

## Worse Than You Think

**2 Kings 5:1** *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.*

**NAAMAN** was a common name in Ancient Syria, meaning “gracious, fair or pleasant.” This particular man, however, had distinguished himself above his countrymen in four ways:

- He was the supreme commander of the army of Syria, the army’s highest ranking officer.
- He was a great man, a man of high social standing and prominence
- He was an honourable man, highly regarded because of the military victories he had won. Jewish tradition says that Naaman was the anonymous soldier who inflicted wicked King Ahab of Israel with a mortal wound in 1 Kings 22:34.
- He was a mighty man of valour, meaning a man of great wealth and a courageous warrior.

### **BUT HE WAS A LEPER!**

- Leprosy was a fatal disease that literally terrified the people of ancient times. It appeared in various forms and stages of infection, but once it became malignant it was a terminal and debilitating condition. At this stage, the skin turned white and became numb, then began to erupt in nodules and ulcers. The limbs would swell and the hands and feet became distorted. The bones and internal organs would be affected as the disease spread, and gangrene usually resulted.
- Leprosy was called **SARA’AT** by the Jews, meaning “a smiting or a scourge.” There was no way to deal with infectious leprosy in ancient times other than to separate the sufferers from the general population (“outside the camp”). Clinical leprosy today is called Hansen’s disease.
- Leprosy’s symptoms showed on the outside, but it was primarily an internal disease of the nerve endings. As the disease progressed, more and more damage was done to the body by the sufferer themselves, as their sense of pain became deadened.
- **LEPROSY IN THE BIBLE IS ALWAYS REGARDED AS A TYPE OF SIN!**
- Naaman’s wonderful life was ruined by his leprosy. Everything else he had achieved would eventually come to nothing because he was afflicted with this horrible, incurable disease.

### **YOU ARE NAAMAN!**

- You may be at the top of your profession, have great wealth or social standing, be the hero of your friends and be admired by your associates. You may even be a noble person, but you are a leper!
- **Romans 3:23** *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*
- Sin is indeed a fatal illness of humanity. Like leprosy, it may start small or even hidden, but it will eventually rise to the surface of your life, deforming the person God intended for you to be.
- **2 Timothy 5:24** *Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.*
- The longer sin is allowed to continue unchecked, the more damage is done and the more scars are left. Sometimes, spiritual gangrene sets in and parts of our life die and drop off – irretrievably – due to our loss of sensitivity to God’s Spirit.

### **YOUR SINFUL CONDITION IS WORSE THAN YOU THINK!**

- It would be bad enough if sin just separated us from God for a lifetime, but it doesn’t stop there. Sin separates us from God for eternity, in a horrible place of punishment called Hell.
- Very few churches talk about Hell any more, but Jesus talked more about Hell than everyone else in the Bible combined! It is a real place!
- The word “hell” is translated from the Greek word “Gehenna” which meant “The Valley of Hinnom.” In this valley south of Jerusalem the ancient Canaanites once sacrificed their children to the fire-god Molech. Even Ahaz and Manasseh, kings of Judah, were guilty of this idolatrous practice. King Josiah later defiled this valley, making it the city’s garbage dump so these sacrifices could never happen again. To consume the garbage, fires burned constantly. Maggots worked in the filth, and wild dogs howled and gnashed their teeth as they fought over the garbage every night. When the wind blew from that direction, the stench was unbearable. Jesus said hell was a place where the worm would not die and the fire would not be quenched. He said there would be weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. In effect, He was saying, “If you want to know what Hell is like, look at Gehenna!”
- The New Testament has 27 books in which Hell is mentioned 234 times. That’s like having a road 27 miles long with 234 danger signs! It is a serious matter!

### **YOUR ETERNAL DESTINATION IS WORSE THAN YOU THINK!**

- The good news is that God doesn’t want anyone to spend their eternity in Hell. Mankind’s sin demanded a perfect sacrifice to satisfy the perfect justice of a perfect God. We couldn’t provide such a sacrifice, so God provided it Himself – He came in a body of flesh to give His life for us!
- Any of us who have been around church have mental pictures of what Calvary must have been like, but it was much worse than we could ever imagine!
- Roman politicians always liked to make examples of condemned men. The long slow parade along public streets was designed to serve as a warning to others that Rome dealt quickly and mercilessly. A centurion usually served as executioner. While four soldiers held the prisoner, he placed the sharp five-inch spike in the dead center of the palm of the hand. A skillful experienced blow would send it through to the wood. Four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free. The wounds in the hands sent fire down through the arms. Fainting only brought temporary relief. It was darkness and pain, then pain and darkness. The pain in the body was a dull throbbing horrible endless pain. It built up. It multiplied. It was cumulative. There was not a moment of respite. Even the cross was positioned so that the greatest amount of sunlight would pierce the prisoner’s eyes. And there was something obscene about having a mob of people standing around waiting for you to die. Then the thirst began. The lips grew dry. The mouth grew parched. The tongue felt thick and rough. What was once saliva now felt like uncombed wool. The blood ran hot, and the skin became fevered. The greatest of all needs at that moment was a drop of cold water, but water was denied. Swelling began in the hands and feet; muscles began to cramp and twitch violently. But the real horror was only beginning. After two hours on a cross, every muscle of the body was locked in solid knots and the agony was beyond endurance. Most men would shriek themselves into insanity.

- Man with all his genius never devised a crueler nor more agonizing death than that of crucifixion. Each hour was an eternity. A man would long for death. It would be his only ambition. On the cross, there was no end of suffering, and no end of humiliation. Most men – including Jesus Christ – died naked. Could there ever be a more intense suffering this side of hell? And yet Jesus Christ was crucified – for MY sins! He took my place and died the most brutal death ever devised by man. Truly, Jesus paid it all!
- There is one final tortuous factor you may never have considered in thinking of Calvary. We find it referred to in a few passages of Scripture that let us know Jesus was stoned as well as crucified!
- **Isaiah 52:14** *As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:*
- **Psalms 22:16-18** <sup>16</sup>*For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.* <sup>17</sup>*I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.* <sup>18</sup>*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.*
- **John 18:31** *Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:*
- **John 19:7** *The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*
- **Leviticus 24:16** *And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death.*
- **John 8:59** *Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*
- **John 10:31-33** <sup>31</sup>*Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.* <sup>32</sup>*Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?* <sup>33</sup>*The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.*
- **John 11:8** *His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?*
- **Matthew 26:26** *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.*
- **1 Corinthians 11:24** *And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*
- **Galatians 6:17** *From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*
- **CALVARY WAS WORSE THAN YOU THINK!** Why would Jesus go through all this agony to save us from the sin we loved and the hell we deserved?

## **BECAUSE HEAVEN IS BETTER THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE!**

- The best way to describe Heaven is by contrast to earth: no more night (Rev. 22:5), no more curse (22:3), no more death (21:4), no more tears or pain (21:4).
- The New Jerusalem's walls are 212 feet thick and 1500 miles high. The city would reach all the way from Maine to Florida and from the Atlantic Ocean to the state of Colorado. If the main avenues were a mile apart and a mile above one another, there would be no less than eight million avenues! If heaven contained rooms each a one-mile cube, it could contain 3,375,000,000 of them. If we started with the time of Adam and spent one hour in each room we would by now have visited less than one quarter of them! (G.T. Haywood)
- **SO HOW DO I GET TO HEAVEN? REMEMBER NAMAAN?**

## **THERE WAS ONLY ONE CURE FOR LEPROSY – A MIRACLE!**

- Naaman had to go outside his own country for a cure; he brought with him a letter from his king, a large monetary gift, and a contingent of chariots and servants to impress the king of Israel. But the king of Israel couldn't help him. He was a RELIGIOUS Israelite, not a TRUE Israelite!
- When Naaman finally got to Elisha's house, it was a mere SERVANT of the prophet who came to meet him. His MESSAGE was both SIMPLE and HUMBLING. Naaman got angry! He wanted the cure to be accomplished by similar methods to those used in Syria.
- Finally, he was convinced to obey God's Word by these immortal words from one of his servants:
- **2 Kings 5:13** *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?*

## **MANY PEOPLE ARE LIKE NAAMAN**

- First, we have to realize that the world has no cure for sin. They aren't even doing a good job treating the symptoms! The disease just gets worse and worse!
- Some people try to impress God – or the church – with the fact that they are indeed a good person. But all of their personality, achievements and possessions don't impress God in the least.
- Many go first to RELIGION to seek a cure for sin. But it is powerless to deal with the root cause! Later, as they seek God, many people feel that He should accommodate them because of their position or religious pedigree. They are angered that God would send one of His servants to tell them what to do! They are even more insulted by the ABSOLUTE MESSAGE they receive!
- IT IS NOT HARD TO OBEY GOD, BUT IT IS HUMBLING.

**ONCE NAAMAN HEARD THE MESSAGE, HE HAD TWO CHOICES: HE COULD IGNORE IT, LIVE WITH HIS LEPROSY, AND DIE – OR – HE COULD OBEY THE WORD OF GOD AND BE CURED! IT'S THE SAME FOR YOU. HERE'S THE "RIVER OF SALVATION" YOU NEED TO WASH IN ...**

**Acts 2:38** *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*