



The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



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Part 24
Mark 9:11-13

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(NIV)

INTRODUCTION

Coming back down the mountain from the Transfiguration, the disciples have once again been given the command to keep silent about what they have witnessed.

This time, Jesus has said “until after the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”

This qualifier gives rise to the understanding that ALL of the “Messianic secret” commands, throughout Mark’s Gospel, have been related to the fact that it is only after the experience of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection that his Messiahship can be correctly interpreted.

As the disciples descend the mountain, though, they are debating exactly how this reference to “rising from the dead” relates to the traditional understanding of Elijah’s return.

Mark 9:11 (NIV)

And they asked him,
“Why do the teachers of
the law say that Elijah
must come first?”

“Elijah must come first”

Having seen Elijah, the disciples naturally wonder about him, because his return was closely connected with the coming “end of the age”.

The expectation was based upon the words of the prophet Malachi:

Malachi 4:5-6 – “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

This belief that Elijah would come just prior to the “end of days” is attested in many Jewish sources.

So the question from the disciples to Jesus is a sort of challenge – how can this be true, Jesus, if Elijah hasn’t appeared yet?

Mark 9:12 (NIV)

Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?”

“Elijah does come first”

Jesus agrees, in part, with the teachers’ claims.

“Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much”

This comment about the “Son of Man” seems out of place here, while discussing Elijah, if the reference is now back to JESUS’ suffering! Why is this relevant?

It is very possible that the phrase “son of man” here is not THE Son of Man, but a Hebrew idiom for simply “a man”.

In Mark, Jesus IMPLIES, but does not state outright, that the coming of Elijah is fulfilled in John the Baptist.

But it is NOT “written” anywhere that ELIJAH would suffer and be rejected when he returned ... which could lead to the possibility that Jesus’ question would be better translated, “Where then is it written that Elijah would suffer much and be rejected”, with the implied answer, “Nowhere!”

And now, Jesus will continue, “And yet he DID!”

The Son of Man’s fate – suffering and death – IS shared by the forerunner of Jesus: Elijah, or John the Baptist.

Mark 9:13 (NIV)

“But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.”

“Elijah has come”

These are Mark’s words implying that John the Baptist WAS Elijah.

Matthew’s Gospel makes this explicit by adding a sentence afterward:

Matthew 17:13 – “Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.”

Perhaps Jesus understood the suffering servant from Isaiah 53 and the struggles of the Son of Man against the beasts from Daniel 7 as applying equally to John the Baptist as to himself, so he used “Son of Man” language here, as well.

Mark 9:13 (NIV)

“But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.”

In Jesus' view, the three are intertwined – Jesus, Elijah, John the Baptist.

Jesus understands that somehow, John the Baptist, in the spirit of Elijah, has come and “restored all things”.

John initiated a wave of revival that Jesus rode.

Many thousands of Jews repented and turned to God, opening their hearts to receive Jesus as well.

John has restored the world to a readiness to see God in Jesus.

And his violent, unjust death points to Jesus'.

But unlike John, Jesus will be raised and glorified, fully vindicated of wrongdoing!

Mark 9:11-13

(NIV)

SUMMARY

Peter, James, and John are curious – will the Elijah they just saw return yet again before the end of the age?

They have basically asked Jesus to interpret the Malachi prophecy for them.

Jesus agrees that Elijah IS to come and accomplish the preparatory work of “restoring all things” – calling people to repentance.

But just as they do not recognize Jesus as the expected Messiah, they do not recognize the coming of Elijah because it does not match their preconceived notions.

And both Messiah and Elijah suffer the same fate as a result.

Understanding who they both are goes hand in hand – but this demands overcoming all the preconceived ideas the disciples had about how the “end of the age” would come about!



Bibliography

The following materials have been used as sources for this Bible study:

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