

Mark 9:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?

Analysis

The disciples asked, 'Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?' (Διὰ τί λέγουσιν οἱ γραμματεῖς ὅτι Ἠλίαν δεῖ ἐλθεῖν πρῶτον;). Having seen Elijah at the transfiguration, they wondered about Malachi 4:5's prophecy requiring Elijah's return before the Messiah. If Jesus is Messiah, why did Elijah appear only privately, not publicly preparing the nation? The verb *dei* (δεῖ, 'must') indicates divine necessity—Malachi's prophecy required fulfillment. The scribes correctly taught that Elijah precedes Messiah but misunderstood how prophecy would be fulfilled. They expected literal Elijah; Jesus teaches that John the Baptist came 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' (Luke 1:17), fulfilling the prophecy typologically. This question reveals disciples' growing understanding—witnessing the transfiguration raised interpretive questions about messianic expectations and Old Testament fulfillment.

Historical Context

Malachi 4:5-6 promised: 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.' First-century Jewish expectation held that literal Elijah would return to prepare for Messiah. At Passover, Jews set a place for Elijah; at circumcisions, they prepared 'Elijah's chair.' This expectation was universal—even John the Baptist was asked if he was Elijah (John 1:21), to which he answered 'No' (meaning not literally Elijah reincarnated). Jesus later identified John as the prophetic fulfillment (Matthew 11:14; 17:10-13), coming in Elijah's spirit and power to prepare the way. The scribes' teaching was correct

regarding prophecy but incomplete regarding its typological fulfillment. Understanding how Old Testament prophecy finds fulfillment in Christ requires Spirit-illuminated reading.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' answer demonstrate that Old Testament prophecy often finds typological rather than literal fulfillment?
2. What does John the Baptist's fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy teach about how God accomplishes His purposes in unexpected ways?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἐπηρώτων	αὐτὸν	λέγουσιν	ὅτι	λέγουσιν	οἱ
And	they asked	him	say	Why	say	G3588
G2532	G1905	G846	G3004	G3754	G3004	
γραμματεῖς	ὅτι	Ἠλίαν	δεῖ	ἐλθεῖν	πρῶτον	
the scribes	Why	Elias	must	come	first	
G1122	G3754	G2243	G1163	G2064	G4412	

Additional Cross-References

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

Malachi 3:1 (Parallel theme): 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.

Matthew 11:14 (Parallel theme): And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

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