

2 KINGS 5:15-19A FIRST STEPS IN FAITH

INTRODUCTION

When a person is converted he does not become a mature Christian in a moment in time. We see something of this in the life of Naaman, the Syrian general, who came to faith in the God of Israel.

NAAMAN'S NEW CONFESSION (verse 15a)

Naaman had been sent by Elisha to wash himself seven times in the Jordan River. Elisha's home was in the city of Samaria, which was some 35 kilometres from the Jordan River. Hence by sending Naaman to go and wash in this river Elisha was making it very clear to him that the miracle was wrought by God. Elisha wasn't even nearby when the cleansing took place. Naaman understood that he had been cleansed by God, not Elisha. When he returned to Elisha he declared, "*Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.*" This is an amazing confession of faith, for two reasons:

1. It was made in public. Like the apostle Paul he was, "*not ashamed of the gospel.*" (Romans 1:16) And so he declared his newfound faith in the presence of all his men.
2. It was an uncompromising confession "*there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.*" Naaman lived in a time of religious syncretism. Every people group had its gods and goddesses, and it was trendy to worship a number of those on offer. But Naaman was convinced – all these pretend gods are a sham, there is only one true God, and he is the God of Israel.

NAAMAN'S NEW CHARACTER (verses 15-17)

How do we know that Naaman had truly been saved? His confession of faith is very important; even more telling is the evidence of a changed life:

1. Generosity (verse 15b)

Naaman said to Elisha, "*Accept now a present from your servant.*" Notice that he called it a present. He did not say, "Please accept my payment for my healing. Here is your fee. Is it enough?" Naaman did not have to give Elisha a red cent. He had already been cleansed and it had happened some 35 kilometres away. He could have walked out of the water, mounted his horse and ridden back to Damascus.

2. Humility (verse 15c)

When Naaman had first arrived at Elisha's home he was a proud general who was incensed that Elisha would not even come to the door to see him. But when he returned from the Jordan River he offered Elisha a gift describing himself as "*your servant.*" Humility is a clear sign of a new heart. It is the foundational Christian virtue.

3. Consecration (verse 17)

Naaman requested "*two mules' loads of earth.*" It may have been his intention to build a place of worship on top of this soil from Israel, or he may have wanted to build an altar with the soil; that is, it would have been a mud brick altar. In either case he clearly believed that using soil from the land of Israel would give his worship a tangible link to the place where he had come to faith and where God was pleased to manifest his presence.

NAAMAN'S NEW CONVICTION (verses 18 & 19a)

Some commentators feel that Naaman is compromising his position as a believer, but I think that here we see Naaman facing up to the dilemmas of being a consistent Christian in a fallen world.