

Gehazi the Servant of Elisha – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Gehazi was the chief servant or personal attendant to Elisha, apparently much as Elisha was to Elijah. As such, he probably would have been seen as the protégé and eventual successor to Elisha. For many, his life is an enigma.

We first encounter Gehazi in 2 Kings 4 (c.897 BC). There he told Elisha, who wished to reward their wealthy Shunammite hostess for her liberal hospitality, of her desire for a child. About five years later (cp. 3:1 and 8:1) the lad God granted her suddenly died. The mother sought out Elisha, cast herself down and caught him by the feet. Gehazi “came near to thrust her away” – probably, we think, not so much from lack of civility for the woman as to protect his master from what he took as far too brash an act (2 Ki. 4:14, 27). Elisha stayed Gehazi from this attempt and, upon learning of that which so vexed her soul, sent him to lay the prophet’s staff upon the dead child. This Gehazi did but without effect (2 Kings 4:29-37).

When Elisha arrived, the dead child was lying on the man of God’s bed. He shut the door, prayed to the LORD, and “lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm”. After walking to and fro, Elisha again stretched himself upon the child – who then sneezed seven times, opened his eyes, whereupon Elijah presented the lad to his mother (2 Kings 4:32-37).

In the interval between the child’s birth and his death, Naaman (commandant of the Syrian army) followed Elisha’s directions to wash in the Jordan River seven times and was cured of leprosy (2 Ki. 5; c.894 BC). The converted Syrian wished to reward the prophet, but the man of God refused. Gehazi, however, ran after Naaman and told him that Elisha requested a talent of silver and 2 changes of raiment for two needy young prophets.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, Gehazi stands before us both a liar and a thief. He has deceived Naaman, misrepresented Elisha, and brought the prophetic office as well as the true God into disrepute. Gehazi *coveted* (the 10th commandment; Exo. 20:17) something Naaman had: so Elisha pronounced that the leprosy of Naaman would cling to Gehazi and unto his seed for ever. He went out from Elisha a leper as white as snow. (2 Kings 5:27 – note: his being sent to hell for these sins was never brought up).

Gehazi is last mentioned as being asked by King Jehoram of Israel to relate of all the great deeds done by Elisha (c. 886 BC). When he came to the account of the Shunammite’s son, the woman herself and the son appeared before the king to appeal for restitution of her home and land. They had been taken from her during a seven year absence due to famine. The wicked king was so moved by the happenstance that he granted her petition & more (2 Ki. 8:1-6, 3:1-3).

Now the question arises: how can a leper appear in the royal court of Jehoram? Solutions have included that: (1) Gehazi “talked” second hand to the king by the use of messengers, (2) this is a different Gehazi, or (3) the Second Kings 8 account is chronologically out of order.

Although possible, all fail to truly satisfy – (2) is suspect as 8:4 calls its Gehazi “the servant of the man of God” and the Gehazi in 5:20 is identified in similar manner. Moreover, (4) the conduct of Gehazi at 8:5 implies he took pleasure in rehearsing the deeds of his former master. Indeed, the context seems to indicate he has repented from his besetting sin (Hebrews 12:1), a sin which for a mere 200 pounds of silver forever removed him from his apparent place in the succession of God’s prophets. Yet true repentance brought about God’s healing Gehazi of the dreaded disease and his standing restored to the extent that he had access to the ear of the king.

Finally, (4) is undeniably the only solution that brings honor to God. All glory be to our Lord for His forgiveness, mercy, and grace that restores such as Gehazi!