

City of Damascus – PT. 1

INTRODUCTION:

1. Today we return to our study of cities of the Bible.
2. In our first study we considered the city of Capernaum, the city in which the Lord chose to live, but which rejected Him and His miracles and was condemned (Matt. 11:23-24 – “And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.”).
3. Today I want us to focus on the city of Damascus, a Syrian and mostly gentile city.
 - A. It was located some 70 miles from Capernaum and 150+ miles north of Jerusalem on the plain of Abana about 2,300 ft. above sea level.
 - B. The Abana and Pharpar rivers run through it making it a fertile oasis.
 - C. Its location also made it an important trade city.
4. Yet, its location in connection with God’s people would seem to make it an unlikely city to consider, but what is revealed about it in the O.T. and N.T. provide for interesting thoughts and observations.

BODY:

I. Early History:

- A. Damascus is mentioned as early as 1500 B.C. in the Tell el-Amarna Letters. Those of *Egyptian* origin mention it as an important trade route that linked Egypt to the nations of Mesopotamia via “the way of the Sea” and “the King’s Highway.”
 1. It is mentioned in **Genesis 14:15** when Abraham defeated Chedorlaomer and the kings with him “and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.”
 2. It is mentioned again in **Genesis 15:2** where Abraham expresses concern about God blessing him saying, “O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”
- B. It played a prominent yet infamous role in relationship to Israel, being the capital of the *Syrian/Aramean* nation, which was very hostile toward God’s people.
 1. As part of the Syrian nation, it fought against David and was defeated, made to be servants, and to pay tribute to him (2 Sam. 8:3-6 – “David also defeated Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his territory at the River Euphrates. ⁴ David took from him one thousand chariots, seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. Also David hamstrung all the chariot horses, except that he spared enough of them for one hundred chariots. ⁵ When the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David killed twenty-two thousand of the Syrians. ⁶ Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus; and the Syrians became David’s servants, and brought tribute. So the Lord preserved David wherever he went.”).
 2. Yet, Rezon, an officer of Hadadezer’s army, escaped and eventually established himself as king in Damascus and became a thorn in Solomon’s side (1 Kings 11:23-25 – “God also raised up another adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliada, who had fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah. ²⁴ He gathered men to himself and became leader of a marauding band, after David slew them of Zobah; and they went to Damascus and stayed there, and reigned in Damascus. ²⁵ So he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, along with the evil that Hadad did; and he abhorred Israel and reigned over Aram.”).
 3. When Israel became divided, the rulers of Damascus of Syria used this as an opportunity to play Israel and Judah against each other and fought against them.
 - a. In 1 Kings 15:18-20 Judah paid Ben-Hadad, king of Damascus of Syria, to break his treaty with Israel and attack them, which he did, gaining territory in Israel as a result.

- b. Later in 1 Kings 20:34 we find that Ben-Hadad and Damascus attacked Israel on various occasions, taking its land and setting up merchants in Samaria.
 - c. After this when Ben-Hadad of Syria sent Hazael his servant to Elisha to see if he would recover from his illness, Elisha prophesied that Hazael would take the throne and do much harm to the children of Israel (2 Kings 8:10-13 – “And Elisha said to him, “Go, say to him, ‘You shall certainly recover.’ However the Lord has shown me that he will really die.”¹¹ Then he set his countenance in a stare until he was ashamed; and the man of God wept.¹² And Hazael said, “Why is my lord weeping?” He answered, “Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel: Their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword; and you will dash their children, and rip open their women with child.”¹³ So Hazael said, “But what is your servant—a dog, that he should do this gross thing?” And Elisha answered, “The Lord has shown me that you will become king over Syria.”).
 - d. Syria, through Hazael, did afflict Israel for many years! (2 Kings 13:3, 22 – “Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-Hadad the son of Hazael, all their days....²² And Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.”).
4. The decline of Damascus:
- 1. It was prophesied to be brought low (Jer. 49:23-27; Amos 1:3-5).
 - 2. Its decline began in 732 B.C. when the city was attacked and defeated by the Assyrians, leaving it historically obscure for more than 200 years.

C. Why talk about Damascus?

- 1. Despite the city being associated with war, death, and loss for the people of God, there are two events associated with it that are worthy of our consideration.
- 2. These events are well known by most of us.
- 3. These events are similar in many ways, especially in the nature of those involved.

II. Event 1: The healing of Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5:1-19)

A. Who was Naaman?

- 1. He was a *commander of the army of the king of Syria*, working out of *Damascus*.
- 2. He was *hostile* toward God’s people, having led *raids against Israel* and taken a young girl captive to be a slave for his wife. Yet, this girl told him how he could be healed by Elisha.

B. Naaman became an example of God’s *grace* freely bestowed by *faith*

- 1. His healing was by God’s *grace* because Naaman was a *Syrian* serving the king of Damascus, an *enemy* of God and His people! He deserved no such thing!
- 2. Yet, Naaman received grace because had enough faith to *seek it out* from God.
 - a. Elisha didn’t go to Syria and force this healing on him.
 - b. Naaman was healed because he had faith enough to listen to his servant and *come to Israel* to receive it!
 - c. The sad thing was that this healing by God’s grace was also readily available for God’s people through Elisha, but they didn’t seek it (Luke 4:27 – “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”).
 - i. When Jesus told this to the Jew of Nazareth, they became angry!
 - ii. Why, because Jesus’ point was that like the Jewish lepers of Elisha’s day who *lacked the faith to come to Elisha for healing*, these Israelites were in danger of not being healed of sin because they *lacked faith to come to Him for healing!*
- 3. Naaman received God’s grace to be healed on *God’s terms*—by *obedience*.

- a. Naaman first sought healing and didn't receive it because he sought it from the wrong source—the king of Israel—who the servant girl had not mentioned.
 - b. When he came to Elisha it was made clear that God's grace to heal would be given him when he *obeyed*.
 - i. Naaman was given the chance to receive *grace* for healing, but *only* if he *obeyed* by dipping *7 times*, not any other number, in the *Jordan river*, not any other river.
 - ii. But Naaman's *arrogance in his own wisdom/thoughts* almost cost him his cleansing (2 Kings 5:11-12 – “But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, “Indeed, I said to myself, ‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.’”¹² Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of **Damascus**, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage.”).
 - i) Naaman *thought* his healing by grace would be accomplished solely by God in some grand fashion through the prophet—he would not have to do anything!
 - ii) Fortunately, Naaman's lowly servant convinced him to obey God's simple instructions and he was healed by grace (2 Kings 5:14 – “So he went down and **dipped seven times** in the **Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God**; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”).
- C. People today must receive grace on God's terms—*obedience of faith!*
1. Many make Naaman's mistake thinking salvation by grace through faith is all done by God and there is nothing that they must *do* to receive it.
 2. Those who believe in Jesus would be wise to follow Naaman's example and obey the simple command of baptism to be saved, no matter what they *think!*
 - a. People say, “how can water save?,” or “we are saved by faith,” which could easily apply to Naaman's case.
 - b. But the scriptures still say...
 - i. Heb. 5:8-9 – “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who **obey Him.**”
 - ii. Acts 2:38 – “Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
 - iii. 1 Pet. 3:21 – “Corresponding to that, **baptism now saves you**—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” – NASB

CONCLUSION:

1. So, Damascus and Naaman gives us with an example that presents two choices—follow his initial rebellion in ignorance and do not obey God's will to be cleansed, or follow his enlightened ways and obey God's word to be cleansed.
2. If you desire to be cleansed of your sins, you must obey God by believing in Jesus, confessing your faith in Him as the risen Savior, repenting of your sins, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Rom. 6:3-4; Acts 2:38; 22:16).
3. Why would you not be cleansed today from your sins?