defied the general's anger, were also unnamed heroes who helped to

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save Naaman's life.

When the leper arrived at Elisha's cottage, he expected to be welcomed with honors usually given to visiting dignitar-

ies. He was insulted and irritated when he was received as a commoner. His rage was evident, his face livid with anger, and his denunciations were unmistakable. The idea of asking a general to bathe in the river Jordan was outrageous. He shouted:

Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? (2 Kings 5:12).

Fear, anxiety, and hope had occupied his thought as he journeyed from Syria, but when he was treated with apparent disrespect, his soul erupted. It was an unnamed man who

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risked his future and life when he accused Naaman of being unreasonable. Proud men dislike rebukes. The subordinate said, "Master, if that prophet had commanded you to fight twenty men half of them would have been already dead. You would have demonstrated how great a warrior you are. But, Sir, there is no need to prove anything; we know how courageous you have always been. Master, you only need to demonstrate your ability to take orders even as we do. . . . How much rather than when he saith unto thee, Wash and be clean."

Her Surprising Fame... Amazing

Sometimes it is not the prominent figures in a painting that captivate attention. The details in the background sometimes reveal the artist's ability. That was evident in this scene from antiquity. The eminent commander by whom deliverance had been given to Syria, the monarch who sent him to seek cleansing in Israel, and the prophet of God were very important in the divine plan. Nevertheless, without the nameless maid, the wife and the messenger who repeated the girl's message to the king, and the soldier who challenged his furious commander, God's historic picture would have been incomplete.

The moral of this story is easily understood. When God makes a chain of circumstances, He uses many links which by themselves would be useless. There are many preachers whose eloquence thrills great congregations, talented singers whose music enralls an audience, but there are multitudes of "small" people who are just as precious in the Lord's sight. No task is insignificant when performed for the glory of Christ. He is able to take unimportant details and weave them into a pattern of extreme beauty. I have always admired Persian rugs, but one stitch never made a carpet. Many threads make a pattern, and under the skilled supervision of the craftsman, the design ultimately becomes an object of great beauty. When we arrive in God's country, we may discover that insignificant acts on earth were used by God to produce amazing results!

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