

11:1 *Commanding*- Vine feels that the *dia* in *diatasso* suggests "a distributive force: giving to each his appropriate charge". In this case we see the initial application of the parables about the servants being each given a specific work to do. That work was to preach to specific people whom the Lord intended for each of the disciples. Those parables apply to us- perhaps in that we are each intended to take the Gospel to specific individuals. If we fail in that work, there is no guarantee that the Lord will give that work to others; the harvest will simply not be gathered as it could have been.

*In their cities*- Without their presence (as they were away on their preaching tour), the Lord went to their home areas. He showed by this how He saw out witness amongst those whom we know and our families to be of the utmost importance- and He was and is willing and eager to back up our credibility in such witness.

11:2 *Sent two of his disciples*- It can't be insignificant that John sends two disciples out just after the Lord had sent out *His* disciples two by two in Matthew 10. Surely this is a literary device to set up John in negative contrast to the Lord at this time; John sent out his pair of disciples in response to his crisis of faith. He knew Jesus was to do mighty works- but he had heard of them only by report. Those he sent out had already heard and seen the Lord's miracles (:4), and yet John sends them to Jesus to ask if He is Messiah. It all reads rather negatively about John. It could even be that he died at a low point in his faith, and yet the Lord's positive comment about Him surely suggests that He saw John as being ultimately saved. The records of the Kings of Israel and Judah, along with various passages in Ezekiel 18, place great emphasis upon how a man *finishes* his spiritual journey, and yet there are also Biblical examples of faithful men dying at low ebb spiritually; this will not necessarily exclude from the Kingdom, and John the Baptist may be another example.

11:3 *Are you He that should come?*- The emphasis may be on the word "you". The coming one was a well-known term for Messiah, based upon Ps. 118:26.

*Look we for another?*- Despite John's clearly stated belief that Jesus was the promised bridegroom, the lamb of God and Son of God (Jn. 1:29-34), it seems things had not gone according to the prophetic program John had imagined- and he now had doubts about Jesus. For a man claiming (at least implicitly) to be Messiah, it would've been an unnecessary question to ask Him 'Are you Messiah?'. It could be inferred that John still believed in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, but had begun to wonder if He was only the *herald* of "another" whom they should

be looking for in order to establish the Kingdom. It could be that John's understanding of himself as the Elijah prophet had led him to expect that all Israel would repent, and then Messiah Himself would come and establish His Kingdom immediately. For this is indeed how the prophecies of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4 could be read. Perhaps John was full of such self-doubt that he wondered if he really had been the Elijah prophet, and was thinking that maybe he had just heralded the Elijah prophet, Jesus, who was in turn to herald "He that should come". This is the problem with holding a dogmatic view of prophetic sequences- when they prove wrong, either because our interpretation was faulty or because human lack of response means they are to come true in another way than ideally planned, then often peoples' faith in Christ Himself is damaged. If we have an open ended view of prophecy, whereby we understand it to state possibilities which may have other ways of fulfillment than what is ideally intended, then such crises don't arise. "Look we for another?" doesn't sound as if John was simply asking for a sign, in the spirit of Gideon. He had major questions about the whole prophetic program, sensing that something had changed; the word for "another" is also translated "altered" (Lk. 9:29). In this sense, his question may not necessarily reflect a crisis of faith in Jesus personally, but rather an earnest desire to know the new details of the revised prophetic program.

So even John the Baptist, whose teaching had prepared most of the twelve to accept Jesus, seems to have not been altogether clear about what we might consider fundamental things. He speaks here of Jesus as "the one to come", a commonly understood description of the Elijah prophet, based on the phrase being used about him in Mal. 3:1- and not of Messiah Himself. Thus John the Baptist anticipated that this "one to come", his cousin Jesus, would be a refining fire (Mt. 3:12)- which is exactly Malachi's language about the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:2; 4:1). This would explain why John the Baptist had apparent 'doubts' whilst in prison as to whether Jesus really was the Messiah. And it would also explain why the disciples expected Jesus to act like Elijah in Lk. 9:52-56. It was not until the baptism of Jesus that John the Baptist came to understand Jesus as the "one to come"; so the preparatory work which he had done with the disciples must have had what we would call a flimsy doctrinal basis. When Jesus called them to follow Him, and they so quickly obeyed, it is often assumed that John the Baptist had prepared them for this. But that preparation must at best have been very shallow and incomplete, given John's own admission that he did not recognize Jesus for who He was until His baptism. Why, however, was John's misunderstanding recorded in the Gospel records? Or the misunderstanding of his father Zacharias, that John was in fact the promised Messiah, "the prophet", the one would bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Romans (Lk. 1:71-79)? Perhaps for the same reason as the language of demons is used, especially to describe the miracles at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. He didn't correct this. But over time it became evident that the sheer power of the Son of God meant that in practice, demons didn't exist. Likewise, as the ministry of Jesus unfolds to us in the Gospel records, it becomes apparent that He was Son of God, the Messiah- and not merely an Elijah prophet.

11:4 *Tell John*- They had already told him once- the same word is used for how they initially had told John these things (Lk. 7:18). There is definitely the sense that John needed to work through the implications of what he was hearing, rather than having some specific explanation from the Lord.

*Hear... see*- The request that John 'hear' these reports more carefully begs connection with the Lord's frequent comment that the Jews heard but did not really hear (e.g. Mt. 13:13-17). John's lack of understanding appears to be in some sense culpable and at best disappointing to the Lord. The Lord is seeking to assure John that if he just thinks about the evidence, it's clear that Jesus is indeed Messiah, and as John had earlier preached- Son and lamb of God, who saves His people from their sins. He seems to be saying that that was so wonderful and fundamental, that the rearrangement of the prophetic timetable is in a sense irrelevant compared to that. Whether or not the timing or chronology of events surrounding the Kingdom comes true as we expect, or whether or not we discern how God has re-planned the fulfillment of prophecy- is all irrelevant compared to the wonder of knowing Jesus as the Christ and personal Saviour.

11:5,6 The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:5,6. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life. But the Lord's positivity is a powerful example.

11:5 *And the poor*- This was as remarkable and significant as the previous miraculous signs, of the blind seeing etc. There was a deep impression that religion was for the middle class or wealthy. Teachers didn't bother preaching to the poor because there was no possibility of financial support coming from them. Yet the Lord opened His manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount by saying that His message was especially intended for "the poor" (Mt. 5:3 s.w.). In many Christian circles, the same is true today. Churches need money (or, they think they do), and so

their focus is not on taking the Gospel to the poor but rather to the potential tithers. The disciples were amazed that the rich wouldn't be saved (Mt. 19:24,25), so deeply ingrained was this idea that spirituality and wealth were somehow supposed to go together. The Lord was teaching the opposite. There's no doubt that the Gospel is designed for the poor; and that if one were to bring "the poor" *en masse* into many churches / ecclesias today, the existing membership would up and go somewhere else. The Spirit was clearly upon the Lord Jesus exactly *because* He preached the Gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18). Our preaching attitude to "the poor" is a reflection of our spirituality. "The poor" in the immediate context were the disciples, for the Lord had just looked upon them in love and commented: "Blessed are you poor" (Lk. 6:20). In the response of "the poor" to Him, the Lord saw a Divine confirmation of His ministry. And it is the same with us. Our ministry is to take the Gospel to the unbelieving poor, and not to get middle class Christian religionists to shift churches and allegiance to our group. James 2:5 is clear that God chooses the poor *more than* the rich to be heirs of His Kingdom; so in this case, our preaching focus should be specifically towards them.

11:6 *Not be offended in Me*- Clearly the Lord saw John as likely to be about to stumble. As explained earlier, the cause of stumbling was [and is to this day] that the Lord at times makes changes in the outworking of His prophetic program. Because things haven't gone just as mere humans imagined it, because they can't get their heads around God's huge sensitivity to human repentance and choices, nor His subsequent willingness to change His timetable to accommodate that... therefore people stumble at Christ. The Lord encountered a similar situation in Nazareth, where people again were "offended in Him" (Mt. 13:57) because His Messiahship was not as they supposed it ought to be. Likewise the death of the Messiah by crucifixion caused even the disciples to be offended- it was simply not how they had imagined Messiah's salvation. They were "offended" exactly because He was 'smitten' (Mt. 26:31), even though the Lord had warned them ahead of time about His death so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The cross was therefore a rock of offence to many (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). So often we see the process- people come to Jesus with preconceived notions of how things should be, and fit those notions into the structure of their 'Christianity'. But the Christ's most fundamental teachings may in fact outlaw their beloved notions and favourite suppositions. And because their imagination of Jesus doesn't fit in with who He actually is- they stumble. It's like falling in love with an idea of a person, rather than with the person as they actually are. God's word presents Jesus as He actually is, and it is this which we must accept, allowing it thereby to jettison all preconceived notions we have of Him. The parable of the sower taught that persecution leads to people being offended (Mt. 13:21), and John was certainly undergoing persecution for the word there in prison. But persecution leads to spiritual stumbling largely because of the dashed expectations- that with Christ, all shall go well for us, and we in this life shall be delivered from problems. But the Lord is stressing throughout His teaching that that Jewish conception of

Messiah and Messiah's Kingship over men was simply incorrect. Those who followed Him would suffer and die, in one form or another, the death of the cross.

*Offended-* The Lord tried not to offend people (Mt. 17:27) and yet people were indeed offended in Him. But in Mt. 18:6-9 He makes offence of others a serious sin. In this connection of thought we see an example of where there are some things which can be said of Jesus, some things He could do, which we simply cannot do. In forgiving others, we are often challenged to forgive *as* the Lord does. Not all that He does can be replicated by us, nor indeed is it possible. Thus for us, forgiveness is usually a process, whereas for the Father and Son it appears to be more instantaneous.

11:7 *Out into the wilderness-* The crowds whom the Lord was addressing were therefore eager listeners of John, even perhaps in a sense his disciples. We see here the fulfillment of John's commission- to prepare *in the wilderness* a smooth way for the coming of the Messianic King of glory. But the crowds didn't respond, and Messiah didn't come in His glorious Kingdom. I suggested on 10:11 that the mission of the disciples was initially to those who had responded to John the Baptist's teaching; and now whilst they were away on their preaching tour doing such follow up work, the Lord was doing the same, addressing a crowd who had also responded to John enough to trek out into the wilderness to hear him.

*Reed shaken-* The reference is probably to the reeds growing in the Jordan where John baptized. Just as the people didn't go there to look at the reeds but at John as God's prophet, so the Lord is hinting that they should not look on John's weakness but upon who he essentially was. When John the Baptist had this crisis of faith, the Lord spoke of John to the multitude as if he was a strong believer, no reed shaken in the wind of doubt. And yet He didn't just paper over John's doubts and forget them, pretending He hadn't seen. The message He returned to John encouraged him to look back to the Isaiah prophecies of Messiah, and to remember especially the way that the weak, doubting ones would be made strong. The Lord evidently sought to strengthen the weak John by this allusion. The language of being *shaken* by *wind* is used elsewhere by the Lord in describing the process of condemnation at the last day (both Greek words are found in Mt. 7:25,27). The Lord's idea may therefore be: 'Sure, John is wavering at this very moment. But when you saw him in the wilderness, he wasn't; and in God's eyes, even now, he's not shaking in the wind, he's not going to be condemned at the day of judgment- even though, as you've just heard, he has his doubts and weaknesses'. Perhaps the Lord had John in mind when He soon afterwards spoke of how He would not condemn even a broken reed (s.w.- Mt. 12:20), but rather still use it as a channel for the oil of the Spirit. The whole situation with John is helpful in coping

with others who clearly are passing through times of trial which is resulting in their faith wavering. Think positively of who they were, have been, and still essentially are...

11:8 *Soft clothing*- The allusion is surely to Herod and Herodias, who had imprisoned John. John's clothing was rugged, not soft (Mt. 3:4).

*Kings' houses*- The Lord is drawing a contrast between John and Herod who imprisoned him. Herod Antipas had minted coins with a reed on them to celebrate the building of Tiberias. Perhaps the Lord is saying: 'OK, so John is weak for the moment, there in prison. But just think of the man he was when he was free, and how in God's eyes he compares so favourably against Herod who imprisoned him'. In His gracious way, the Lord is teaching that the overall sum of a man's spiritual life must be considered, and not whether he ends it with some element of weakness. This approach is also to be found in the way the inspired record appears to comment upon some of the kings of Israel and Judah- weakness at the end didn't necessarily scribble God's overall judgment of their lives.

11:9 *Did you go out*- Three times in :7-9 the Lord reminds them of their trek out into the wilderness to hear John; His point is that the respect they once had for him should remain, despite his wavering under extreme suffering. God's overall impression of Job appears similar, and it is a good teaching for we who are all too inclined to too harshly judge a good believer for a temporary period of weakness. The Greek phrase 'go out to see...' is used in classical Greek about going out to a spectacle or show. The Lord is suggesting that perhaps that was all their interest in John might have been, just as today likewise, it's quite possible to visit the truest church and hear the truest teaching, yet unperceived by those who are merely 'going to church'.

*More than a prophet*- The idea is 'the greatest prophet'. Judaism had various theories about who had been the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The Lord was saying that actually, the greatest of them was that man who was now sitting in the grim prison cell in Machaerus Fort, having a crisis of faith and understanding.

11:10 *This is he*- The emphasis is on the word "is". He *was* the prophet who came to herald Messiah. And yet John had denied that he was Elijah, nor "that prophet" (Jn. 1:20), surely a reference to the Elijah prophet; even though he later stated that he had been 'sent before' Messiah (Jn. 3:28), and was the voice of the Isaiah 40 prophet crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). The Lord is saying 'Actually, John *was* that prophet. He initially denied it in his humility, but he really was and is "that prophet". Now again his humility has led him to self-denial, he's wondering whether in fact I am the Elijah prophet and the Messiah Himself is yet to be 'looked

for'. But take it on My authority- he really was the Elijah prophet, even though his humility leads him to self-doubt at times'. See on :14 *this is Elijah*.

*Behold-* An invitation to perceive, and the Lord was asking them to perceive in that imprisoned man a great prophet, to see beyond his temporary, surface-level crisis of John, to perceive that "this is he".

*I send my messenger before your face; he shall prepare your way before you-* The pronouns are somewhat different from the original in Mal. 3:1: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before [My face] ... says Yahweh of Armies". Jesus, as the face and presence of God to men, interpreted the words of His Father as being spoken personally to Him. The way was prepared before God's face, according to Malachi, but God's Son applies that to Himself. That is not to say that Jesus was God in any Trinitarian sense. He was the supreme manifestation of God, and He quotes Malachi 3 in such a way as to teach that to those with ears to hear. We have a window here onto how the Lord Jesus read Scripture; passages about His Father were applied by Him to Himself, but that is no claim by Him to be God Himself in person.

The Lord is reminding the crowds who had gone out to hear John in the wilderness that *they* were the way which John had tried to prepare, and He was now the face of Yahweh standing before them. But they had become side-tracked from the essence of personal transformation by a worry about the credibility and humanity of the messenger; and again, this is a principle which badly needs our attention in our own path. So often believers leave the path, the way prepared, because of the perceived weakness or plain humanity of the one who taught them.

*Prepare... before you-* The Hebrew text being quoted in Mal. 3:1 has a word play here. "Prepare" translates *panah*, meaning to turn the face (s.w. Gen. 18:22 where the Angels "turned their faces"), and "Before [your face]" translates *paniyim*. The idea is that the messenger would turn the faces of people towards the face of God. The height of the calling was hard for Jewish minds, indeed for any human mind, to take on board; that the God whose face even Moses could not see can be seen face to face, thanks to the work of John the "messenger" turning men's faces to the face of Christ, who is the image of God. No wonder the people so easily became distracted from the height and wonder of the invitation, by focusing upon the fact that a depressed and humble prophet awaiting death in a dark prison cell had some crisis of Biblical interpretation. And so, so often the wonder of our calling likewise is eagerly forgotten by us and eclipsed by petty gossip and speculation about the faith and possible spiritual status of another man.

11:11- see on 20:11.

*Born of women-* The Lord Jesus was Himself the greatest of all born of women (Gal. 4:4), but in His humility He adds no rider to the effect 'John was the greatest of all born of women, Myself excepted, of course'. How we love Him for His humility.

*Least-* The little ones were the disciples, according to what the Lord had recently said in Mt. 10:42 (s.w.). He was urging them, yet again, to see their exalted status and to get over Judaism's attitude that the prophets were icons to whom the rank and file of God's people should never pretend. The Lord is using hyperbole here to make the point- that His immature 'little ones' were going to be far greater than even John, the greatest prophet. Or He could be implying that there will be some element of rank in God's future Kingdom- ruling over different numbers of cities, one star differing from another in glory. And the least in that age will be far greater than John was *in this life*. And yet Jesus was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom in the sense of the breaking in of God's principles in the lives of men. He could mean that John was the greatest under the old system, but the least of those within the new system were greater than John. Oscar Cullmann made a case for translating *mikroteros* here as "the youngest", with reference to the Lord being younger than John the Baptist and yet greater than him (see Jn. 3:30).

*Is greater-* Note the present tense. The following verse speaks of preaching the Gospel of that Kingdom (Mt.11:12 cp. Lk.16:16), perhaps implying that by responding to Christ's Gospel of the Kingdom we are associated with the Kingdom, and are thereby "greater" than the message which John preached.

Luke adds: "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized by him" (Lk. 7:30). God will fulfil His purpose for us- if we align ourselves with it, and thus see in everything that happens in our lives *His* will being forwarded. We can choose to not align ourselves with His will. The Pharisees rejected the purpose of God against themselves by not being baptized by John (Lk. 7:30 ESV). His will is not that we should sit around doing Sudoku, watching movies, bantering on the internet, trying to get as much money as possible to finance our nice meals, expensive coffees and designer clothes. His will, as expressed in His very Name, is that He 'will be' grace, love, care, justice, salvation, righteousness, all over the world and to every man and woman. If these things are our focus, our mission, our purpose, our passion, our underlying heartthrob, if *His* will is behind *our* will... then everything somehow comes together for us in a dynamic and fulfilling existence, both in this world and in the life eternal.

11:12 *The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force-* This can be seen as constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord in Lk. 16:16: "The Kingdom of God is preached, and every man



*presses into it*"; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). We either violently snatch / take the Kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12), or the devil of our own nature will snatch us away (s.w. Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). The choice before us is that pointed: fight or fall. The Lord graciously and generously saw the zeal of the mixed up, uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going. The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men". This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going.

However, there are other alternatives in interpretation. It's been suggested that 'the violent ones' may have been a term used to describe Jesus and His followers by His opponents; in which case the Lord would be alluding to this and saying that the enthusiasm of His people was in spiritual and not physical terms. Another option would be that the Lord is alluding to the Zealots and other groups who were trying to bring the Kingdom of God about by political, violent action; and the Lord would then be lamenting that since John's time, there were men who had misunderstood his message of the Kingdom by trying to bring it about by force. And there is a telling double meaning in the Greek for 'take it by force'; it could also mean that the Kingdom is under attack by these violent men. In this case, the real meaning and progress of the Kingdom as God intended, in terms of His spiritual dominion in human life, was being hindered by those who were trying to establish it by force. This suggestion is re-enforced by the use of the same word in Jn. 6:15, where the mistaken multitudes wanted to 'take [Christ] by force' and make Him King there and then. And this would explain the context- the imprisonment of John by the violent Herod would then be the basis for this saying. The violent were attacking and taking by force the Kingdom preachers like John.

11:13 *Prophesied until John*- The sentence begins with "For...". This is an explanation of the cut-off point between the time of the Kingdom, and the period of the law and prophets. It was as if their work was being done up until John. The *law* prophesied until John in the sense that in the Messiah whom John proclaimed, the law's prophecies were fulfilled. Note that the law just as much as the prophets is to be seen as prophesying. And yet other changeover points or boundaries are suggested within the New Testament. The law would 'pass' when all was fulfilled, which seems to hint at the 'finishing' of all when the Lord cried "It is finished!" on the cross. The law would not pass *until* this point (Mt. 5:18, using the same word as in 11:13 "until"). The Lord's death was clearly a major ending point for the old system. And yet Heb. 8:13 speaks of the old system as decaying and becoming old, and being about to vanish away- surely in the destruction of the temple in AD70. There are other hints in the NT that the old system somehow operated with some level of acceptance from God until AD70. Why the different potential changeover points? Presumably because the hope and intention was that John

would successfully prepare the way, and the Messianic reign would be ushered in by Israel's acceptance of their Messiah. And yet they killed Him. That point in itself was the theological changeover moment. But still not all Israel accepted the apostolic preaching of repentance for the crucifixion. And so in practice, the changeover point came when the temple was destroyed and any serious obedience to the old covenant was thereby rendered impossible. In all this we see God's amazing grace and desire continually to work with people, factoring in the possibility of their repentance.

11:14- see on 21:32.

*If you will receive it-* The same word was used earlier in this section, when the Lord spoke of the apostles being 'received' by those who had initially responded to John's teaching (Mt. 10:14,40,41). If Israel would receive it, John the Baptist was the Elijah prophet. The course of fulfillment of prophecy was conditional upon whether John succeeded in turning the hearts of Israel back to the fathers or not; on preparing them for the great and terrible day of the Lord. The Kingdom *could* have come in the 1st century had Israel received John as Elijah. But they would not. And so another Elijah prophet is to come in the last days and prepare Israel for her Messiah. "If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come" (RVmg.) says it all. The Elijah prophet who was to herald the Messianic Kingdom *could have been* John the Baptist- if Israel had received him. But they didn't, and so the prophecy went down another avenue of fulfillment. It could be that Mal. 4:6 implies that there is still the possibility that even the latter day Elijah ministry may not be totally successful- for the earth / land is to be smitten with a curse unless he succeeds in turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and there is no lack of evidence that the land may well be 'smitten' in the last days.

Some prophecies are fulfilled according to the acceptance of their fulfillment by believers, and therefore have their fulfillments in different ways at different times. Thus for those who received it, Malachi's 'Elijah' prophecies were fulfilled in John the Baptist, for those who accepted him (Mt. 11:14). The implication is that for those who didn't, those prophecies weren't fulfilled. When the Lord stood up and read from Isaiah, He commented that "this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Lk. 4:21). He didn't mean that His reading those words in a synagogue had fulfilled them. He speaks of "your ears" as standing for 'your correct perception / understanding' in Mt. 13:16. What He was surely saying was that for those of them who perceived who He was, Isaiah's words were ringing true. For those who rejected Him, of course, they weren't fulfilled, and therefore their complete, universal acceptance / fulfillment would be delayed until a future day; just as it was with the 'Elijah' prophecy.

*Receive it-* The "it" could refer to the prophetic message of the Law and prophets- hence GNB offers "and if you are willing to believe their message...". It was taken as assumed that every Jew received / accepted the Law and the prophets, but the Lord's point was that if they really received it, then they would accept John's message and now accept Him as Messiah. Likewise

the Lord challenges the Jewish scribes as to whether they had ever really read the Old Testament (Mt. 21:16,42; Mk. 2:25)- when they spent their days doing so (Jn. 5:39 RV).

*This is Elijah-* See on :10. John in humility and self-effacement had denied being the Elijah prophet (Jn. 1:20), and he now had a similar doubt, wondering whether in fact Jesus was the Elijah prophet and the Messiah was still to be looked for. The Lord is saying that John was who he was, the Elijah prophet, despite John's self-doubt. And we again have an example- we are to treat our brethren as whom God sees them as being, notwithstanding their temporary weaknesses and self-doubt. The use of "this" rather than "he" could be because the Lord had in mind the Elijah prophet's ministry, and not just John personally.

11:15 *Let him hear-* The Lord often uses this phrase, the idea seems to be that not all have the capacity to really hear, but if we do, then, we still have to exercise a choice as to whether we do or not. That would also be true to observed experience, because that is indeed how it seems- some people have no interest in God's word, something is not 'given' them, so that they never 'get it'; and those to whom it is given, there must still be a conscious choice exercised. For those who decide rightly, it becomes true that to him who has, more is given (Mt. 13:12). That verse in 13:12 begs the question 'Has what?'. The answer is surely given here in 11:15: 'ears to hear'. The hearing or listening which the Lord refers to is listening to the message of John- for the next verses liken John's ministry to calling out to people to respond, although most choose to be non-responsive. Maybe the idea is 'Despite John having a temporary crisis of faith and understanding, that is no excuse for not hearing his message'. Perhaps the tension is being developed between the need to *hear* John, whereas it is thrice stressed that this crowd had gone out into the desert to *see* John (11:7-9), as if they were going to a show- a powerful challenge that echoes down to our generation of churchgoing and churchianity.