

Luke 9:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again.

Analysis

They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again—The disciples report the same speculation Herod heard (vv. 7-8): John the Baptist resurrected, Elijah returned, or an ancient prophet risen. All three proposals recognize supernatural power at work but fall short of Jesus's true identity. Each category—prophet, forerunner, revenant—is inadequate.

The assessment "John the Baptist" acknowledges Jesus's prophetic boldness and moral authority but misses His messianic identity. "Elijah" recognizes eschatological significance (Malachi 4:5-6 promised Elijah before the Messiah) but mistakes the forerunner for the Messiah Himself—Jesus later identifies John as the Elijah figure (Matthew 11:14). "One of the old prophets risen" grants extraordinary status but limits Jesus to the prophetic tradition rather than recognizing Him as the culmination of all prophecy, the Word made flesh (Hebrews 1:1-2). The people's opinions, though respectful and recognizing divine activity, demonstrate that human reason alone cannot grasp the Incarnation. Only divine revelation enables correct confession (Matthew 16:17: "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven").

Historical Context

First-century Jewish messianic expectation was diverse and often confused. The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal expectations of multiple eschatological figures—a prophet

like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), a priestly Messiah from Aaron's line, and a kingly Messiah from David's line. Elijah's return was widely anticipated based on Malachi 4:5-6. Some expected resurrection of ancient worthies at the messianic age. Jesus's ministry confounded these categories because He combined prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles in one person while transcending them all as God incarnate. The confusion reflects humanity's tendency to fit divine revelation into pre-existing frameworks rather than allowing God to redefine categories.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Why do all the popular opinions about Jesus's identity, though recognizing supernatural power, fall short of the truth, and what does this teach about the limits of human reason in knowing God?
2. How do contemporary attempts to redefine Jesus (great teacher, moral example, revolutionary) parallel the first-century categories that recognized His greatness but missed His deity?
3. What role does divine revelation play in correct confession of Christ, and how does this challenge reliance on intellectual investigation alone?

Interlinear Text

οἱ δὲ ἀποκριθέντες εἶπον, Ἰωάννην τὸν βαπτιστὴν
G3588 **They** **answering** **said** **John** G3588 **the Baptist**
G1161 G611 G2036 G2491 G910

ἄλλοι δὲ Ἠλίαν ἄλλοι δὲ ὅτι προφήτης τις τῶν
others **They** **say Elias** **others** **They** **say that** **prophets** **one** G3588
G243 G1161 G2243 G243 G1161 G3754 G4396 G5100

ἀρχαίων ἀνέστη
of the old **is risen again**
G744 G450

Additional Cross-References

Mark 6:15 (Prophecy): Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets.

Matthew 14:2 (Resurrection): And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

John 1:21 (Prophecy): And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

Malachi 4:5 (Prophecy): Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

John 7:40 (Prophecy): Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet.

John 1:25 (Prophecy): And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

John 9:17 (Prophecy): They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.