

Timing

Matthew 17: 9-13

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We should be grateful for whatever glimpses of glory God graciously gives. They often provide crucial sustenance for us during hard times, but they will not do away with hard times altogether.

I. It's Not Time to Tell (Future)

- a. Commanded
 - i. to give or leave instructions, *command, order, give orders*
- b. Until
 - i. Don't Tell Vision Mark 9:10
 - 1. Vision – **that is viewed with one's eye, *someth. seen, sight, vision***
 - a. The word here means a supernatural "vision," not in the sense of something imagined but in the sense of something seen
 - b. Three disciples are privileged to come to an advance viewing. Even as we must today avoid the heresies of the so-called health-wealth gospel and of a triumphalist ecclesiology, it is equally important to note that God does give us from time to time foretastes of glory. But we cannot predict when and how he will provide them, we dare not demand them, and for most people they will probably remain the exception rather than the norm.
 - 2. Silence-
 - a. In Mark the command to silence proves the centrality of the passion for Markan theology. The glorious Christ is not to be preached before Easter, for without the cross there is no gospel
 - b. If Jesus regularly exhorted silence concerning his messianic identity lest the people misunderstand his messianic calling, how much more would he do so in the present case where his divine glory was briefly seen. The secret was to be kept until his resurrection
 - c. secrecy until the resurrection is never specifically clarified, but it is clearly related to the secrecy of 16:20
 - ii. Son of Man

1. If the transfiguration presents Jesus as the glorified Son of God, the sequel announces the suffering of the Son of man. This mirrors 16:13–23, where the confession of Jesus as Son of God and the promise of his church’s triumph are followed by a passion prediction concerning the Son of man (16:21–3). The pattern—the Son of God triumphant/the Son of man suffering—may be illustrated in this fashion
- iii. Risen from the Dead
 1. Mk. has here the words: “And they kept the saying to themselves, disputing what the ‘rising from the dead’ was.
 2. Mk. has here the words: “And they kept the saying to themselves, disputing what the ‘rising from the dead’ was.” unwillingness to accept Jesus or his message
 3. that is, until Jesus had finished his work on the cross and again assumed his glorious status, now as the Risen One
 4. The language ‘until the Son of Man is raised from the dead’ echoes the language of the Passion prediction in 16:21

II. It’s Time to Understand (Past)

a. Scribes’ Vision

i. Elijah Must come first

1. With the sight of Elijah and Moses talking to Jesus fresh in their minds, the disciples are prompted to ask about the coming of Elijah
2. Peter’s confusion is now followed by general perplexity concerning Elijah. The logic of the disciples’ question is uncertain, perhaps because they are again portrayed as somewhat dense. Didn’t they remember Jesus’ explanation in 11:14? But seeing Elijah has apparently reminded them of the Jewish belief, based on Mal 4:5, that Elijah would come as a messianic precursor. Perhaps the sequence of thought here is: if Jesus is the messianic Son, then why are the scribes (“teachers of the law”) still looking for Elijah? Or they may wonder if this appearance of Elijah on the mount of transfiguration fulfills Malachi’s prophecy even more directly than the ministry of John the Baptist
3. Two facts in the preceding narrative may have suggested this question. The disciples had seen Elijah on the mountain. In what relation did this appearance stand to the coming which was attributed to him by the official theologians? Further, it was part of this official theory, that Elijah would prepare the way for the Messiah by restoring all things. (On this see Volz, *Jüd. Eschat.* p.

192.) But if all things were restored, and Israel was made ready for the Messiah, what did Christ mean by foretelling His death and resurrection?

4. At the heart of this pericope lies the hermeneutical question of the meaning of Malachi's prophecy. The scribes had done their job well in concluding "Elijah must come first." Their insistence on this point, however, was determined to a large extent by their *a priori* convictions about how the eschatological fulfillment had to occur, and it was probably motivated by their
5. According to the prophet Malachi, Ἡλίου δεῖ ἐλθεῖν πρῶτον, "Elijah must come first." On the nuance of δεῖ, "it is necessary," as the divine will, cf. Comment on 16:21. This is essentially a distillation of Mal 4:5

ii. Elijah is coming

1. But first Jesus reassures them that Malachi's prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist. The restoration he brought must thus have included his ministry of preaching and the widespread repentance to which it led. Full restoration of course awaits Christ's return (Acts 1:6; 3:21), leaving open the question whether there is a yet unfulfilled part of the prophecy regarding Elijah
2. In short, Jesus responds initially by fully agreeing with the scribes in their understanding of Malachi's prophecy that Elijah is to come and accomplish his preparatory work. It is only in the astonishing conclusion now to be drawn that Jesus parts company with the scribes.

iii. Will restore all things

1. Restore- **to change to an earlier good state or condition, restore, reestablish**
2. The precise nature of Elijah's task of *apokatastasis* is left unstated and we cannot tell what Matthew had in mind, for there were differing notions. Mal 4:5–6 has Elijah reconciling families. The LXX (3:22–3) adds that the prophet will also reconcile 'the heart of a man with his neighbour'. In Lk 1:17 Elijah is thought of as one who will turn 'the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared
3. (and cf. especially the cognate noun ἀποκατάστασις, "restoration" or "establishing," in Acts 3:21 in an allusion to the return of Jesus), but to a preparatory work of repentance and renewal
4. The verb ἀποκαταστήσει, "will restore," is drawn verbatim from the LXX of Mal 3:23

b. Time for the Truth

- i. Elijah already came
 - 1. The idea that Elijah would preach repentance was presumably common (cf. Rev 11:1–13)
 - 2. John the Baptist fulfilled the rôle of Elijah in preparation for the first advent, the historical Elijah will return to prepare for the second advent (cf. Rev 11:1–13).
 - 3. Christ answers that the scribes are right in expecting a return of Elijah to accomplish a restoration, because so much was foretold in the prophet Malachi.
 - 4. The startling conclusion is left implicit. If John was Elijah, then Jesus is the one whose way was prepared by John (3:3), the Messiah and the one who brings with him the eschatological kingdom. The proper identification of John leads to the appropriate Christology.
- ii. They did not recognize
 - 1. By way of reply, Jesus will point out that Elijah, as forerunner, did not come to prevent the Messiah's suffering and death but to foreshadow it
 - 2. The allusion here is to John's ministry of repentance and renewal. The forerunner had in fact come, but "they did not recognize him" (οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν) and furthermore did to him whatever they pleased (cf. 14:6–12; cf. for the historical Elijah
- iii. Did to him whatever they wished
 - 1. Wished – desired
 - 2. Jesus goes on to observe that Elijah's mission, to restore the people of God, was met with opposition, and that this same opposition will lead to the death of the Son of man.
- c. Time to come
 - i. Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands
 - 1. Suffer- ***be badly off, in an evil plight***
 - 2. As for the Jewish leaders, they still look for Elijah because they have rejected John the Baptist (v. 12a). Herod even executed him (v. 12b). And the same fate awaits Christ (v. 12c). In Matthew's distinctive conclusion, based on his previous pattern of pointing out the disciples' insight, we learn that these three finally do understand (v. 13).
 - 3. thus too [οὕτως καί] the Son of Man is about to suffer [πάσχειν] at their hands" (cf. the first passion prediction in 16:21 and the second, which will occur in vv 22–23).
- d. Disciples

- i. Understood
- ii. John the Baptist

Word Studies

Commanded - **to give or leave instructions, *command, order, give orders***¹

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 339.

Vision- that is viewed with one's eye, *someth. seen, sight, vision*²

Restore- to change to an earlier good state or condition, *restore, reestablish*³

Wished – Desired

Suffer - *be badly off, in an evil plight*⁴

Commentary Studies

17:9 The substance is Markan, but with a range of Matthean touches. Though he introduced it at 16:20, Matthew avoids Mark's use of διαστέλλειν ('order'),⁷⁵ preferring ἐντέλλεσθαι ('direct').⁷⁶ Perhaps because of the change of scene, Jesus is freshly introduced despite having just been named in 17:8. Direct speech replaces indirect speech, a fact which is highlighted by the addition of an introductory λέγων ('saying'). Mark's διηγῶνται ('relate')⁷⁷ becomes the simpler εἶπτε ('tell'). ἃ εἶδον ('what they saw') becomes τὸ ὄραμα ('the vision'), in line with the connection with apocalyptic visions explored above.⁷⁸ Mark's εἰ μὴ ὅταν ('except when') is improved to ἕως οὗ ('until'). As in 16:21, there is a move from ἀναστῆναι to ἐγερθῆναι with

someth. someth. = something

² William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 718.

³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 111.

⁴ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 785.

⁷⁵ As he does each time, Mark uses this word.

⁷⁶ Which he shares with Lk. 4:10 in Mt. 4:6 and with Mk. 10:3 in Mt. 19:7, and uses distinctively in 28:20, the only other place where Jesus is the subject.

⁷⁷ Not used by Matthew.

⁷⁸ Twenty-one of the thirty-eight uses of ὄραμα in the LXX are in Daniel, generally in relation to apocalyptic visions.

reference to the resurrection (see there).⁷⁹ In line with a tendency noted before (see, e.g., at Mt. 16:11–12), Matthew drops entirely Mk. 9:10, with its focus on the failure of the disciples to understand. Matthew is headed here towards a point where he can assert clear understanding on the part of the disciples (17:13).

The language ‘until the Son of Man is raised from the dead’ echoes the language of the Passion prediction in 16:21, but for ‘Son of Man’ either we need to go to the Markan form of the Passion prediction or to reach back to Mt. 16:13 or (less likely) to vv. 27 or 28. Matthew now allows the tie between ‘Son of Man’ language and the Passion which he avoided at 16:21, but initially in connection with Jesus’ resurrection rather than his death and against the backdrop of the proleptic manifestation of his glory as the Son of Man in the transfiguration. Soon after, in 17:12, Matthew will allow an immediate connection between Son of Man language and the Passion of Jesus, which will be reflected in the remaining Passion predictions.⁸⁰ The reason for secrecy until the resurrection is never specifically clarified, but it is clearly related to the secrecy of 16:20 (see discussion there).

We have already noted some links between Mt. 17:1–9 and Mt. 28:16–20. But the list is fuller. In common are a limited number of disciples, a mountain setting chosen by Jesus, a seeing of Jesus that impacts the disciples, Jesus coming to them (which in Matthew is restricted to these texts), reference to Jesus ‘directing’ (ἐντέλλεσθαι) (also restricted in Matthew to these texts), the use of highlighting ἰδοὺ (lit. ‘behold’), significant ties to Daniel, and interest in the resurrection (spoken of in Mt. 17:9 and lying behind the appearance in 28:16–20). It is not easy to be sure what to make of these links, but what is probably intended is that Mt. 28:16–20 represents a further stage in the progressive realisation of the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom.

D. The Suffering of John the Baptist and of Jesus (17:10–13)

10 ^a*The disciples asked him, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’* 11 *He answered, ‘Elijah does indeed come,’^b and he will restore^c all things.* 12 *But I tell you that Elijah already came, and they did not know him but did^d with him whatever they wished.* ^e*So also the Son of Man is about to suffer by [means of] them.’^e* 13 *Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist.*⁵

⁷⁹ But many texts conform the reading in Mt. 17:9 to the Markan reading (Ⲭ C L [W] Z W f¹, 13 33 892 106 1342 1506 etc.). The reading adopted is based on B D.

⁸⁰ See Mt. 17:22; 20:18; 26:2.

lit. literally

⁵ John Nolland, [*The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 705–706.

9 On the way down from the mountain, Jesus commanded the disciples to “tell no one” (μηδενὶ εἶπητε) what they had just seen. Matthew uses ὄραμα, regarding it as suitable for a theophany. The word here means a supernatural “vision,” not in the sense of something imagined but in the sense of something seen. It replaces Mark’s ἃ εἶδον, “what you have seen,” as a kind of technical term, but not to take away from the reality of the event. (Only Matthew among the Gospels uses this word. The frequent use of it in Acts [e.g., 9:10; 10:3; 11:5; 16:9] is usually connected with divine revelations or “visions” in the proper sense of the word.) The command to secrecy is a variant of the messianic secret motif (see *Comment* on 8:4). If Jesus regularly exhorted silence concerning his messianic identity lest the people misunderstand his messianic calling, how much more would he do so in the present case where his divine glory was briefly seen. The secret was to be kept until his resurrection (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, “the Son of Man,” is here a circumlocution for “I”; cf. *Comment* on 8:20), that is, until Jesus had finished his work on the cross and again assumed his glorious status, now as the Risen One. In this sense the transfiguration was a foreshadowing of Jesus’ glorious resurrection (cf. the appearance on the mountain in 28:16–20). When the resurrection became the center of the early church’s proclamation, then too the story of the transfiguration could be made known. But the disciples surely would have been hard pressed to comprehend at this point Jesus’ intent (despite Matthew’s omission of Mark 9:10).

10 With the sight of Elijah and Moses talking to Jesus fresh in their minds, the disciples are prompted to ask about the coming of Elijah. They knew well the scribes’ (γραμματεῖς, the professional scripture scholars; see further *Comment* on 2:4) insistence (perhaps even in response to Jesus’ and their proclamation of the kingdom) that the coming of the eschatological age had the precondition of the return of Elijah. The οὖν, “therefore,” probably is linked not with the reference to the resurrection but to the transfiguration narrative as a whole and in particular to the appearance of Elijah. According to the prophet Malachi, Ἡλίου δεῖ ἐλθεῖν πρῶτον, “Elijah must come first.” On the nuance of δεῖ, “it is necessary,” as the divine will, cf. *Comment* on 16:21. This is essentially a distillation of Mal 4:5: “Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes” (cf. LXX [Mal 3:22]). For the rabbinic expectation of

Elijah, see m Ḳed. 8:7; m B. Meṣ. 3:5. Thus the disciples shared the question of the scribes concerning whether the Elijah they had just seen was going to return yet again before the end of the age. With their uncertainty and lack of understanding of the resurrection saying (cf. Mark 9:10), however, it is unlikely that their question was specifically how Elijah could return before the imminent death and resurrection of Jesus (contra Fenton, Gundry, Patte). Their question concerns, rather, the meaning of the Malachi passage.

It has been pointed out by M. M. Faierstein (so too J. A. T. Robinson and J. L. Martyn) that it is far from clear that the Malachi passage or Jewish tradition brought the prior coming of Elijah specifically into relation with the coming of the Messiah. The response of D. C. Allison, however, shows that the association is not to be regarded as a Christian invention. Fitzmyer calls attention to the difficulty of establishing a general Jewish expectation that the Messiah was to come on the “day of the Lord.” The question about Elijah in the present verse concerns only the meaning of the Malachi prophecy that Elijah must come before the end of the age. Undoubtedly, the disciples also wondered how this expectation was to be related to the eschatological realities being announced by Jesus, whom they had just confessed to be the Messiah (16:16).

11 Jesus responds to their question by alluding to the same passage with the words Ἠλίας μὲν ἔρχεται, “Elijah is coming” (ἔρχεται being reminiscent of the LXX’s ἔλθειν), going a step further by adding καὶ ἀποκαταστήσει πάντα, “and he will restore everything.” The verb ἀποκαταστήσει, “will restore,” is drawn verbatim from the LXX of Mal 3:23, where, however, the object clause is “the heart of the father to the son and the heart of a man to his neighbor” (the Hebrew of Mal 4:6 is only slightly different). The future tense, therefore, does not suggest that Jesus expects a future return of John the Baptist (contra Gundry). The restoration of “everything” (πάντα) must here refer not to the eschatological renewal of the present order itself (which would make Elijah the Messiah himself, rather than the forerunner of the Messiah), as, for example, apparently in Acts 1:6 (and cf. especially the cognate noun ἀποκατάστασις, “restoration” or “establishing,” in Acts 3:21 in an allusion to the return of Jesus), but to a preparatory work of repentance and renewal (as in the Malachi passage; see especially Luke 1:17 and cf. Sir 48:10). Only an interpretation of this kind can make possible Jesus’ identification of John the Baptist with Elijah in the verse that follows. In short, Jesus responds initially by fully agreeing with the scribes in their understanding of Malachi’s prophecy that Elijah is to come and accomplish his preparatory work. It is only in the astonishing conclusion now to be drawn that Jesus parts company with the scribes.

m Mishnah

Ḳed. Ḳduyyot

m Mishnah

B. Meṣ. Baba Meṣi’a

LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

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12 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν, “but I say to you,” carries a degree of emphasis to the following statement. The scribes were right in thinking that Elijah had to come before the commencement of the eschatological age, but now Jesus flatly asserts that Ἠλίας ἤδη ἦλθεν, “Elijah has already come” (cf. the explicit statement in 11:14). The allusion here is to John’s ministry of repentance and renewal. The forerunner had in fact come, but “they did not recognize him” (οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν) and furthermore did to him whatever they pleased (cf. 14:6–12; cf. for the historical Elijah, 1 Kgs 19:2, 10). There is an unmistakable typological correspondence between the fate of John the Baptist and that of Jesus (cf. 11:16–19). Jesus too, coming as the promised Messiah to his people, was largely unrecognized (cf. 16:13–14; John 1:10), although this is implied rather than stated here (both John and Jesus were regarded as prophets; cf. 21:26, 46). The second point, however, is made very explicit: “thus too [οὕτως καί] the Son of Man is about to suffer [πάσχειν] at their hands” (cf. the first passion prediction in 16:21 and the second, which will occur in vv 22–23). ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, “the Son of Man,” as in v. 9, is here a circumlocution for “I.” If the scribes and the Jewish leaders had not recognized John as Elijah, their culpability in not recognizing Jesus was, if anything, even greater, given the public ministry of Jesus.

13 The reference to an Elijah who had come, and to whom they did as they pleased, apparently jogged the memory of the disciples (cf. 11:14; 14:12), and “then they understood” (τότε συνῆκαν) that Jesus spoke of John the Baptist. The startling conclusion is left implicit. If John was Elijah, then Jesus is the one whose way was prepared by John (3:3), the Messiah and the one who brings with him the eschatological kingdom. The proper identification of John leads to the appropriate Christology.

Explanation

At the heart of this pericope lies the hermeneutical question of the meaning of Malachi’s prophecy. The scribes had done their job well in concluding “Elijah must come first.” Their insistence on this point, however, was determined to a large extent by their *a priori* convictions about how the eschatological fulfillment had to occur, and it was probably motivated by their unwillingness to accept Jesus or his message. As they saw nothing in John’s fate in Herod’s prison that corresponded with their expectations of Elijah, so also they saw nothing in Jesus’ claims or in his humility that corresponded with their conception of the Messiah. And when he was crucified, that served only to confirm that he could not have been the Messiah. Thus their rigid, preconceived notions tragically caused them to be blind to the very heart of God’s mission in his Messiah. What was required of them was to revise their categories and to understand, with Paul among other Jews, that “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23), rather than being a self-contained and intolerable contradiction, is the glorious high point of God’s promises to Israel—and through Israel to the nations of the world.⁶

⁶ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 14–28](#), vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 498–500.

(M) 9. *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell no man the vision, until the Son of Man be risen from the dead.*] Mk. has: “And as they came down from the mountain, He charged (διεστείλατο) them that they should recount to no man what they saw, except when the Son of Man should rise from the dead.”

ἐγερθῇ for ἀναστῇ; cf. on 16:21.

Mk. has here the words: “And they kept the saying to themselves, disputing what the ‘rising from the dead’ was.” Mt. omits other statements of misunderstanding on the part of the disciples; cf. the omission of Mk 6:52, 8:17, and see Introduction, pp. xxxiii f.

(M) 10. *And the disciples asked Him, saying, Why therefore do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?*] Mk. has: “And they were asking Him, saying, Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” Two facts in the preceding narrative may have suggested this question. The disciples had seen Elijah on the mountain. In what relation did this appearance stand to the coming which was attributed to him by the official theologians? Further, it was part of this official theory, that Elijah would prepare the way for the Messiah by restoring all things. (On this see Volz, *Jüd. Eschat.* p. 192.) But if all things were restored, and Israel was made ready for the Messiah, what did Christ mean by foretelling His death and resurrection? Why death in view of the restorative work of the forerunner?—ἐπηρώτησαν] aor. for Mk.’s imperf, as often. τί for Mk.’s ambiguous ὅτι; cf. similar changes in 17:19 = Mk 9:28, Mt 9:11 = Mk 2:16.

(M) 11. *And He answered and said, Elijah indeed cometh, and shall restore all things.*] Mk. has: “And He said to them, Elijah indeed having come first, restores all things.”—ἀποκατατήσει] for Mk.’s ἀποκατιστάνει is an assimilation to the LXX. of Ma 3:22. Christ answers that the scribes are right in expecting a return of Elijah to accomplish a restoration, because so much was foretold in the prophet Malachi.

The words which follow in Mk. are very obscurely expressed: “And how has it been written concerning the Son of Man, that He should suffer much, and be set at nought?” Does this mean: “It has not been so prophesied. Elijah’s coming was foretold, but not the Messiah’s suffering”? Or, “Seeing that Elijah was predicted as coming to restore, in what sense are the prophecies of

M the Second Gospel.

M the Second Gospel.

M the Second Gospel.

LXX. The Septuagint Version.

Messiah's suffering to be understood"? Or, "Elijah indeed comes, and (yet) how has it been written of the Son of Man? (It stands written) that He should suffer"? "But I say to you that Elijah has come," that is, "It was not only foretold that he should come, but he has come in the person of John the Baptist." "And they did to him whatever they wished." That is, "And he did not restore all things, because Herod thwarted prophecy by putting John to death. Thus no restoration has taken place, and there is room for the fulfilment of the prophecies of Messiah's death." "As it has been written concerning Him." To what does this refer? The answer is generally found in 1 K 19:2, 10 "The fate intended for Elijah had overtaken John: he had found his Jezebel in Herodias" (Swete). But how can this prophecy by type and contrast explain the matter of fact words καθὼς γέγραπται ἐπ' αὐτόν? How can the escape of Elijah from death at the hands of Jezebel be a prophecy of the execution of John the Baptist at the instigation of Herodias? Mt. has re-edited the passage in order to simplify it. He omits the obscure question Mk 12b, and the equally obscure καθὼς γέγραπται ἐπ' αὐτόν. The reference to Herodias can hardly have been present to his mind, for he has omitted Mk.'s statements that she persecuted the Baptist. Further, he adds: οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν ἀλλά, to explain the failure of the prophecy that Elijah should restore all things, and to compensate for the omission of Mk 12b adds the definite statement: οὕτως καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μέλλει πάσχειν ὑπ' αὐτῶν.

(M) 12. *And I say to you, That Elijah has already come, and they did not recognise him, but did in his case whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer from them.*]—οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν] *i.e.* did not recognise Elijah in the person of the Baptist.—ἠθέλησαν] aor. for imperf., as often.—ἐποίησαν—ὅσα ἠθέλησαν] Cf. Dn 11:16 ποιήσει—κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ.—μέλλει] see on 16:27.

(E) 13. *Then understood the disciples that He spake to them concerning John the Baptist.*] An editorial comment in favour of the disciples; cf. 16:12.⁷

M the Second Gospel.

E editorial passages.

⁷ Willoughby C. Allen, [A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1907), 186–187.

In Mark the command to silence proves the centrality of the passion for Markan theology. The glorious Christ is not to be preached before Easter, for without the cross there is no gospel.¹⁸ What about Matthew's understanding of the injunction, the last such in his gospel? On the messianic secret in Matthew see on 9:30. The present verse, 17:9, makes the three apostles unique and authoritative bearers of the kerygma. They will proclaim after Easter things previously concealed. In the light of the resurrection and after the cross they will be able to tell the whole truth about Jesus the Son of man.

Mk 9:10 ('So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant') has been omitted by our gospel. The result is that the understanding of the disciples (cf. v. 13) is no longer doubtful (cf. the omission of Mk 6:52 and 8:17). See further the discussion on pp. 587–92. Matthew may also have been moved to excise 9:10 because he found it difficult to believe that the disciples could have wondered about the meaning of the (general) resurrection of the dead.¹⁹

10. καὶ ἐπηρώτησαν αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ λέγοντες.²⁰ Matthew has made the subject, 'the disciples', explicit, and changed Mark's imperfect to an aorist (see on v. 13). Otherwise there are no differences. Note that the redactional alterations of vv. 9b and 10a make for two parallel sentences: Καί + finite verb + αὐτοῖς/αὐτόν + definite article (ὁ/οἱ) + subject (Ἰησοῦς/μαθηταί) + λέγων/λέγοντες.

τί οὖν οἱ γραμματεῖς λέγουσιν ὅτι Ἠλίαν δεῖ ἐλθεῖν πρῶτον; Compare *m. Ber.* 1:1: *lāmmā ·āmēṛū ḥāḱāmim*. Mark opens with ὅτι λέγουσιν. οὖν* is Matthean, and our author has rightly interpreted Mark's ὅτι as meaning τί = 'why?' (cf. BAGD, s.v. ὅτι, l.c). On the scribes see 1, p. 240. On the expectation under discussion see below and 1, pp. 313–14. On δεῖ as a way of referring to Scripture see on 16:21. An allusion to LXX Mal 3:22–3 (ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω ὑμῖν Ἠλίαν τὸν Θεοσβίτην πρὶν ἐλθεῖν ἡμέραν κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ, ὃς ἀποκαταστήσει καρδίαν πατρός πρὸς υἱόν ...) seems certain.

¹⁸ The explanation that the command to secrecy functioned to explain why the pericope was not known in the early tradition is today much less popular than it once was.

¹⁹ This only holds, however, if he had the text of B **℣** Maj before him. Mk 9:10 D W *f*¹³ lat have σταν εκ νεκρων αναστη; 'They kept the matter to themselves, questioning what "When he shall rise from the dead" means.'—Another possibility is that Mk 9:10 reflects a problem with which Matthew was no longer concerned. If Jesus did not distinguish between his vindication and the general resurrection of the dead, then, after Easter, his solitary resurrection would have been difficult to reconcile with the disciples, expectations and they might have concluded that they did not understand what Jesus meant by resurrection—a conclusion with its literary deposit in Mk 9:9–10.

²⁰ Perhaps αὐτου, found in B C D *f*¹³ Maj *f* *ff*² q sy mae bo^{pt}, should be added after μαθηται.

* An asterisk (*) after a Greek word or phrase signifies that that word or phrase is listed in vol. 1 on pp. 75–9 and so is characteristic of the First Evangelist.

11. Jesus begins his response to the disciples' question by agreeing with the scribal expectation: Elijah is to come and restore all things.

ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν. Mk 9:12a follows δέ with ἔφη αὐτοῖς. ἀποκριθεὶς/-θέντες + finite verb* is often redactional, and Mark's αὐτοῖς has been eliminated as otiose.

Ἡλίας μὲν ἔρχεται καὶ ἀποκαταστήσει πάντα. Compare Mk 9:12: Ἡλίας ἐλθὼν πρῶτον ἀποκαθιστάνει πάντα. (This, unlike its Matthean parallel, could be a question.) The addition of μὲν²¹ (= 'it is true') is typical (μὲν ... δέ*), and ἀποκαταστήσει marks assimilation to LXX Mal 3:23 (for which see above).

ἀποκαθίστημι occurs only one other time in Matthew, in 12:13, of a hand being restored. But the passage in Malachi gave the word an eschatological connotation (cf. Acts 1:6; 3:21). In its present context, the future tense, ἀποκαταστήσει, is not likely to mean that Elijah is still to come or will come again. 'Will restore' simply agrees with what the OT and the scribes say. Many Christian interpreters, however, have taken Matthew's text to mean that Elijah has come and will come (so e.g. Chrysostom, *Hom. on Mt.* 57:1, and Gundry, *Commentary*, p. 347). Historically this has been one way of avoiding the contradiction between the synoptic identification of John with the Tishbite and the Baptist's denial that he was Elijah (Jn 1:21): John the Baptist fulfilled the rôle of Elijah in preparation for the first advent, the historical Elijah will return to prepare for the second advent (cf. Rev 11:1–13).

The precise nature of Elijah's task of *apokatastasis* is left unstated and we cannot tell what Matthew had in mind, for there were differing notions. Mal 4:5–6 has Elijah reconciling families. The LXX (3:22–3) adds that the prophet will also reconcile 'the heart of a man with his neighbour'. In Lk 1:17 Elijah is thought of as one who will turn 'the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared' (cf. 4 Ezra 6:26). The idea that Elijah would preach repentance was presumably common (cf. Rev 11:1–13; *Pirqe R. El.* 43)—and probably did much to encourage the identification of John with Elijah. In Ecclus 48:10 the prophet is expected 'to restore the tribes of Jacob', which may mean ingathering the diaspora (cf. Tg. Ps.-J. on Deut. 30:4) or purifying a remnant (cf. *m. Ed.* 8:7). According to rabbinic texts he will explain points in the Torah which baffled or divided the rabbis (see Davies, *SSM*, pp. 158–61). There are also places where Elijah is expected to restore the bottle of manna, the bottle of sprinkling water, and the bottle of anointing oil (e.g. *Mek.* on Exod 16:33). Finally, already by Matthew's time Elijah—who in the OT raises the dead—may have been expected to inaugurate the resurrection or reawaken the dead.²² (Note that in Mark the disciples' question about Elijah follows directly a discussion about the resurrection of the dead.)

* An asterisk (*) after a Greek word or phrase signifies that that word or phrase is listed in vol. 1 on pp. 75–9 and so is characteristic of the First Evangelist.

²¹ NA²⁶ reads μὲν for Mk 9:12b, but it is missing in D L W Ψ f¹ 28 565 892 pc latt and seems to have been taken over from Matthew.

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²² Relevant texts include Sib. Or. 2:187–8 (cf. Did. 16:6): 8:169–70 (?); *m. Sota* 9:15; *b. Sanh.* 113a; *y. Sabb.* 3c; *Ma'ase Daniel*, pp. 225–6.

12. Jesus next makes a claim for ‘realized eschatology:’ Elijah has in fact already come. But Jesus goes on to observe that Elijah’s mission, to restore the people of God, was met with opposition, and that this same opposition will lead to the death of the Son of man.

λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι. Mk 9:13a commences with ἀλλά.

Ἡλίας ἤδη ἦλθεν. Mark has: καὶ Ἡλίας ἐλήλυθεν. Compare 14:15 (ἤδη παρῆλθεν—diff. Mk 6:35). The reader of the gospel immediately equates Elijah with John the Baptist, for the equation has already been made (see on 11:14).

καὶ οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν. This is redactional. It explains why Elijah was rejected: his identity was not recognized.

ἀλλ’ ἐποίησαν ἐν αὐτῷ ὅσα ἠθέλησαν. Compare Dan 8:4; 11:3, 16; Jub. 2:29; Josephus, *Ant.* 10:103.²³ Mk 9:13 reads: καὶ ἐποίησαν αὐτῷ ὅσα ἠθελον. Matthew often substitutes the aorist for the imperfect (Allen, pp. xx–xxi). His ἐποίησαν ἐν αὐτῷ (cf. LXX Gen 40:14; Theod. Dan 11:7) reminds one of the Hebrew *‘āsā + bē* and the Aramaic *‘ābad + bē*. As with the previous clause the identity of the subjects (‘they did’) is not specified. Are they the Jewish people as a whole or their leaders or Herod and Herodias (cf. 14:1–12)? In view of the next line, where the Son of man also is done in by ‘them’ (αὐτῶν), one may do best to think of those in charge, that is, those with political and religious authority.

Matthew has omitted Mark’s final clause (‘as it is written of him’), perhaps because he knew that there is no OT text predicting Elijah’s rejection. (1 Kgs 19:2, 10, and 14 scarcely qualify. They concern the historical Elijah.²⁴) Still, it may not be irrelevant to point out that Mal 4:6 can be read as holding forth the *possibility* of Elijah’s failure: ‘And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children ... lest I come and smite the land with a curse’. Also, there may have been a tradition about Elijah = Phinehas²⁵ and other immortals who would taste death at the end (cf. 4 Ezra 7:29).

οὕτως καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μέλλει πάσχειν ὑπ’ αὐτῶν.²⁶ This is a much revised version of Mk 9:12b: ‘And how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?’ The First Evangelist has (i) moved the statement from its place in Mark (see section (ii)); (ii) characteristically added οὕτως* and ὑπ’ αὐτῶν²⁷ in order to enhance the parallelism between the fate of John and the fate of Jesus (see pp. 475–6); (iii) made the Son of man the active subject; (iv) inserted μέλλει (see on 16:27), connoting necessity, as he will shortly again in another passion prediction (see 17:22; cf. 20:22); and (v) in general resolved the

²³ These texts appear to record a standard way of expressing ungodly tyranny.

²⁴ Also dubious is the opinion that Rev 11:3–14 and related traditions are in the background.

²⁵ A. Zeron, ‘The Martyrdom of Phineas-Elijah’, *JBL* 98 (1979), pp. 99–100.

²⁶ The excision of this clause by Albright and Mann, p. 205, is groundless.

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²⁷ Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 7:209; 10:92.

ambiguities of the Markan passage.²⁸ In the process the clear allusions to Isa 53—πολλὰ πάθη and ἐξουδενηθῇ²⁹—have been passed over. Evidently the evangelist judged the parallelism between John and Jesus to be of greater moment in this context.

13. An editorial remark³⁰ on the disciples' understanding draws the paragraph to its close.

τότε συνῆκαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ὅτι περὶ Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς. Compare the redactional 16:12 (τότε συνῆκαν ὅτι ...)—also concluding a paragraph. This is the second time Matthew makes the equation of John with Elijah explicit (the first being 11:14). No other NT writer does so even once. (It is a characteristic of Matthew to make explicit what was only implicit in his tradition.)

(iv) *Concluding Observations*

17:9–13, which so thoroughly eliminates the obscurities of Mk 9:9–13, answers a Jewish objection against Christian claims, adds to the numerous parallels already drawn between John and Jesus, and marks out Peter and James and John as authorities for the Jesus tradition (cf. p. 711). The passage also, through the identification of John with Elijah, may be intended to form an *inclusio* with 11:14 ('he is Elijah who is to come'), indicating that the central section of the gospel is coming to its close. Lastly, one should consider the way in which vv. 9–13 balance vv. 1–12 and parallel 16:13–23. If the transfiguration presents Jesus as the glorified Son of God, the sequel announces the suffering of the Son of man. This mirrors 16:13–23, where the confession of Jesus as Son of God and the promise of his church's triumph are followed by a passion prediction concerning the Son of man (16:21–3). The pattern—the Son of God triumphant/the Son of man suffering—may be illustrated in this fashion:⁸

17:9 The motif of silence appears for the final time in Matthew, and for the first time Jesus suggests the injunction is not permanent. After the resurrection the disciples must tell others about his transfiguration. Here is the most important interpretive key to the messianic secret

²⁸ For these ambiguities see Allen, p. 187.

²⁹ See the Markan commentaries and Black (v) for details.

³⁰ τότε*, μαθηταί*, and βαπτιστής* are all typical. συνίημι: Mt: 7; Mk: 5; Lk: 4.

⁸ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*](#), vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 713–717.

motif: Christ's mission can be fully understood only after he has completed his ministry of suffering and has subsequently been vindicated. The glimpse of his glory revealed by his transfiguration, like the glimpses given by his other miracles, which generated commands to silence, may not be allowed to hinder his journey to death. On "Son of Man" see under 8:20.

As suggested by 16:28, the transfiguration foreshadows Jesus' resurrection and his return.¹⁵ If 16:21–28 stressed the need for Jesus' passion, here Matthew provides a balancing reminder of Jesus' coming glory. Three disciples are privileged to come to an advance viewing. Even as we must today avoid the heresies of the so-called health-wealth gospel and of a triumphalist ecclesiology, it is equally important to note that God does give us from time to time foretastes of glory. But we cannot predict when and how he will provide them, we dare not demand them, and for most people they will probably remain the exception rather than the norm. The question, for example, with respect to physical healing should never be "why am I not healed?" but "why am I *ever* healed?" We should be grateful for whatever glimpses of glory God graciously gives. They often provide crucial sustenance for us during hard times, but they will not do away with hard times altogether.

(2) Discussion about Elijah (17:10–13)

¹⁰ The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

¹¹ Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

17:10 Peter's confusion is now followed by general perplexity concerning Elijah. The logic of the disciples' question is uncertain, perhaps because they are again portrayed as somewhat dense. Didn't they remember Jesus' explanation in 11:14? But seeing Elijah has apparently reminded them of the Jewish belief, based on Mal 4:5, that Elijah would come as a messianic precursor. Perhaps the sequence of thought here is: if Jesus is the messianic Son, then why are the scribes ("teachers of the law") still looking for Elijah? Or they may wonder if this appearance of Elijah on the mount of transfiguration fulfills Malachi's prophecy even more directly than the ministry of John the Baptist. In light of Jesus' answer in v. 11, they may also be wanting to know why Malachi speaks of the restoration of all things (Mal 4:6), which has not yet literally occurred. In fact, if we give full logical force to the connective "then" in this verse, the disciples may be asking, If Elijah is to come and restore all things, why can he not prevent the death of the Son of Man (since Jesus' reference to his resurrection in v. 9 obviously implies he must die first)¹⁶

¹⁵ But cf. Allison and Davies, 2:707 for parallels with Jesus' execution as well.

¹⁶ Cf. R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 346–47.

17:11–13 By way of reply, Jesus will point out that Elijah, as forerunner, did not come to prevent the Messiah’s suffering and death but to foreshadow it.¹⁷ But first Jesus reassures them that Malachi’s prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist. The restoration he brought must thus have included his ministry of preaching and the widespread repentance to which it led. Full restoration of course awaits Christ’s return (Acts 1:6; 3:21), leaving open the question whether there is a yet unfulfilled part of the prophecy regarding Elijah. Revelation 11:3–6, in which one of the “two witnesses” has a miracle-working ministry closely parallel to Elijah’s, suggests there may be but is not clear about how literally this text should be taken. The two witnesses could well stand for the entire witnessing community of the people of God in the last days. As for the Jewish leaders, they still look for Elijah because they have rejected John the Baptist (v. 12a). Herod even executed him (v. 12b). And the same fate awaits Christ (v. 12c). In Matthew’s distinctive conclusion, based on his previous pattern of pointing out the disciples’ insight, we learn that these three finally do understand (v. 13).¹⁸⁹

¹⁷ See H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, BSC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 322.

¹⁸ Cf. further C. L. Blomberg, “Elijah, Election, and the Use of Malachi in the New Testament,” *CTR* 2 (1987): 100–108, and the literature there cited.

⁹ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 264–266.