

Elijah and the Day of the Lord

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It has been assumed by some religious leaders, and their organizations, that the prophet Elijah will appear before the return of Jesus Christ and start restoring the law and commandments of Almighty God (Mal. 4:5). Some even claim that Elijah will be one of the two witnesses mentioned in the eleventh chapter of Revelation. If either of these assumptions were correct, they would nullify numerous scriptures regarding the suddenness of Christ's return,

But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven (NU adds – nor the Son), but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Mt. 24:36-39; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; Ed. note in parenthesis).

In the case of Malachi 4:5, if Elijah were to appear prior to Christ's return, many people would be aware and, therefore, Christ's return could not be compared to "a thief in the night" (cf. Mt. 24:43; 1Thes. 5:2; 2Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3).

If Elijah was one of the two witnesses mentioned in the eleventh chapter of Revelation, people would know the time of Christ's return by calculating one thousand two hundred and sixty days from the day of Elijah's first appearance to his death, plus the three and a half days during which the bodies of the two witnesses remain dead (Revelation 11:3; 9) Consequently, scriptures like Matthew 24: 36-39, 43; 1Thessalonians 5:2; 2Peter 3:10 and Revelation 3:3 would be misleading at best.

As the erroneous teaching that Elijah is one of the two witnesses is covered in the document entitled "*The Prophecy of Two Witnesses*", this study will examine scriptures dealing with Elijah's "restoration of all things",

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.⁶ And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5-6; cf. Dt. 4:9-10; 6:5-7; Ps. 78:5-8).

In Malachi 4:5, "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" is describing a period of time at the end of Christ's millennial rule on earth (Rev. 20:7ff). In order to arrive at this conclusion, the prophetic timing of phrases like "last day", "day of the Lord", or "Lord's day" must be understood correctly. For example, Christ used the phrase "last day" numerous times and applied it to both the first and second resurrections,

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood (annually at the New Covenant Passover service, through the symbols of the unleavened bread and wine; cf. Mt. 26:26-28) has eternal life, and I will raise him up at **the last day** (first resurrection) (Jn. 6:54; cf. Mt. 24:31; 1Cor. 15:50-53; 1Thes. 4:13-17; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

He who rejects me (Christ), and does not receive my words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in **the last day** (second resurrection) (Jn. 12:48; cf. Rev. 20:6; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Why would Christ use the phrase “last day” to describe events associated with both the first and second resurrections, which cover a period of a thousand years? The answer is found by combining two other scriptures (Isa. 28:9-10),

But **the day of the Lord** will come as a thief in the night (Christ’s return), in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (laid bare – found) (2Pet. 3:10; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that **with the Lord one day is as a thousand years**, and a thousand years as one day (2Pet. 3:8; emphasis added).

“The day of the Lord”, mentioned in 2Peter 3:10, describes the period from Christ’s return to the second resurrection, and concludes with the dissolving of the entire physical universe. Therefore, phrases like “the day of the Lord”, “Lord’s day”, or “last day” must be examined in their proper context to determine the extent of time they are referring to. This principle can now be applied to Elijah’s restoration prior to “the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

It is no coincidence that some of Christ’s disciples were given a vision in which they saw Elijah and Moses in a resurrected state. This occurred during the third festival of the year known as the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34), or Feast of Booths (Neh. 8:14). This Holy Day period pictures a time in the future following Christ’s return, and includes the restoration of Almighty God’s law and commandments (Isa. 2:1-4),

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, brought them up on a high mountain by themselves, ² and was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light. ³ And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him (Christ). ⁴ Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish **let us make here three tabernacles**: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’ (Mt. 17:1-4; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Therefore, when Christ told his disciples that Elijah must appear as part of the restoration of all things, he meant it literally. The only way this could happen would be if Elijah were resurrected from the dead with many others, including Moses, and the vision confirmed this,

And his disciples asked him, saying, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ ¹¹ Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Elijah truly is coming and will restore all things’ (Mt. 17:10-11).

Christ made the above mentioned statement after John the Baptizer had come “in the spirit and power of Elijah”, as prophesied in Luke 1:17, and been executed by Herod (Mt. 14:6-12),

But I (Christ) say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands. ¹³ **Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptizer** (Mt. 17:12-13; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Christ's assertion that Elijah would come to restore all things is a confirmation of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5, and includes the fact that Elijah would literally appear at some point in time prior to "the great and dreadful day of the Lord". The demons fear this future event because it will be the time of their judgment,

And suddenly they (two demons) cried out, saying, 'What have we to do with you, Jesus, you Son of God? **Have you come here to torment us before the time** (of the great and dreadful day of the Lord) (Mt. 8:29; Ed. notes in parenthesis; emphasis added).

A second witness to this period of judgment, that includes sinners in the spirit realm, is found in the following text,

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for **the judgment of the great day** (Jude 6).

This "judgment of the great day", which will include the judgment of Satan and the angels under his control, cannot refer to the time of Christ's return because this final judgment will not occur until the end of the millennium,

For **the great day of His wrath** has come, and who is able to stand? (Rev. 6:17; cf. 16:14; emphasis added).

More specifically, this "great day of judgment" follows the release of Satan and his final rebellion,

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison (Rev. 20:7ff).

Then I (John) saw **a great white throne** and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them (Rev. 20:11ff; emphasis added).

This "great day of judgment" is pictured by the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, thus placing it at the end of the millennial reign of Christ,

Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep a feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a Sabbath-rest, and **on the eighth day a Sabbath-rest** (Lev. 23:39; cf. Nu. 29:12-35; emphasis added).

This "great day of judgment" is not going to be a pleasant experience. This is why Elijah's commission, following his resurrection, is so important,

The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. ¹⁵ That day is **a day of wrath**..... (Zep. 1:14-15a; emphasis added).

This is why a number of scriptures make it clear that the first resurrection is preferable,

...And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a **better resurrection** (Heb. 11:35b; emphasis added).

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (Rev. 20:6; emphasis added).

At this point, it is important to emphasize that Elijah's restoration actually began with John the Baptizer who announced Christ's "first coming",

I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance, but **he who is coming after me is mightier than I**, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; emphasis added).

So the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 includes John's teaching of repentance, baptism, and the coming kingdom of God with Jesus Christ as its delegated ruler (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). However, this restoration could not continue without Christ finishing the commission given to him by his heavenly Father (Jn. 17:4; 19:30). Once finished, the restoration continued through Christ's body, the church (Col. 1:18, 24; cf. Eph. 3:10; 1Pet. 1:12), and will continue at Christ's return when Elijah is resurrected. Logically then, Elijah, after his resurrection, can only continue this process of restoration, rather than starting it just before Christ's return. In fact, Elijah was one of many prophets sent to witness against sinners in the hope of restoring them to Almighty God.

For **all the prophets** and the law prophesied until John (Mt. 11:13; cf. 2Kgs.17:13; emphasis added).

To summarize so far, the timing and sequence of prophecies in scripture can be very challenging. It must be determined whether certain scriptures are meant literally or figuratively. In the case of Elijah appearing to restore all things, Christ meant it figuratively in the case of John the Baptizer, but literally in the context of Elijah coming up in the first resurrection and continuing the restoration of all things. Consequently, by organizing the various scriptures pertaining to this prophecy, it becomes apparent that this restoration began with John, continued through Christ's short ministry and, because he completed everything his Father gave him to do, is now ongoing through his body, the church (Eph. 3:10; 1Pet. 1:12), and will continue with Elijah after his resurrection. Finally, it will draw to a close before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. If this restoration were to fail completely, many would suffer the consequences (Mal. 4:6b). Therefore, the message of restoration that Christ delivered on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles is extremely important today and needs to be taken seriously by every generation,

On the last day, **that great day** of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.'³⁸ He who believes in me (what Christ taught), as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'³⁹ But this he spoke concerning the (Holy) Spirit, which those believing in him would receive (upon repentance of sin; cf. Ac. 2:38); for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn. 7:37-39; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

So phrases like “last day”, “Lord’s Day”, and “Day of the Lord” can refer to events that will occur over an extended period of time. However, depending on the context, these phrases can also refer to an event that will happen at a very specific point in time. When Christ gave the prayer outline in Matthew 6:9-13, he included the request that “his Father’s kingdom come”, and that “his Father’s *will* be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Once the Adversary is bound (Rev. 20:1-3), this process of teaching the law and commandments of “the Father’s kingdom” will continue under Elijah’s direction throughout the millennial reign of Jesus Christ (Isa. 2:1-4). During this extended period of time, sinners in both the physical and spiritual realms will have an opportunity to repent and be restored in their relationship with Almighty God (Joel 2:28-32). Those who sinned and did not repent, prior to this thousand year period, will come up in the second resurrection, which is described as the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. This period of judgment, that will take place at the end of Christ’s millennial reign, will not be pleasant because it involves the refinement of many individuals who were previously resistant to God’s way of living, as summarized by His law and commandments (Mt. 8:11-12; 25:31-34; Rev. 3:17-18). The goal of this final period of judgment is the restoration of every sinner to Almighty God, while still maintaining everyone’s free moral agency (2Pet. 3:9b). In other words, no one is going to be forced into repentance. They will need to come to this point willingly (Isa. 1:19).

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