

Matthew 11:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

Analysis

'And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.' Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the prophesied Elijah—not through reincarnation but in fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6's prediction that Elijah would precede Messiah. The phrase 'if ye will receive it' (εἰ θέλετε δέξασθαι/ei thelete dexasthai) indicates this truth requires spiritual receptivity—those hardened against Jesus won't accept John's identity or mission. John came 'in the spirit and power of Elias' (Luke 1:17), not as Elijah reincarnated but as prophetic fulfillment of Elijah's role. He dressed like Elijah, called Israel to repentance like Elijah, confronted wicked rulers like Elijah, and prepared for divine visitation like Elijah. Reformed theology rejects reincarnation but affirms typological fulfillment: John fulfilled what Elijah represented—the forerunner preparing hearts for God's arrival. This verse also demonstrates how prophecy works: not always literal (Elijah himself) but often typological (one like Elijah). It requires spiritual insight to recognize fulfillment, which God grants to His elect.

Historical Context

Malachi 4:5-6 promised Elijah's return before the 'great and dreadful day of the LORD' to turn hearts of fathers to children and vice versa. Jewish interpretation debated whether this meant literal Elijah or prophetic figure. John the Baptist, when asked 'Art thou Elias?' answered 'I am not' (John 1:21)—meaning he wasn't Elijah reincarnated. But Jesus unambiguously identifies John as the prophesied Elijah figure. This apparent contradiction resolves when we understand: John denied being literally Elijah; Jesus affirmed he fulfilled Elijah's prophesied role.

Elijah himself appeared with Moses at Jesus's Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), confirming he hadn't been reincarnated as John. Yet after seeing Elijah, the disciples asked about Malachi's prophecy (Matthew 17:10-13), and Jesus again identified John as its fulfillment. The early church used this as apologetic proof: Malachi's prophecy was fulfilled, therefore Jesus is Messiah. It also taught Christians how to read Old Testament prophecy: not wooden literalism but Spirit-guided understanding of typological fulfillment.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that recognizing John as Elijah requires willingness to 'receive it'—how does spiritual receptivity affect understanding?
2. How does this example of prophecy fulfillment (typological rather than literal) inform how you interpret other Old Testament predictions?
3. What does John's self-effacement (denying greatness while Jesus affirms it) teach about humility and proper self-assessment?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	εἰ	θέλετε	δέξασθαι,	αὐτός	ἐστιν	Ἐλίας	ο
And	if	ye will	receive	it this	is	Elias	which
G2532	G1487	G2309	G1209	G846	G2076	G2243	G3588
μέλλων ἔρχεσθαι							
was for to come							
G3195 G2064							

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:

Luke 1:17 (Parallel theme): 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.

1 Corinthians 3:2 (Parallel theme): I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

John 16:12 (Parallel theme): I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

Ezekiel 2:5 (Parallel theme): And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.
