

# Homiletics Analysis: 2 Kings 5

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## Content & Intent

### **This Text — Content:**

Second Kings 5 narrates the healing of Naaman, commander of the Aramean army, from leprosy through the prophet Elisha. The chapter moves in three distinct phases. In the first (vv. 1–14), Naaman — powerful, celebrated, yet leprous — is directed by a captive Israelite servant girl to the prophet in Samaria. His journey to Israel and his initial refusal of Elisha's prescription (washing seven times in the Jordan) reveal the fundamental problem: Naaman expects healing on his own terms, through spectacle and status. His servants' intervention breaks through his pride, and he obeys, and is healed. In the second phase (vv. 15–19), Naaman returns to Elisha and confesses that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel — a stunning, unsolicited confession of exclusive monotheism from a foreign military commander. He requests two mule-loads of Israelite soil and seeks Elisha's blessing for a compromise he foresees in his vocation. Elisha sends him in peace. In the third phase (vv. 20–27), Elisha's servant Gehazi secretly pursues Naaman, lies to obtain silver and garments, and lies again to Elisha upon returning. Elisha pronounces judgment: Naaman's leprosy will cling to Gehazi and his descendants forever.

### **This Text — Intent:**

God is seeking to accomplish two things simultaneously through this chapter. First, He is dismantling the assumption that grace operates along lines of human status, nationality, merit, or religious pedigree — and replacing it with the scandalous reality that grace reaches the unlikely outsider who humbles himself and receives, while bypassing the insider who grasps. Second, He is issuing a sharp warning: the grace of God is never a resource to be monetized, managed, or exploited. The chapter intends to humble the proud, astonish the reader with the reach of God's grace, and expose the lethal danger of treating the gifts of God as instruments of personal gain. Naaman's healing and Gehazi's judgment are not two separate stories — they are two sides of the same theological claim.

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**Subject Sentence:** Grace reaches the humble outsider and judges the grasping insider.

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**Primary Claim:** God's grace overturns every human hierarchy of worthiness — it flows freely to the foreigner who stoops to receive it, and it is forfeited by the insider who attempts to exploit it; the only posture that receives grace is open-handed humility, and the only posture that destroys it is self-serving calculation.

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## Interpretive Evaluation

**The structure of the chapter and the Naaman-Gehazi contrast.** Some expositors read 2 Kings 5 primarily as a missionary or evangelistic text — Naaman’s healing as a paradigm of outreach to the nations. This reading is not wrong, but it is incomplete. The chapter’s own architecture gives roughly equal space to the Gehazi episode (vv. 20–27) as to the healing narrative, and this proportion is not accidental. The text is not primarily about the geography of grace (that it reaches Gentiles) but about the *posture* that receives it and the posture that forfeits it. A reading that treats vv. 20–27 as an appendix or moral footnote misses the chapter’s governing theological symmetry.

**Naaman’s confession and its scope.** Naaman’s declaration in v. 15 — “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel” — is sometimes read as proto-monotheism, an early stage in a journey toward full faith, perhaps incomplete or merely pragmatic. Dispensational readings may emphasize that this is an Old Testament figure whose faith operates within limited revelation. This deserves acknowledgment: Naaman is not a New Covenant believer, and his request for earth (v. 17) and his anticipated genuflection in the temple of Rimmon (v. 18) reflect genuine theological and practical limitations. However, the Reformed reading does not require that Naaman’s confession be systematically complete to be genuine. Jesus’s own use of Naaman in Luke 4:27 treats him as an exemplar of faith-reception — the outsider who received what insiders refused. Naaman’s confession is presented in the text without irony or qualification: it is genuine, and Elisha confirms it by sending him in peace.

**The Rimmon compromise (v. 18).** This is the chapter’s most exegetically contested moment. Naaman asks for forgiveness in advance for bowing in the house of Rimmon as part of his royal duties. Elisha’s response — “Go in peace” — has generated three distinct readings: (a) tacit approval of a necessary pragmatic compromise; (b) a non-committal dismissal that neither approves nor condemns; (c) a genuine blessing that trusts the work of grace in Naaman’s life to God’s ongoing work. The Reformed reading prefers (c), and the grounds are textual. Elisha does not answer with silence, with qualification, or with caution — he speaks a benediction. The text presents this as a pastoral response to a genuinely converted man working out the implications of new faith in a complex pagan context, not as an endorsement of syncretism. The text does not invite the preacher to moralize about Naaman’s compromise — it invites admiration for Elisha’s grace-shaped pastoral wisdom.

**Gehazi and the nature of his sin.** Some traditions read Gehazi’s sin primarily as greed or dishonesty — a character flaw. The text warrants a sharper reading. Gehazi’s sin is theological before it is moral. He treats the grace of God as a commodity. He sees Naaman’s healing and calculates that something was owed, that Elisha left money on the table, that the occasion of another man’s mercy was an opportunity for personal gain. This is not merely avarice — it is a fundamental misunderstanding of what grace is and how it operates. The Reformed reading finds here a type of every attempt to attach a price to what

God gives freely — and in its most serious form, a parallel to Simon Magus (Acts 8) and every commercialization of the gospel.

**No significant divergence** exists between Reformed, Lutheran, and broadly evangelical traditions on the basic narrative contours of this chapter. The sharpest distinctives emerge in how the Naaman-Gehazi contrast is handled and how heavily the chapter's missionary/missiologial dimensions are weighted relative to its grace/posture dimensions.

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## Key Canonical Support

- **Luke 4:24–27** — Jesus cites Naaman explicitly as evidence that God's grace has always extended beyond ethnic Israel to faith-receptive outsiders; this is the canonical lens through which the New Testament reads 2 Kings 5, and it confirms that the text's primary claim is about the reach and nature of grace, not merely a narrative of physical healing.
  - **Acts 8:18–24 (Simon Magus)** — Peter's rebuke of Simon's attempt to purchase the Spirit's power is the New Covenant parallel to Gehazi's sin; both episodes expose the same theological error — treating the grace of God as a commodity — and both result in sharp judgment.
  - **Isaiah 1:18 / Psalm 51** — The Old Testament's consistent testimony that God's cleansing is received through humble acknowledgment, not through earned worthiness, grounds the theological claim that Naaman's seven dippings enact: it is not the quality or grandeur of the act but the obedient posture of the recipient that the grace of God works through.
  - **Romans 9:30–10:4** — Paul's argument that Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness attained it while Israel who pursued it did not — grounded in posture, not pedigree — maps precisely onto the Naaman-Gehazi contrast: the outsider receives; the insider grasps and loses.
  - **Ephesians 2:8–9** — The definitive New Testament statement of grace as gift received rather than earned or transacted grounds the chapter's claim at its fullest theological depth: Naaman's healing is a narrative enactment of what Paul will later articulate propositionally — grace is received with empty hands.
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**Aim:** To confront every assumption that God's grace operates on the basis of status, merit, or insider privilege — and to call every reader to the only posture that receives it: open-handed, expectation-releasing humility.

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## Content Table

| Verse(s) | Content                                                                                                                                           | Notes                                                                                                        |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5:1      | Naaman introduced: commander of Aram, great man, favored, mighty — but leprous                                                                    | The “but” of v. 1 is the text’s hinge word — status and need set in stark juxtaposition                      |
| 5:2–3    | Captive Israelite servant girl directs Naaman to the prophet in Samaria                                                                           | The instrument of grace is the most marginalized figure in the chapter — a captive child                     |
| 5:4–7    | Naaman presents himself to the king of Israel with a letter; the king of Israel tears his robes in despair                                        | Political channels are useless; the king reads “cure leprosy” as a provocation to war                        |
| 5:8      | Elisha intervenes: “Let him come to me, that he may know there is a prophet in Israel”                                                            | Elisha’s confidence is not in himself but in what the encounter will reveal about God                        |
| 5:9–10   | Naaman arrives with full military entourage; Elisha does not come out but sends a messenger with the prescription: wash seven times in the Jordan | The snub is deliberate — Elisha will not perform for status                                                  |
| 5:11–12  | Naaman is furious — he expected a dramatic prophetic gesture; the Jordan is inferior to Syrian rivers; he turns to go                             | The precise anatomy of pride: expectation of spectacle, offense at simplicity, preference for his own rivers |
| 5:13     | His servants reason with him: if the prophet had commanded something great, would you not have done it? How much more this simple thing?          | Grace often enters through unexpected voices; the servants name the irrationality of Naaman’s pride          |
| 5:14     | Naaman dips seven times; his flesh is restored like a little child’s                                                                              | “Like a little child” — the phrase is not merely descriptive; it echoes the posture required                 |
| 5:15     | Naaman returns and stands before Elisha: “Now I know                                                                                              | Genuine conversion: the movement from transaction                                                            |

| Verse(s) | Content                                                                                                                                               | Notes                                                                                                                              |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | there is no God in all the earth except in Israel” — offers a gift                                                                                    | (I will pay for healing) to confession (there is only one God)                                                                     |
| 5:16     | Elisha refuses the gift: “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing”                                                             | Grace cannot be purchased; Elisha’s refusal is a theological act, not false modesty                                                |
| 5:17     | Naaman requests two mule-loads of earth; vows to offer no burnt offering to any god except the LORD                                                   | New faith expressed in culturally conditioned form; the request reflects theological seriousness, not superstition                 |
| 5:18–19  | Naaman requests pardon for bowing in the house of Rimmon; Elisha says “Go in peace”                                                                   | Elisha’s pastoral wisdom: he sends a new believer in peace, trusting grace to do its ongoing work                                  |
| 5:20     | Gehazi reasons to himself: “My master has spared this Naaman the Aramean, in not accepting from his hand what he brought” — resolves to run after him | The internal monologue of covetousness: he reframes Elisha’s theological act as a lost opportunity                                 |
| 5:21–24  | Gehazi lies to Naaman, fabricates a story about two young prophets needing silver and garments; Naaman eagerly gives double what was asked            | Naaman’s eagerness highlights the contrast — he gives generously; Gehazi takes covertly                                            |
| 5:25     | Gehazi returns and stands before Elisha; Elisha asks “Where have you been, Gehazi?” — he lies again: “Your servant went nowhere”                      | The lie compounds the sin; Gehazi stands before Elisha as Naaman had stood before him — but in concealment, not confession         |
| 5:26–27  | Elisha pronounces judgment: Naaman’s leprosy will cling to Gehazi and his descendants forever; Gehazi goes out leprous, white as snow                 | The symmetry is exact: Naaman’s leprosy transferred to Gehazi through grasping — grace gives; greed takes what it does not receive |

## Divisions Table

| Division | Verses  | Label                                                                           |
|----------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1        | 5:1–3   | The Setup: Great Man, Great Need, Unexpected Instrument                         |
| 2        | 5:4–8   | Failed Channels: Politics Cannot Do What Prophecy Can                           |
| 3        | 5:9–14  | The Prescription Refused and Received: Pride Broken, Healing Given              |
| 4        | 5:15–19 | The Confession: Naaman Returns as a Worshiper, Not a Customer                   |
| 5        | 5:20–27 | The Reversal: Gehazi Takes What Grace Gave Freely and Inherits What Naaman Lost |

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## Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

**Subject Sentence:** Grace reaches the humble outsider and judges the grasping insider.

**Primary Claim:** God’s grace overturns every human hierarchy of worthiness — it flows freely to the foreigner who stoops to receive it, and it is forfeited by the insider who attempts to exploit it; the only posture that receives grace is open-handed humility, and the only posture that destroys it is self-serving calculation.

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## Applications (Five)

**1. (Mind/Belief)** The grace of God does not travel along the routes you expect — and your expectations of how it should come may be the very thing blocking you from receiving it. Naaman nearly missed his healing because he had a detailed mental picture of how a prophet ought to behave and how a healing ought to look. His rivers were better than the Jordan; his idea of a cure was grander than Elisha’s prescription. Examine the conditions you have placed on receiving from God: the form the answer must take, the channel it must come through, the dignity it must preserve. The text asks: are you standing at the Jordan, furious that it is not the Abana?

**2. (Affections/Worship)** The moment Naaman’s flesh was restored like a child’s, something more than his skin changed — he came back a worshiper. His confession in verse 15 was not extracted from him; it arose from him. Genuine encounter with the grace

of God does not produce mere gratitude for a service rendered — it produces the recognition that there is no God like this God. Let your affections be trained by this: the proper response to grace received is not “thank you for the transaction” but “now I know — there is no other.” Rehearse the grace you have received until it produces in you what it produced in Naaman: the kind of awe that makes you want to carry Israelite earth home with you.

**3. (Will/Behavior)** Gehazi’s sin began in his internal monologue — “My master has let this man off” (v. 20). He reframed a theological act as a missed financial opportunity. This is the anatomy of spiritual covetousness: translating another person’s grace-shaped generosity into a deficit you have the right to recover. Identify where you are doing this — where you are watching God’s gifts flow to someone else and calculating what you are owed. Repent specifically of the reasoning, not just the action. Gehazi’s feet followed where his heart had already gone.

**4. (Mind/Belief)** The servant girl in verse 2 is the most marginalized person in the chapter — a captive child, unnamed, without status — and she is the hinge on which the entire narrative turns. God’s grace is not mediated through the powerful and the credentialed. It comes through the least likely voices, through the people we are too proud to hear. The text places her at the beginning deliberately. Who in your life is she? Whose voice are you not hearing because of how little you expect from them?

**5. (Affections/Worship)** Elisha’s refusal of Naaman’s gift in verse 16 is one of the most theologically charged moments in the chapter, and it passes quickly. He will not receive payment because grace is not a transaction — and to accept payment would be to transform what God gave freely into something earned. The preacher of the gospel, the Christian in community, the parent raising children in the faith — all of us are called to handle grace the way Elisha did: as a gift to pass on, not a resource to leverage. Ask yourself honestly: have I made the grace I have received something that enhances my position, my reputation, or my resources? Or have I passed it on the way Elisha gave it — without charge, without credit?

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## Theological Importance

**Theological Importance:** Second Kings 5 is one of the Old Testament’s most concentrated demonstrations that the grace of God operates in sovereign freedom, unbounded by ethnicity, status, religious pedigree, or human expectation. God heals a Syrian military commander — the enemy — through a captive Israelite child, a reluctant prophet, and a muddy river. Every element of the narrative strips away the conditions under which grace was expected to operate and replaces them with the conditions under which it actually operates: humility, obedience, and receptivity. The chapter also establishes, with unusual sharpness, the inseparability of grace from holiness: the same God who gives freely to the humble will not allow His grace to be commercialized by the

grasping. Gehazi's judgment is not a tonal shift in the chapter — it is the chapter's completion. Grace is precisely as serious as the punishment for exploiting it.

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## Reformed Theological Significance

**Reformed Theological Significance:** This chapter is a narrative exposition of sovereign grace — and it is structurally designed to rebuke every form of insider entitlement. The outsider receives; the insider loses. This is not incidental to the story; it is the story. The Reformed tradition's insistence that salvation is entirely of grace, received through faith by the empty-handed sinner, finds its Old Testament narrative ground here. Naaman contributes nothing to his healing except his eventual willingness to stop imposing conditions on it. His healing is a type of justification: the leper made clean, not by the grandeur of the river, not by the merit of the act, but by the word of the prophet and the grace of the God who sent him. Gehazi stands as a perpetual warning against every theology that attempts to attach a price — even a modest, seemingly reasonable price — to what God gives freely. The Reformed understanding of the gospel as sheer gift, received with open hands and met with worship rather than transaction, is nowhere more vividly enacted in Old Testament narrative than here.

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## Main Takeaway

You do not receive grace by deserving it, managing it, or improving its delivery method. You receive it by stopping — stopping your expectations of how it should come, stopping your calculation of what it is worth, stopping your pride at the Jordan — and washing. Naaman's flesh came back like a child's because he finally came to the river like one. Come to the river.

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## Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the Gehazi episode as a moral appendix rather than a theological counterweight.** The most common homiletical failure with this chapter is spending 80% of the sermon on Naaman's healing and treating vv. 20–27 as a cautionary tailpiece about honesty or greed. The chapter's architecture will not support this. Naaman and Gehazi are the chapter's two poles — one receives what grace gives; the other takes what grace refused to sell. A sermon that does not give the Gehazi episode its full theological weight has not preached 2 Kings 5.
- **Reducing Naaman's healing to a missionary paradigm without preaching its grace-posture claim.** This chapter is legitimately used in missiological contexts — Jesus himself uses it this way in Luke 4. But if the sermon's primary claim becomes "God's grace extends to the nations," it will generate the correct observation while

missing the controlling claim: it is not *where* grace goes that is the surprise — it is *how* it operates and *who* receives it. Naaman is not merely a Gentile who gets healed; he is a proud man who nearly refuses to be humbled and is healed only when he relents.

- **Moralizing Naaman’s humility as a spiritual discipline to imitate.** The application “be humble like Naaman” misreads the text. Naaman did not choose humility as a virtue — he was argued out of his pride by his servants, and even then he obeyed with what was likely gritted teeth. The text does not present his humility as admirable character formation; it presents his obedience as the condition of reception. The application is not “cultivate humility” but “stop imposing your conditions on God’s prescription.”
- **Softening Elisha’s pastoral response to Naaman (v. 19) into vagueness.** Preachers who are uncomfortable with “Go in peace” as a genuine benediction sometimes preach the Rimmon passage as an unresolved tension — Naaman goes with a blessing but presumably with a compromise God quietly tolerates. This misses the text’s pastoral point. Elisha does not hedge — he blesses. The sermon should trust the text’s confidence here and use it to model grace-shaped pastoral wisdom in complex discipleship situations.
- **Failing to name the specific theological nature of Gehazi’s sin.** If the sermon preaches Gehazi’s sin as “greed” or “dishonesty,” it has correctly identified symptoms and missed the disease. Gehazi’s sin is fundamentally a misunderstanding of grace — he believed that the healing of Naaman created a debt that someone ought to pay. This is a theological error before it is a moral one, and the judgment is proportionate: Gehazi inherits the leprosy that was freely removed from Naaman. Preach the theology, not just the behavior.
- **Missing the servant girl as a structural and theological hinge.** The unnamed, powerless, captive child in verses 2–3 is the instrument through whom the entire chapter is set in motion. Preachers who do not dwell here long enough miss one of the chapter’s pointed ironic reversals: the most marginalized person in the narrative is the one who knows where grace is found. This is not a supporting detail — it is the chapter’s opening statement about how grace operates.