

## John is not Elijah

'Substitutionism' predominates in Christian churches around the world, the idea that the Church has completely replaced Israel in all of God's future plans. It is theological anti-Semitism. But to maintain that idea, its advocates are obliged to disregard Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11, several other NT texts, and much of the OT prophecies. Disregarding such a large portion of the Sacred Text can have somewhat unpleasant consequences, since the Author of the Text will not take kindly to such an attitude. Afterwards, it should come as no surprise to anyone to find that those who approach the Text with this preconceived idea tend to do nasty things to any passage that is inconvenient for them – for example, Matthew 17:10-13.

So His disciples questioned Him saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 In answer Jesus said to them: "Elijah is indeed coming first, and he will restore all things. 12 But I say to you that 'Elijah' has come already, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. Thus also the Son of the Man is about to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptizer.<sup>1</sup>

It is common to hear such people discourse on verses 12 and 13, severely disregarding verse 11. But since any doctrine should take into account all relevant texts, we can start with the source of the discussion, Malachi 4:5-6.

Behold, I will send you the prophet Elijah, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; lest I come and strike the earth with total destruction.<sup>2</sup>

In Matthew 16:28 Jesus spoke of seeing "the Son of the Man coming in His kingdom", and in the understanding of the three disciples, the Kingdom of the Messiah was linked to 'the day of Jehovah'. They understood that they had just seen a microcosm of the Kingdom, and they had seen Elijah, but they were descending the mountain back into a reality that hardly resembled the Kingdom. Hence the question, I suppose. But let us get back to the relevant texts.

The second is found in Luke 1:17—the angel Gabriel is announcing to Zechariah truths about the son he is going to have, John the Baptizer. This son would go before the Lord his God "in the spirit and power of Elijah"; and refers to Malachi 4:5-6. Faced with the old man's doubt, Gabriel declares that he was sent by God to deliver the message. Now then, would anyone have the courage to say that both the angel and God himself had the intention of deceiving the old man? If John would be Elijah himself, how could the angel say that John would act in Elijah's spirit and power, instead of being Elijah?

Now let us go to John 1:21—when priests and Levites from Jerusalem asked John if he was Elijah, he replied, "I am not". Come now, would anyone have the courage to say that John lied? If he did not lie, then he was not Elijah. Could John be mistaken about his own person and his own office? Hardly: his father had been very clear, and after a long time in the wilderness with God, he began his public ministry. Luke 3:2 clarifies that "the word of God came upon John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (the Text says "upon John", not 'to John'; he was compelled by the

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<sup>1</sup> At this point John is already dead, but in verse 11 the Lord declares that Elijah is still going to come—John performed the function for Christ's first advent that Elijah (literally) will perform for the second advent.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word here means 'total destruction', not 'curse', as in many versions. And when will there be total destruction of the planet? It will be at the end of the Millennial Messianic Kingdom. On the other hand, destruction during the 'great tribulation' will come close; it will be terribly terrible!

Word). In John 1:23 the Baptizer quotes Isaiah 40:3 as referring to himself. John neither lied nor made a mistake—he was not Elijah.

But what about Matthew 11:14—“if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come”? Jesus was praising John the Baptizer with some sayings rather difficult to understand; for example in verse 11: “among those born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptizer; but he who is least in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he”.<sup>3</sup> Verse 12 has also given commentators trouble. In verse 14, when Jesus says, “if you are willing to receive it”, it is because the matter is not transparent. Although John was still alive, he was in prison, from whence he would only emerge dead. How then could Jesus say that Elijah still had to come, if it was in fact Elijah who was in prison and would only come out dead? Now we go to Matthew 17:10-13 and Mark 9:11-13, which are parallel; only now John was in fact dead. In verse 11 (Matthew 17) Jesus declares, “Elijah is indeed coming first, and he will restore all things.” Since John was already dead, and Jesus puts the coming of Elijah in the future, then John was not Elijah. Further, John did not “restore all things”; in fact, he restored relatively little. In short: John filled the office, herald, for the first advent of Christ that Elijah himself (literally) will fill for the second advent. They are different people, with different moments.

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<sup>3</sup> Evidently, as forerunner of the Kingdom John was not part of it—the Kingdom was rejected at that time; both forerunner and King were killed—those who participate in the actual future Kingdom will be more privileged. “Born of women” excludes Adam. Men like Noah, Abraham, Moses, Daniel would be of equal standing, just not “greater”. But those who live during the Messianic Kingdom (Millennium) will be more privileged than all except Adam, because the earth will return to conditions similar to Eden.