

### Jesus' Conversation with Peter, James and John

#### Mark 9:9-13

Mark 9:9-13 – *“Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.*

*<sup>11</sup> And they asked Him, saying, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” <sup>12</sup> Then He answered and told them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? <sup>13</sup> But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him.”*

#### Background Notes

“The mountain” (v9) is most likely Mt. Hermon, the mountain where the Lord was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James, and John. As they came down the mountainside, the Lord told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the resurrection! Why did the Lord ask them not to tell anyone until after His resurrection? Think it through. If they had tried to share this experience with others immediately after the Transfiguration, the people’s incorrect ideas about the Lord’s Messiah-ship would just be continued – the idea that a kingdom of glory was about to be set up, and that Jesus was about to set Himself up as an earthly king. Even the disciples were finding it hard to drop these popular notions about the Messiah, so Peter, James and John were asked to wait until after the resurrection before they shared this amazing experience.

The three disciples wondered about the Lord’s statement about the rising from the dead (v10). The idea of a general resurrection from the dead was certainly part of Jewish thought coming from the Old Testament, so it was not a foreign idea for the disciples. But the idea of a resurrection out from among the dead was new to them.

In verse 11, they asked about Elijah: *“Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”* The fact that they had just seen Elijah at the Mount of Transfiguration triggered this question. Their idea of Elijah coming to set things straight before the coming of the Messiah comes from a prophecy in Malachi 4:5, *“Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”*

Peter, James, and John wanted to know how this prophecy fit in. After all, they had just seen Elijah. Did that mean that he was now coming to restore all things? And if he was, why had he just disappeared and wasn’t out there preaching? Furthermore, if Elijah was going to set things straight, why did the Messiah have to suffer and die (as the Lord had related

to them), and then rise from the dead? All these questions were in the disciples' minds as they came down from the Mount of Transfiguration.

Our Lord's answer was threefold.

- a. First, Elijah would come and restore all things in accordance with the prophecy in Malachi.
- b. Second, although Elijah would come and restore all things, the Son of Man would still have to suffer because that was also prophesied. Most likely our Lord had the suffering passages of Isaiah in mind, and maybe Psalm 22 as well. Listen to the well-known words of Elijah 53:3-7:

*“He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.  
Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

- c. Third, Elijah had already come. The fact that parts one and three of the answer, that Elijah would come and restore all things and yet Elijah had already come, will be explained in our one doctrinal point.

## **Doctrinal Point**

### **Elijah has come - and is coming.**

What did the Lord mean by this double answer? The parallel account in Matthew 17 helps us. Matthew 17:11-13, *“Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. 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.” Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”* So John the Baptist who came on the scene to prepare the way for Jesus as Messiah was the “Elijah who had come.” John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, and with the same kind of ministry as Elijah.

Mark 9:13 says that they did to John the Baptist exactly what was done to Elijah. As the nation for the most part did not receive Elijah, so the nation for the most part did not receive John the Baptist. And as wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel tried to get rid of Elijah, so wicked King Herod and his wife Herodias planned the death of John the Baptist.

The Elijah prophecy of Malachi 4:5 was at least partially fulfilled with John the Baptist. But the Lord also said Elijah *is coming*. Elijah will come. What did He mean? Before the Lord returns to this earth to set up His Kingdom, another figure will come in the spirit and power of Elijah to denounce sin and call people to repentance - just as Elijah did in the Old Testament and just as John the Baptist did at the first coming of Christ.

This prophet-to-come *may* be Elijah himself. Revelation 11 mentions two witnesses who will come in the future, before the Lord comes back to this earth. Revelation 11:6 says (in reference to these two witnesses), “*These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy.*” This certainly reminds us of Elijah. So one of these two witnesses may very well be Elijah. Or it may be one who comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. Most likely, therefore, Revelation 11 is the future fulfillment of the Malachi prophecy, and that is what the Lord had in mind when He said, “*Elijah will come and restore all things.*”

Just as there are two parts to the Lord’s statement about Elijah - that he *has come* and he *is coming*, there are also two parts to the fulfillment of the Malachi prophecy: that Elijah came as John the Baptist, and yet he’s still to come in the future. This double fulfillment to that prophecy can be looked at in several ways.

One way is called *partial fulfillment*. John the Baptist partially fulfilled the Malachi prophecy, and the “Elijah to come in the future” will completely fulfill that prophecy.

Another way to look at it is *typical fulfillment* - that John the Baptist was a *type*, or picture, or illustration, of the one who will come in the future and fulfill that prophecy.

I prefer to call this particular situation *dependent fulfillment*. What does that mean? In Matthew 11:13-14 our Lord said this about Elijah: “*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.*” In other words, if the nation of Israel had received the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and King, and if they had received the Kingdom at that time, then indeed John the Baptist would have been the fulfillment of the Malachi prophecy. But that was *dependent* on the nation’s receiving the Lord as King and as their Messiah. Because they did not, the prophecy of Malachi about the coming of Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord is yet to be fulfilled. Elijah has come - and is yet to come!

## Practical Applications

### 1. There’s a right time and a wrong time for us to share mountaintop experiences.

Peter, James, and John had a tremendous mountaintop experience - but they were told not to share it until after the resurrection. In this case it was better for them to wait because people would get the wrong idea what the Lord’s Messiah-ship and program were all about. Thus they were to wait to tell others about it until after the resurrection.

In the same way, there is a right time and a wrong time for *us* to relate our “mountaintop experiences.” We love to share our spiritual highs and our mountaintop experiences with others, but we need to be careful when and where we share these experiences. Sometimes we need to use restraint because unspiritual people wouldn’t understand. The Lord said in Matthew 7:6, “*Don’t throw your pearls before swine,*” and that can certainly apply to your spiritual experiences. Other times we need to use restraint because of our own pride. Whenever we have a mountaintop experience, there’s an unfortunate tendency to think we’re more special or more spiritual than other believers. Sometimes we even play the “can you top this” game with other Christians. We need to be careful.

In 2 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul shared a mountaintop experience, when he was caught up into paradise. Talk about mountaintop experiences! But the apostle Paul was given a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him from spiritual pride. He only shared his experience fourteen years later, when he was able to share with control and understanding. There is a right time and a wrong time for us to relate our mountaintop experiences.

## **2. Let’s bring our biblical questions directly to the Lord.**

In verse 11, Peter, James, and John did the right thing: “*They asked Him, saying, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”*” They had a question, and they brought it directly to the Lord. They should have done this with their question in verse 10, when they were questioning amongst themselves what the “rising from the dead” meant. If they had brought that directly to the Lord, I’m sure the Lord would have answered that question. They brought their question about Elijah to the Lord, and the Lord answered.

We, too, should bring our biblical questions to the Lord. What do you do with the questions that you have concerning Scripture? Do you ask everyone but the Lord? Too often we don’t bring our questions about the Bible to the Lord. We’re too ashamed, or we’re too proud to admit that we don’t know - or we ask everybody but the Lord!

It’s not wrong to do research and ask others our biblical questions. In fact, many times that’s how God answers us. But let’s remember we can go straight to the Lord with our biblical questions. He wants us to have answers. He doesn’t want us to be wandering around spiritually, questioning the Bible. He wants to give us answers.

At one time I had a number of questions about the charismatic movement. Finally, I went straight to the Lord and asked Him those questions, and the Lord answered me by placing me in a situation where I was surrounded by many charismatic Christians. I had the opportunity to see first-hand some of the answers to many of my questions.

The Lord wants to give us answers. Why do we grope around for answers? Let’s bring our biblical questions directly to the Lord!