

ELIJAH THE FORERUNNER **(Matthew 11:13-15)**

Matthew 11:13 (NKJV)

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The law and the prophets represent the whole of the Old Testament. The whole message of the OT was really preparatory and looked forward to the coming of Christ. But John was the last of these OT prophets, and as such he had the privilege to actually “**bring the message home**,” so to speak, in that no longer was the message one of anticipation, but now one of announcement that the KING is here; hence the need for repentance so that they might go into the kingdom.

“When John stepped out on the stage of history, his unique role was not just prophecy; it was announcing the fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning Christ’s First Advent.” – **William MacDonald**

“This establishes the primary function of the OT in Matthew’s Gospel: it points to Jesus and the kingdom.” – **D.A. Carson**

By the way, as a side note, what was the collective experience of the OT prophets up until John? Did they have a “cushy” life? Were they well accepted and appreciated?

Acts 7:52 (NKJV)

52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,

This is pre-kingdom experience. Why should John think he was any different? He proclaimed the “kingdom as being at hand,” but they were not there yet. What was missing? Well, it was the reality of REPENTANCE. Until Israel is repentant, the expectation is largely that of rejection and persecution that goes with it. This will be the experience of God’s people generally until the kingdom comes. In this there is consistency!

Matthew 11:14 (NKJV)

14 And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

Jesus was not saying that John the Baptist was literally “Elijah”. John had plainly said he was NOT Elijah in John 1:21. However, John did come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Luke 1:17 (NKJV)

17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

John the Baptist had an Elijah-like ministry in calling the people to repentance. If the people of Israel had responded, they would have gone into the kingdom. But you say, how can that be – because then Christ would not have gone to the cross. Well, God knew they wouldn't receive Him, and the cross was part of the plan all along.

So how can the offer of the kingdom pre-cross be legit if God knew they were going to reject Jesus as the Messiah all along?

"If Israel had accepted Christ at His first coming, would He have established the kingdom immediately, and would John the Baptist have been Elijah? The answer is yes. You say, 'How can that be?' I have an answer for you: I don't know. I only know what Jesus said, and He can do things which I cannot explain. In fact, He does a lot of things which I can't explain; I simply accept them."

– J. Vernon McGee

Clearly there are TWO "Elijah" figures in relationship to prophetic history. After the martyrdom of John the Baptist, Jesus again renewed the promise that Elijah must come first and restore all things. John did not do this, but Elijah will.

Matthew 17:11–13 (NKJV)

11 Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, **Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.**

12 But I say to you that **Elijah has come already**, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands."

13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

Prophetically, it is Elijah who comes before the Messiah to call Israel to repentance, and ultimately, he will be successful. As Jesus said, he ***"will restore all things"***. John the Baptist came in the role of Elijah but was not successful – in that sense. He experienced persecution and death.

As you put it all together – the Messiah **MUST** have an “Elijah” forerunner before He comes. That was true at His first coming, in which John the Baptist, in an Elijah-like role, called the people to repentance because the kingdom was being offered on that condition. However, the people under their religious leadership at that time rejected Jesus Christ and called for Him to be crucified.

Prior to the Second Coming of Christ, Elijah will come as the forerunner to Christ, and he will succeed in calling the nation of Israel to repentance.

Malachi 4:5–6 (NKJV)

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

6 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 a curse.”

Before the GREAT TRIBULATION – which is the second half of the Tribulation, Elijah will appear on the scene, and in repentance he will turn the hearts of the children of Israel (cf. Acts 3:21). For this reason, many of us believe Elijah will be one of the two special witnesses in the first half of the Tribulation Period as seen in Revelation 11.

To this day, the Jews, when celebrating the Passover meal, set a plate for Elijah – waiting for him to come. At some point in the meal, they will have a child go and check the door to see if Elijah has come.

But you see, they don’t understand the Messiah ultimately has **TWO** comings, and in relation to each coming He has an “Elijah” forerunner who calls the people to repentance.

When Israel is finally repentant, the Messiah will come and set up the kingdom. So, yes indeed, we are still waiting for Elijah to come and successfully call Israel to repentance. First comes Elijah the forerunner, and then comes the Messiah and His kingdom.

“There is scarcely a passage in Scripture which shows more clearly that the kingdom was being offered to Israel at this time. Its coming was contingent upon one thing: Israel’s receiving it by genuine repentance. ...

[John] fulfilled Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, but not Malachi 4:5-6 because the latter passage is dependent upon the [repentant] response of the people.” – **Stanley Toussaint**

Matthew 11:15 (NKJV)

15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

In context, the point is that John the Baptist, with an Elijah-like ministry, was indeed the prophesied forerunner going before the Messiah, showing that indeed Jesus is the prophesied Messiah.

The formula: “***He who has ears to hear, let him hear***” is used 15 times by the Lord – seven times in the gospels in relation to His earthly ministry (cf. Lk. 8:8; Mt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mk. 4:23; 7:16; Lk. 14:35); and eight times in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 2-3; 13:9). Only Jesus used this language denoting His voice of authority. It denotes a solemn warning that one had better pay close attention to the message being given because it is all important.

This phrase “***He who has ears to hear, let him hear***” puts the emphasis on being responsible to respond. It thus emphasizes human responsibility and the need to personally appropriate what is being said.

Here is the bottom line: If John the Baptist did indeed fulfill the Elijah-type prophecies concerning the forerunner Elijah, then Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah!

What are the odds that anyone could ever, just as a matter of happenstance, have a forerunner go before them in the spirit and power of Elijah? What are the odds that it could happen just at the right time with a national audience like John the Baptist had? What are the odds that it just happens to align with prophecy given 700 and 400 years in advance, as seen in Isaiah and Malachi, respectively? What are the odds that following this forerunner, a man with unparalleled signs and wonders ministry would come on the scene? What are the odds that this could all just be orchestrated by man? The odds are ZERO!

Scholars estimate that Christ fulfilled at least 109 specific OT prophecies at His first coming. Statisticians claim that the odds of one person fulfilling just 8 of these prophecies is one in 10 to the 17th power. That is a 10 with 17 zeros after it (i.e., 100,000,000,000,000,000).

The equivalent of this would be to fill the state of Texas with 2 feet of silver dollars. Mark one of them with an X and then thoroughly mix. The odds of having a blindfolded man pick out the X-marked silver dollar is one in 10 to the 17th power. Yet Jesus fulfilled not merely 8 specific prophecies, but over a hundred of them!

Only God could orchestrate the many-faceted prophetic details that found fulfillment in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the reality of John the Baptist fulfilling the forerunner prophecies to the letter, as found in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, is one of the major pieces of evidence showing emphatically that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!