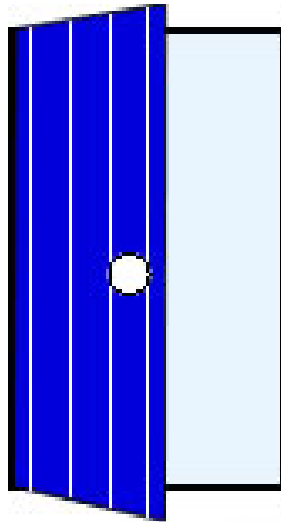


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Malachi

THE COMING OF ELIJAH

Malachi 4: 5-6

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." We should notice the connection between Moses (V4) and Elijah (V5). Both were on the mount of transfiguration. It was through **Moses** that the covenant was **made**: it was through **Elijah** that the covenant was **restored** (1 Kings 18: 30-31 etc). Elijah called the people **back to God**.

The coming of "Elijah the prophet" raises some interesting questions. For example, was this prophecy actually fulfilled through the preaching of John the Baptist, or does it still await fulfilment? If the prophecy has been partially fulfilled in John, but awaits complete fulfilment, are we to expect Elijah himself, and does the Bible tell us anything more about his coming? We will endeavour to address these questions.

A) Was this prophecy fulfilled by John the Baptist?

Quite clearly, this merits careful consideration, and we must notice the following New Testament passages:

i) John was certainly not Elijah! (We do not believe in reincarnation!). "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, **I am not**", John 1: 19-21.

(ii) Whilst John was not literally Elijah, there was a correspondence between John and Elijah. The angel made this clear to Zacharias: "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the **spirit and power of Elias**", Luke 1: 16-17. See also Matthew 11: 4. "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if ye will receive it, **this is Elias, which was for to come**." John was "Elias, which was for to come", because of the similarity of his ministry. Like Elijah, he called people back to God. Through his preaching, men and women were convicted of sin, brought to repentance, and prepared for Messiah's coming.

(iii) The Lord Jesus certainly referred to John in this way. See Mark 9: 11-13, "And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that **Elias must first come**? And he answered and told them, **Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things**; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things and be set at nought. But I say unto you, that **Elias is indeed come**, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him." See also

Matthew 17: 10. See also Matthew 17: 10. John certainly **did** "make ready a people prepared for the Lord": see Acts 19: 4, "Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they **should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.**"

We conclude **(a)** That the words, "**Elias is come already**" and, "this is **Elias which was for to come**", refer to John the Baptist's preaching "in **the spirit and power of Elias.**" **(b)** That the words, "If ye will receive it" do not mean, 'if you receive John the Baptist', but, 'if ye will understand and receive what I am saying.'

B) Was this prophecy COMPLETELY fulfilled by John the Baptist?

In this connection, we must carefully consider Matthew 17: 11-13 (and Mark 9: 11-13): "Elijah truly **shall** first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come **already**.....Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." This *could* suggest that whilst the prophecy has been partially fulfilled, it has not yet been completely fulfilled. In favour of this, we could argue that it is not realistic to suggest that the prophecy was completely fulfilled in John the Baptist, since this would imply a period of 2,000 years between his mission and "the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." We could also argue that the ministry of John preceeded 'the day of grace', rather than "the day of the Lord", and therefore the prophecy must await future fulfilment.

Against this, however, it could be argued that there is a precedent in this very prophecy for a gap of two thousand years between the sending of "Elias" and the "great and terrible day of the Lord." See 3: 1-4, where reference is made to John the Baptist: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." Clearly, there is a two thousand year period between the preaching of John the Baptist, and the coming of the Lord Jesus in the described manner, when He will appear "like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap"

C) Does the passage refer to John the Baptist AND Elijah?

In support of this suggestion, we could argue that events prior to the "great and terrible day of the Lord", have cast their shadow before them in the preaching and call to repentance by John the Baptist, and on that basis, we can expect another preacher in the mould of Elijah, like John the Baptist, if not Elijah himself. M.C.Unger, who espouses this view, suggests that he will be 'a great prophetic witness in Elijah's *official, not his personal capacity*, in the sense the John the

Baptist was an Elijah in spirit. (Luke 1: 16-17).' Unger also notes that it cannot possibly be Elijah himself, since that would involve 'a glorified person with a ministry amongst men *before* Christ's advent in glory.'

We should notice, however, that the other prophetic scriptures are silent on the subject, unless he is one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. But the fact that the whole world will rejoice at their death, strongly suggests that they will not "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers!" If there is to be a future 'Elijah', he could be a powerful preacher amongst the 144,000 witnesses described in Revelation 7, but this is pure speculation.

As a supplementary question, if Elijah *is* one of the two witnesses, who is the other witness? Is it Moses, bearing in mind the character of the ministry described in the passage? Or is it Enoch? If it is Enoch, then the two witnesses are the two men in the Old Testament who went to heaven without dying. In which case, God will send them back miraculously, and then take them back after their bodies had lain for three and a half days in Jerusalem. We then have to ask *when* God will send them back to earth. Will it be immediately before their three and half-year ministry, or at or some earlier time?

Bearing in mind then that the prophetic scriptures give no further information, the suggestion that Elijah, or another preacher of the same stature, will literally exercise a ministry on earth immediately prior to "the great and terrible day of the Lord", raises more questions than it answers! To the contrary, there is certainly a similarity between Malachi 3: 1-4 and 4: 5-6, and we can justifiably conclude **(a)** that in both cases, no reference is made to the interval between the first and second advents of Christ, and **(b)** that in both cases, the preacher is John the Baptist. It is significant that John himself made *no reference to the interval*: see Luke 3: 16-17, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I cometh.....He will thoroughly purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into His garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." There seems, therefore, good reason to conclude (without taking an entrenched view!) that Malachi 4: 5-6 was fulfilled by John the Baptist. To quote, again, the Lord Jesus, "Elias is come *already*.....Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of *John the Baptist*", Matthew 17: 11-13. One further question remains:

D) How does the passage apply to John the Baptist?

i) "He shall turn the heart of the *fathers to the children*, and the heart of the *children to their fathers*." The way in which this verse is quoted in the New Testament suggests that this reconciliation will take place because people will turn from sin and disobedience. "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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", Luke 1: 16-17. As a

result of John's preaching, there would be people **united** in their readiness to receive Christ. See, again, Acts 19: 4. (Note that one effect of the Lord's ministry was to **separate** families. "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child.....for I am come to set a man at variance against his father.....", Matthew 10: 21, 35-36).

ii) "He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, **lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.**" This is true **now**. This world would have been judged long ago, were it not for the presence of believers. This will be true in the future. See Matthew 24: 21-22, "For then shall be great tribulation.....And except those days should be shortened, there shall no flesh be saved: but for **the elect's sake** those days shall be shortened", Matthew 24: 21-22. Compare Genesis 18: 23-25, "And Abraham drew near and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

The Old Testament concludes with reference to **"a curse."** The New Testament concludes with reference to **"no more curse"**, Revelation 22: 3. In fact, the New Testament concludes with reference to divine grace. "The **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen", 22: 21. The reason for the change from "curse" to "grace" lies in Galatians 3: 13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being **made a curse for us** for it is written, **Cursed** is every one that hangeth on a tree." The Old Testament ends with "Lest **I come** and smite the earth with a curse." The New Testament ends with, "Surely **I come** quickly", with the response, "Even so, **come**, Lord Jesus", Revelation 22: 20.