

## THE DILEMMA CONCERNING ELIJAH (Mk. 9:9-13)

Mk. 9:9 And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup> And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. <sup>11</sup> And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.

Peter, James, and John were in a quandary, - they could not come to terms with what Jesus had spoken about when He mentioned He would suffer and be rejected and killed. They, of course, had heard Him say He would rise again (Mk. 8:31) but that did not 'register on' them because they *could not* 'come to terms' with the whole subject of Him having to die. It was absolutely repulsive ... and it didn't 'tie in' with what they had been taught by their Jewish teachers concerning the Messiah.

Then, on the mountain where they met Moses and Elijah in their glorified forms ... and they too were talking to Jesus about His death which would take place in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31), - it was as certain as that (!), - ... the disciples had a terrible time trying to accept and understand it. ... We have to say, we would not have found it any easier to understand. If we had been there and saw the *glory* of the Lord Jesus, *we* also would have had a problem believing such terrible events were facing Him.

As far as the disciples were concerned, they were brought up believing glory, power, and authority were associated with the Messiah ... not defeat and death. ... He will conquer His enemies, He will bring salvation to the Jews, He will promote Israel to supremacy above the nations, the whole world will be blessed through Him and His people ... but it was a horrendous and a frightening thought to give *any* credibility to what Jesus was prophesying.

Yes, of course they loved Jesus ... and it's not that they did not want to believe Him ... and they did not want anything terrible to happen to Him ... but they were thinking of themselves too, and, - the way they saw it, - the hope of their nation lay in the Messiah. ... Mk. 9:9 And as they came down from the mountain, ... what they saw had deeply affected them, and they were walking along, very *deep* in their own thoughts ... he [*Jesus*] charged them [*Peter, James, and John*] that they should tell no man what things they had seen [*on the mountain of transfiguration*], till the Son of man were risen from the dead. ... He commanded them under no circumstances to tell anyone what had happened on the mountain ... not to even to the rest of the disciples ... until Jesus would be raised from the dead.

Imagine ‘holding in’ such a *secret* as that! Imagine having seen something so outstanding and magnificent as what they saw and not being able to discuss it outside them three selves! They cannot wait to get down the mountain to tell about their experience ... and then Jesus commands them *not* to say a word to anyone ... *not anyone!*

How could you cope?! How could you *not* tell someone ... not even about the resurrection! ... Why not? ... Think about it ... If they had come down the mountain and told *everyone* what they had heard and saw, there would have been a mighty furore among the people to crown Jesus King and receive Him as the Messiah. But, that would have been *wrong*, for it wasn’t the right time because before Jesus would become their Messiah He had to **Mk. 8:31** ... *suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again* ... That is how God had structured His plan. First and foremost, - at this particular stage ... more important that the establishment of a Kingdom ... - was the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross for His people ... *That took priority!*

The Gospel is not about how many people Jesus healed, or helped overcome certain social issues, or about the Jews being freed from the Romans. It is not about people recognising Jesus on the basis of what He could do for them on a national level. The Gospel is that Jesus would die on the cross for them, and rise again ... **Mt. 1:21** ... *thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins* ... and the three disciples were ordered to say nothing about what happened on the mountain until that took place, - Jesus died and rose again ... And *then*, - when the Holy Spirit would come on the Day of Pentecost, ... *that’s when* they were allowed to tell it, - when Peter would stand up and preach in front of the crowds in Jerusalem, **Acts 2:32** *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. ... 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ* ... when the Gospel story of Jesus dying and rising again was *completed* ... *that’s when* the Gospel was to be preached! ... You see, the Gospel is not what *we* can do for God, but the Gospel is what *He* has done for us. ... Making Jesus the King of the Jews at that time was not the priority because *first of all* He had to **Mk. 8:31** *suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

But then, if they were not to say anything about it, why did Jesus have them there to witness it? He had them there simply to fix their faith and to confirm the statement of Peter concerning Christ as the Son of the living God (Mk. 8:29). Previously, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had explained how Peter had reached that conclusion, **Mt. 16:17** And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. *Then*, at Caesarea Philippi, the glory and majesty of the Lord Jesus had been revealed to Peter by the Father ... but, on the mountain, *they* had actually *seen* and *witnessed for themselves* His glory!

So, the reason they are told to say nothing is because they had nothing really substantial about *the Gospel* yet to say ... not until Jesus died and rose again. ... And strangely enough, they did what they were told, **Lk. 9:36** ... they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

You could now imagine them walking along with all these things going through their minds ... wanting to ask questions, and yet not really sure whether they should or not. ... We could see them looking at each other ... "Go on, *you* ask a wee bit more!" ... **10** And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one *with another* what the rising from the dead should mean.

Now obviously they understood what 'rising from the dead' meant for they had seen it, **Mt. 10:5** These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: **6** But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. **7** And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. **8** Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead ... **11:4** Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John [*the Baptist*] again those things which ye do hear and see: **5** The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up. ... So, it was more than raising people from the dead they were asking about.

And they would also have known the Scriptures ... such as how Job had declared, **Job. 19:26** And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God ... and how Daniel had prophesied resurrection in chapter twelve ... So they did not have a problem with the resurrection of the dead ... but where they *did* have real difficulty was about how it related to Jesus, and how He, - *the Messiah*, - could *possibly* be put to death in order to rise again. ... And this takes over their minds ... and they can't shake it for it is a worry that would not go away!

But, since they were not allowed to mention it to anyone else, the only Person they could speak to about it was Jesus ... so they *had* to say something, - they were ‘*bursting*’ to find out, **11** And *they [Peter, James, and John]* asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? .. The scribes were the teachers of the Old Testament who taught, - and rightly so, - that Elijah had to come before the Messiah, **Mal. 4:5** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: **6** 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.

In ancient times a king or a ruler would not enter a town unannounced for it was part of the ceremony they would be preceded by a forerunner, for example, **Mt. 25:1** Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. **2** And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. **3** They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: **4** But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. **5** While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. **6** And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. ... The ‘cry’ was made by the forerunner to announce the approach of the bridegroom. Similarly, Malachi prophesied that before the coming of the Messiah, **Mal. 3:1** 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 ... **4:5** I will send you Elijah the prophet.

So, Elijah would come to announce the arrival of the Messiah? ... Okay ... the disciples were thinking this through, - they were grappling with their thoughts, and what they had been taught in the synagogue ... If Jesus is the Messiah, and this is Him, - He has come, - so, where is *Elijah*?! ... In fact, there is no ‘if’ about for they *know* Jesus is the Messiah ... so, where is *Elijah*?! ... **12** And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things ... Elijah will indeed come first, and he will restore everything ... Yes, right, we believe that, but ... *how*? ... Well, Jesus was confirming the Scripture to them ... The prophecy of Malachi is absolutely correct ... Elijah is coming, **Mal. 4:5** ... *before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD* ... And he will bring the people back to repentance, and he will prepare them for the arrival of the Messiah to establish His Kingdom and reign the earth from Jerusalem.

So Jesus, *where’s Elijah*? Jesus, You tell us You are soon going to Jerusalem to suffer and to die ... *where’s Elijah*?! ... Do you see what was happening

though? They were inadvertently veering off the main subject, - Jesus was speaking about Himself, but they go off at a tangent and change to subject to Elijah ... and even though the subject of where to, and when, and how Elijah would come was important, the *more* important aspect was not about Elijah, but about Jesus and His death and resurrection! And that is why the Lord said what He said, **12 And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things ...** He didn't stop there though, for Elijah was not the main issue, and so Jesus continued ... **and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. ...** The main concern for you disciples at this time is not Elijah, but the more immediate and pressing issue is how you deal with the news of My death and resurrection ... Don't wander away from it! Focus on the *priority* and how the Son of man, - that's Me, Jesus told them, - and how I will suffer many things and be rejected ... treated with utter contempt, and then I will be raised up again from the dead.

He was saying to them to go back and look at what the Psalmist wrote in such places as Ps. 22 and 69, or the details of His death in Is. 53 and Zech. 12:10, **they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, or in the Book of Lamentations, 1:12 Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.**

The disciples were asking, "How can You be Messiah if Elijah has not come yet?" ... And He answered them with another question, "How can I be the Christ, the Messiah, if I don't die in your place?!"

... What about the prophecy concerning Elijah? Well, take it simply ... before Christ's return this prophecy of Malachi will be fulfilled, **3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me ... 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD ...** That is what it says, so that is how it will be.

Has Jesus died? Yes, of course He has. Did He actually physically *really* die? Yes, of course He did. Has Jesus risen again? Yes, of course He has. Did He actually physically *really* rise again from the dead? Yes, of course He did. ... Well, since those parts of Biblical prophecy have been fulfilled literally, there is no reason to doubt the reference to Elijah will also be literally fulfilled ... Perhaps he will be one of the two witnesses, as referred to in Rev. 11? ... I don't know, and speculation could lead along a wrong path ... and speculation was what had gripped these three disciples.

On the other hand, though, Jesus added, **Mk. 9:13** 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. ... What does He mean now?!! ... There might have been a slight dose of exasperation among the three disciples! ... If they were confused before, they are absolutely bewildered now!

So Jesus did what He had often done on previous occasions. He saw they were perplexed, - it was all too much for them to take in, - ... so He brought it down to their level, **Mk. 9:13** 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. ... Within this context, Jesus was obviously referring to John the Baptist, for that is how He could help them understand what He was saying ... and the passage in Mark has to be studied in relation to the passages in Matthew and Luke ... Also, John the Baptist's father, - prior to John the Baptist's conception, - had been told, **Lk. 1:13** Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. **14** And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. **15** For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and *he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost*, even from his mother's womb. ... John the Baptist was the forerunner ... the one who announced the first coming of the Messiah.

At that is what happened for down by the River Jordan, the Jewish leaders came from Jerusalem to examine him, **Jn. 1:22** Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? **23** He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias [*Is. 40:3*]. ... John the Baptist rightly saw himself as this 'voice crying in the wilderness' ... **29** The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. ... **36** ... Behold the Lamb of God!

However, he was not the literal Elijah reincarnated or anything else for that is what John the Baptist denied in **Jn. 1:21**, And they asked him, ... Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. ... And yet, he came in the spirit and power of Elijah. That is what Jesus was referring to in **Mt.11:7** And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? **8** But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. **9** But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. **10** For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I

send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. **11** Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12** And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. **13** For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. **14** And *if ye will receive it, this is Elias*, which was for to come. **15** He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. ... If you want to believe it within this immediate context, and if it helps you to understand and make it clearer for you, then John the Baptist is a *type* of ‘Elijah’, ... he is a *preview* of the Elijah who will come as the forerunner of the Messiah, prior to the ‘great and dreadful day of the Lord’ (cf. Mal. 4:5), yet in the future.

Hypothetically, - and we are ‘talking *ifs*’, - *if* the people had accepted John the Baptist and his message ... and *if* they had also accepted Jesus as the Messiah, John would have indeed fulfilled that Elijah prophecy ... *But* the people hadn’t so, therefore, it is not relevant for had they accepted John the Baptist and his message and had they accepted Jesus, there would have been no cross and no salvation. ... What our Lord was saying here is that John the Baptist pointed to the one who will come at the end of the age in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Look at what Jesus said again, **13** 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 [*i.e. Elijah*]. ... King Ahab and Queen Jezebel made Elijah’s life a misery (I Kings 19), and King Herod did the same with John the Baptist ... in fact, what King Herod did was worse for he put John the Baptist to death, - he beheaded him. ... And Jesus was saying, they wanted to kill John the Baptist, and they did ... and they want to kill Me, and they will.

And what the Lord Jesus is doing is verifying, reiterating, and affirming He has to suffer and die, and be resurrected ... and He will come again ... and Elijah will be His forerunner, His announcer, and the Kingdom will be established. ... The death, the resurrection, the coming glory, **Is. 9:6** For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. **7** Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. ... **Micah 5:2** But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. **3** Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth

hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. <sup>4</sup> And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

That is how it will be. I cannot say I understand every detail, - just like the disciples didn't understand every detail either, - and yet, Jesus showed them sufficient of these things that they would believe and accept His word without question. It is not a 'blind faith' with which we believe the things we cannot understand but it is the faith God has given us by the Holy Spirit to receive. ... Remember what the voice of the Father from Heaven declared, **Mk. 9:7** *This is my beloved Son: hear him.* ... You have to listen. You have to take it in. You have to receive what I am telling you! ... There is no salvation without the cross and the resurrection ... and the disciples needed to understand that, and they also needed to know God had it all within His plan.

Paul wrote, **I Cor. 1:23** *we preach Christ crucified* ... and we love the preaching of the cross because that is where Jesus died for our sins. If there had been no cross, there would have been no salvation, and there would have been no pardon from sin. There would have been no Saviour ... But Jesus died on the cross to be our Redeemer, and He *purchased* us back by the shedding of His own precious blood. And because of the victory of the death and resurrection God's only-begotten Son, we are looking forward to His return, and being with Him forever. ... And that was the crux of the message the Lord Jesus was teaching His disciples here. ... Despite their inability to understand it completely, - every little detail, - they were to believe, - as *we* are to believe that all that He did at Calvary, He did for us. ... And that is the confidence upon which we make our profession of faith ... that Jesus Christ is Lord (I Cor. 12:3). Amen.