

Turning Hearts in the End Time. Lesson 13

The News every day reminds us that we are in the time of the end, and for all of us life takes certain twists and turns. Our families go through periods of conflict, change, disunity or even abuse, and many stresses and strains that often impact their faith. The good news is that we worship a God who not only knows our sorrows, our pain of disillusionment, our fears, but is also acquainted with them all. As we study the book of Malachi we could say that Malachi lived in a time reminiscent of our day, polluted offerings, profane God's law, irreverence of His Holy Temple, infidelity etc.

In chapter one the prophet begins by showing God's love for Israel, and proving it by recalling to memory the differing destinies of Jacob and Esau, how that the descendants of the latter had suffered ruin and desolation, while the former had experienced favour and protection in the past, and should be still more blessed in the future (ch. 1:1-5). The very priests had been foremost in offending Him, by polluting His altar and offering unworthy sacrifices. They performed their office in a mercenary and perfunctory spirit, and actually despised the worship of God, and they were reprov'd for carrying out heathen marriages in defiance of the Law.

The distinctive character of the Messianic prophecies in this book consists in the announcement of the second Elijah, who should precede the advent of the Messenger of Jehovah, the Messiah Himself, and in the statement of the universal and everlasting nature of Christ's sacrificial offering and mediatorial office. (4:5-6). This message first given by the prophet Malachi was repeated by the angel Gabriel when he announced the birth of John the baptizer, to his father Zacharia

What is it that Elijah would do? Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

What is meant by the phrase "turn the hearts"?

Several applications have been suggested.

1. The reconciliation of the people of Israel with the Lord God as Father; In speaking to the prophet Jeremiah God said, I will cause them to walk by the rivers of water ----- for *I am a Father to Israel. Jeremiah 31:9b I will be a Father to you and you shall be My sons and daughters 2 Cor. 6:18.*
2. Restoration and renewal of family relationships. Parent-child relationships are a practical expression of covenant faithfulness with God. God told Isaiah, *those from among you shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called, The Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell in Isaiah 58:12*
3. Then the reference is to the work and influence of the second Elijah on all classes of society, on the hearts of both fathers and children. Thus the bond of union, which had been broken, will be restored. *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God Luke 1:16*

But why is John the Baptist here called Elijah?

Foretelling his birth, the angel said unto his father, Zacharias, "And he shall go before Him in the *spirit* and *power* of Elijah." There were many points of resemblance between Elijah and John.

1. Both prophesied in a time of great unbelief and apostasy from the law;
2. Both sought to bring back the people to the piety of their fathers;
3. Both prophesied before great and terrible judgments.

The historical circumstances in which they lived were remarkably parallel. Ahab reappears in Herod, Jezebel in Herodias. The words of Mark (6:20), where he speaks of Herod, fearing John, and did many things, apply without any alteration to Ahab. Their very appearance, the fashion of their dress, and their mode of life, were identical. Bengel says of John: "Even the dress and food of John were in accordance with his teaching and office. The minister of repentance led the same life as penitents themselves should lead." His mode of life was a sermon *de facto* on mortification.

Matthew (11:14-15) makes some very interesting observations. The antithesis of these verses with the preceding verse, the prophets have prophesied, is here hinted at: now is the time of the fulfillment of those prophecies. The idea itself was before expressed as the kingdom of heaven suffering violence. This then furnishes an explanation of the manner in which it suffereth violence. John was the Elijah who was to come as the precursor of Messiah, according to Mal. 4:5. The Jews understood the passage literally, and expected that Elijah would arise from the dead, and actually appear among them. Jesus removed this mistake (comp. Matt. 17:12), by acknowledging John as the Elijah of whom Malachi had spoken.

And if ye will receive it. Jesus gives the information plainly, but doubts if it will be of any use to them. For the reception of a truth depends upon the attitude of the will. In this case to acknowledge John as Elijah would mean to accept the present consequences of that reformation which Elijah was to bring about (Mal. 4:6). But "the human will has a natural disinclination to cultivate and sharpen the conscience in combination with the knowledge of the law, has no desire to look into this mirror, and men as a rule desire to have quite a different picture of themselves from that which conscience shows them" (Martensen's 'Christian Ethics,' i. § 119).

Jesus had taken the disciples with Him on the mountain where He was transfigured before them. There, for a very brief period, they saw Moses and Elijah who disappeared as mysteriously as they appeared. The disciples were perplexed about the brevity of time that the two heavenly visitors were with the Master, and sharing the common Jewish opinion, and supposing his residence with our Saviour would be a permanent one, they were perplexed at his disappearance and asked Jesus, Why then say the Scribes, that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered, "*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.*"

John's denial before the Sanhedren, I am not Elijah (John 1:21) has been made use of by the few Protestant commentators who have held the view of another Elijah. However, he affirmed he was when he said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord;" *in that sense*, he was Elijah.

What do we know about Elijah? He was a prophet of God. With this lesson we have one of the most eventful stories. Ahab king of Israel marries a heathen princess, Jezebel, who introduces Baal worship into the land. Consequently, the teachings of God that uplifted marriage, family, and sexuality were overshadowed by such practices as prostitution, and other sexual perversions. Into this arena of conflict over worship comes Elijah. Ahab was attracted to Jezebel not because of how she walked but because of how he refused to walk. God had called him to lead His people in the way of righteousness but he got sidetracked by a woman whose influence led him astray. The Seventh-day Adventist church has been called to proclaim the Elijah message of repentance. Called to rebuild the old waste places.

How are they to do so? As in Elijah's day the people have strayed from God, they have transgressed the law and declared open rebellion. Many so called protestants who claim to keep the law have abandoned the fourth commandment which God says, *It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever.* Notice, the time span, forever! *Moreover also I gave them My Sabbath, to be a sign between Me and them that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them Ezekiel 20:12.* Our duty is to proclaim a "thus says the Lord." Elijah was a marked man after telling Ahab that there would not be dew or rain for three and a half years. Subsequently, God instructed him to go and hide by the brook Cherith where he would be fed by ravens. This he did and the ravens brought him food morning and evening. He remained there until the brook dried. God then told him to go to Zarephath where a widow would take care of him. 1 Kings 7:2-5.

Why did God send him to this city which was near to Jezebel's hometown?

Could it be that God was showing that He rules, even those of the heathen household?

Elijah greeted the widow with a grim test: to use her last bits of oil and flour to feed him and to trust God for both her and her son's future. As her oil and meal stretched out for many days, the woman came to understand, though not fully, more about the God of Israel. Tragically, her only son fell sick and died. In keeping with some of the prevailing myth she questioned Elijah's sincerity in the death of her son. 1 Kings 17:18. Elijah's subsequent response was to heal her son. Her heart-felt joy is recorded in 1 Kings 17:24. In Luke 4:26, Jesus remarked on the faithfulness of this woman.

What would this do for your spiritual experience? The mother's response reveals the effect of the Elijah message. Faith in God and His Word arises in the heart as, by His power, life is restored and the family is reunited. Today, there are many who give assent as doctrines are preached, but are lukewarm in their spiritual experience. When the truths of God's Word are experienced personally and revival and restoration occur in home relationships, conviction is powerfully laid upon the heart. When evil rears its ugly head God's people must be ready to stand and having done all must stand (*Ephe. 6:13*). Israel was still continuing her rebellion and

Elijah was again sent to Ahab. Ahab gathered all the people, and all the prophets of Baal, on Mt Carmel. Here Elijah faced, the most challenging moment of his ministry, more so because he thought he was the only true prophet left.

He challenged the prophets of Baal to offer sacrifice but to let Baal light the fire and he would do the same with Yahweh. After much ado they failed miserably. After their failure Elijah prepared his sacrifice. He was deliberate in every aspect. He called the people to come near, and at the hour of the evening sacrifice he called upon Yahweh to show Himself as the only true God, and the God of Israel. Then fire came down and consumed the sacrifice. The invitation in 1 Kings 18:30 to *come near to me* is reminiscent of the Saviour's call in Matthew 11:28, Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Elijah's focus on Jehovah's altar reminds us of the need for family altar, which provides an opportunity for togetherness and cooperate worship. The call to, *come near*, also reminds us that of ourselves we cannot go to God; we can only respond to His call of grace, freely given.

How is John's message similar to that of Elijah? Elijah called the people to return to God, *choose ye this day whom ye will serve*, but they were content in their idolatrous ways and would not listen 1 Kings 18:21. John came preaching the gospel of repentance, *repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, but, as in the days of Elijah, they were content in their sin. How much better are we? As Elijah, John was to prepare the way for the promised Messiah. He referred to Christ as *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* John 1:29. Then went on to narrate the mission of Christ which was to turn their hearts heavenward. The same challenge that Elijah gave to Israel is being given to us today. *If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal/Pope, follow him.*

Whose side are you on? What are you following? The traditions of men or the commandments of God? Choose ye.

Paul writing to timothy says: *This know also that in the last days perilous times will come.* (2 Timothy 3:1). The world needs, desperately, to see a demonstration of unselfish, caring, lasting commitment, and unswerving devotion to God. By His grace, Christian families can and should provide such a demonstration. As the apostle Paul counseled, we must remember that any demonstration we give is also for ourselves. We are, through Jesus, part of the family in heaven (Eph. 3:15). Thus, whether we are a family of one or more, we are called to be witnesses to the God we profess to serve.

May we have grace so to profit by this solemn warning, that we may escape the malediction of those on the left hand at the great day, and inherit the blessing which will be pronounced to those on the right hand by the almighty and everlasting Judge! (Matthew. 25:33-46) *Now unto the King Eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen! 1 Timothy 1:17*

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear A proverbial expression to evoke attention, or to mark a conclusion from certain premises.