

Gehazi: Missing the Mark



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 39:4–6; 2 Kings 4: 5; 8:1–6; Jer. 9:23, 24; John 13:1–17; 1 Tim. 6:10.*

Memory Text: “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him” (*Deuteronomy 13:4, NIV*).

Gehazi was a servant. Not just any servant but the servant of one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history: Elisha. Elisha had been called by the Lord to minister to the prophet Elijah, in preparation for Elisha's own prophetic ministry (*1 Kings 19:16*). For many years Elisha served Elijah and listened, observed, and thus understood what it meant to be a prophet. When Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind of fire (*2 Kings 2:11*), Elisha's time had come. His ministry was not as fiery and glamorous as Elijah's, but he exerted a far-reaching influence.

Thus, Gehazi had a wonderful opportunity to be closely associated with someone as blessed of God as Elisha. It's hard to imagine all that he could have learned and seen in the years that he worked with the prophet.

Yet, as we will see this week, despite so much potential and so many great opportunities, Gehazi became a miserable failure. His story serves as an example of someone who gets sidetracked and becomes unable to distinguish the important from the peripheral. How crucial it is for us to learn from his mistakes!

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 18.*

Write a brief job description of a servant, based on the following verses: *Gen. 24:2–4; 39:4–6; Luke 14:17; 17:7, 8; Acts 2:18.*

Being a servant means primarily that one puts aside one's own wants, wishes, and comfort and involves oneself totally in someone else's life. A servant is there to assist the master in carrying out the master's plans, wishes, and activities. Sometimes being a servant involves carrying messages, accompanying someone, acting for the person, and doing menial jobs that need to be done. At other times it involves managing finances and households, but always the servant acts not to further his own ends but to further his master's.

Gehazi was the servant of prophet Elisha. Being a servant to a prophet was a unique privilege. It involved more than menial labor. It was a type of apprenticeship. Elisha himself had served as Elijah's servant (*1 Kings 19:19–21*). Although the job of prophet depended on a divine call, it would seem that this special time of serving together helped the would-be prophet develop his faith and trust in God. By serving his master Elijah, Elisha would be learning to put himself aside and serve others. This would prove to be the best qualification for any future ministry. We have no record of Gehazi's calling, but we will see the opportunities that he was given.

This servant idea is by no means restricted to Old Testament times. Jesus said that the willingness to be a servant was a prerequisite for any leadership position in the church (*Mark 9:35*).

Read *John 13:1–17*. How does this passage show the link between leadership and servanthood?

The disciples have been with Jesus for three years. They have learned from His teachings, they have even shared in His healing ministry, and yet they are not ready to go out as God's ambassadors. They were ready to learn in theory and enjoyed the association with Jesus, but they still were not prepared to put themselves aside and humbly serve one another.

How do we get the humility and the death to self needed in order to serve others? How do we learn to serve others with an attitude of seeking nothing back for ourselves?

Learning Firsthand

A good teacher teaches by example and gives plenty of opportunities for the student to apply what he or she is learning. Elisha was this type of teacher.

Read 2 Kings 4:8–17. What is Gehazi’s role in the narration? What opportunities is Elisha giving Gehazi?

The story of the woman of Shunem follows another miracle involving a woman. In 2 Kings 4:1–7, Elisha helps a widow clear her debts and keep her two sons from being sold into slavery. And now Elisha is on his way to Shunem. Given the general status of women in biblical times, it is strange that the narrator gives a married woman such status. Her husband’s name is not given. All we know is that he is consulted about the building of the guest room and that he is old, even though he still seems to be fit enough to supervise the harvesting of his fields. In the first part of the story Elisha actively involves Gehazi. He sends him to call the woman and includes Gehazi in his expression of thanks. He asks Gehazi’s opinion and acts on Gehazi’s suggestion. Gehazi rises to the occasion by being observant and showing sensitivity to the woman’s real needs. Elisha gives Gehazi the opportunity to initiate a miracle. Within a year the miracle child is born.

Read 2 Kings 4:18–31. What change in attitude do we see here in Gehazi as compared to what we saw in the previous story?

The miracle child is now a young boy. Gehazi is still Elisha’s servant, but something of the sensitivity he once had seems to be gone. When the woman arrives and brushes past him to grab hold of the feet of Elisha, Gehazi tries to push her away. He sees only the “rudeness” of the Shunammite woman, who oversteps any type of social convention in her action (*vss.* 25–27). He does not seem to be able to see her deep distress as does Elisha.

It sometimes is easy to be so self-centered and self-absorbed that we become insensitive to the feelings and needs of others. Who hasn’t been on both ends of that equation? How can you learn to be more sensitive to the feelings and needs of others? Also, how can you learn to bear gracefully the insensitivity of others toward you?

A Question of Faith

Read 2 Kings 5:1–19 and answer the following questions:

- Why did the king of Israel react as he did? Was his reaction reasonable or unreasonable? What did he really fear was going on?

- Why did Naaman react as he did to Elisha's command to him? What good reasons did he have for his reaction? In what ways did his reaction reflect the king of Israel's toward the letter?

- Read verse 12. What kind of logic is the captain using there? What mistake is he making?

- How does Naaman refer to himself before Elisha after the miracle happened? What does that say about him?

- Why do you think Elisha refused to take any money from the captain? Why would it be important that he not take any?

- Read carefully verses 17–19. What is going on here? How do we understand Naaman's request and Elisha's response to it?

Gehazi's Fall

It's hard, at least from our perspective today, to understand why characters in the Bible did what they did at times, especially in the face of so many miraculous events. The incredible healing of Naaman happened right before Gehazi. He saw not only the power of God but the actions of his master, who refused to take any money from the captain. One would think that would have been more than enough to humble him before God and man, but apparently it didn't.

Read 2 Kings 5:20–27. How did Gehazi, at least at first, rationalize his actions? What little bit of nationalism, or ethnic prejudice, is hinted at in Gehazi's thoughts?

The Bible is full of warnings against the love of money and the dangers of earthly possessions. These warnings are directed not only toward the wealthy. It is not the amount of material possessions that we have that is the problem but rather our attitude toward what we have. The battle against greed requires constant attention. We continually have to adjust our thoughts toward our possessions and surrender them to God. We can keep our perspective by consistently giving not only material possessions but also time. The love of material things blinds us to our true mission and purpose in life and in the end can cause our eternal ruin if we are not careful.

It is strange that Gehazi swears to himself by the living God and then goes off to deceive. Does he think that the living God does not see him? What a powerful testimony to the power of our own corrupt hearts to deceive us!

Naaman, meanwhile, is very generous about giving Gehazi the gifts, but he probably goes away with some questions, especially when his two servants return and report Gehazi's strange behavior. Gehazi has let his greed interfere with the witness that Elisha wants to give to this new convert.

Of course, in the end the same God who performed miracles revealed the truth to Elisha about what Gehazi did, and, just like that, his ministry and life were ruined.

It's very easy to underestimate the incredible hold that the love of money (*1 Tim. 6:10*) can have on us. What examples, from either biblical or nonbiblical history, can you think of in which money led to someone's ruin? How can we learn to protect ourselves from what can be a very dangerous temptation?

Living on Leftovers

We last hear of Gehazi in 2 Kings 8:1–6. What do we find the ex-servant of Elisha doing?

Many years have passed since the great miracle of the raising of the Shunammite's son. Gehazi's skin disease must not be too disfiguring, for we now find him in the royal court. Gehazi, Elisha's "ex-servant," is talking about what has been. He is bragging about Elisha and his miracles, and in doing so he is most likely reflecting on his own importance by his connection to Elisha.

We never may have heard of this storytelling session had it not been for the timing of this event. The biblical author tells us that at the precise time that Gehazi was telling about the miracle of the Shunammite's son being brought back to life, the Shunammite appears before the king. God in His providence uses Gehazi's bragging to help the woman of Shunem. The woman of Shunem is by now most probably a widow, as no mention is made of her husband, and it is unusual that a woman would appear before the king on such business instead of her husband. She is most likely in charge of her family until her son becomes of age. She has been out of the country for seven years during a severe drought. Having the right relationships and knowing the right people may be important and seen as advantageous from a human point of view, but God views things differently.

What relationship really counts, and why? *See Jer. 9:23, 24.*

And so Gehazi fades from history. The sad part of the story is the fact that Gehazi could have been doing God's work. He could have learned from Elisha. He could have been the next major prophet or perhaps a leader and teacher in the schools of the prophets. Now all he can do is speak about the good old days when he worked with the prophet. Gehazi could have been making history; now all he can do is live in the past.

We need to recount and remember God's dealing with us in the past. But at the same time, we need to be careful about dwelling on what happened in the past, at the expense of living correctly in the present. How do we strike a right balance here? How can dwelling too much on the past negatively influence our walk with the Lord today?

Further Study: “Solemn are the lessons taught by this experience of one to whom had been given high and holy privileges. The course of Gehazi was such as to place a stumbling block in the pathway of Naaman, upon whose mind had broken a wonderful light, and who was favorably disposed toward the service of the living God. For the deception practiced by Gehazi there could be pleaded no excuse. To the day of his death he remained a leper, cursed of God and shunned by his fellow men.

“ ‘A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.’ Proverbs 19:5. Men may think to hide their evil deeds from human eyes, but they cannot deceive God. ‘All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.’ Heb. 4:13. Gehazi thought to deceive Elisha, but God revealed to His prophet the words that Gehazi had spoken to Naaman, and every detail of the scene between the two men.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 252.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the warning signs that money or the pursuit of it is taking the place of God in our lives? How can we learn to use money and not let it use us? What role do tithing and giving offerings play in connection with the whole question of the influence and power of money over our lives?
- 2 As a class, go over your response to the last question in Thursday’s lesson. What are the things that really matter in life, and why is it so easy to lose track of what really matters?
- 3 What reasons might have led Gehazi to think that he could get away with his deception? He knew God existed; he had seen miracles take place, some quite incredible, in fact. Yet, despite all this, he tried to deceive his master. Perhaps he had done similar things before and gotten away with it. Perhaps in his own mind he truly rationalized his actions. We don’t know. What we do know, however, is that it’s not that hard to deceive ourselves. What are ways we can learn to protect ourselves from falling into the same self-deception?
- 4 Go back to 2 Kings 5:17–19. What lessons should or should we not draw from Naaman’s request to Elisha about bowing down in the house of Rimmon?
- 5 What are some practical ways you can serve others?

Unexpected Christmas Gift

by NATALIA CHRISTOVA

Last year, as soon as I accepted the Adventist message, I wanted to share my new joy and love for God with others. But I wasn't sure how. Then at Christmastime the pastor gave us copies of a short version of *The Great Controversy* and challenged us to give them away. I took one and prayed that God would show me the person He wanted me to give it to.

I decided to give the book to a former classmate, Antonia. She thanked me and looked at the table of contents. One chapter that deals with what happens when a person dies intrigued her. She wanted to know more about what I believe, especially about what happens after death. But since I was a new Adventist Christian, I didn't know how to explain it to her. I offered to visit her every week and share the previous week's Sabbath School lesson.

While I was visiting with Antonia, her older sister, Antonetta, came over. Antonetta seemed interested in what we were discussing, and I decided to visit her too, even though I hadn't been invited. She invited me in, and after we talked for a while, I offered to present a set of Bible lectures that included pictures and Bible texts that were designed for public evangelism. I told her that I would do it for Antonetta and anyone she wanted to join her in her home.

Antonetta accepted and invited her husband and children to join her. I needed some moral support, so I invited the youth leader from my church to join me. We presented the material in Antonetta's home, and then we invited her and her husband to visit our little church.

Antonetta and her husband agreed to attend. They were thrilled with the friendly congregation of believers and with the new truths she was learning in her home. "I've been a Christian for some time," she says. "But it was only when Natalia invited me to the Adventist church that my eyes were opened to the truth.

"I never expected to receive a gift of God's love when I visited my sister last Christmas," Antonetta adds. "That gift of love has transformed my family forever. Our lives are happier, and we're healthier now that we understand God's will for our lives."

Antonetta and her husband are preparing for baptism, the fruits of a small Christmas gift to a friend. Antonetta's sister, Antonia, is still interested in learning more, so Antonetta and I visit her and share our faith with her.

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