

Family Seasons

Turning Hearts in the End Time

Lesson #13 for June 29, 2019

Scriptures: Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 3:2; 11:14-15; 17:10; 1 Kings 16:29-17:24; 18:20-45.

1. In this series of lessons, we have considered many issues that face families. Sometimes, we do well; and sometimes, not so well. Fortunately, for those of us who hold firmly to the truths taught by the Bible, there is a glorious outcome at the end. Does it help to get you through the difficult times to know that God is in charge and that He will bring everything to a glorious end at the second coming?
2. There are three humans that we know for sure are already in the kingdom of heaven: Enoch, Moses, and Elijah. We do not know very much about Enoch; but, the lives of Moses and Elijah are spelled out in some detail in Scripture. In this lesson we will discuss Elijah the prophet of the Old Testament. Also, we will discuss the New Testament forerunner of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, who is the “New Testament Elijah.”
3. Read Malachi 4:5-6. The last two verses in the Old Testament in Protestant Bibles suggest that before “the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah.” (*GNB**) What does that mean? Surely, the coming of Jesus more than 2000 years ago did not constitute “the great and terrible day of the Lord.” So, when will the great and terrible day of the Lord come?
4. And why did Jesus suggest repeatedly as recorded in Matthew 11:14-15; 17:10; Mark 6:15; and Luke 1:17 that John the Baptist was Elijah?
5. The prophet Malachi, living about 400 years before Christ, presented a very sad picture of things in and around Jerusalem. It seems that the people were almost mocking Malachi after each of his predictions. But, we know that a Jewish tradition developed suggesting, based on those verses from Malachi, that Elijah would appear personally as the herald of the Messiah. We know that Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot and also that he appeared to Jesus Christ on the mount of transfiguration. (Matthew 17:1-13) Why do you think Moses and Elijah were chosen to come and encourage Jesus on the mount of transfiguration? Why not send Gabriel? For one thing, Moses represented those who have died and been raised to life again; Elijah represented those who will never taste death.
6. But, the bigger question is: What does it mean to “turn the hearts” of the people? Clearly, God has been calling human beings to follow Him right down through the history of our world. There have been times of gross rebellion and occasionally times when groups of people have come back to God.
7. Why do you think Malachi specifically mentioned bringing fathers and children together again? What does that have to do with “the great and terrible day of the Lord”?
8. We know that the family is the basic building block of society. That is the place where children are taught, where they learn by example, and, hopefully, learn how to prepare themselves for the return of Jesus.
9. Jesus Himself reemphasized the teachings of Moses that our first commandment is to love God and the second is like unto it to love our fellow human beings. (See Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5; and Matthew 27:37-40.) Is there a relationship between those two commandments? Additionally, Seventh-day Adventists have pointed to the first four commandments as representing our love for God and the last six as representing our relationships with other human beings. And that is, obviously, true. But, is there a real basis

on which to say that those who love God will also love their fellow humans?

10. If you have a few minutes to do so, read the chapter in *Prophets and Kings* entitled “Carmel.”
11. Ahab was a terrible king; he was more wicked than any of the Israelite kings before him. Worst of all, he married the daughter of the King of Sidon. She was determined to convert all the people of the kingdom of Israel into worshipers of Baal and Ashtoreth. Unfortunately, with the help of the Devil, she did a remarkably good job.
12. Read 1 Kings 16:29-17:24; compare Luke 4:25-26. Try to imagine the scene when Elijah, dressed in very rough clothing, marched into the palace of Ahab without asking permission from anyone and announced to the king that there would be no rain until he said so. Then, Elijah turned around and marched out; and before the people in the palace had a chance to recover from their shock, he was gone.
13. First, he spent some time at the brook Cherith in foreign territory east of the Jordan and not far from his home. When the stream ran dry, Elijah moved to Zarephath. Zarephath was located just a few miles from Sidon, Jezebel’s hometown, the place where her father reigned as king. For a few minutes, consider Jezebel’s position.

Jezebel utterly refused to recognize the drought as a judgment from Jehovah. Unyielding in her determination to defy the God of heaven, she, with nearly the whole of Israel, united in denouncing Elijah as the cause of all their misery. Had he not borne testimony against their forms of worship? If only he could be put out of the way, she argued, the anger of their gods would be appeased, and their troubles would end.

Urged on by the queen, Ahab instituted a most diligent search for the hiding place of the prophet. To the surrounding nations, far and near, he sent messengers to seek for the man whom he hated, yet feared; and in his anxiety to make the search as thorough as possible, he required of these kingdoms and nations an oath that they knew nothing of the whereabouts of the prophet. But the search was in vain. The prophet was safe from the malice of the king whose sins had brought upon the land the denunciation of an offended God.

Failing in her efforts against Elijah, Jezebel determined to avenge herself by slaying all the prophets of Jehovah in Israel. Not one should be left alive. The infuriated woman carried out her purpose in the massacre of many of God’s servants. Not all, however, perished. Obadiah, the governor of Ahab’s house, yet faithful to God, “took an hundred prophets,” and at the risk of his own life, “hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.” 1 Kings 18:4.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 126.1-3. [Bold type is added.]

14. That is amazing! Elijah was hiding very near Jezebel’s father’s home, and no one noticed! Try to imagine having a widow with one son living in a small village; suddenly, a strange single man showed up and began living with them. It must have been apparent fairly soon that they were the only ones in town who still had food! How could one hide that? They lived right on the Mediterranean Sea, couldn’t they have caught some fish?
15. We do not know how old the widow’s son was. But, it is hard to imagine that he would not talk to his friends and brag about the fact that they had food!
16. We do not know anything about this widow except a few notes about her time with Elijah. When her son died, she was very upset, as one might imagine. But, then Elijah prayed to

God and miraculously brought him back to life. I am sure that she felt deeply rewarded for the trust she had placed in Elijah. Would you be willing to give the last bit of food you had in your house in a time of starvation to a stranger? Why did she do it? She mentioned Israel's God!

17. One of the major sins of Baal worshipers was offering their children as sacrifices to their god. See Jeremiah 19:5 and Micah 6:7.
18. The story of Elijah continues. Read 1 Kings 18:20-45. These verses talk about the experience on Mount Carmel. Try to imagine the thoughts and feelings of the 850 prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth as they traveled from Jezreel to Mount Carmel. Did they sense some foreboding? Did they have any idea what Elijah's challenge to them would be?
19. In that confrontation, Elijah allowed them to go first. You can be sure that they tried to cover up their activities. They tried to do everything possible to get their sacrifice to burn. There is no way a single human being could have prevented them from starting a fire under that sacrifice. Surely, the Devil would have helped them; more than that, if they had been able to light that fire, they would have tried to chop Elijah into pieces almost instantly! But, the God of heaven was in charge; He prevented any hint of fire appearing on that altar.
20. When the time of the evening sacrifice—about 3 PM—came and they still had not managed to get any response from their gods, Elijah painstakingly and step-by-step reconstructed the altar of Jehovah which had been there from years past. Then, he placed the wood on top and the sacrifice on top of that. Then, he did something surprising; he asked people to bring 12 large pitchers of water and pour over the sacrifice, the wood, and the altar, and fill a trench that he had dug around the base of the altar.
21. It is impossible for us to know how many people were watching as Elijah did all of that. But, you can be sure that everyone within sight or hearing was paying very careful attention. Then, Elijah knelt down and offered that simple prayer. Suddenly, lightning struck from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the water, and left a black hole in the ground! One prayer; one immediate response! And the obvious response came from the crowds: "Yahweh, He is God!" What else could they say?
22. The story of Elijah in the Old Testament makes it clear that God will go to almost any length to bring His responding children back to Himself.
23. Try to imagine the conversations that took place that evening in the homes of the Israelite people after the Elijah-on-Mount-Carmel experience. Did a significant number of people actually turn their hearts back to God?
24. Read Revelation 13:13. Satan has been waiting for thousands of years to imitate God's miracle on Mount Carmel. Finally, he will be given permission! What will be our response?
25. Read Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:14; 17:12-13; 11:10; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 7:27; and Malachi 3:1.
26. These verses make it clear that John the Baptist was not only the forerunner of Jesus, but also the prophesied "Elijah" of the New Testament. Did John the Baptist recognize that he was the Elijah to come? Surely, his preaching mirrored much of what Elijah had done in the Old Testament.
27. Why do you think the preaching of one man in the wilderness on the "other side" (east side) of the Jordan River stirred up such a response from the Jewish people? They had been waiting for hundreds of years for the return of Elijah as prophesied in Malachi. Did they go because they felt guilty? Even King Herod loved to listen to John; but, it disturbed his conscience because he was married to Herodias, his brother's wife.
28. Read Luke 3:3-14. No question about it; John had a revolutionary message. Not only were

people to confess their sins and be baptized but also they were to share with the poor. They were not to cheat people in their transactions or to make any false accusations.

29. How do you suppose such a preacher would be received in our day? Would people even notice? Was it the Holy Spirit who drew the people out to listen to John?
30. There is little question but that John's parents had died long before he began his ministry. Jewish rabbis were not supposed to begin preaching until they were at least 30 years old. Many scholars believe that John, to avoid the corruptions in Jerusalem, had moved down to the Jordan Valley and likely associated with the Essenes who copied many of the Scriptures as the Dead Sea Scrolls. They had a very austere lifestyle; John seemed to have taken that up.
31. But, John knew that he was not the Messiah. He had received a message from God that the Messiah was coming.

Jesus and John the Baptist were cousins, and closely related by the circumstances of their birth; yet they had had no direct acquaintance with each other. The life of Jesus had been spent at Nazareth in Galilee; that of John, in the wilderness of Judea. Amid widely different surroundings they had lived in seclusion, and had had no communication with each other. Providence had ordered this. No occasion was to be given for the charge that they had conspired together to support each other's claims.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 109.2.

32. When Jesus finally arrived on the banks of the Jordan and John saw Him, John knew immediately that this was the promised Messiah. See John 1:29,35-37; 3:27-30. What kind of a sign do you think John received that told him that this was the right Person? What did John's disciples think when John called Jesus the "Lamb of God"? What must have gone through their minds when they thought about lambs? It is interesting to note that when they heard the message about Jesus, those disciples of John almost immediately went to alert friends and relatives to come and see Him. By that time, Jesus had completed the 40 days in the wilderness and clearly showed the marks of that experience.
33. What do you think John would say if he showed up in your church one Sabbath morning? What would he say if he came to your home?
34. We still have not answered the question: When will "the great and terrible day of the Lord" come? (See Malachi 4:5-6.)

Those who are to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ are represented by faithful Elijah, as John came in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for Christ's first advent.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 3, 62.1; *Maranatha** 22.2; 118.3; *FLB** 290.3.

The work of John the Baptist, and the work of those who in the last days go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah to arouse the people from their apathy, are in many respects the same. His work is a type of the work that must be done in this age. Christ is to come the second time to judge the world in righteousness.—Ellen G. White, *Southern Watchman*,* March 21, 1905, par. 10; *Maranatha** 22.3.

35. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 and Ephesians 2:11-18. Clearly, these passages are talking about transforming people's lives from being enemies of God into being His friends. Paul delighted in the fact that the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles had been torn down.

36. What kinds of walls exist in the Christian church and even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in our day? Are we as a church, or even as individual families, demonstrating the unselfish, caring, lasting commitment to God that was shown by Elijah and John the Baptist? How will we respond when the day comes when we have to choose between: 1) Worshiping God despite international laws calling for a death penalty for people who do that or 2) Following the world and living comfortably?

37. Our families can be a great sermon. Have they been so?

The most powerful sermon that can be given the unbelieving world in recommendation of our faith is a well-disciplined family. Children that are educated to habits of self-denial and self-control, and are taught to be courteous, kind, and affectionate, will make an impression upon minds that nothing else can.—Ellen G. White, Letter addressed to Brother and Sister Smith, December 10, 1871, *Pamphlet 123** 45.1.

38. We profess to be children of the King and to be part of God's family. Is that obvious to the ones around us?

39. If you have a few minutes, read the chapter entitled, "The Voice in the Wilderness" in *The Desire of Ages* pages 97-108.

40. John was not noted for being subtle. His rebukes were very straightforward, and he did not care who he rebuked if they needed it.

Our message must be as direct as was that of John. He rebuked kings for their iniquity. Notwithstanding the peril his life was in, he never allowed truth to languish on his lips. Our work in this age must be as faithfully done.—Ellen G. White Comments, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,* vol. 4, 1184.7; *FLB** 290.4; *SW*,* March 21, 1905, par. 12.

41. What is the Elijah message? Seventh-day Adventists have believed that Ellen White is our prophet. We have read Revelation 12:17; 14:12; and 19:10 and have believed that Ellen White's presence in our church qualifies us as having the "spirit of prophecy." Could it be that Revelation 19:10 is talking about an entire church that is faithfully presenting the Elijah message? The word *prophet* from Greek means someone who speaks on behalf of someone else, an ambassador. Do we qualify as a group of people to speak the truth about God to the world? Are we doing that?

42. Can you think of the examples of some personal friends or family members who have had their lives turned around and their hearts turned back to God? Perhaps, they could give their stories.

43. There are also times when God speaks very bluntly! A careful reading of the prophets of the Old Testament will virtually always give you the impression that God has a fourfold message:

- A. I, God, have saved you and treated you well.
- B. You have rejected Me.
- C. Terrible devastation will follow your rebellion.
- D. In the end, I will forgive, save, and restore you.

—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 171.

44. Read again Malachi 4:5-6. What is the relationship between healing families and the preservation of entire nations?

45. What would John say to our nation today with the divorce rate around 50%?
46. Why do you think that at the end of Matthew 11:11-14 as Jesus talked about John, He ended with the words: “Listen, then, if you have ears!” (Compare Revelation 2&3.)
47. Are we ignoring the message?

“ *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* ’ ” (Matt. 3:2, ESV). This command of John’s is the identical phrase that Jesus spoke in His ministry (Matt. 4:17). *Commanding* people to repent may sound tactless in our ears today, but it’s important to remember that John was relatively successful. People were baptized, “confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:6). What gave such impetus to this message?—*Ibid.** 172. [Italic type is in the source.]

48. Review what John the Baptist said to the different groups of sinners who came to him. The strongest words were probably addressed to the church leaders! Is it easier or more difficult to reach out to church leaders and convince them that they need to come back to God as compared to people of the world?
49. It is important to notice that John lived a very abstemious life. He had a very meager diet and lived in the wilderness. By contrast, Jesus went to banquets with sinners and tax collectors. Why do we have these two extremes working almost side-by-side?
50. Most churches have people in them with differences of opinion about certain issues. Have you ever felt uncomfortable even in inviting a non-Adventists to come to church with you because of the squabbles going on in the church? Obviously, it would be wonderful if misunderstandings within the church could be eliminated. Notice these very interesting words from G. K. Chesterton (first published in the *Illustrated London News*, April 19, 1924):

“The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected.”—retrieved on April 24, 2019 from:

<https://www.chesterton.org/quotations-of-g-k-chesterton/> [section on “Government and Politics”].

51. Have you ever been accused of misrepresenting the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Look at the example of John. When people began to flock to Jesus and left John with not so many followers, look at his humble response: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30)
52. For a while, John the Baptist was the most exciting and popular person in the Jewish realm. People walked miles to hear him. He received a rousing endorsement from Jesus. But, John recognized that he was not the Messiah. When the Messiah did arrive, John pointed people in that direction.
53. Are we pointing people in the right direction by our lives and the words we speak? Could we be as humble as John the Baptist was? Do we reach out with kindness and sympathy, even placing our arms around new members who come to Sabbath school?
54. We need to remember that church is not a club for saints; it is a hospital for sinners. And the better the hospital, the sicker the patients that go there! What have you learned from this series of lessons? Do you feel more comfortable witnessing to others based on what you have learned?

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