

Aim: Witness**Refer:** 2 Kings 7-9; Great Controversy chapter 7

Martin Luther was born into a poor German home; his father worked hard as a miner, to send Martin to school; he wanted Martin to be a lawyer. Sometimes they were so poor that Martin sang for people to earn a coin to buy food and he was often teased and bullied at school. His parents were very strict and religious, and to young Luther, pleasing God seemed to be a very difficult thing.

Life was easier when he went to university; he was a dedicated student with good memory, reasoning and understanding skills and did well. One day in the library, he found a Latin Bible; he had never known such a book existed! The priests had parts of the New Testament to read in church and he thought that was all there was.

He had always worried about sin and as he read he felt overwhelmed by his sinful state. He decided to join a monastery, and found a Bible chained to a wall and so in his spare time he read, even giving up sleep and food. The monks in this monastery spent their time fasting, begging for food and doing many other things that were painful to both their bodies and their pride in the hope of removing guilt. But despite doing everything required, Luther felt worse. Then God sent Johann von Staupitz, the priest in charge of the university, to Luther. Staupitz told Luther to stop torturing himself and to turn to Jesus for forgiveness. This was not easy, but Luther was finally able to gain the peace of forgiveness from God.

Luther moved to the University of Wittenberg; he continued to study the scriptures and at Staupitz' urging, began preaching about them.

Luther was delighted when he was able to travel to Rome, the centre of the Church. He walked, staying at monasteries on the way; in Italy, he was surprised to find that some monasteries were like luxury resorts – a total contrast to the monastery where he had lived.

Another surprise awaited him in Rome itself. The language of the people, especially the priests was anything but pure - often filled with swearing, even in church! And opportunities for all types of sin were found everywhere. Still he joined the crowds of people climbing Pilate's staircase on their knees at the promise of forgiveness from sin; but half way up, a thundering voice seemed to say to him, "The just shall live by faith." – He sprang to this feet and left in shame, promising that from now on he would follow only the word of God.

Luther's first impressions of God were that God was strict and hard to please and it seems that he got this impression from his parents. The teachings he found in the monastery didn't change this idea either; it wasn't until Johann von Staupitz pointed him to the forgiveness of Jesus that he was able to see that he had been wrong in his impressions. Staupitz and Luther's further Bible study showed him that God is love and He sent Jesus to forgive sins. I think we could say that perhaps Luther's parents weren't the best witnesses for what God is really like, and that Staupitz was a good witness.

What about the maid in the story of Naaman? What sort of witness was she? Why? Would she have made a good witness if she had been lazy?

Have you heard of Gehazi? (If not, summarise it: Elisha will not accept gifts in payment for Naaman's healing but his servant Gehazi secretly follows and pretends to accept gifts on Elisha's behalf)

What did Elisha say would happen to Gehazi? 2 Kings 5:27

Elisha's refusing to take payment was a witness to the fact that God's gifts cannot be bought. Was Gehazi a good witness?

Moving on to chapter 6: The king of Aram thought that one of his men must be a spy because the king of Israel always seemed to know what he had planned.

When the king confronted his men, demanding to know who it was who did they say? Verse 12

So the king of Aram thought he would solve his problem by capturing Elisha.

Read what happened in verse 15-23

Once again God had shown His power; to Elisha's servant, to the Israelites and to their enemies.

Some time later the king of Aram again returned and this time he laid siege to Samaria – surrounded it so that no one could go in or out. Food became scarce in the city. Word came to Elisha that God was about to rescue them. Read 2 Kings 7:1, 2

Four lepers happened to be camped out just outside the city gates. People with leprosy were not allowed inside the Israelite cities because leprosy was contagious. What did they decide to do? Read verse 3, 4

When they got to the enemy camp what did they find and why? Verse 5-7

So the men helped themselves to food and drink and silver and gold and clothes and so on. Then they remember the starving people in the city so they went and called out to the gate keepers.

Did the king believe them at first? Verse 12

Why don't you think he believed them? (He didn't know them; they didn't look very good; they were lepers; their story was unbelievable...)

They sent a small group out to check. Then the king appointed the officer – the same one who didn't believe Elisha to control the gate, but the people were in such a rush to get to the food that he was trampled in the rush and died as Elisha had predicted.

The king didn't believe the lepers – he was influenced by the way they looked, what little he knew about them – he knew they were lepers, and the unexpected things they were saying.

If a witness in a courtroom didn't look very good, and what was known about them wasn't good either and their story was unbelievable – would people find it easy or hard to believe them?

Read Acts 1:8

Christians are called to be witnesses too.

Discuss: How does the way a Christian dresses affect their witnessing?

Discuss: How does the way a Christian acts affect their witnessing?

Challenge: What areas can you change or work on to become a more effective witness for Jesus?