

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

THE MISSION OF ELIJAH

In Galatians 3:16 we are emphatically told that to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, and in Romans 9:4 that the promises belong to Israel. The Old Testament closes with one of the greatest promises to Israel to be found in the Word of God. It is a promise that is yet to be kept by God. Through the prophet Malachi He declared: **"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"** (Mal. 4:5,6).

These are the glorious words that close the Old Testament, and even though the meaning of certain statements made in this promise are somewhat obscure, its leading features are quite plain. We are told that before "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" comes, Elijah the prophet will be sent to the people of Israel, and he will accomplish a far-reaching work of spiritual nature. It is also declared that if it were not for this great work, it would be necessary for the Lord to smite the earth with a curse when He comes.

The Lord is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. If He returned to earth today, He, according to His word, would **"take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"** (2 Thess. 1:8), and since people like this make up the overwhelming majority of mankind, His action would be one of smiting the earth with a curse. But we can rest assured that He will not need to do this, for before He comes He will send Elijah who will do a work that will make such far-reaching vengeance unnecessary.

The phrase "turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the children to their fathers" is somewhat obscure as to its exact meaning. However, we can say with certainty that these words indicate a work of great spiritual value and importance, first for Israel and then from them a blessing for all families of the earth. Furthermore, we know that in God's order the family is the one unit He has established, and that these words indicate a full return to, the family system when God governs 'the earth. In the family, the father is supposed to be the head and the teacher of the children. Today, the average father is incapable of being either head or teacher, and at the best the children regard the father as a well-intentioned nincompoop whose chief function is to bring in the money. The ministry of Elijah is going to make fathers to be what they should be, and he will do the same for the children.

The words of the angel of the Lord to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, shed further light on the meaning of this phrase. Concerning John he said: **"And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 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"** (Luke 1:17).

The ministry of John the Baptist did not fail. It prepared many in the land of Israel for the first advent of Christ. The work of Elijah in a coming day will prepare all Israel for the second advent of Christ. When He comes again He will find a nation fully ready for Him. There should not be even as many as one who will need to be eliminated because he knows not God. **"For they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more"** Jer. 31:34). This is God's promise to them.

The words of Christ emphasize still further the far-reaching spiritual nature of the work Elijah is to do: **"And His disciples asked Him saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come and restore all things"** (Matt. 17: 11). From this we know that the work of Elijah is not to be insignificant. He will "restore all things," and this will be done before the beginning of the great and notable day of the LORD.

It must be noted here that Elijah does his great work in the time period and under the conditions brought about by the divine assumption of sovereignty which inaugurates the government of God upon the earth. He is the one who

will indicate the exact boundaries of the land God promised to Abraham, the boundaries of the land allotted to each tribe, the division of Israel according to their tribes, the identification of the Aaronic family, the three divisions of the tribe of Levi, the restoration of the judges and counselors as promised in Isa. 1:26, the identification of historical sites, the restoration and proper observance of the feasts. Today no one knows how passover was observed in the time of Christ. All this will be restored by Elijah when God governs the earth.

The prophecies of Malachi and the words of the Lord Jesus concerning the coming and ministry of Elijah have proved embarrassing to many students of the prophecies of things to come. They do not know what to do about a coming of Elijah and his great work before the return of the Lord. They have no room for such a grand event within the limits of their tight systems of prophetic interpretations.

Some get around it by making Elijah to be one of the two witnesses described in Rev. 11:3-12. But this cannot be true for Elijah does a great work of "turning." He turns the hearts of both fathers and children. The verb *turn* which appears twice in the Malachi prophecy is the Hebrew word *shuv*, and it denotes the kind of turning that denotes the conversion of the heart. See Psalm 51: 13, Psalm 19:7, and Isa. 6:10 where this same word is translated converted. Since the two witnesses in Revelation are smiting both the earth and men upon it, we cannot say that they are doing a work of converting men so that the Lord will not need to smite the earth with a curse when He comes.

Others get around the direct prophecy of Malachi by saying that it was fulfilled in John the Baptist. They feel they have solid ground for this position. And since this is the way they want it to be, they steadfastly refuse to consider any truth that would make their position impossible. Furthermore, they refuse to see that if proven true the idea would break the Word of God. In considering the teaching that John the Baptist and his ministry fulfilled the Malachi prophecy of the coming of Elijah, certain facts must be faced.

When the priests and the Levites asked John if he were Elijah, his emphatic answer was, "**I am not**" (John 1: 21). This should be enough to settle the question for all who permit the Word of God to speak in matters in dispute. John the Baptist certainly knew who he was and the nature of his

mission, and he declared that he was not Elijah.

In the Malachi prophecy we have the direct statement of the LORD that He would send "Elijah the prophet." Since John declared that he was not Elijah, he could not have been the one God promised to send. Even though he came in the spirit and power of Elijah, he did not fulfill the Malachi prophecy. God made a promise and we have every right to believe He will fulfill this promise. We do not need to settle for John the Baptist. To do so would break the Word of God.

The language of Matthew 17: 10,11 seems to indicate that the scribes were justifying their "do nothing" attitude toward the Lord Jesus by quoting the prophecy of Malachi. They insisted that He did not have Elijah as His forerunner. This led the disciples to ask: **'Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come'** (Matt. 17:10). And even though John the Baptist had come, had completed his ministry, and had been beheaded, the Lord Jesus said in answer: **"Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things"** (Matt. 17:11).

Thus our Lord made the coming of Elijah and the restoration of all things to be still future events, even after the death of John the Baptist. However, He added: **"But I say unto you, That Elijah 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. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist"** (Matt. 17: 12,13).

This is the passage that many use to prove that John was Elijah. At first glance it would seem to teach this, but many of us have learned to take more than one glance at a Scripture passage. We know that Elijah never died, and that John was "born of a woman." If John were Elijah, then we would have here a clear case of reincarnation. But if this be so, what became of that Elijah who "went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kgs. 2:11)? Furthermore, when Elijah appeared with Moses on the mount of transfiguration, it was Elijah and not John (Matt. 17: 3). What then did our Lord mean when He said, **"Elijah is come already?"**

Since the scribes were using the fact that Elijah had not yet come as proof that Jesus was not the Messiah, it is evident that His words were directed against them. If they did not recognize John as one sent from God, they

would not recognize Elijah if he were sent by God. If Elijah had come they would have treated him just as they treated John, since John came in the spirit and power of Elijah. I believe that the Lord here used a figure of speech that is familiar to all of us. We speak of the need for "a Lincoln" or "a Gladstone" or "a Solomon." Our Lord was telling the disciples that *an* Elijah had already come and the scribes had rejected him. Would it have been any different if *the* Elijah had come?

In an earlier reference to John and Elijah our Lord had said: "**And if ye will receive it, this is Elijah which was for to come**" (Matt. 11:14). The truth here is expressed in the same manner as we find in Matt. 26:26 where the Lord said: "This is. My body" meaning "this represents My body." Thus, in Matt. 11:14 our Lord declared to all who received him, John represented Elijah, and he would do for them individually what Elijah will do for Israel as a nation.

So, by the words "Elijah, who is about to come," our Lord confirmed the fact that Elijah's coming was a future event even though John was then upon the earth.

There is one group in the United States that has made so much of the coming of Elijah to restore all things that they have built a small denomination upon this principle. They would have all believers looking for and waiting for Elijah. This is wrong. Elijah will make no appearance until after God has assumed sovereignty. All his work will be done within the parameters of the kingdom of God. We must put first things first and continue to live looking for the blazing forth of the glory of our great God and Savior the Lord Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). Elijah will not come until this great manifestation has taken place.

ISSUE NO. SB091