

Elijah to Come?

Over the years there has been considerable debate about whether or not there will be another Elijah to come before the return of Christ.

Christ though, made it clear in Matthew 17:11-12 that Elijah had already come in the form of John the Baptist, *'And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.'* Verse 12 qualifies verse 11 and there is no indication here of a future Elijah.

He repeated that statement in Matthew 11:14, *'And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.'*

The birth of John the Baptist was plainly prophesied by the angel to his father Zacharias in Luke 1:15-17, *'For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 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'*. It is quite foolish to pretend that any of these points here about John's future ministry would not occur, as though God could make a mistake.

We are told that he would turn many of the children of Israel to their Father in verse 16, and this he did through his teaching.

Jesus also said that John was the greatest of the prophets, Matthew 11:11, *'Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'* Despite what some have claimed, he restored knowledge of the need to repent and wash away ones sins in baptism, as well as teaching about the kingdom of God, and introducing the Messiah. Matthew 3:1-2, *'In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*

Unfortunately we know little more about his preaching, for the emphasis in the New Testament is obviously upon Christ, but it was apparently wide ranging, Luke 3:18, *'And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.'* It is therefore presumptive indeed to say that John restored nothing and did not fulfil the prophecies about Elijah in Malachi chapters 3 and 4.

It is true that we could read in the Book of Malach, 3:1 and 4:5, that possibly there would be another Elijah-like figure such as John the Baptist who would precede the unexpected return of Christ for His Saints, *'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.'* *'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and*

dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.'

It has been suggested that this possible Elijah figure could be one of the two witnesses who preach during the Great Tribulation, while the Saints are with Christ on the sea of glass, (Revelation 14:1, 15:2) as he is mentioned in close connection to the day of the Lord, when Christ **suddenly** comes to His temple.

The main problem with the Church of God has long been with its ministry, some of whom, by their arrogance and oppression, have caused many to stumble at the Law which brought about the fragmentation of the Church of God, Malachi 2:8, '*But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.*' Their mistake has been to take to themselves the glory that belongs only to God.

They "corrupted the covenant", and we are told **how** in Ezekiel 44:10, '*And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity.*' They have been guilty of idolatry, of building within the spiritual temple an 'image of jealousy' [a hierarchy or oligarchy with ranks of men who rule over God's people] which caused many of God's people to look to a man or men rather than Jesus Christ, the result of which was that God departed from that organization, where He had been, and gradually withdrew His Spirit, Truth and Biblical understanding. Ezekiel 8:4-6, '*And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, [in the Spiritual Temple] according to the vision that I saw in the plain. Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry. He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary?*

This of course was directly against Jesus Christ's clear commandment to the church as well as His personal example, Matthew 20:25-27, '*But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. **But it shall not be so among you:** but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.'* By claiming that this 'image of jealousy' was the 'government of God', allegiance was demanded for the 'Elijah figure'. The people could then be held under dominion, in fear of loss of salvation by being disfellowshipped from the 'one true church', which increased the power and control of the ministry, and the opportunity for abuse.

This is the *spiritual* evil from which we are told to flee in Revelation 18:4, '*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*' It is also called the 'image of the Beast' in the Book of Revelation, because it emulates the hierarchical political structure of the Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church.

Jesus Christ condemned such, because He knew that mortal men with human nature cannot handle the power or glory that is part of the kind of government we will see in the Kingdom of God. Only those who obey Christ's instructions, and **avoid being part of such a system now**, choosing instead to **serve after His example** while He was a mortal, will qualify to rule with Him in His Kingdom, Revelation 20:4, *'And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, **neither his image**, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.'* Mark 10:42, *'But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them **but so shall it not be among you**'*, 1Peter 5:2-4, *'Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; **Neither as being lords over God's heritage**, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.'*

The abuse of such power always provides bitter fruits, and yet sadly it was claimed as the greatest achievement of one 'Elijah figure', who placed himself at the head of an idolatrous hierarchy which he called the 'government of God'.

Jesus Christ told us to measure the ministry by their fruits, Matthew 7:16-17, *'Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.'* Its fruits were the introduction of oppression, fear and excommunication into God's Church, and when placed into the hands of his chosen successor, it resulted in the destruction of that organisation and its loss of the truth, and yet the same 'government of God' has been espoused again by the ministers of fragments of that church, where the same bitter fruits have already been seen.

It has been claimed that this Elijah figure built the end-time church and finished it, despite Matthew 16:18, *'And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'* Certainly the **early** ministry of this gifted man provided a strong foundation of much biblical truth, especially about the Kingdom of God. Herbert W. Armstrong was indeed used by God to raise up a major branch of God's church and many of us owe much to his efforts, but to claim that he is not only the Elijah figure but was also pictured as Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:9, is not appropriate. *'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.'* Zerubbabel's temple was a prefigurement of the much greater millennial Temple which will be built by Christ himself, Zechariah 6:12, *'And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and **he shall build the temple of the LORD.**'* Zerubbabel is a symbol of Christ, not a man.

They say that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Even a man as great as Moses made the serious mistake of presumption. He undoubtedly achieved a great deal for God over many years but then lost his chance to lead Israel across the Jordan because of his

error and presumption, Numbers 20:10-12, *'And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; **must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.'***

HWA also claimed to have proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom of God into all the world as the Elijah figure. Notice what Matthew 24:14 actually says, *'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come....AND THEN shall the end come.'* Has it come? Decades have passed since 'a strong hand from someplace' [rather than the name of Jesus Christ] was proclaimed 'into all the world', but we will only see that scripture **truly** fulfilled when Revelation 14:6-7 comes about, and THEN will the end truly come, *'And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having **the everlasting gospel** to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, **and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people**, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; **for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.'***

What about his claim that he 'restored all things', Matthew 17:11-12, *'And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.'* Only in the recent years has the knowledge that the Hebrew calendar did not exist in its present form until some 1000 years after the death of Christ, become well known. The true calendar used at the time of Christ, based directly on the observation of the abib firstfruit barley and the visible new moon at Jerusalem, along with the true Holy Days, were not restored by HWA, no more than he restored the pattern of the early New testament church with its service oriented ministry, knowledge about Christ's return at the time pictured by the Firstfruit harvest in Israel, and where the Saints are taken after they flee Jerusalem. Sadly then, if there is an Elijah to come, we are still looking for him, but the fact that the serious mistake of looking to one man at the top, instead of directly to Jesus Christ could occur, contains a lesson for us all.

God could not allow such a serious flaw to be permanently built into His church, and brought about its fragmentation in order that we learn to recognise and avoid such idolatry, and look to the pattern of the early, independent New Testament church. Those who did learn that lesson have been blessed with further revealed knowledge about the flow of end-time events, while those who have remained in idolatry have stagnated with a false understanding of the last days, which could take them into the Great tribulation, rather than the First Resurrection.

The refining process is already taking place, Malachi 3:2, *'But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap.'* Will you believe the claims of a man, or the words of Jesus Christ?