

## AN ARCH DECEIVER

"But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, ..... went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." II Kings 5:20, 27.

Gehazi is one of those men whom later ages have accepted as a type. His very name has come to be representative of a particular character. We do not know much about him, but the little that is recorded about him enables us to learn some important lessons.

### I. His Privileges.

#### 1. Fellowship with godly men.

Elisha was God's witness to that age. He bore his testimony on behalf of the spiritual life, and against the sins of Israel. He declared God's message to the nation, and to every individual member of it.

Gehazi came under the influence of Elisha. It was his great opportunity. He heard the Word of God from the lips of this great prophet. The way of purity and righteousness was set before him in the daily life of his master. He was reminded continually by all the acts of Elisha what his life ought to be.

It was a glorious privilege and great blessing to witness Elisha's lovely life and noble deeds, to overhear his prayers, to be remembered by him in prayer, to listen to his counsels and to have him for a guide. Thus he, like each of us, had his great chance. He saw what he could be; an ideal for his own life was there embodied in the life of the man of God with whom he lived.

Gehazi was surrounded by all these sacred influences that he might not take the downward path, that he might choose the good and live. The opportunity was given to him, and urged upon him. There was no mistake about it.

One might have thought that Gehazi, with the rare privilege of such companionship, would have developed into a shining saint, but it was not so. He dwelt with a hero, but he was a coward. He lived with a saint, but he was a knave. He was associated with a prophet of God, but he was a petty thief.

Alas, too often this is the case in these days. There is no redeeming power in a noble example. A man may live with beautiful spirits, yet never catch any of their loveliness.

Not only did Gehazi have the golden privilege of residence with Elisha, God's prophet, but he was always being brought into contact with other godly men. Elisha's house was the rendezvous of prophets and "sons of the prophets." There Gehazi met the best of the best. What hymns of praise, prayers and conversations Elisha's servant heard!

#### 2. Familiarity with sacred things.

Gehazi had received a lot of information about God. Frequently the name of God fell from his sullied lips. He mentioned God while plotting to serve the devil. God was on his lips, but was far from his heart.

Gehazi's case is a stern reminder that mere theoretical knowledge of these great realities is completely inadequate. No companionship, however spiritually exalted, and no theology, however accurate, can supply or take the place of personal religious experience.

### II. His Perversity.

#### 1. Gehazi did not appreciate Elisha.

He did not appreciate the prophet of God either as to his character or his conduct. One may live with people and yet fail to comprehend and appreciate them. Greatness and goodness may not be discerned by those who spend their days in its immediate presence. No man is a hero to his valet, they say; then, so much the worse for the valet. Elisha's servant failed to appreciate alike the prophet's character and his deeds. It seems that he was oblivious of Elisha's extraordinary quality. The principles by which Elisha's conduct was governed had no attraction for him. He had lived many a day with Elisha, yet knew not the secret of his conduct. This fact reminds us that spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

2. Gehazi harbored an evil thought.

"But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said." To whom did he speak? To himself. It was a cherished thought, but God knows a person's thoughts and records them. He said this in the silence of his heart. What did he say? "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." What a base thought it was! Gehazi should have crushed it immediately. Instead, he allowed it to change into a determined purpose. So, his tragic fall may be traced to a cherished godless thought.

3. Gehazi was dominated by a lust for gain.

The young man was enslaved by greed, which is one of the most cruel despots. Lust for gain was his ruling passion.

After Naaman had been miraculously cleansed of leprosy, he might have returned to his own land immediately, but his heart had been renewed, and the great man did not shrink from appearing before Elisha, the humble man of God, as he had done before. He voluntarily returned to make an humble confession of his faith in God, to thank the prophet for what he had done for him, and to reward him. When he came to trust the prophet's God, he readily paid due reverence to His prophet. Elisha refused to accept a reward for his services, lest any should think that the gifts of God might be purchased. He was sufficiently honored when he was used of God to bring healing and health to Naaman. Elisha desired no other reward than the joy of hearing Naaman praise God.

Gehazi failed to follow the example of his master, who had refused to accept a reward for services rendered. Having been present when the restored Naaman came back from the Jordan River with grateful heart, the prophet's servant had beheld with longing gaze the gift which the Syrian commander-in-chief spread out before his master. The sight of that wealth was a spark which kindled the fires of hell in his bosom. His mouth watered after it. He evidently thought Elisha was a fool for letting Naaman off so easily. He considered him fair game, for he had brought the wealth on purpose to leave it. To him Elisha's conduct was incredible. He could not feel the power of Elisha's spiritual motives in sparing Naaman and letting him go free of payment. Gratuitous services were not in harmony with his mercenary spirit.

After Naaman's cure, he had a very strong desire to give of his gold and silver, not as a matter of remuneration, but as an expression of his gratitude to Elisha, but when the prophet refused to accept it, the Syrian started home, taking with him his money, jewels and raiment. Then it was that Gehazi's covetousness or overpowering desire for money got the better of him. All that he let himself see was that with the departing Naaman so much money went away too, and that unnecessarily to his way of thinking. He reasoned, why should not my master have taken the money? Naaman could well afford it; he wanted to give it; and it was far less than the equivalent of what he had received from his visit to Elisha. Even though the prophet was exceedingly anxious to avoid making any wrong impressions upon Naaman and those who accompanied him, yet Gehazi was ready to jeopardize everything provided he

might gain financially by doing so. Not until now had this servant shown any such spirit to the prophet. He had covered up his real attitude a long time, but sin in the heart, unconquered by the grace of God, will surely manifest itself in some way.

4. Gehazi was a deceitful servant.

In attempting to cover up his own sin, he made three false statements.

(1) He pretended that Elisha had sent him.

When he had determined to get some of Naaman's wealth, he promptly followed him and deliberately misrepresented his master by alleging that he had sent him.

(2) He asserted that Elisha needed the silver and the changes of raiment for two young men, sons of the prophets. He feigned unselfishness and told a plausible story, even though it was an absolute falsehood. Did it pay? He must have laughed in his sleeve at this credulous Syrian who believed his ridiculous story. He must have felt the contemptuous pity of conscious superiority over Elisha, as he came back loaded with his treasure to the home of his master.

(3) He told Elisha that he had not gone out.

When he quietly presented himself before his master the question was asked: "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" In accents of injured innocence the ready lie was uttered: "Thy servant went no whither."

### III. His Punishment.

With eyes from which fire flashed, knowing that Gehazi was lying to him, and in words that scathed the scoundrel at whom they were flung, Elisha denounced his conduct. As to his punishment three things may be said.

1. It was immediate.

He lost his health. The prophet said, "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever." Scarcely was the verdict declared than it was carried out. "And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." That ruined constitution was the price he paid for successful wickedness.

Leprosy did not gradually creep over him, with all the attendant symptoms, but all at once, his sin was punished. He went out from the presence of his master whom he had tried to deceive, "a leper as white as snow."

2. It was intensive.

He was shut out from privilege. He was shut out from the tabernacle of his childhood. His friends forsook him, and on his brow was printed indelibly the mark and stigma of his fraud.

3. It was extensive.

It took in the whole of his family. His seed inherited the bitter reproach: unclean, unclean! He thought, with his suddenly gained possessions, he could become master, instead of servant; be rich, instead of poor; his children would inherit those riches from him, but the only possessions he could now leave them would be the spots of his leprosy. Behold the reward of falsehood and deceit. Their heir-loom handed down to his posterity was leprosy.