

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27



LET'S BEGIN HERE

We've all felt the deep wounds of betrayal: scars from a former grade school playmate or a high school best friend, pain from a messy breakup or divorce, infidelity, embezzlement, and gossip. Deliberate deceit cuts deep. David's writing reveals he knew this anguishing experience: "Even my best friend, the one I trusted completely, the one who shared my food, has turned against me" (Psalm 41:9). In this message, Chuck Swindoll delved into the deceit of Gehazi, a minor character in Israel's history known for betraying the major prophet Elisha.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, using Gehazi's story, we'll dig deep into the root of deceit by tracing the character differences between those who trust in the Lord and those who help only themselves.



DIGGING DEEPER: CONTRAST IN NARRATIVE

Much of the Bible is written as narrative—including 2 Kings, which chronicles the history of Israel. Can you think of other examples of historical literature in the Bible?

About the intentional history-narrative combination, Chuck Swindoll notes, "Often this historical section of Scripture is called *narrative* because God is communicating His Word as a grand story."¹

Don't let the word *story* mislead you. The stories of the Bible are absolutely true! *Story* simply refers to the style and skill with which God brought together the Scriptures. The Bible is rich with literary devices that not only enrich the movement of the grand story, but also cue the reader about God's providence and kindness and about the characters whose actions demonstrate they are God's people.

Quotable

"What is the right thing to do?" If you ask yourself that question, you will not be a deceiver.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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One of the most rewarding and intriguing aspects of narrative is how observation, interpretation, and correlation occur simultaneously as we process what we're reading. To enhance our vision, let's pull those tasks apart and focus on doing each one.

Let's start with observing *contrasts* in 2 Kings 5 by zooming in on the prophet Elisha and his servant Gehazi. Along the way, we'll also make correlations and then bring the two together to interpret what we've read.

In verses 5 through 19, we see Elisha's values on full display. He demonstrates the preeminence of God's presence and power. He shuns the appearance of being bought or bribed. He flees from favoritism or nationalism. Gehazi was this man's trusted servant. Yet Elisha's values never quite rubbed off on his servant. How do we know this? Gehazi declared as much:

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said to himself, "My master should not have let this Aramean get away without accepting any of his gifts. As surely as the Lord lives, I will chase after him and get something from him." (2 Kings 5:20)

The word *but* begins this verse—a major signal that we should contrast what came before and what was written after.

What did Gehazi think about his master's actions?

What modifiers does the narrator use to describe Elisha? How is he characterized?

How does Gehazi identify Naaman? Does he call him by name? What implications lie in how Gehazi identifies Naaman?



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Did you notice that Gehazi said, “As surely as the LORD lives”? That’s not the the first time we’ve seen those words. Repetition in Scripture always warrants a closer look. Just a few verses up in 5:16, Elisha declared the same thing. How does his declaration differ from Gehazi’s?

Through repetition, the writer invites us to *contrast* the statements of the two men. Why? So we will understand that Gehazi is *not* serving the Lord, but himself.

Now read 2 Kings 5:2–3:

At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman’s wife as a maid. One day the girl said to her mistress, “I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy.”

What does 2 Kings 5:2 report about the relationship between the Israelites and the Arameans?

Was the young girl with Naaman there voluntarily? How do you imagine this circumstance would have influenced the young girl’s relationship to Naaman and his wife?



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How does the young girl refer to Naaman? By name? What does her word choice say about their relationship?

The young girl has only one recorded sentence. What do her words reveal about her character?

Both the young girl and Gehazi use the term “my master” to describe Naaman and Elisha, respectively. Was Gehazi serving his master? Explain why or why not.

Now, jot down some notes about the contrasts between Elisha’s servant and Naaman’s.

A Tale of Two Servants

If anyone had reason to be resentful and angry at Naaman, it was the young girl, stolen from Israel and forced into slavery in the country of her captors. Yet because of her character, that young girl became a vehicle of God’s grace to pagan people.



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Throughout the Old Testament, God's people often found themselves in exile as a form of punishment from God. Using a resource like lumina.bible.org, do a search for the word *exile*. Observe how often the word appears and note a few examples or turn to this word in a Bible dictionary for some additional insight. Make notes of what you discover.

God's people lived in exile in a variety of countries for a variety of reasons. Yet always, no matter where they were or why, God's expectations of good character and His instructions on how they were to live their lives remained the same.

Read the letter to the people exiled in Babylon in Jeremiah 29:4–23, and zoom in on verse 7:

“Work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.”

The “I” in that sentence is *God*. In 2 Kings 5, a young, nameless slave girl embodied the heart of God, as spoken in Jeremiah's prophecy, with more grace and spiritual depth than Elisha's right-hand man! Her actions aligned with Elisha's. Both individuals were fueled by their loyalty and service to the God of grace. Both embodied the humility and confidence that come from serving God rather than mammon.

The result of Elisha's and the young girl's faithfulness? A miracle even greater than healed leprosy! Naaman proclaims, “From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the LORD” (2 Kings 5:17).

Then Gehazi enters the scene and interrupts the process of repentance. He doesn't want to see “this Aramean” gain God's grace without penalty. Gehazi thinks Naaman needs to pay up.

Read 2 Kings 5:20–27. What actions do you see Gehazi take? What motivated him? What consequences did he face?



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Does Gehazi's attitude show up in our churches today? How? What impact do "Gehazis" have on those around them?

Does Elisha's and the young girl's attitude show up in our churches today? How? What impact do "Elishas" and "young girls" have on those around them?

Where are *you* aligned—do you more closely resemble Gehazi or the young girl and Elisha? How? Be specific.

Are there "Arameans" whom you believe should have to pay? Write a prayer to God about it.



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Bring It Home

Chuck offers two helpful takeaways from this passage to implement into our lives.

- *Leave no room for deception.* Do this by always asking yourself: “What is the right thing to do?”
- *Guard against rationalization.* Do this by always asking yourself: “What is my motive?”

Now that you have studied the contrasts between Gehazi, Elisha, and the young girl, what are some applications that you have gleaned?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, guard my heart from deceit. Give me Your wisdom to discern the right thing to do, with the right motivation, in every circumstance. May the company I keep be known by their honesty and guilelessness. Give me the faith to serve You with purity on my lips and in my heart.

Endnote

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2016), 6.



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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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