

## January 31, 2010 2 Kings 2:1-15 “A Fiery Departure” by Richard Boatman

<sup>1</sup> When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven...Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel...*[This same dialog was then repeated regarding Jericho and the Jordan River.]* <sup>6</sup> ...So the two of them walked on. <sup>7</sup> Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. <sup>8</sup> Elijah took his cloak...and struck the water with it. The water divided ...and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. <sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "What can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. <sup>10</sup> "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not." <sup>11</sup> As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. <sup>12</sup> Elisha...cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart. <sup>13</sup> He picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan <sup>14</sup> ...and struck the water with it [and the water] divided...and he crossed over. <sup>15</sup> The company of the prophets...who were watching, said, "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha." And they bowed to the ground before him.

Author Phillip Keller writes of Elijah nearing his departure from earth: “During his meteoric career, Elijah had been the voice of God speaking to a decadent nation sunk in debauchery. He had become the conscience of his generation...the living embodiment of faith in action demonstrating the invisible power of God...He had shown to a skeptical, cynical society that one man with God can be a majority. He had...been the powerful bastion of godly manhood who...had become a father to his people and in particular to the young prophet [Elisha].”

Elisha had been with Elijah for nearly a decade now. He knew his master’s moods and movements. There was something in the air. His departure from this realm was drawing near. Elijah kept trying to leave his protégé along the way at Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho, perhaps to soften the grief over his departure, but Elisha would hear nothing of it. He **drew even nearer** to his teacher.

James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands...and purify your hearts.” There is a point in our spiritual growth, and I

think Elisha had reached it, where our longing is more for God than for our fathers and mothers in the faith. As Aristotle grew beyond Plato—his longing for truth becoming greater than his fellowship with his Greek master—so Elisha, by drawing near to Elijah was actually drawing near to God, longing for the God Elijah served.

Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho—these may seem like insignificant villages and cities, but for Elisha they were **signposts along the way**. An artist, a minister and a cowboy converged at the Grand Canyon at the same time. As they stood on the edge of that massive abyss, each one responded. The artist cried, "Ah, what a beautiful scene to paint!" The minister mused, "What a wonderful example of the handiwork of God!" The cowboy said, "What a terrible place to lose a cow!"

We can travel the journey of our lives, and never really discern the spiritual signposts along the way. Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho—these three locales that form a triangle of travel by our two prophets are actually large in meaning. Gilgal means "Circle of Stones," probably referring to a place where special sacrifices were performed. Bethel means "House of God," a gathering place for prophets in training, and Jericho means "Place of Fragrance," the wonderful aroma from date palms and flowering fruit trees wafting its way through Jericho on the warm air.

These three things—sacrifice, gathering with other worshipers, and the fragrant aroma of communing with God are essential to our spiritual growth. They are necessary preparations to **crossing the Jordan**.

Like Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon and building Rome into an empire, crossing the Jordan River is symbolic of moving to the next spiritual level. About 400 years before Elijah, Joshua had led the new nation across this same Jordan, from the other direction. It represented the next level, as Israel claimed its homeland but not without facing formidable foes—the stronghold of Jericho being the first. (Remember, Jericho means "place of fragrance." It is interesting to note that we cannot benefit from being in the "place of fragrance," i.e. communion with God until we face our strongholds of fear, lies that keep us from laying claim to God's covenant promises.) A little over 900 years after Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan, another fiery prophet would baptize in this very river. And then our Savior would come to be baptized by this John the Baptist to fulfill all Scripture.

I think crossing the Jordan for us means we move from mediocrity to meaning; from God's presence to God's power; from dancing with the world to dancing with God; from being servants of God to being heirs through the Son. In fact, this is the

**special request** Elisha was asking of Elijah. Asking Elijah to “inherit a double portion of your spirit” was a direct reference to Jewish inheritance laws. The oldest son was entitled to a “double portion,” twice as much as anyone else. Elisha was asking to be considered Elijah’s spiritual firstborn. Elijah said, “If you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours.” And indeed, Elisha witnessed the **fiery departure** as Elijah was ushered into the realm of God...but his cloak of anointing was left behind.

Elisha sees Elijah ascend into the fire of God and is left the cloak, the mantle signifying he has become Elijah’s spiritual son. Hold on to your seats...here is the New Testament application. Jesus comes to a separated, broken world and trains disciples. He ascends, leaving 120 disciples to wait for his presence in the upper room. On the day of Pentecost, fire descends upon them and they are filled with the Holy Spirit. They begin preaching the gospel, the good news, the message which still calls us into God’s inheritance through Christ in the power of the Spirit. Listen to Romans 8:15-17: “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...” Now hear verses 28-29: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

There is fire at Elijah’s departure, his ascension into God’s realm. Jesus ascended and then sent the fire of the Spirit at Pentecost. Elisha was left Elijah’s mantle, a symbol of his inheritance as Elijah’s spiritual son. As Christ’s followers, we enter into his anointing and share his inheritance, the “firstborn among many brethren.”

Elisha did not live out his life in the mere memory of Elijah. He honored that memory by living in that same anointing, continuing the witness and voice of God in the land. As believers, we are not to live out our lives living in the mere memory of a past tense Savior, but, in vital union with his presence and power, **continuing the adventure** as God’s witness and voice in the earth.

Walking down the street, a man passes a house and notices a child trying to reach the doorbell. No matter how much the little guy stretches, he can't make it. The man calls out, "Let me get that for you," and he bounds onto the porch to ring the bell. "Thanks, mister," says the kid. "Now let's run." We’ve been brought into the greatest of adventures with Jesus. Now let’s run with him!