

## Episode #828 Matthew 17 Part 2-Elijah Comes First

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord had just been transfigured before Peter, James, and John on top of a high mountain, where they saw Him speaking with Moses and Elijah. When Peter suggested that they build a base of operations for all three of them, making Moses and Elijah equal with Christ, a cloud of light covered them and the voice told them that Jesus is God’s beloved Son. After they could see again, they saw Jesus only. Now, on the way down the mountain, the Lord is teaching them based on this.

III. Elijah Comes First. Matthew 17:9-13.

A. Verse 9. He commanded them, leaving them no other option.

1. It is important that this tells us this was a vision. Visions are not made of actual objects. John was the only gospel author who was present here, and he does not mention this in his gospel. Peter, then, is the only one present who talks about it, and in II Peter 1:16-18 he tells us that they saw the power and Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ. This tells us this was a vision of the far future, when Moses and all God’s saints will have long been raised from the dead. No explanation of Moses’ presence without resurrection is necessary. Consider that in that future day, His accomplishment in His death and resurrection is what Moses and Elijah want to talk about!
2. By His orders all testimony is stopped, just as in 16:20 regarding the fact that He is Jesus the Christ.
3. From the dead is *ek nekron* or “out of dead (ones)” or dead people. This was a new phrase to them, and Mark 9:10 tells us they questioned with one another what “rising out of dead (ones)” should mean. The teaching of the Old Testament is that all the dead of Israel would rise together for God’s kingdom, Ezekiel 37:11-14, though the rebels would then be purged out, Ezekiel 20:38.

B. Verse 10. They said this because of Malachi 4:5-6. His coming is before the great and awe-inspiring day of the LORD, and Jesus Christ’s Parousia starts during the day of the LORD, so they were correct.

C. Verse 11. “Indeed” is the Greek *men*, meaning “on the one hand.” Elijah’s coming is put in the future. There will yet be a time after God intervenes and injects Himself into the affairs of mankind when Elijah will appear, II Kings 2:1, 11. According to Bullinger, “restore” means not just the same, but better. It is used for the healing of the man with the withered hand and one of the blind men He healed. The restoration of the kingdom to Israel in Acts 1:6 is this word. The author hopes to be restored to the Thessalonians in Hebrews 13:19. Elijah will restore all things: every Israelite to his tribe, all of the borders of the tribes, the borders of the land, the temple, the priesthood, etc. Perhaps his long sojourn in heaven has been to prepare him for this.

D. Verse 12. “But” is “on the other hand.”

1. We know that John was not Elijah, since he said in John 1:21, “I am not” (Elijah). Some want to say that John must be wrong and the Lord must be right, since He knows better than any man. I do not at all agree with this method of interpretation: taking two passages, putting them in the ring

together, and then declaring the passage you want to believe as the winner and the other passage as the loser! All Scripture is true, whether you like it or not, and all true interpretations fit all Scripture. This idea is to deny John's status as a prophet, for surely a prophet would know who he was. Elijah is a grown man living in heaven, and could not be born as a baby. Reincarnation is not a Biblical doctrine. There is only one way to interpret this: that John was one in the character of Elijah, AN Elijah, for the typical definite article (used in Greek before names) does not appear here. (Note: this is to say this interpretation is allowable, but it is not proof, since the definite article does not occur in verse 11 either.) John was always going to be an Elijah since before his conception, Luke 1:17. He is not the first to have the Spirit and power of Elijah, II Kings 2:9-14. As for Elisha's "double portion," Elijah worked 8 miracles, Elisha 16! Elisha shared the spirit and power Elijah had in his first mission on earth. John shared the spirit and power he will yet display in his next earthly mission in the kingdom of God: compare Luke 1:17 to Malachi 4:5-6. A man came who had the same spirit as Elijah to turn men's hearts to God, and yet look what the wicked leaders of Israel did to him! Yet John could not have the same spirit as Elijah by doing something Elijah never did, but was only predicted to do. Elijah must fulfill this prophecy. Elijah will fulfill this prophecy. This will take place in the premillennial kingdom of God.

2. "Know" means recognize. They will demonstrate their refusal to recognize him as what he truly was in Matthew 21:24-27.
3. "Wished" is the Greek *thelo*, willed, meaning will in the sense of desire. The religious leaders rejected him, whereas Herod imprisoned and murdered him.
4. Ezekiel was called "son of man" many times in the Old Testament. This is a favorite phrase of Matthew, who uses it 32 times, Mark 15 times, Luke 25 times (and 1 in Acts), and John 11 times (and 2 in Revelation). Matthew, on the other hand, uses Son of God 8 times, Mark 3, Luke 6 (and 2 in Acts), and John 10 (and 8 in I John, 1 in Revelation). Matthew is presenting Christ as the King of kings, thus the representative or Son of Man is an appropriate title. It also makes sense that "Son of God" is second-most in Matthew. John makes sense as the most for "Son of God" since he presents Christ particularly as God.
5. "Suffer" is the same word as in His prediction of his sufferings at Jerusalem in Matthew 16:21.

E. Verse 13. John did not restore all things as Christ said in verse 11, nor even very much. He did not do a work of such magnitude that the Lord will not need to come and strike the earth with a curse, as Malachi said in Malachi 4:5. Elijah will still literally come before the second coming of Jesus Christ and will do these things.

IV. Conclusion: The transfiguration was actually a vision of Christ's future Parousia, when probably He will be on that very mountain with Moses and Elijah. The disciples wanted to know why the scribes said Elijah must come first, and Christ confirmed that he will! But an Elijah had already come, John the Baptizer, and they rejected him. John did not fulfill the prophecy, but only did a similar work. The prophecy will yet come about in the future, as all true prophecies of the Lord must do. May that day come soon!