

*These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.*

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## 2 Kings 2:1-12

NRSV

Israel has split into two kingdoms: Israel (the north) and Judah (the south). At the time of our story, (850-849 BC), Ahaziah is King of Israel. The Bible tells us that only two people were sufficiently worthy to be taken up to heaven without dying: Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah. Elijah and Elisha start their journey at Gilgal, in the hill country north of Bethel. Three times (vv. 2-3, 4-5, 6) Elijah invites Elisha to travel no further: he tests Elisha, to determine whether he is truly loyal to his master. Each time, Elisha proves his loyalty, and so the two travel southward from "Gilgal" (v. 1) to "Bethel" (v. 2), then east to "Jericho" (v. 4) and "the Jordan" (v. 6). (Note that vv. 4-5 differ from vv. 2-3 only in the place name.) The "company of prophets" (vv. 3, 5, 7) are communities of followers, disciples, of Elijah; they are like monks.

Elijah's "mantle" (v. 8), his cloak, is almost part of him. As in the crossing of the Reed Sea (see Exodus 14) and the carrying of the Ark across the Jordan (Joshua 3:14-17), the waters part. In v. 9, Elijah offers Elisha a reward for his loyalty: then Elisha requests that he receive the principal ("double") share of Elijah's spirituality. (Deuteronomy 21:17 requires that the eldest son inherit a double portion of his father's possessions.) Per v. 10, Elijah cannot grant this request himself, for it is God's to give. If Elisha sees Elijah taken up, God has granted the wish. "Fire" (v. 11) is a symbol of God's presence (e.g. God appeared in the burning bush in Exodus 3:2.) V. 12a is difficult to interpret. Perhaps Elisha contrasts the chariots of God (v. 11) with those of Israel; perhaps Elisha recognizes that Elijah's spiritual strength is better security for Israel than its army. Elisha does see Elijah's departure. Tearing of clothes was an expression of grief or distress. In vv. 13-17, Elisha picks up Elijah's mantle, the symbol of spirituality. Some of the "company of prophets" search for days to find Elijah's body, but in vain. Elijah has been taken up to heaven. Elisha is his successor.

## Psalms 50:1-6

NRSV

This is a liturgy of divine judgement. God "summons" the whole earth and the "heavens" (v. 4) to witness his legal judgement of the ungodly. In Jerusalem ("Zion", v. 2) he shows himself in traditional Old Testament ways: in "fire" (v. 3) and "tempest". He will be both "judge" (v. 6) and prosecuting attorney ("testify ...", v. 7). Animal sacrifices sincerely offered are acceptable to him (v. 8), but offering sacrifices as mere ritual is not; indeed it is needless slaughter of his creatures (vv. 9-13). Reciting the Law without the intention of keeping it (v. 16) is to mock him: not obeying him, ignoring his advice, befriending thieves and "adulterers" (v. 18), slandering family members, and thinking that he is evil too (v. 22), are the grounds for God's case against the wicked, "you who forget God". They

will be destroyed, but those who "honour" (v. 23) him, who walk in his "way", will be rewarded with "salvation", prosperity.

## 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

NRSV

Paul continues to answer a letter from the Corinthian church. It appears that some have criticized him for failing to make the good news clear, or for limited success in bringing people to Christ. In v. 2 he says: "... by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God". V. 3 recalls 1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ...", who will be destroyed at the Last Day (but their conversion is still possible.) "In their case" (v. 4), the devil or *the god who is this world* (a possible translation), materialism, has so filled their minds that they cannot see that the gospel illuminates, shows, the "glory of Christ" (and, per v. 6, of God shown by Christ), Christ being the perfect "image of God" (v. 4), representation of God – and the model for the Christian's future state. In v. 5, Paul says that (contrary to what some may claim), he proclaims not himself but Jesus; he serves the church for Christ's sake whatever suffering that may entail. In quoting Genesis (the first words God speaks in the Bible) in v. 6, he points out that God began the creation process with "light", understanding. God reveals himself through history. The light of God undergirds the ministry Paul brings to the Corinthians. God's light has been experienced by people throughout the ages; the believer's transformation is in the *heart*. Those who see Jesus' face reflect his glory.

## Mark 9:2-9

NRSV

Jesus has foretold his death and resurrection, and that God's kingdom will begin soon. "... the Son of Man must ... be rejected ... and be killed, and ... rise again. He said this quite openly" (8:31-32). Then: if any want to follow him, let them renounce their self-centeredness. Those who play it safe will perish; those who give their lives for him and the gospel will be saved (8:34-35).

Now "six days" (v. 2) after Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus takes the inner circle of disciples ("Peter and James and John") up a mountain. There he is "transfigured", changed in form, metamorphosed. He appears in "dazzling white" (v. 3), a sign of God's presence (as did Moses when he had been "talking with God", Exodus 34:29). "Elijah" (v. 4) was taken up into heaven. Moses' burial place was unknown (see Deuteronomy 34:6); in late Judaism, he was also thought to be taken up. (Others point out that Elijah represents the prophets and Moses the law, the basic authority in Judaism.) Peter rejoices in this experience ("good", v. 5): it is a preview of Jesus' glorification as God's Son. He wishes to prolong the event by making "dwellings", temporary shelters as erected at the Feast of Tabernacles, a joyous festival of God's presence. V. 6 may say that he was so dumbfounded by the experience that what he said was irrational. The "cloud" (v. 7) is a symbol of God's presence. The proclamation spoken by the divine voice is like that at Jesus' baptism (see 1:11). The Son of Man is revealed to be Son of God. The vision ends "suddenly" (v. 8). Then v. 9: only when Jesus has risen will the vision make sense to others.