

What Is the Work of Elijah?

“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” (Malachi 4:5, 6).

So closes the Old Testament. *What does this mean? WHO is Elijah? Is he here today? Is the main commission to this “Elijah” to restore family unity?*

In my more than 30 years in the ministry of Jesus Christ, I have met many who claim to be *mentioned in the Bible!* There have been those who have claimed to be Moses, one of the prophets, Elijah or even Zerubbabel or the two witnesses!

Once, I had to forcibly eject from my office a man who claimed he was “Jesus Christ”!

True to Jesus’ warnings, “many false prophets shall arise and deceive many!”

It is heady wine, indeed, for those claiming religious credentials to “discover themselves” in the Bible! When a religious leader claims before his followers that he is mentioned, *personally*—mentioned in the same way great prophets and patriarchs of God are mentioned—then he can lay claim to *divine credentials*, and this aura of mystical spiritual credentials gives him unique *control* over his followers.

But is “Elijah” alive today?

Is the “work of Elijah” being done?

John the Baptist

Jesus Christ said of John the Baptist: “Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he ... and if ye will receive it, this is Elias [Elijah] which was for to come” (Matthew 11: 11-14).

Jesus Christ plainly said that John the Baptist was *typical* of the “Elijah who was to come.” Notice the prophecy concerning John the Baptist given to Zecharias, John’s father, by a powerful angel: “. . . Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

“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 [spirit] 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 [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 1:13-17).

Notice that an *angel* gives us further insight into what is truly meant by the prophecy that Elijah would “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.”

He plainly says a part of the ministry of John the Baptist would include turning the “disobedient to the *wisdom of the just*”!

What *was* the ministry of John the Baptist?

In several places, Jesus spoke of him as “the prophet who was to come,” and it is plainly said that he fulfilled the prophecy of *Isaiah* who prophesied of “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the WAY OF THE LORD, make His paths straight” (Matthew 3:3).

John’s ministry was a *great* ministry! It was a ministry of witness and WARNING; calling upon that living generation barely prior to the beginning of Jesus Christ’s ministry to REPENT!

The Bible says, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”

John preached: REPENT, and believe the gospel!” And what does it mean to REPENT? To repent (Acts 2:38) means to be deeply broken up over your past SINS! But, first, you must come to know *what sin is* (1 John 3:4).

You must come to see yourself as rebellious and disobedient to the laws of God! Repentance and conversion will finally bring a *deep* sense of awareness of God; a desire to throw oneself totally on the mercy, love and forgiveness of God; an acknowledgement of God as divine SOVEREIGN in your life!

Repentance and conversion replace the human, carnal spirit of antagonism, resentment, vanity, jealousy, lust and greed with the Holy Spirit of God, which is “love, joy, peace”!

Saul, whose name meant “destroyer,” was completely CONVERTED by the power of God’s Holy Spirit and became one of the most outstanding examples of a loving, gentle, meek, humble servant of God found anywhere in the Bible! His was a TOTAL personality *change*!

Consider the average carnal-minded person you know. Though “good,” the way the world might reason, how many people walking the streets of the cities of our nations are deeply aware of their *debt* to such men as Noah, Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? How many know that, commencing with the 12th chapter of the book of Genesis, the Bible could be characterized as a story about “one man’s family”?

How many know about the great *covenants* made between God and faithful Abraham; Abraham, who believed and *obeyed* God, to whom the promises of both race and grace were made unconditional?

Yet, what happens at repentance and *conversion*?

A whole new WORLD of knowledge and information opens up! Those who were walking about in *ignorance* of God’s divine plan; those who knew NOTHING of the Old and the New Covenant; repentance, salvation, and the coming Kingdom of God, now truly do develop *a hunger* for the Word of God! They want to read and study the Bible! They discover *who we are* in the scheme of things; discovering how God promised the inheritance of national *greatness* to the seed of Abraham!

They learn that all of us, whether black, brown, yellow or pertaining or belonging to whatever race, when converted and receiving the Holy Spirit of God become “the seed of Abraham” (Galatians 3:29).

Truly their hearts are turned “to the FATHERS”!

For, after all, WHO ARE the “fathers” spoken of in the Bible? Notice!

John was rebuking some of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism. He said to them, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham to our father’; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matthew 3:7-9).

Notice how, in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Lazarus is carried “by the angels into *Abraham’s bosom*” (Luke 16:22).

The rich man, figuratively in the resurrection, lifts up his eyes and sees a wall of flame—the *lake of fire*—approaching! He then cries out and says, “*Father Abraham*, have mercy on me . . .” Later, in the discussion between the rich man and “father Abraham,” Abraham says, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

“And he said, nay, FATHER Abraham: But if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

“And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from he dead.”

Notice that, in this parable, Jesus refers to “Father Abraham”!

Notice another account of one of Christ’s controversies with Jewish religious leaders.

After Christ had said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” they answered Him and said, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, ‘Ye shall be made free’?”

Now notice a seeming contradiction.

Jesus said, “I know that ye are *Abraham’s seed*; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you” (John 8:32-37).

Notice: Jesus acknowledges their racial claim to being Abraham’s children!

BUT notice how He *rejects their spiritual* claim to being Abraham’s children!

“They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, if ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: This did not Abraham.

“Ye do the deeds of your father” (John 8:39-41).

Then Jesus said, “Ye are of *your father the devil!*” (John 8:44).

As the argument continued, the Jews spitefully asked, “Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, if a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than OUR FATHER ABRAHAM, which is dead? And the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?”

Jesus answered, “If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: It is my *father* that honoreth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God:

“Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his sayings.

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.

“Then said the Jews unto Him, thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

“Jesus said unto them, verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I AM!” (John 8:52-59).

Notice! These *unconverted*, hateful, murder-plotting Jews claimed to be the children of “Father Abraham”!

Jesus acknowledged the veracity of their claim racially, but REJECTED their claim *spiritually!*

He chided them for claiming they were “Abraham’s seed,” saying Abraham did not do the *works* they were doing!

Jesus then characterized His relationship with His FATHER in heaven; and showed that He, as VERY GOD prior to His human birth, had been BEFORE Abraham—was, in fact (had they been able to grasp it), Abraham’s FATHER!

Does a light begin to dawn?

The ministry of John the Baptist was a call to *repentance!*

When one repents, he *does*, in fact, find that his heart is turning to “the FATHERS,” meaning the patriarchs, prophets and the “fathers” mentioned in the *Bible!*

But Doesn't Conversion Heal and Reunite Families?

Consider this. The church is the Body of Christ; a spiritual organism, not merely a political *organization*.

As the spiritual Body of Christ, the church is to do *the work* Jesus Christ commanded.

He gave to His church the great COMMISSION to “preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God as a witness [and a *warning!*] to all nations, and then shall the end come!” (Matthew 24:14).

Even as John the Baptist preached the gospel, so did Jesus say, “Repent ye and believe the gospel!”

Now, what *happens* all too often, when one or two members of a family REPENT?

Notice what Jesus predicted: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

“But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

“And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

“But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come” (Matthew 10:16-23).

Here is the very commission of Jesus Christ to His 12 apostles! It represents a latter-day commission to the CHURCH! It shows that, eventually, church leaders will be *brought* (that means dragged, under arrest, in handcuffs—not greeted in sumptuous banquets!) before governors and kings for the name of Christ, and for testimony “against them” (not for them).

And what happens as a result of this powerful witnessing to the world?

“The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death!” But is this not a *contradiction* to the way many have “understood” the prophecy of Malachi 4? If the hallmark of the ministry of the church at this time—the “work of Elijah”—is to UNITE families; if one of its main features is to provide youth programs, clubs, field trips, summer programs and camps, athletic endeavors and clubs for *children*, then WHY does Jesus Christ prophesy that the work of the church would cause such *violent family division and strife*?

Notice! “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

“And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.

“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:34-39).

There you have it! Jesus Christ plainly says that those who *obey* Him will find themselves “at variance against his father” and that families will likely be DIVIDED!

On the other hand, is this what God wants within families in the church? Of course not! Otherwise, why would the Holy Spirit have inspired the apostle Paul

to speak so glowingly of the state of marriage; to urge husbands and wives to love and respect one another; to urge parents to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”?

Why is there such strong emphasis on children being obedient to their parents (Ephesians 6:1) and over the appropriate roles of husband and wife?

No, when BOTH parties are converted; when both members of a family are members of God’s true church, then the ideal family situation is that urged by the apostle Paul!

Sadly, this is not always the case. Sometimes, because one member of a family is called of God; his mind is open and he is *converted*, given God’s Holy Spirit, it only succeeds in alienating him from his carnal-minded family members!

Notice what Christ promised: “And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matthew 19:29).

Do you see? Surely the work of the church of whom Jesus Christ is the LIVING HEAD is a work which is characterized by unwanted *family division*! Jesus said so! He so prophesied!

You cannot find a *promise* that, when you are converted, it will result in immediate *family harmony*! Rather, it is more likely to result in the *opposite*!

However, for those who are *greatly blessed* to be the exceptions; where *whole families* are converted and come into God’s church, then such family strife and division need not occur!

But can you, in conscience, claim that one of the outstanding identifying marks of the work of the true church would be “*restoring family unity*”?

Is that what is really meant by the prophecy concerning Elijah which is to come?

Notice! “God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the FATHERS by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by a Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds [ages]” (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

Who are “the Fathers” toward whom the “hearts of the children” are to be turned by the work of this latter-day Elijah?

Your Bible says they are “the just”! (Luke 1:17).

Notice it again: “And he [John the Baptist] 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!”

Notice what John’s father, Zecharias, was inspired to say of John the Baptist: “And thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to *prepare His way*; to give *knowledge of salvation* unto His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:76-79).

The ministry of John the Baptist was to ADULTS—a ministry crying out to “prepare the way of the Lord,” and to “*REPENT*”!

And who was one of those who was deeply moved by the angel’s message concerning John? His own FATHER, Zecharias!

And what did Zecharias say? “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us:

“To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; The oath which He sware to our father Abraham, That He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:68-75).

Read that moving passage again! First, Zecharias says that Abraham is “our father Abraham”! and speaks of the great God who is “to perform the mercy promised to OUR FATHERS and to remember his holy covenant.”

John's message, when it took root deep within the hearts of mature adults, would cause a great and abiding realization of the enormous debt that sense of gratitude the living generation owed to such great patriarchs as Abraham!

In this way, disobedient and sinning men would find their "hearts turned to the *fathers*"!

No, the ministry of a modern-day Elijah is far GREATER; far *GRANDER*, than merely "teaching children how to *have fun!*"

The ministry of a modern-day Elijah is a ministry of a call upon all mankind to REPENT!

Even as John the Baptist fulfilled, typically, the ministry of Elijah who was to come, so there is to come a prophet who will become known over all the world as the greatest voice calling upon mankind to REPENT OF SIN, and will indeed be "turning the hearts of the children [this modern, sinning generation of *adults*] to the *fathers*"!

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