

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

COMINGS AND GOINGS

2 Kings 2:1-12

Transfiguration of Our Lord

Analysis by Marcus Felde

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

4Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

6Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and

struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

9When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." 10He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." 11As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. 12Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Preliminary remarks: In order to understand this pericope, we need to read to the end of the story in v.18. First, Elisha tests to see whether he has indeed received the promised spirit from his "father." Then, the disciples of Elisha check to make sure Elijah has not just been thrown down "on some mountain or into some valley." Sure enough, Elijah is gone! But just as certainly, the spirit was not. Elisha says "Told you so."

DIAGNOSIS: Departures

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Befuddled (see vv. 13-18)*

The disciples of Elijah searched in consternation, and in vain, for a trace of the one they trusted. ("Maybe he fell out of the chariot?" "Did anyone check his house?" "Has he used his MasterCard?" "Was that really Elijah?") Their vocation was to follow someone named Elijah, but what could they do, when that was all of a sudden impossible?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Betrayed?*

There was a question of loyalty, here. Yes, it was just possible

that the baton had been passed to Elisha. He certainly looked fired up! But their hearts were torn, because they did not want to be bad “sons” of their “father” prophet, Elijah. They were confused by his mysterious disappearance, and just possibly this meant they had been betrayed.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Bilked?*

They checked to see whether Elijah had been thrown down “on some mountain or into some valley.” Were they looking for a body? Or might he have made a soft landing? Hanging over their serious search was the implied possibility that things might have gone awry. Israel might have suffered a greater loss than just chariots and horses. They were missing their prophet. And, if the prophet was missing, had God gone missing also?

PROGNOSIS: Arrivals

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Sleight of (God's) Hand*

What to outward appearances was a disappearing act was in fact an epiphany. God was showing up in Elisha! Talk about sleight of hand! That was the real story. People took the disappearance wrong, as if God could ever abandon his children. No, even in swiping Elijah from a people who needed his type, God gave back twice as much. So, too, with the “departure” which Jesus was to accomplish in Jerusalem (see Luke 9:31), as Jesus discussed with Moses and Elijah there on the mountain. In a departure from conventional wisdom, God would take his Son (on the cross) in order to bless us with the Son's Spirit.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Behold, the Lamb of God!*

Quicker than Elijah's students could re-enroll with Elisha, we turn our eyes and hearts to Jesus, the Resurrected. We will not be bilked by human leaders, when no less than the Son of God is on offer! We will not be left holding someone's cloak (Mark

14:51-52), or holding the bag. Remember that the latter-day Elijah, John the Baptist, pointed his followers to Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Doubles All Around*

A double share of the spirit of Elijah was probably what it took to enable Elisha to heal Naaman, etc. But the One we believe in has not stinted with his Spirit, bestowing it even upon young women and old men. In that Spirit, we are all Elijahs (whose name means "The Lord is My God!"). We have arrived! Lucky world.