

2 Kings 5 — Wash, and Be Clean — the Captive Girl's Witness, the Great Man's Rage at a Simple Cure, the Convert's Load of Earth, and the Leprosy That Changed Owners

2 Kings 5: Naaman, captain of the host of Syria, learns from a captive Israelite girl that a prophet in Samaria can heal his leprosy; Elisha sends word to wash seven times in Jordan; Naaman rages at the simplicity, relents, is cleansed, and confesses the God of Israel; Elisha refuses his gift, but Gehazi chases it with a lie and inherits the leprosy; Elisha's ministry under the unnamed king of Israel (almost certainly Jehoram son of Ahab), c. 847 BC (secular chronologies place Jehoram's reign at roughly 852–841 BC).

Elijah has gone up in the whirlwind, and his mantle — literally — now rests on Elisha (2 Kgs. 2:13–14). The northern kingdom limps along under Jehoram, a son of Ahab; the chapter never bothers to name him, which tells you what the narrator thinks matters. To the northeast, Syria — Aram of Damascus — is the standing threat, close enough that its raiding parties carry off villagers (v. 2). Elisha's miracles so far have stayed domestic: a widow's oil, a Shunammite's son, multiplied bread (2 Kgs. 4). Now the circle widens, dramatically. The next miracle is for the enemy's top general.

Hebrew Word Studies

tsara (H6879) / **tsarat** (H6883) (צָרָה / צָרָה) — **to be struck with leprosy; leprosy, a defiling skin disease vv. 1, 3, 6, 7, 11, 27.** The word brackets the chapter like a manacle looking for a wrist: verse 1 ends its parade of honours with "but he was a leper," and verse 27 closes with Gehazi going out "a leper as white as snow." Biblical **tsarat** is broader than modern Hansen's disease; it is scripture's standing emblem of uncleanness that no rank can outdress. The law gave it a unique horror — the leper "shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be" (Lev. 13:46) — and the Old Testament keeps using it as heaven's disciplinary signature: Moses' hand as a sign (Ex. 4:6), Miriam struck "leprous, white as snow" for speaking against the Lord's prophet (Num. 12:10), Uzziah for grasping at the priesthood (2 Chr. 26:19–21), Gehazi here for merchandising grace. Significantly, the law prescribes no cure — only diagnosis, quarantine, and a ritual for cleansing if healing somehow came (Lev. 14). That is what the king of Israel grasps in terror (v. 7): only God makes lepers clean. Which is why, when a Galilean rabbi later touches a leper and says "I will; be thou clean" (Mk. 1:41), the claim embedded in the act is unmistakable. Leprosy is what sin looks like when it surfaces; and the chapter's terrible symmetry — the disease lifting from the humbled outsider and cleaving to the covetous insider — is a warning that the surface always, eventually, tells the truth.

rachats (H7364) / **tabal** (H2881) / **taher** (H2891) (רָחַץ / טָבַל / טָהַר) — **to wash, bathe / to dip, plunge, immerse / to be clean, pure vv. 10, 12, 13, 14.** Three verbs stage the miracle. Elisha's command uses two — "wash (rachats), and be clean (taher)" — and verse 14 supplies the third: Naaman "dipped himself" (tabal) seven times. Tabal is a priest's verb: it is what Levitical hands do with hyssop and blood and living water in the very ritual for cleansing a healed leper (Lev. 14:6–7, 15–16), a rite that also sprinkles "seven times" (sheba, H7651, the number of covenant completeness governing verses 10 and 14 alike). It is the verb for the priests' feet dipped in this same Jordan when the waters cut off for Israel's crossing (Josh. 3:15). So when a Syrian general immerses himself seven times in Israel's river at a prophet's word, the vocabulary is already liturgical: this is an ordinance in everything but name. The old Greek translators felt it — the Septuagint renders verse 14 with ebaptisato, "he baptized himself," the clearest Old Testament foreshadow of the word the gospel will make its own. And taher is the priestly verdict-word of Leviticus 13–14, the difference between "unclean" outside the camp and fellowship within it. The chapter's whole doctrine of cleansing lives in these verbs: God appoints a simple washing; man's part is to go down into it, whole body, no substitutions, as many times as the word says; God's part is the verdict — "and he was clean." Jesus prescribes by the same pattern ("Go, wash in the pool of Siloam," Jn. 9:7), and the risen Christ builds his church on the same watery door: "come unto me and be baptized... that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Ne. 27:20). Naaman's Jordan is every convert's font — humbler than the rivers back home, and the only water with the promise in it.

qaton (H6996) / **naarah** (H5291) / **naar** (H5288) (קָטָן / נַעֲרָה / נַעַר) — **little, small, young / girl, young maid / boy, lad, young servant vv. 2, 14, 20, 22–23.** Trace the chapter's smallest words and you find its skeleton. Verse 2: a **naarah** qetannah — a "little maid" — carried captive, the least person in the story. Verse 14: the cleansed general's flesh returns "like unto the flesh of a little child," a **naar** qaton — the same adjective, now describing the great man himself. The girl's littleness was where the miracle began; the child's littleness is what the miracle produces. Between those poles the chapter has quietly

defined conversion: the way in is down, and the healed man ends up the size of the child who first testified. Gadol — "great" (vv. 1, 13) — is the counterweight: Naaman's greatness is what the leprosy shadows, and "some great thing" is what his pride demanded; the servants' genius was to see that only a little thing could cure a great man. Then the third strand, and the dark one: Gehazi is Elisha's naḥar (v. 20) — his "servant," his boy, the same word — who lies about two naḥarim of the sons of the prophets (v. 22) to extract the treasure. The chapter's little ones stand at both doors: a little maid whose selfless word brings a leper to cleansing, and a young servant whose selfish word carries the leprosy back in. Littleness, it turns out, is not automatically holy — it is simply where the real decisions get made, out of the spotlight, while the kings and captains imagine the story is about them. "Out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (D&C 64:33) — in both directions.

shalom (H7965) / dabaq (H1692) (שָׁלוֹם / דָּבַק) — **peace, wholeness, well-being / to cleave, cling, stick fast vv. 19, 21–22, 27.** Two words close the chapter, one for each ending. Shalom is Elisha's parting gift to the convert — "Go in peace" (v. 19) — with the full Hebrew freight of the word: wholeness, soundness, a life knit back together. Then watch the word sour in Gehazi's mouth: Naaman, seeing the runner, asks "Is all well?" — ha-shalom? — and Gehazi answers "All is well" — shalom (vv. 21–22) — while sprinting to defraud the peace just pronounced. He counterfeits the blessing as smoothly as he counterfeits the oath. Dabaq is the chapter's last verb of consequence, and its résumé makes the sentence shattering: this is covenant vocabulary's word for holy attachment — a man shall "cleave unto his wife" (Gen. 2:24), Ruth "clave unto" Naomi (Ruth 1:14), and Israel is commanded to "cleave" to the LORD himself (Deut. 10:20; Josh. 23:8). What you cleave to defines you. Gehazi cleaved to silver, so what cleaves to him is the plague: "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee" (v. 27) — the grammar of devotion executed as a sentence. Moses had warned in nearly these words that nothing of the cursed thing should "cleave" to Israel's hand (Deut. 13:17). The pairing is the chapter's closing scale: peace clings to the man who let go of everything; to the man who grabbed, what he grabbed for clings back.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The hinge bears the weight, and it is worth saying why. The chapter could have ended at verse 19 as a perfect conversion story, or run verses 20–27 alone as a perfect cautionary tale. Braided, they teach what neither teaches separately: the grace that cannot be earned also cannot be sold, and the two errors are secretly the same error. Naaman's pride wanted to pay for cleansing; Gehazi's greed wanted to charge for it. Both men, from opposite ends, tried to convert grace into a transaction — and the chapter's pivot is Elisha standing between them with empty hands, twice refusing, so that one man could learn the gift is free and the other could reveal that he never believed it was. The little maid opens the chapter giving testimony for nothing to the man who enslaved her; Gehazi closes it extracting payment by fraud from the man his master healed. Between a captive who gave and a freeman who grasped, the story quietly asks which one was the slave.