

Where Are
the
Elijahs?

Experiencing the
Spirit of Elijah Today

John Youngberg

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Foreword

The Book's Emphasis— Family Relationships and the Cross

The focus of this book is the Elijah Message with emphasis on the Innocent Sacrifice, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and His Cross. The book is also, to large degree, family oriented. Why? Because the Elijah Message is an important family message, especially to those living during the time of the three angels' messages. The following five points give evidence of the family connections.

1. The crisis in Elijah's time was Baal and Ashera worship. This amounted to indiscriminate sexual behavior. Sex was an act of worshiping their gods. The Ashera prophetesses plied their trade in their groves and temples. They were temple prostitutes. It was Satan's direct attack on the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." On Mount Carmel, God, the *Family Maker*, interposed to rescue His people Israel from the spell of Satan, the *family breaker*.
2. Integral to Baal and Ashera worship was child sacrifice. When the people had an important request to make of their gods—rain, good crops—they would offer a child on the altar to impress their gods and obtain a positive answer.
3. Malachi 4:5-6, "And he [Elijah] will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers."

4. Author, Ellen White, quoted Malachi 4:5–6 in her classic book, *The Great Controversy*, 369, and applied it to family reconciliation. Referring to the children and parents in 1844, she wrote, “The hearts of parents were turned to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents. The barriers of pride and reserve were swept away. Heartfelt confessions were made, and the members of the household labored for the salvation of those who were nearest and dearest.”
5. The prophetic reform movement of the last days is called to restore all things, particularly the two Eden institutions, the seventh-day Sabbath and marriage, with family implications. The fourth commandment, the Sabbath commandment, is the seal of faithfulness to the true Creator God expressed in the first table of the Decalogue.

The fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother,” is the only commandment with a specified promise—long life. The seventh commandment is the seal of faithfulness to a spouse and purity toward others, as is the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” All three of these commandments, enshrined in the second table of the Decalogue, deal with marriage and the family.

In these last days, what a privilege it is to proclaim the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath, marriage, and the family—all in question in today’s world.

Section II of this book provides more detail on the application of Malachi 4:5–6 to today’s family.

Section I

The Historical Elijahs

Have you ever climbed a mountain? Mountain climbing has been very important to me. One time, my late wife, Millie, and I were descending from Mount Elbert, the highest point in the state of Colorado, U.S.A. Suddenly, we experienced severe lightning and thunder simultaneously, which created an electro-magnetic field around us.

Millie cried, “John, I feel a pain right in the middle of my head!” Having a habit of claiming Bible promises when in trouble, she asked, “Is there a Bible promise about protection from lightning?” Being in trouble myself, I answered, “I don’t remember any, but I am going to pray right now anyway.” We felt God’s protecting hand as we hastened on down the mountain, pelted by hail, sleet, snow, and rain.

On another occasion, my two sons, John and Wes, were with me, scaling the Mount of the Holy Cross in Colorado. Near its summit two intersecting ravines filled with snow most of the year form a beautiful white cross, visible for many miles, for which the mountain is named (see picture on the next page). As we climbed the mountain, we commented how the cross reminded us of Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary. Have you ever spiritually climbed Calvary, the real Mount of the Holy Cross, where Jesus died to show how much He loved you, so that you might not perish but have everlasting life?



Mount of the Holy Cross, State of Colorado, U.S.A.

The Bible speaks about two mountains that were important in the life of the prophet Elijah, both literally and spiritually—Mount Carmel and Mount Horeb, also called Mount Sinai. Mount Carmel was the place where Elijah invited the Israelites to choose between the pagan gods or the true God, Jehovah, as their leader. On Mount Horeb (Sinai), nearly 600 years after God, amid thundering, proclaimed the ten commandments, Elijah heard Him speak in a “still small voice,” calling him to complete his mission as God’s messenger (see 1 Kings 19:12).

Spiritually speaking, have you ever climbed a Mount Carmel or a Mount Horeb? Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882), the greatest American poet of his generation, wrote a poem, “A Psalm of Life” (Cook, *One Hundred and One Famous Poems*, 123). I have adapted three short stanzas of his poem to inspire us to become modern Elijahs as we begin to look at the life of this great prophet.

Where Are the Elijahs?

Lives of great men [and women] all remind us
[God] can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still [submitting], still pursuing
Learn to labor and to wait.

In Section I, let us join Elijah in his unusual journey as we explore the meaning of his historical life in the mountains, valleys, and ravines of ancient Israel, and even in Jezebel's hometown near Sidon in Phoenicia.

Chapter 1

The Last Message— The First Marathon

The Story of Pheidippides

In the year 490 BC, the troops of the Persian Army which had been victorious from India's Indus River all the way to the Nile and from the Danube River to Hellespont—modern Turkey—were on the move again. Transported by six hundred galley boats, the Persian soldiers landed on the Plains of Marathon. Their goal was to capture and destroy Athens, which lay some 25 miles (45 kilometers) to the southwest.

Upon numbering their troops on the overlooking hills, the Greeks could see they were outnumbered by the Persians eight to one. General Miltiades sent his most able runner, Pheidippides, to ask for reinforcements from Sparta, a city-state to the southwest. He made the trip of 140 miles on foot in about 36 hours over rugged, mountainous terrain.

The Spartans were willing to help Athens against a common enemy but would march only when the moon was full because of their religious customs. That would be many days hence. Returning the 140 miles back to the Plains of Marathon, Pheidippides brought the message that no military help was forthcoming. General Miltiades decided he must attack immediately, and thus the battle began against a surprised enemy.

The Greeks broke the Persian lines and hurled them back into the sea. Six thousand four hundred Persians lay dead, while only 192 Athenians were killed. However, as General

Miltiades watched the Persian galleys sail away to the south, a fear gripped his soul. Maybe those ships were heading for Athens, which was mostly undefended. Athens knew nothing of the victory of that day at Marathon and might surrender to the Persians.

Summoning Pheidippides again, General Miltiades sent him on yet another vital mission, “Tell the city fathers in Athens that they must not surrender for the Greek forces have been victorious at Marathon.” Over the mountains, across rocky terrain, now on the road, Pheidippides sped toward Athens. The destiny of Greece might well depend on his faithful delivery of the message.

Pushing himself nearly beyond the limits of human endurance, tired from his run of nearly 300 miles the previous days, Pheidippides pressed on. Now his blurry vision made out the walls and gate of Athens. Almost completely drained of energy, he still rushed on into the *agora*, the marketplace. Totally exhausted, he saw one of the city fathers. “Pheidippides! What is it?” the city father anxiously queried. Falling to the ground as he breathed his last breath, the dying Pheidippides gasped, “Rejoice! We have won the victory!”

The approximate 26 miles from Marathon to Athens are celebrated today in the marathon runs of modern-day Olympics. Historians consider the Battle of Marathon to be one of history’s 15 crucial battles up through the nineteenth century. It contributed to the saving of Western civilization. (Wikipedia.org, *The Battle of Marathon*; greekboston.com, *The Real Story of Pheidippides*).

The Messenger and the Message

In ancient times, without telephones, emails, or text messages, when a king or general wanted to communicate with a city or a people, he would send a runner such as Pheidippides to carry urgent news to others—often at great

distances. The content that the runner carried was the *message*. The runner was the *messenger*.

This book is about the Elijah Message. This is the message that Jesus said will “restore all things” (Matthew 17:11). Although there are several dimensions of the last-day message that will be developed later in this book, it is only *one* message. The messenger in Elijah’s day was Elijah. The messenger of the Elijah Message at Jesus’ first coming as Messiah was John the Baptist. The messengers to herald Jesus’ second coming are today’s Elijahs.

This message is to be delivered with the speed of angels’ wings as described in Revelation Chapters 14 and 18. Across the mountains and valleys, the Elijah messengers must hasten on their mission and let nothing distract them. Elijah’s message is infinitely more vital and important than was that of Pheidippides. The destiny is not Athens, but the world.

Every living soul on planet Earth depends on the faithful delivery of this message, “Rejoice, Jesus has conquered! We have conquered through the death of Jesus on Calvary.” The faithful messenger may have to sacrifice life itself to deliver the message, but rejoice! Victory for all eternity is freely offered to every man, woman, and child who receives and accepts the message.

Reflection

Could I become one of the messengers who deliver the Elijah Message in these times?

In our own life situations, it sometimes seems as if we must go almost beyond the limits of human endurance as we fight the battles and gain the victories in our own marathons. We too are striving for victory—victory in our personal lifestyle so as to LIVE—live longer, healthier, happier, and holier.

Am I willing to fight courageously the “marathons” that life brings to me?

Note:

The chapters in this book are not all sequenced according to the chronology of Elijah’s ministry. Chapter 2 jumps ahead to the essence and heart of the Elijah Message. At the end of Chapter 2 an illustration has been included that demonstrates chronologically eight stages of Elijah’s ministry and shows the sequence of his seven recorded prayers.

Chapter 2

“Then the Fire of the Lord Fell”

Victory of One Against Tens of Thousands

It was perhaps the most dramatic moment in Old Testament history in the battle between right and wrong—King Ahab and his retinue of soldiers standing there on the heights of Mount Carmel. Nearby, stood 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. Beyond, on the ridges were tens of thousands of Baal devotees who came to see the battle of the gods. Elijah stood alone next to the altar of Jehovah, and he spoke **his third recorded prayer** in the hearing of the multitude. “Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again” (1 Kings 18:37).

The prayer was finished. A brief, almost painful silence followed. Suddenly the heavens split open. The Bible account uses seven momentous words to describe the act, “Then the fire of the Lord fell” (1 Kings 18:38). A question may come into your mind. Where did the fire of the Lord deserve to fall? The fire of God’s wrath deserved to fall upon the tens of thousands of devotees to Baal who had forsaken Jehovah and surrounded Elijah on Mount Carmel. God’s justice called for these idolatrous Baal worshipers to be blotted off the map.

Elijah should have been left standing alone on Mount Carmel. But the Bible says, “Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench”

(1 Kings 18:38). Where did the fire actually fall? It fell on the innocent sacrifice, a representation of the Messiah's death on the cross of Calvary.

The key to the Elijah Message is the Innocent Sacrifice. When the fire of God's wrath fell, it did not fall on the guilty sinners, the fire fell upon the innocent sacrifice that had been placed on the altar. The essence of the Elijah Message is the invitation for all to claim the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ, the Innocent Sacrifice, for parents and for their children.

Ellen White's book on the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, 25, says, "Christ was treated as we deserve that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His."

Before Elijah repaired the altar, he "came to all the people, and said, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' But the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). That day on Mount Carmel fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice on Jehovah's altar. Then tens of thousands of families, as they witnessed this display of Divine power, fell on their faces and exclaimed, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" (1 Kings 18:39).

Victory for Today's Family

What happens when every day we recognize the Innocent Sacrifice that was made for us on Calvary? Have we erected personal and family altars in our homes today? When will the parents and children in this generation say, "The Lord, He is God!" and follow Him?

Russell, a Professor of Neurology at Montemorelos University Medical School in Mexico, and his wife, Dot, were blessed with three children. As the children grew into

adolescence and beyond, two of the three accepted Jesus as their personal Savior, but Mark took a different journey. Mark decided he was not ready for baptism and a commitment to God. He went with the wrong crowd and did not follow what Dad and Mom taught at the family altar in their home. As Mark reached adulthood, his parents accepted a call to mission service in Mexico.

The years passed by. Mark was back home in Pennsylvania. Russell and Dot stayed in touch with their son. Every morning earnest prayer was made, imploring the merits of Christ’s blood over precious Mark. One day before dawn, Russell was in the darkness of the early morning hours. As he was praying, he implored God, “Lord, here I am again with my elbows leaning on the balcony of heaven. My elbows are getting tired. My knees are getting tired. How many years have my wife and I and other family members been praying for Mark?” It seemed like a voice said, “Russell, you love Mark. I love him even more. There is a big surprise coming for you.”

Scarcely a few days had gone by when the telephone rang with a long-distance call from the United States. “Dad, Mom, it’s Mark. I just wanted to tell you that I have come to the Lord. I’ve found God, and I am preparing for baptism.” Today, Mark is following his Lord as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. God can change hearts and lives.

Children born into Christian families often choose their own path away from Christ. Never doubt what God can do to bring them back. Never, never, never give up hope. They will come to know the Lord when they accept the blood poured out from the Innocent Sacrifice, bringing the gift of salvation to them personally. My prayer is that God will provide heart-turning miracles for many families like Mark’s.

Reflection

Why do you think the Old Testament closes with the promise of the Elijah Message that in the last days God will turn the

Where Are the Elijahs?

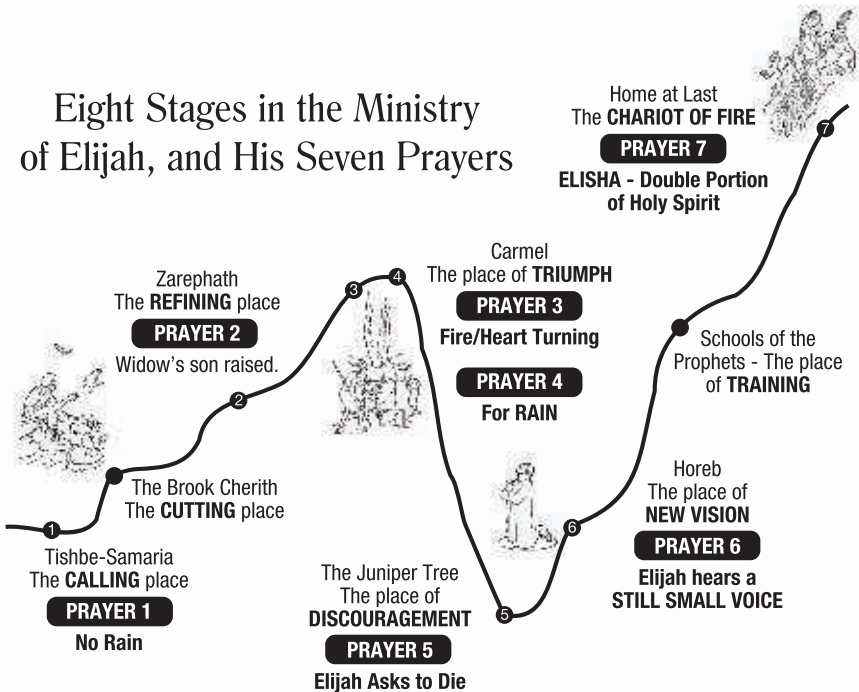
hearts of parents and children to each other in preparation for the great day of the Lord? (see Malachi 4:5–6).

Why do you think it is that after 430 years of prophetic silence, the New Testament prophecies begin with the angel Gabriel quoting the same Elijah Message promise to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist? (see Luke 1:14–17).

What did Jesus mean when He said to Peter, James, and John, “Elijah is coming first and will restore ALL things?” (Matthew 17:11, emphasis supplied).

What did Ellen White mean when she asked, “Where are the Elijahs of today?” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, 527).

Eight Stages in the Ministry of Elijah, and His Seven Prayers



Chronology of the Elijah Story

Note:

The following chapters provide additional glimpses into the exciting ministry of the prophet Elijah. This chapter examined the third prayer of Elijah’s seven prayers that are recorded in the Bible. The seventh and last prayer is found in Chapter 19. These prayers are not all presented chronologically in the chapters of this book, but the graph on the left shows the order in which the seven prayers fit into Elijah’s ministry. Would you like to consider the other six prayers? I invite you to read on:

- Prayer 1, page 25;
- Prayer 2, page 29;
- Prayer 3, pages 15 and 35;
- Prayer 4, page 38;
- Prayer 5, page 41;
- Prayer 6, page 42; and
- Prayer 7, page 109.

Chapter 3

Tishbe, a Balm from Gilead

Elijah's First Home

She lived about 860 years before Christ. She married a good, righteous man. Theirs was a happy home. Time went by and their hearts were happier yet when they found out a baby was expected. The husband and wife lived in the land of Tishbe, the agricultural area in Gilead on the east side of the Sea of Galilee close to where Jesus fed the 4,000.

When their baby was born, they named him Elijah, which means "Jehovah is my God." We don't know the names of the parents; they were unheralded. I imagine he was raised at his mother's knee. Let's not forget Dad; he was there too. Even though the parents were unknown in the history books of this world, I believe their names are written large in heaven's Book of Life because of their wonderful parenting.

Elijah grew to be a fine young man who was destined to electrify the land of Israel with his message. In generations to come, even to our present day, the Elijah Message has turned the hearts of young and old to each other and to God. God tells us that Elijah will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers and mothers.

Coming Back Home

A young lady named Doris grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist Christian home. She went to Adventist schools for her elementary, academy, and college education. When she became of legal age, she left her parents' home and went to the big city. City life offered many interesting attractions. Doris had a good job, a large variety of entertainment, and there really wasn't time for church.

Doris was enjoying her city life, but when she had a little spare time in her apartment, she began to think of the past. She really did love and miss her mom and dad. On Friday nights, Doris would begin to feel nostalgic for home and think to herself, *Dad and Mom, what are they doing now? Is Mom playing the piano, the songs for Sabbath? Are they eating cinnamon rolls this Friday night like we always had when I was home?*

Another Friday night came, another battle with nostalgia. *What are Mom and Dad doing now? Why fight it?* Something was tugging at Doris' heartstrings. She picked up her cell phone and dialed home. "Hello Dad, Mom? It's me, Doris. I love you. I'm coming home." I can tell you there was joy in that home and in heaven when Doris returned, not only to her home, but also back to her church family. The Elijah Message of turning back has been repeated thousands of times, turning the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to their parents.

An old Negro spiritual says, "There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole. There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul." Yes, there is a balm in Gilead. Elijah's home, Gilead, had a particular aromatic salve they called the balm of Gilead which was highly prized. A healing balm is also available for human hearts. This balm will bring health and happiness to personal family members and to church family members. Jeremiah 8:22 asks significant questions, "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?"

Reflection

So many young people walk away from the voice of God.

How can I share the love of God with those who have cut loose their hold of hope and love?

What is my responsibility to the members of my own family, especially to the youth and children, as well as to those in my neighborhood and in my circle of acquaintances?

Have I ever experienced separations within my family? In what way do the promises of the Elijah Message for the turning of hearts provide hope for my family?

Have I seen a need for the balm of Gilead? Where? How can I personally bring the balm of Gilead to a world sick with sin?

Why is the balm of Gilead, in the Elijah Message, so valuable to each individual today?

Chapter 4

“Oh God, Do Something!”—The Call

Idolatry in Israel

In this chapter, we are going to reflect on the first prayer of Elijah in Scripture. The Elijah story tells us he felt great anguish at the idolatrous practices surrounding his hometown and all of northern Israel. Let's look at the historical scenario.

Ahab was king in Samaria, where he reigned for 22 years over the ten tribes of Israel in the north. Of all Israel's kings, Ahab was the worst idolater. It was only some 56 years since the death of Solomon when the kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms, the southern kingdom with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the northern kingdom with its capital in Samaria. During those 56 years the northern kingdom was swept into the precipice of apostasy. Before the division of the tribes, Jehovah, the Creator God had been recognized throughout all the land of Israel as the only true God.

The worship of Jehovah was now outlawed in Ahab's kingdom on pain of death. Ahab opposed the Schools of the Prophets and tried to weaken their influence as much as possible. Not everyone in northern Israel followed Ahab in his apostasy. Obadiah, one of Ahab's servants who continued his loyalty and worship of Jehovah, hid 100 students from these schools in two caves (see 1 Kings 18:13). However, the majority of the Israelites in Ahab's kingdom became idolaters.

Ahab, ever the avid politician, formed an alliance with Ethbaal, the king of Sidon in Phoenicia to the northwest on the coast of the Mediterranean. Ahab formalized a treaty with Ethbaal by marrying his daughter Jezebel. You may have heard of her, or maybe not. Your children or siblings may be named Mary or Nancy. But have you ever heard of anyone naming a newborn daughter Jezebel? Probably not, and there is a good reason. Being an idolater, she brought many of the pagan practices forbidden by Jehovah into the Israelite culture, and eventually she died a gruesome death as a judgment from God.

Today, records of the worship, lifestyle, and culture of those times are available for review. Even centuries earlier, in the times of Gideon, Baal was worshiped (see Judges 6:24–32). Ethbaal was the priest of the goddess Ashtoreth, the chief goddess of the Sidonians. Ashtoreth was the fertility goddess, patron goddess of sexual love. The legends of the Phoenicians tell about the x-rated, immoral practices of these people. Their worship amounted to sexual orgy.

The male god, Baal, had incestuous relationships with his sister, Ashtoreth, and with his mother, Asherah (mentioned 40 times in the Bible), who was the goddess of the groves. They practiced their rituals with the intent of obtaining bountiful crops. If they needed to impress the gods and goddesses to bring them abundant harvests, the Baal worshippers would sacrifice their children to these pagan deities. Life was cheap.

In Tishbe, where Elijah was born, the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth was the common practice. From the archaeological records of this time, found in Samaria, we know the names parents gave to their children. One parent named their child *Abibaal*, meaning “Baal is my father.” Another named a child *Meribaal*, “my lord is Baal;” another *Baalmani*, “Baal is the answer.” These people were completely idolatrous. But when Elijah was born, his parents named him *Elijah*, “Jehovah is my God.” What a testimony to the true God.

In Elijah's day he probably witnessed the scenes of the fires burning around the Baal altars, under the groves where religious prostitution was practiced. These pagan worshippers had a special request of their god, Baal. As they danced around the altar, they brought forth one of their children. Taking the child to the burning altar, the parents would place him on it amid the dreadful screams of pain. Now Baal would be impressed. Now the harvest would be abundant. I imagine that Elijah may have viewed the horrendous scenes of child sacrifice, and the Spirit of God welled up within his soul and he prayed that God would do something about it.

Elijah's First Recorded Prayer and His Divine Call

An idea came into Elijah's mind. Baal is the rain god, the storm god. If the clouds would cease to bring rain, the lack of rain would prove Baal was an imposter, a phony, and a fraud. Did Elijah just come up with this idea? No, God put the idea in his thoughts. Prayer really begins in heaven, not on earth. Elijah prayed to the Lord; the answer was already prepared.

Interestingly enough, this prayer of Elijah is recorded in the New Testament book of James. Scripture says, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months" (James 5:17). Elijah prayed fervently. The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when the word of the Lord came to him, calling him to give the message to King Ahab.

Elijah was not self-appointed. He had not expected to be commissioned as the messenger. But when God called, Elijah answered. The book, *Prophets and Kings*, 121, reveals that Elijah traveled night and day until he arrived in Samaria. Wow! If Elijah was going to do the Lord's work, nothing could delay him. He was going to get there as quickly as he could and present the message promptly.

Boldly, Elijah walked into Ahab's palace and straight to Ahab's ivory throne where the king was seated. Apparently unnoticed by the guards, Elijah strode unannounced into the very presence of King Ahab. Elijah had first bowed low before the King of kings; he could now stand tall before this earthly monarch. Elijah raised his right hand to heaven and said, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word" (1 Kings 17:1).

I suppose Ahab's mouth dropped open. He was speechless, astonished. Elijah turned 180 degrees and walked out of the palace. Minutes later the stunned Ahab realized what had just happened to him. He most likely commanded his guards, "Catch that man!" But it was too late. Elijah had disappeared, taking with him the key to the heavens. Elijah had taken with him the rain that brings the harvest. When God spoke, Elijah obeyed, no questions asked. **This is the first of Elijah's seven prayers.** He prayed that God would intervene; that there would be no rain.

Who knows whether you have come to the cosmic battleground for just such a time as this? Maybe, God has called you to an important ministry in the church. But when He calls, be ready to answer. Perhaps God has even called you to a special ministry of training children. When God calls, you answer. If God puts a child in your arms, it is as though He is saying, "Here, take this child and train him, train her, that she or he will shine someday as a jewel in My glorious heaven." God is calling men and women today. Have you heard the call? Are you ready to answer?

Reflection

Ellen White asked the key question, "Where are the Elijahs of today?" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 527).

How can I know that God is calling me? Am I willing to stand up when God calls, regardless of the cost? Can I be an "Elijah"?

Am I willing to put my life on the line in order to share God's messages? Will God provide me with protection as I work for Him?

We know that end-time events will be worse than anything people on planet Earth have previously experienced.

Are the sins of the world today any less horrific than were the child sacrifices in Elijah's time? How do end-time events impact my convictions?

Why are fervent prayers needed? What does fervent prayer mean to me? Have I experienced God answering my earnest, persevering prayers? For what kind of help should I now be urgently crying out to God?

Chapter 5

God's Leading

The Brook Cherith

“**T**hen the word of the Lord came to him [Elijah], saying, Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan” (1 Kings 17:2–3). God spoke; Elijah obeyed. The exact location of the Brook Cherith is not known today. According to the Bible, it was a brook that ran across the land of Gilead in the highlands east of the Jordan River. Waterways from the highlands cut deep ravines as they flowed down below sea level to the Jordan River. In one of these ravines Elijah found refuge. The word Cherith means “cutting place.”

Just as the stream had cut down through the rock and made a canyon, a ravine, Elijah's refuge became a cutting place. Early in his ministry, Elijah had been sent to this cutting place. Far removed from human habitation, he had time to meditate and commune with God alone. God was taking this rough-hewn prophet and shaping him into the kind of man who would be able to complete the difficult tasks that were ahead of him in his unique ministry. Not only did God care for Elijah's spiritual needs, but He also provided for his physical needs by sending him to a place where he would have water to drink. Then God sent ravens to provide his daily food.

Michelangelo, the famous sculptor and artist, had the ability to see an image in a plain chunk of marble and to sculpt the rough stone into a beautiful image. That's the kind of business God is in for His disciples. As Jesus hews and shapes the character, He brings out the image of the divine in the life and ministry of His followers.

Zarephath—Raising the Dead

“Then the word of the Lord came to him [Elijah], saying, ‘Arise go to Zarephath’” (1 Kings 17:8–9). He did not question the Lord saying, *Where did you say, Lord? Zarephath? That's in the land of Sidon. That's Jezebel's hometown!* When God calls, we answer, wherever He sends us.

Traveling by night, Elijah crossed the land of Israel, some 85 miles to arrive at the gate of Zarephath. There he found a widow gathering two sticks to prepare her last meal. The barrel of flour was almost empty. The cruise of oil was failing. He asked for water. He asked for a morsel to eat, and the widow invited Elijah to stay with her and her son. God had arranged this, giving her the promise that the bin of flour would not be depleted, and the oil would not be used up until God sent rain upon the land.

Hard times had come upon the widow of Zarephath. She had seen her husband die, and now, during Elijah's stay in her home, her son died also. Maybe the son died in her arms as she clutched him in a tender embrace. The widow called to Elijah, whose room was in the loft of her home. She immediately told Elijah of the tragedy. He received the dead child from her arms, took him up the stairs to his own room, and laid him on his bed.

Then Elijah cried out to God and began his **second recorded prayer**, “O Lord my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?” (1 Kings 17:20). Then he stretched himself on the child once, twice, three times—his heart beating very close to the unbeating heart of the child. Three times he called to the

Lord to intervene, continuing his prayer, “O Lord my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him” (1 Kings 17:21). God heard Elijah’s voice and performed a wondrous miracle. The child’s life returned; he had been resurrected. Elijah returned the young boy to his mother’s fond embrace and she exclaimed, “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth” (1 Kings 17:24).

Elijah’s ministry went from Cherith, which literally means the “cutting place,” to Zarephath, which literally means “the refining place.” We see God taking the prophet, cutting him out of the rough rock, polishing him up and refining him. Miracles were beginning to take place in Elijah’s ministry, incredible miracles, even raising the dead to life.

Modern Resurrection Miracle

The Elijah Message is a message of bringing new life to families with heart-turning taking place in marriages and between parents and children. Some children, parents, and spouses have been taken away from their families by death. Some have been separated from each other by their own choices. They need new life.

It was a Friday afternoon when the telephone rang. It was Naomi calling. She was in tears, and Pastor B had a hard time getting the whole story. After two more conversations that afternoon, the pieces were finally together. The pastor realized that Naomi’s husband, Jason, had moved out. Naomi was left alone in the apartment. Their marriage was in imminent danger. The pastor asked, “Naomi, where is Jason?” She said, “He’s in the office,” and she provided his number.

Moments later the pastor was on the phone with Jason. Of course, Jason knew what was up. Pastor B did not call him every day of the week. Jason said, “Pastor, do not think there is any other woman involved here. There is no other woman. The reality is I can’t live with *that* woman.” He proceeded with a long list of grievances, as the pastor listened patiently.

Finally, Jason summarized his situation, "Our marriage is dead." He paused for breath, and Pastor B jumped in. "Tell me, Jason, do you believe in the doctrine of the resurrection?" "Well, yes. I have a PhD in Systematic Theology. What does that have to do with this situation?" "Jason, do you believe God can resurrect a dead marriage?" Silence. Finally, Jason spoke, "Yes, but that would have to be a miracle." "Jason, I believe in miracles. My wife and I will pray night and day for you until God performs a miracle in your marriage."

Pastor B sent Jason and Naomi some helpful information to their separate addresses. Pastor B and his wife prayed Friday. They prayed Sabbath. They prayed and began to fast on Sunday, "God, please intervene in this marriage." Monday, Pastor B went to the mailbox. *Hmm, an envelope from Jason.* He took it into the dining room where his wife was. They opened it and read, "Dear Pastor and Mrs. B, Good news! The resurrection miracle has taken place! We have reconciled. Our relationship continues to grow. We hope to attend a marriage seminar soon. We are grateful for your prayers and thankful to God." Signed, Jason and Naomi.

Pastor and Mrs. B dropped to their knees beside the dining room table. They thanked the God in heaven, a God who resurrects the dead, a God who can even resurrect dead marriages. There is a balm in Gilead. A physician is there. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). He will give new life to marriages and new life to parents and children who need to reconcile.

Reflection

Have I ever had a "Brook Cherith" in my experience? What are my needs today? Have I had a place where I was far removed from all human support?

Have I trusted God to organize His heavenly forces to send me help in my time of need? How do I know God is listening to me?

Where Are the Elijahs?

How is God shaping me today? Do I have a ministry that is of God? Can people say of me, "Oh, man of God! Oh, woman of God! I know that God is with you and God has sent you?"

Do I know of any dead marriages and dead relationships in my church? How am I going to reach out to those around me needing new life in Jesus?

Have I ever had a prayer of thanks over empty plates at an empty table?

That is what happened to one family. Plates were on the table, but no food. The refrigerator was empty. The cupboards were bare. But they bowed their heads and prayed. "Lord, thank You for the food You are going to send." They scarcely finished praying when they heard a knock at the door. A neighbor carrying bags of groceries said, "I just felt impressed I should bring these things to you." Yes, God still answers prayer.

May God bless you as you reach out to Him in prayer on behalf of others. Elijah's second recorded prayer is what some refer to as a **DUE** prayer—*Diligent, Urgent, and Earnest*.

Chapter 6

On Carmel's Heights—Part I

The Battle of the Gods

The Bible says that the word of the Lord came to Elijah and told him to go to Samaria. Then the word of the Lord told him to go to the Brook Cherith. The word of the Lord also told him to go to Zarephath. In the third year of famine, the Lord commanded Elijah to meet Ahab and God would send rain on the earth. Every time God spoke, Elijah obeyed. Elijah went to meet Ahab as the Lord had told him. When Elijah met Ahab, who was out exploring the land and looking for water with his servant Obadiah, Elijah summoned Ahab and all Israel, including the prophets of Baal and Asherah, to assemble with him at Mount Carmel.

As Elijah resolutely climbed Mount Carmel, he could see King Ahab arriving in his royal robes along with his prophets and all the Israelites gathering in the surrounding area. Ellen White wrote that King Ahab presented himself with great pomp as he walked up the mountain. Tens of thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands of people from Israel's ten northern tribes attended. The crowds cheered the king as the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophetesses of the groves took their places. Without pomp at center stage stood one man alone—Elijah—who had called all the people of Israel to the competition.

The thousands who lined the ridges of Mount Carmel did not come to see a World Series. They did not come to see a

Super Bowl or a World Cup. They came to see the battle of the gods. Baal was on one side. According to these idolaters, Baal was their rain god, their lightning god, their fire god. Jehovah, the Creator God and the great I AM was represented on the other side.

The contest between the false gods and the true God began. On one side were huge throngs of people along with prophets, prophetesses, and a king. On the opposing side stood one prophet, alone. Can one man with God's blessing constitute a majority? Is strength always in numbers? Elijah offered the challenge: how long are you going to go limping between two opinions? (see 1 Kings 18:21). It must be one way or the other, not a little bit of Yahweh and a little bit of Baal. Either you are all on Baal's side or all on Jehovah's side.

Elijah told the worshipers of Baal to go first to offer their sacrifice because they were many. Then he would follow. "The God who answers by fire, He is God" (1 Kings 18:24). The whole multitude agreed to the contest. Yes, the rules were fair. Baal was on his home turf since he was the fire god, the storm god, and the rain god. Surely, Baal could answer by fire and send rain.

All morning long the prophets of Baal cried out, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered" (1 Kings 18:26). At noontime Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened" (1 Kings 18:27). But although the Baal prophets called until they were hoarse and cut themselves with lances until the blood gushed out, yet no voice was heard, no one answered or paid any attention to their cries. The pleading for Baal to answer went on for six hours. Finally, at three o'clock in the afternoon the hoarse voices died out and there was silence atop Mount Carmel. Baal had not been able to come to the help of his devotees in their hour of need.

“Come Near to Me”

Elijah's message was a relational message. In 1 Kings 18:21 Scripture says, “Elijah came to all the people.” There is closeness here. “Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me.’ So all the people came near to him” (1 Kings 18:30). He was ready to prepare the evening sacrifice to Jehovah. Before he prayed, the Bible says again, “Elijah the prophet came near” (1 Kings 18:36). The Elijah Message is clear, it is a message of nearness, of closeness, of relationships with other people. It is not just about denouncing sins.

Elijah also “repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down” (see 1 Kings 18:30). The stones were still there from years gone by when they used to worship Jehovah on that mountain. With the passing of the years, however, the stones had fallen little by little from the elements of nature and the herding of cattle in the pastures nearby. Elijah took the stones and built them up again into an altar.

Elijah's prayer is a very important part of the message of 1 Kings 18. In contrast with the prophets of Baal who had shouted for six hours, “Oh Baal, hear us.” Elijah prayed, “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again” (1 Kings 18:36–37). This calm prayer of Elijah may be uttered in about 20 seconds. [**Elijah's third recorded prayer**]

The part of this prayer that I want to emphasize says, “that this people may know that ... *You have turned their hearts back to You again.*” The message is first about turning their hearts back to God and HE accomplishes that when they choose Him above all other gods. Malachi 4:5–6 extends the same theme to families. “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers [and mothers].”

The Elijah Message is a heart-turning message. It is not just about obedience, although obedience is important. It is not a cold formality. “Hey! Come over here. We must have family worship whether you want it or not. Turn off the television.” No, it is a message that turns the hearts of the parents to the children and the children to the parents in a spiritual sense. True heart-turning engages the family members in reflecting to each other the warmth of God’s love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

The Six Rs of the Elijah Message

Relationship: As Elijah called the people, “Come near to me,” so I will come near to my spouse, my father and mother, my sons and daughters, my neighbors.

Redemption: That is what the Innocent Sacrifice has done for us. Jesus died that I might live. I want to share this with others.

Repentance: That is what heart-turning really means. As God points out sins in my life, and I fall upon the Rock and am broken, God gives me repentance.

Rebuilding (Repairing): The broken-down family worship altars need to be repaired. The breach in God’s law caused by the idols within each of us and by the Baals of today who seek to annul God’s true seventh-day Sabbath (see Genesis 2:2; Isaiah 58:12–14) needs to be repaired. The waste places need to be rebuilt.

Refreshing Rain of Revival: Today’s Elijahs must persevere in prayer until the latter rain of the Holy Spirit falls copiously.

Restoration: The Elijah Message “restores all things.” Tell me what Satan has taken away and that is what the

Elijah Message can restore. The paths to walk in must be restored.

Reflection

Do I ever find myself worshiping at the wrong altar? What can I do to change my worship altar to focus on the God of heaven and earth?

What false gods such as money, entertainment, sex, may I be calling on to meet my felt needs? Can these things truly meet my ultimate needs?

How can God help me to experience heart-turning? Are there individuals in my life who need to have heart-turning experiences? Are any altars that I know of broken down and in need of repair?

Do I want a heart-turning kind of worship in my home? Is that the kind of worship that I want to share with the people in my church?

Have I ever experienced a day when I made a choice to follow God's leading that resulted in my standing completely alone?

Friend, God is with you. He will help you, like Elijah, to come near to the people. In your relationships you will always have opportunities to invite others to worship at God's altar. You can invite those who do not know God to find a close, loving friendship with Him. He hears each person that calls to Him. Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." He is always ready to fulfill this promise when we take time to request of Him the wisdom that comes only from Him.

Chapter 7

On Carmel's Heights—Part II

An Abundance of Rain

Our topic, On Carmel's Heights Part II, is about **the fourth recorded prayer of Elijah**, for "... abundance of rain." The Bible specifically says Elijah prayed and it did not rain, and he prayed again and it did rain (see 1 Kings 18:41-45; James 5:17-18).

You will remember that the story in Chapter 2 of this book told about the innocent sacrifice being burnt when the fire fell from heaven in answer to Elijah's third recorded prayer. Then the false prophets were slain, and Elijah sent Ahab off to feast. He told Ahab to eat for there was the sound of an abundance of rain. No one else heard any sound but Elijah's eyes could see things that other eyes did not see. His ears could hear things that other people's ears could not hear.

So Elijah went to the top of Carmel's heights, and he began to pray. He prayed once and sent his servant to find out if a cloud was coming. Nothing. Elijah prayed twice. Nothing. Elijah prayed three, four, five, six times. Still nothing. Yes, Elijah prayed time after time. Finally, after the seventh request for rain, Elijah's servant returned with the announcement that a little cloud about the size of a man's hand had appeared. That sign was all Elijah needed to know that God was answering his prayer. Soon the heavy showers came in great abundance, ending the three- and one-half years of famine.

Why didn't God answer the first time? Why did Elijah have to pray three times before the widow's son was resurrected? Shouldn't once have been enough? Luke 18:1 says, "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart." In Luke 11:9–10 Scripture says that we should keep on asking. Literally the Greek says, "keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking." According to the Bible, we must persevere in prayer, asking again and again until our petitions are granted.

Persevering Prayer

Amazing things happened when Elijah prayed. I think also of other great prayer warriors history has revealed to us. One of the greatest who stands out in my mind is evangelist and educator, George Müller, who lived in the 1800s. In his book on Müller's life, Arthur T. Pierson tells about the work he did for orphans over a period of more than 50 years.

When I visited his orphanages in Bristol, England, I tried to relive and understand the experience of this devoted man of prayer. During his lifetime he provided for thousands of orphans, but he never asked anyone for money to support his ministry. He depended entirely on God to provide for their needs in response to his own untiring, unwavering prayers and the prayers of his devoted staff.

In Müller's office, now a museum, I picked up his Bible, and turned to one of his favorite texts, Psalms 81:10, underlined by his own hand, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." On one occasion he wrote, "It is not enough to begin to pray, nor to pray aright. Nor is it enough to continue for a time to pray. But we must pray patiently, believingly, and continue in prayer until we obtain an answer" (*George Müller of Bristol*, 546).

The following story illustrates George Müller's habit of persevering prayer. He began praying for the conversion of five of his friends. After many months, the first was converted to Jesus Christ. Müller continued to pray every day for his friends. Five years later the second friend was

converted. Another six years went by before the third friend accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. Müller continued to pray daily for the last two friends for 36 more years until he died. After his death, they also accepted the Lord Jesus Christ in answer to Müller's persevering prayers. (www.wgbd.org/george-muller.html *George Muller* by Basil Miller, p. 146. Retrieved January 22, 2021).

Reflection

Have I ever wondered why it seemed God was not answering my prayers even when I have prayed the prayer over and over again? Why did it seem God was not listening?

Who in my life may need my persevering, intercessory prayer? In what ways can praying for another person change my own life? Why does God want me to pray for His guidance in my life and in the lives of my family members and friends?

Am I praying for more than just a few scattered drops of the Holy Spirit? Am I praying for an abundant down pouring of the Holy Spirit? Can I ask, believe, and claim the promise in Zechariah 10:1? "Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain."

May God grant the latter rain power of the Holy Spirit to our families, to our ministries, and to our churches in these final days of Earth's history. John 16:23-24 gives us this promise, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Chapter 8

Running Away from God and Capturing a New Vision

Under the Juniper Tree—Elijah Wants to Die

Elijah—we could call him “the marathoner.” He ran 17 miles on muddy roads from Mount Carmel to the gate of Jezreel, Ahab’s summer capital, while staying ahead of Ahab’s chariot. Then he traveled by foot another 95 to 100 miles down to Beersheba, and finally a day’s journey into the desert. There he lay down under the juniper (broom) tree, totally discouraged, and prayed that he might die. “It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!” (1 Kings 19:4). **This is Elijah’s fifth prayer.**

There in the desert under the juniper tree he slept the sleep of exhaustion, wanting to die after running away from Jezebel’s threats to kill him. He had been sleeping for a while when an angel of God suddenly awakened him. No, it was not an enemy. It was a friendly face bending tenderly over him and saying, “Arise, and eat” (1 Kings 19:5). Elijah looked and found a cake baked on coals and a jar of water. He ate and drank. 1 Kings 19:7–8 says, “The angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, ‘Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.’ So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.”

In the past, some Christian counselors thought that being depressed was a sin. They counseled depressed persons by telling them that they shouldn’t feel that way and to get

control of themselves. Current thought is that using such phrases does not help the depressed person. An example of God's way to deal with such situations is found in this Elijah story in 1 Kings 19. In modern clinical terms Elijah's angel might have said something like this: *Let's see if we can address the problem of your low blood sugar. You've been on the run a long way—17 miles to Jezreel running ahead of Ahab's horses, 100 miles to Beersheba, and here you are a day's journey into the wilderness—and you haven't had any nourishment. Get up and eat.*

The Still Small Voice

After Elijah had eaten the food that the angel prepared, he continued to “run” for 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb, also called Mount Sinai, the Mount of God. It wasn't a bad choice. If you are depressed, why not go back to where you know God has manifested Himself? This mountain is the place, where amid fire and thunder, God had manifest Himself in Moses' time to the children of Israel in the wilderness, when He spoke the ten commandments in their hearing.

There, on Mount Horeb, Elijah entered a cave and spent the night. As he lay quietly in the cave, the word of the Lord came to him. God again dealt with Elijah's depression by questioning him and giving him an illustration of God's care. **This is Elijah's sixth prayer**, not a typical prayer, but an audible conversation with God about his situation. The voice from heaven asked, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9).

Then Elijah lamented his situation and recounted to God his own zeal for the Lord and Israel's deplorable condition. He said, “Lord, four things are wrong here. It's the people. Number one, they have forsaken Your covenant; number two, they have thrown down Your altars; number three, they have killed Your prophets; and number four, I am the only one left who serves You and they want to take my life” (author's paraphrase of 1 Kings 19:10). Then God told Elijah to go out of the cave and stand on the mountain before the Lord.

1 Kings 19:11–12 says, “And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.” Elijah heard the still small voice, a delicate whisper, and God *was* in the still small voice.

When Elijah heard the voice, he wrapped his face in his mantle, the Bible says, and went out to stand in the entrance of the cave—maybe Moses’ cave. Suddenly a voice came to him and said again, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:13). Elijah again recounted the four reasons he had mentioned previously, including “I alone am left; and they want to take my life.”

The Word of the Lord had come to him in the past telling him to go to Samaria. The Lord had also sent him to the Brook Cherith, and to Zarephath, and finally to Mount Carmel. But God had not sent him to the cave at Mount Horeb.

Capturing a New Vision

“When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ (Psalm 46:10)” (*The Desire of Ages*, 363). In the cave of despondency Elijah complained, “I alone am left and they seek to take my life” (1 Kings 19:14). God then told Elijah, “I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal.” God also revealed to Elijah the next assignments in his mission (see 1 Kings 19:15–19).

God also gave Elijah another task: training his successor, Elisha, who would strengthen the Schools of the Prophets after Elijah’s ascension (see 1 Kings 19:16, 19–21; 2 Kings 2).

Reflection

The reality is that people sometimes get depressed. Maybe you have never really wanted to die. On the other hand, if you ever did feel like you wanted to die, remember Moses; he wanted to die (see Numbers 11:15). The prophet Jonah wanted to die (see Jonah 4:1–3). Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth (see Jeremiah 20:12–18). So did Job (see Job 3:1–6; 6:8–9). If you do get discouraged or depressed, you can still find hope as these servants of God did.

Have I ever felt depressed because of my situation? Maybe a Jezebel is after me. Maybe it is a gossipy church member. Perhaps it has become a challenge to handle the kids.

How can I counsel a depressed person—someone who is so depressed that he or she wants to die?

When I have run from God, when I have turned my back on duty, will God still hear me?

Have I ever felt like I was the only one left who was faithful to God?

Do I feel that at some crucial time in my life, God has communicated with me and given me special guidance? If so, share your experience with a friend or acquaintance.

The prophet Joel said that in the last days, “Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28). The psalmist David says in Psalm 20:4 (NIV), “May He give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.” My friend, I would ask you what is your dream? You may want to share your dream with a friend or acquaintance. God has incredible miracles that are waiting to happen for you, as you move out of your comfort zone into the faith zone. He has a plan for you. He has a dream

for you at this time of your life. Do you know what that dream is?

God does not always give us what we pray for. Elijah prayed that he might die. Did God fulfill that request? He did not, because God did not want Elijah to die under the juniper tree. God had other dreams for his servant. Elijah would actually go to heaven without dying. He was only the second person in all human history—second and last to go to heaven without seeing death. God had plans for Elijah to go to heaven in a flaming chariot of fire after a period of time when he had completed the work God gave him to do on Earth.

Does God have better plans for me than I can imagine? Is His plan for me greater and better than my wildest dream? Have I ever wished that God would appear to me in a dramatic way to reveal His plans for me? How exactly does God manifest Himself to us today?

Ellen White in *Steps to Christ*, 83, encourages those who desire to work for Christ, but do not feel that they have any big dreams. “You are not to wait for great occasions or to expect extraordinary abilities before you go to work for God. If your daily life is a testimony to the purity and sincerity of your faith, and others are convinced that you desire to benefit them, your efforts will not be wholly lost. The humblest and poorest of the disciples of Jesus can be a blessing to others.”

Dear friend, you can hear God speaking to you today. Maybe not in a cyclone wind, in an earthquake, or in a fire. But He says, “I’ll be with you wherever you are in life’s journey. I’ll be there in the faintest whisper, in the still small voice.” *Are you listening?*

Chapter 9

The Second Elijah— John the Baptist

Heralding the Time of the Messiah's First Coming

John 1:6–7 says, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.”

Malachi, in the last prophecy of the Old Testament 430 years earlier, looked forward to the coming of another Elijah. And Gabriel, the highest angel in heaven, announced this same prophecy to the surprised priest, Zachariah, as the first prophecy of New Testament times. “He will also go before Him [Jesus] 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).

Peter, James, and John had heard it from Jesus' lips, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. ... Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist” (Matthew 17:11, 13). John the Baptist's role was to give people a clear picture of where they were on the map of salvation history. At that time, Israel had journeyed 400 years with no living prophet. Suddenly people flocked to hear a man who knew where they were in the stream of time.

The prophet Daniel had prophesied the exact year of the Messiah's first coming (see Daniel 9:25–27). So “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance” (Mark 1:4). Soon the promised Messiah

would appear and would come “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel’” (Mark 1:14–15). Get ready! The Savior of the world is coming.

It seemed like an echo of Isaiah’s prophecy 750 years earlier, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; The glory of the Lord shall be revealed” (Isaiah 40:3–5).

The Crooked Places Made Straight

Adam Clarke in his commentary on Matthew 3:3 relates interesting insights when referring to the above prophecy of Isaiah. Clarke directs the reader to a story that illustrates what these phrases meant in the times of Medo–Persia. Diodorus, an ancient historian, told a story about a queen, whose name was probably Semiramis.

During her reign she wanted to visit the far-flung outposts of the empire. However, the queen knew that the Zarcean Mountains lay between her and her destination, Ekbatana, Persia. Instead of taking the circuitous route around the mountains, Queen Semiramis decided that she wanted to journey through them on a more expeditious, shorter route.

Before her departure, she sent ahead of her the *stratores*, whose job it was to repair the roads that she would travel. These workers would remove the obstacles, and fill in the craggy precipices and deep hollows. This requisite preparation had to be completed before she left home. The crooked places were made straight, the rough ways smooth, the valleys filled in, and the mountains and hills brought low.

Following the *stratores*’ repair work, the royal chariot pulled by magnificent horses would travel the road announced by heralds. The subjects of the empire would crowd beside the highway as the queen passed by. Thus,

the prophecy of Isaiah 40:4, “the high places will be made low, the low places will be filled in and the crooked road will be made straight,” seems to be connecting ancient life experiences with the expected work of John the Baptist, who heralded Christ’s coming (*Clarke’s Commentary*, vol. 5, 51).

Someone has said the entire Old Testament can be summarized in one verse—Isaac’s question to his father as they approached Mount Moriah—“Where is the lamb?” The New Testament can also be summarized in one verse in the words of John the Baptist—“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Genesis 22:7; John 1:29).

“And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he [John the Baptist] will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him [Jesus] 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 1:14–17).

John the Baptist’s Ministry

The second Elijah, John the Baptist, addressed the sins of his culture including, the pride of the religious leaders, the materialism and overcharging of the tax collectors, and the immoral relationships of the royalty. These were all “gods” that the people worshipped. **John’s answer to the problem was, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).**

Characteristics of John's Ministry

1. Heralding the fulfillment of prophetic time for the Messiah's coming
2. Presenting Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, "Behold! The Lamb of God"
3. Denouncing the sins of his age
 - a. Thievery
 - b. Violence
 - c. Pride
 - d. Hypocrisy
 - e. Immorality
4. Calling sinners to repentance
5. Demonstrating humility. "He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30)
6. Living modestly
7. Standing for righteousness even unto death. He was beheaded—the first martyr of the emerging Christian church

John the Baptist was the *stratore* who prepared the way for the Messiah. He was also the herald who announced the coming of a King in righteousness, Jesus, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. That was about 2000 years ago. Now the world is preparing for Christ's second coming. More "Elijahs" and "John the Baptists" are needed to prepare the way and herald Christ's coming in the clouds of heaven to receive His followers and take them home to the heavenly mansions.

"In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, such a work as that of John [the Baptist] is to be done. God calls for men [and women] who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. ... In order to

give such a message as John gave, we must have a spiritual experience like his. The same work must be wrought in us. We must behold God, and in beholding Him lose sight of self" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, 332–333).

Reflection

Am I ready to meet the King of kings and Lord of lords at His second coming?

Am I one of the "stratores," who is preparing the road for Jesus' second coming to this earth? Am I a herald of His second coming?

In what ways is God working in my life to make crooked places straight?

Section II

Heart Turning

Introduction

In Section II we will explore family dynamics and relationships that can promote heart-turning in families and encourage others to become modern Elijahs who uplift the cross of Jesus to those who may not know Him. In so doing, they lead others to make the choice to serve God instead of the world and prepare for the second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



Author's gender-inclusive paraphrase
of Malachi 4:5–6 with Luke 1:17

What happens when LOVE turns hearts and links the generations in a common mission to share the message of the cross anywhere and everywhere?

Notable are the Waldensian missionary families who lived secluded lives in the Piedmont Valleys in northern Italy and in other European countries during the dark ages. For many unbroken generations, parents passed the torch of truth to their children, who then passed it on to their children. They taught their children to share the Scriptures in their own country as well as foreign countries in spite of persecution and death from the Roman power if discovered. An account of their missionary outreach can be found in *The Great Controversy* by Ellen White, 61–78.

One example of a modern missionary family who was inspired by the many stories of pioneer missionaries is the Alfred G. Youngberg family. After Alfred married Bertha Oss, they went to India and served as missionaries in the Seventh-day Adventist church from 1922 until 1929. Counting four generations, beginning with Alfred and Bertha, 25 of their family have served as foreign missionaries, 24 of them in Seventh-day Adventist missions. The Divine mathematics is $1 + 1 = 25$. The details of this family's service are recorded in the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* with internet access. Look for the article on Alfred Youngberg and Bertha Oss Youngberg.

Chapter 10

He Restores All Things—Part I

Jesus' Promise That the Elijah Message Would Restore All Things

“**A**nd His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will **restore ALL things**. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist” (Matthew 17:10–13, emphasis supplied).

Peter spoke of restoration in his post-Pentecost sermon (Acts 3:19–21). “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of **restoration of ALL things**, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (emphasis supplied). In these verses Peter is referring to the glorious second coming of our Lord and Savior and to the Elijahs who prepare His way.

The Elijah Message and Mothers

When will we have stalwart young men like Elijah, Moses, John the Baptist, Timothy, and, dare we say, Jesus? When we

have mothers like the anonymous mother of Elijah and when we have mothers like Jochebed, mother of Moses; Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist; and Mary, mother of Jesus. When we have mothers like Eunice and grandmothers like Lois who raised Timothy.

They and other biblical greats lived lives largely shaped by their mothers. God called Queen Esther, who was left an orphan at a young age and raised by her cousin Mordecai and his wife, whose name is not mentioned in the Bible. These godly Jewish people became Esther's adoptive father and mother, and through their influence she became a Persian queen. God used Esther to save the Jewish people, who were living in Persia at that time, from extinction.

The author's gender-inclusive paraphrase of Malachi 4:5-6 with Luke 1:17 is as follows: Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And the Spirit and power of Elijah will turn the hearts of the fathers and mothers to their children and the hearts of the children to their dads and moms. Today, are parents turning their hearts toward their children? God has promised, their hearts will come back and turn toward their parents. Friends, it is still true that the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world. And those lips that speak the truth in love will reach hearts as no one else can.

Cornelia's Jewels

Cornelia lived in ancient Rome and married about the year 172 BC. Her husband's name was Grakus, and God blessed them with a family. However, some 17 years later Grakas died, and Cornelia was left alone with her children. She was offered proposals for marriage. Pharaoh of Egypt wanted her as his queen and some of the aristocracy of Rome would have been very happy to marry her, but she preferred to live for her children. (*Cornelia's Jewels*. James Baldwin. Retrieved January 21, 2021. From americanliterature.com.)

The years went by and one day Cornelia received a visit from a matron of the Roman aristocracy—a lady decked out with fine jewels and elaborate dress. Cornelia, on the other hand, was dressed very simply. The matron asked her, “Cornelia, where are your jewels?” Cornelia called her two boys to her side, took one in each arm, embraced them, and said, “THESE are my jewels.” (Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (2021). *Cornelia (Mother of the Gracchi)*. Retrieved January 22, 2021, from www.en.wikipedia.org.)

In all ages, women have had to make challenging decisions regarding their priorities every day.

A Modern-day Mother

The story is told of some kids who were outside playing. Their mother was busy inside. Her hands were in the sink washing the dishes. The washer and dryer were running. The door opened. The children came running in, saying excitedly, “Mother! Mother! The wind is just right. Let’s go out and fly the kites.” The mother thought, *Fly the kites? The laundry, the unwashed dishes and more than I can do, and now I should fly kites?* These thoughts slipped through her mind, but she never expressed them. She wiped her hands on the dishtowel and went out to fly kites with her kids.

Decades went by. It was family reunion time. The children now grown were gathered with families of their own. One of them said, “Remember the good times we used to have at home?” “Yes,” said another. “You remember the time the wind was just right, and Mom came out to fly kites with us?” “Yes!” Everyone remembered. No one remembered or mentioned that the dishes had been unwashed a few hours longer or that the laundry was not yet finished. Mom had chosen the better part and dropped everything to seize the moment and spend valuable time with her children at their simple request.

The Elijah Message and Fathers

The Bible is full of the stories of fathers who were there for the children and of some who were not there for their children. I think of the story of Enoch. Genesis 5:21 says that Enoch lived 65 years and had a son. His name was Methuselah. After the birth of his son, Enoch walked with God. When Enoch saw how this son had a close love for him, Enoch learned to love his heavenly Father more. (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 84) Enoch represents fathers who are learning to love more deeply.

Father Abraham

Abraham was called the father of the faithful. His early name *Abram* means “exalted father.” His new name, *Abraham*, means “father of many nations.” In the book of Genesis, the Bible repeats time after time that Abraham built an altar to the Lord where the family worshipped together (see Genesis 12:7; 13:4, 17–18). Not all of Abraham’s choices in life were ideal: for example, his decision to take another wife at the suggestion of his childless wife, Sarah.

Sarah and Hagar became the mothers of Isaac and Ishmael respectively, but this complicated the family dynamic. In spite of Abraham’s lack of good judgment in taking Hagar as his wife, and in spite of the situation of rivalry between the two wives and their two offspring, “in his latter days Ishmael repented of his evil ways and returned to his father’s God” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 174).

Where Have All the Fathers Gone?

Does the heart-turning message of today speak to fathers as well as mothers? It happened in the country of Armenia. The date was December 7, 1988. Dad left his son Armand at the school that morning. At 11:41 a terrible earthquake rocked the whole country of Armenia. Within minutes, 45,000 people were dead and some 500,000 were left homeless. Father ran to the school where he had left

Armand, and there he saw that the concrete slabs had fallen in. The school was a total ruin. What did Dad begin to do? He started lifting concrete, taking out rocks—anything to find his son’s schoolroom.

Within minutes, the fire chief arrived. Fires were burning all around them, and the fire chief said, “Please stop your work because it is not right to lift up the hopes of the people around here. We know that no one can be alive in there, and besides it is dangerous. Explosions are happening right and left.” But the father refused to be deterred. He continued to work, and when other fathers came, instead of sending them away, he said, “Here, help me. Let’s move this slab together.” He worked 36 hours without stopping. At the end of that time, he looked into a dark corner where the slabs had made a little cave, and there was Armand. Armand said, “Dad! I knew you would come, because you told me if I ever needed you, you would be there.” (*Vartabedian: Are you going to help me?* Retrieved January 24, 2021 from armenianweekly.com).

Do All God’s Followers Have a Role to Play in Heart Turning?

Not all married couples are parents, and some singles may be parents. Can the Elijah Message be theirs as well? The biblical Elijah and John the Baptist were single, as were many other prophets of God. Singles must often make difficult decisions and set priorities about their relationships when God calls. An example of two single sisters, Mary and Martha, and their single brother Lazarus is recorded in Luke 10:38–42. These three siblings lived in Bethany and were close friends of Jesus. When he needed rest, he often spent relaxing time in their home away from the crowds.

One day the three were hosting Jesus and His disciples in their home. Mary sat at Jesus’ feet listening to His every word while Martha was busy in another room preparing the meal. She came to complain to Jesus, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her

to help me” (v. 40). Jesus responded kindly, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (vv. 41–42).

At Simon’s feast, this same Mary came to anoint Jesus’ body with fragrant oil for His burial, even before His death on the cross (see John 11:2 and Mark 14:3–9). After Jesus’ resurrection, Mary was by Jesus’ tomb when He revealed Himself first to her, and asked her to go to the disciples and to tell them for Him, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God” (John 20:11–18). Whether father, mother, child, or single, God is ready to pour out His Spirit upon any follower of His who is willing to serve Him.

Reflection

Just think of the biblical promise, “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy ... on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28–29).

Do you think that Joel 2 can be fulfilled in our day? Do you agree that this could happen very soon?

Mothers, grandmothers, where are your jewels today? What are you doing to raise up champions of the truth? Have you asked Jesus to help you shape lives for Him?

Fathers, grandfathers, how are you teaching your children to love Jesus? In what ways are you showing your children the true love of Jesus in making daily decisions?

Aren’t you thankful that even though children and parents may wander far away from God, they may return to each other and to the God of their fathers just as in the biblical story of Abraham and Ishmael. So I ask you today,

what does Elijah restore? He restores his followers to a rightful place in their relationships to God and to each other.

Children and singles, are you daily asking God how you can serve Him? Can God “who has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets, use you as “modern Elijahs” to prepare others for His second coming?

May God bless us all as His children, to show the Father’s love and compassion in our ministry for Him.

Chapter 11

He Restores All Things—Part II

Copperhill

Tucked away in the extreme southeastern part of Tennessee in the United States, near the border where three states meet, lies an area largely forgotten by today's rushing travelers. Long ago, this area had been inhabited by the Cherokee tribe of Native Americans. The names reveal the land lineage. There is the Hiwassee Scenic River, Ticoa Lake, and Chattahoochee National Forest. When I drove through this countryside for the first time, I could not believe my eyes. The hills and valleys were gutted, with deep gullies running everywhere. The trees were gone, and vegetation had disappeared. Wildlife was not to be found. It was a reddish, barren, lonely moonscape. I had never seen so much environmental damage.

I researched what had happened to the area and learned about a copper vein that was discovered in the hills around 1843. Overnight a thriving mining area had sprung up. Hundreds of people arrived. They mined the copper, which was found in its natural state along with sulfur. Trees were cut down in order to fuel the furnaces to purify the copper. The ore became high quality copper, but the refining process released sulfuric acid into the air as a byproduct. This deadly acid killed all the vegetation for miles around leaving the place bereft of plant and animal life. Eventually, the vein of

copper ran out. The people moved away. The place became a ghost town, but the gullies remained.

In the 1980s, the successor companies to the original copper company began the reclamation process. Truckloads of rich black soil were brought in, and trees were planted (wikipedia.org, *Copperhill, Tennessee*). Today, if you visit Copperhill, Tennessee, you will find a thriving natural wildlife area. The world is like Copperhill on a cosmic scale. Much of the natural beauty is gone from our world, but we have the promise that all will be restored.

In our world, a rapacious enemy entered the picture in Genesis 3 and nearly destroyed God's perfect creation. God looked down from His high heaven on that western spiral arm of the Milky Way galaxy. He saw the little to medium size star we call the Sun and eight planets orbiting around it. The third planet out was Earth, the rebel planet. Earth had no hope, but God came down to restore all things.

Heart-Turning—Repentance

When the Elijah Message refers to turning hearts, it is literally talking about repentance and forgiveness. Elijah's prayer, "Lord turn their hearts back" (see 1 Kings 18:37), called people to repent of their sins toward their children. John the Baptist's message was also about repentance, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Referring to the children and parents who suffered the great disappointment of 1844, Ellen White wrote, "The hearts of parents were turned to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents. The barriers of pride and reserve were swept away. Heartfelt confessions were made, and the members of the household labored for the salvation of those who were nearest and dearest" (*The Great Controversy*, 369).

Family Repentance

Once, a dad had to confront his son about some of his inappropriate behaviors. Dad went out, got a switch, and

gave Son an old-fashioned spanking. Both Son and Dad were upset. Son went to his room and closed the door. After half an hour or so Dad cooled off. He knocked on the door and his son opened it. "Son," Dad said, "just want to tell you I'm sorry. I lost my cool. I shouldn't have done it that way. Will you forgive me?" "Oh, Dad, I don't expect you to be perfect," Son replied. Dad was forgiven. They both felt better.

Later, Dad learned that his son had been planning to run away and live with a close relative far from their home, where he would not have had the same Christian influences. If Dad had not humbled himself and asked forgiveness, Son's career in the medical profession might never have happened.

Sometimes it is necessary for dads and moms to make things right with their children. At Camp Au Sable, a youth camp in the State of Michigan, I presented a study on the Elijah Message about asking for forgiveness. Afterwards a young lad, perhaps ten years old, rushed to the front and said, "That was the best sermon I ever heard!" There was no one more surprised than I because the talk had not been a sermon and certainly had been far from eloquent. I said, "Sonny, why do you say that?" The boy explained that his parents had commanded their children to say, "I'm sorry," whether they were sorry or not, but the parents themselves never said, "I'm sorry" to the children.

Ernest Hemingway wrote about a father in Spain who had gotten upset with his son. An altercation resulted, and the son ran away from home to the big city of Madrid. A few weeks went by, Dad cooled down, and reason prevailed. The father put an ad in the Madrid newspaper, *El Liberal*, which said, "Paco, all is forgiven. Meet me at the Hotel Montaña at 12 o'clock on Tuesday." Signed, "Papi." Dad traveled to Madrid. He went to the plaza in front of the Hotel Montaña. Paco is a rather common name in Spain, and what a surprise awaited him. Eight hundred young men by the name of Paco were waiting in the plaza, waiting for a father to tell them they were forgiven.

Reflection

When I examine my own life, do I find a ghost town landscape? What can I do to restore “new black soil and trees” back into my life? How can Jesus be part of my reclamation process?

The Bible says, “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight” (Matthew 3:3). *Am I willing to prepare the way of the Lord with my friends and family by sincerely saying, “I am sorry I hurt you. Will you forgive me?”*

Where do I find myself in the steps mentioned by Peter in his post-Pentecost sermon [repent, be converted, sins blotted out, receive the times of refreshing that come from the presence of the Lord (outpouring of the Holy Spirit), the restoration of all things]? Am I on the road toward total restoration?

Do I want to be part of the Elijah Message and the restoration of ALL things? How can I help others to be part of a restoration journey?

It may not be long until this happens. *Am I preparing? How shall I prepare?*

Chapter 12

How Much Is a Child Worth?

A Mother's Story

Many years ago, the story was told of a mother who had gone down the street briefly to the corner store to buy a few household items and left her new infant asleep in the crib. While in the store, she heard the fire engines go by, rushed out of the store, and found that her own house was engulfed in flames. As she approached, the firemen told her, "No one can enter that house. Too late!" But a mother's love could not stay outside. She broke through the fire lines and into the home, through the burning rooms and into the infant's bedroom. Retrieving her daughter from the little cradle, she brought the child out to safety. The mother herself had to be hospitalized and treated, and the scars from her burns remained.

Years went by. One day mother was washing dishes with her little daughter, and her daughter said, "Mother, what ugly hands you have!" This cut like a sword into the mother's heart. She said, "Daughter, let's sit down and I will tell you a story." Mother told the child about her rescue from the burning flames when she was a baby. The daughter, with tears flowing said, "Mother, I think you have the most beautiful hands in all the world!" (*Mother's Hands*. Arthur S. Maxwell. Retrieved January 24, 2021 from family.adventist.org.) How much is a child worth? A thousand dollars? A million dollars? All that we have? Incalculable?

Jesus would have died to save even one little child.

Historical Evidence of Child Sacrifice

Archaeologists have unearthed the remains of the city of Carthage, a large city in North Africa near where Tunis in Tunisia is today. There they found the largest cemetery of sacrificed humans ever discovered. This research found that, over a period of 600 years, human sacrifices had increased as the city became more urbanized. They found a total of 25,000 urns where the children were buried in nine layers, one on top of the other. Some urns contained the remains of as many as three children (Stager & Wolff, 1984).

Carthage was established as an outpost of the Phoenicians, a seafaring people from Tyre and Sidon, who traded throughout the Mediterranean area. Over a period of years, the Phoenicians sacrificed these infants to the god Baal (Baal Hamman) and the goddess Astarte, also known as Ashtoreth. When the archaeologists deciphered the inscriptions on the tombstones, they discovered one that said, "This sacrifice is dedicated to the goddess Astarte."

Why did the people make these infant sacrifices? The archaeological journals reveal that whenever the people in Carthage sought to obtain some great favor or make a vow, they offered children to their deities. These horrific child sacrifices were apparently both a form of population control and a way to get answers to their prayers (Stager & Wolff, 1984; Stager & Greene, 2000).

The Last Night of Carthage

The year was 146 BC. The Roman legions thundered at the gates of Carthage, the Pearl of the Mediterranean. The fair daughters of Carthage had long since cut their hair to make bowstrings for the weaponry of the beleaguered archers who tried to defend the walls, yet the walls were crumbling.

Max Rafferty in his book, *Suffer, Little Children*, describes the events of that night. The parents and children of Carthage were gathered around their idol. They had come to make the ultimate sacrifice to their god. They prepared

for the sacrifice by stoking the idol to incandescent heat and then pushed their children up a ramp into the bosom of the idol. The parents were praying to their god that he would accept their sacrifices and save the city from destruction. But that night was the last night of Carthage. The next day the Romans took the city, destroyed the inhabitants, and threw down the altar of Baal.

Child Sacrifice in Israel

In apostate Israel, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel adopted these forbidden heathen practices from the Phoenician people. At that time, God called upon Elijah to confront the people of Israel about their allegiance to Him, calling them back to worship Him and to follow the Creator God—the Lover of children, the true God of the rain and harvest.

A number of years ago I visited the archaeological ruins of the city of Megiddo located in the Valley of Megiddo in Israel. This is an area which has been drenched by the blood of thousands and thousands who fought over this strategic location in back and forth battles between the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Syrians who came from the north, and the Egyptians who came from the south.

On the north side of the valley, I could see the hills of Nazareth where the loving Jesus spent his childhood and adulthood up to the age of 30. Looking on one side of the city I saw a large round altar. In ancient times altars such as this were a part of the multilevel Canaanite temples where child sacrifices occurred during Baal worship. Then turning around 180 degrees I could see Mount Carmel, the mountain of Megiddo where God responded to the worthless Baal worship.

Child sacrifices to Baal also infiltrated the southern kingdom of Judah. People offered their sons and daughters in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem. Jeremiah (7:31; 19:5–6; 32:35) and Ezekiel (16:20; 20:26; 23:37) sternly condemned these infant sacrifices. They were,

in great part, a cause for the Babylonian captivity. Earlier, these pagan high places were destroyed by good King Josiah, who restored true worship during his lifetime (Youngberg & Youngberg, 1988, 83–87).

Aren't you happy that children are not sacrificed to idols today? Or are children being sacrificed in other ways in modern times? Are parents now sacrificing their children through abortion in exchange for a few moments of pleasure, even in Christian homes? Do parents offer their children on the altar of unwholesome media entertainment for their own convenience? These children are not burned on an altar but are just as truly sacrificed to the gods of this world.

We can bring our children, our little ones, to Jesus, the One who said, "Let the little children come to Me. ... for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). In raising our children, we may not always reach the ideal that God has for us, but we can confess our faults to God and to our children, and God will forgive us. We can leave our mistakes in the past and allow God to help us improve our relationships and prepare to be a part of His everlasting kingdom. May this be the experience of each of us is my prayer. May God bless us and our children that we will be together forever with Him.

Reflection

Think of the miracle of conception. Spouses join together to bring into the world a child in the parents' image, made with their 46 different chromosomes, their genetic makeup. This new human being can transfer that genetic makeup to many successive generations.

What can we do as parents so that the developing embryo/child also reflects the image of God?

Did the Baal worshippers have a different idea of a child's worth than we do today?

Where Are the Elijahs?

In what ways might Seventh-day Adventist Christians be sacrificing children today? Are the gods of personal ambition, materialism, selfish leisure, unwise priorities, and workaholic drives pushing today's children to destruction?

Have family worship and prayer been replaced by the internet and television? What is stopping parents today from being loving guardians of the children God has given? If we and our home activities were weighed in the balance, would we be found wanting?

Chapter 13

Family Covenants

God's Covenant for His Family— Family Covenants with God

When Elijah complained to God on Mount Horeb, he said, “The children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant” (1 Kings 19:10). The children of Israel were no longer following the laws God had given them through Moses, including the Ten Commandments.

The Old Testament frequently refers to covenants that included the whole family. In Genesis 6:18, God said to Noah, “I will establish my covenant with you; and you will go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife and your sons’ wives with you.” This was God’s family covenant with Noah. In Abraham’s time, God made a covenant with him and promised, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). This covenant was repeated later to Isaac and to Jacob.

The most complete covenant in the Bible is the covenant God gave to Moses and the children of Israel, which Moses first gave in discourses and later wrote as the whole book of Deuteronomy. The seven components of this covenant are the following.

1. Covenant History
2. Characteristics of Lifestyle
3. Blessings of the covenant when faithfully followed
4. Curses of the covenant when disregarded

5. Covenant Oath, the formal promise by participants
6. Call for Witnesses to the oath taking
7. Provision for storing and rereading the Covenant Document

Establishing Family Covenants

Does it please God when His Children make a Family Covenant with Him and with each other? What guidance does Scripture give to support the idea of Family Covenant? What should that covenant contain? A review of the Ten Commandments reveals that three of them relate directly to family relationships.

Fifth Commandment: “Honor your **father and your mother**, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

Seventh Commandment: “You shall not commit adultery” [**husbands and wives**] (Exodus 20:14).

Tenth Commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s **wife [nor husband]**, ... nor **anything** that is your neighbor’s” (Exodus 20:17).

Perhaps it is not customary for families to make covenants outside of the marriage vows. However, a covenant between spouses and their children could be very beneficial to remind them that they have certain responsibilities and obligations to protect and care for each other throughout their lives. Jesus, Himself, gave us the example of caring for His aging mother even as He was dying on the cross, and He commended her into the care of His beloved disciple, John. “He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:26-27). Moses in Leviticus 19:32 admonished the Israelites, “You

shall rise before the gray headed, and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord.”

In Psalm 127:3, King Solomon spoke about the blessing of children. “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.” Psalm 128 says, “Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house. Your children like olive plants all around your table. ... Yes, may you see your children’s children” (vv. 3, 6).

Parents’ care of their children should be their highest priority. Jesus spoke very strongly against child abuse when He said, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” (Mark 9:42). Other Bible verses also support sound parenting practices: “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21). “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Children or parents may feel no obligation to care for one another, as the following story illustrates. Pastor Philip tells of a youth who came to see him. This youth accepted no responsibility for his family. His mother was frantic about his lifestyle. She was physically ill. Yet this young man said, “Well, if she gets sick that’s her problem. I have my problems, she’s got hers.” There were no mutual expectations between mother and son, no covenant between them that this youth recognized. There is a need for family members to develop a covenant with God and among themselves, formally or informally, in order to avoid family breakdown and lack of commitment to one another.

Family Covenant Under a Pine Tree

I want to share one of the Youngberg family covenants. True, we had a family covenant at our wedding, but beyond that, we have renewed our covenant on other occasions. Millie, my second wife, and I were married about two years

when we took a family vacation in Colorado. We enjoyed ourselves while camping out at the Ouray Amphitheater Campground. It was a lovely, lovely place near a long hill where our son, Wes, enjoyed skateboarding.

God was very close and everything was peaceful in the camp. Then one day there was a problem. No one was talking to anyone in the family. Times were “tough.” Can you guess what day of the week it was? Yes, it was Sabbath, when the enemy works a little harder to bring discontent.

Finally, I said, “Well, come on, family, let’s go up and take a hike on the trail above the camp. As the family was hiking along it began to rain. The four of us found refuge under a pine tree. We were sitting on a log waiting for the rain to pass when we began talking to each other again. After a bit, I said, “You know we all have similar goals and maybe we should get along with each other better. Millie said some words about being sorry for what she had done, son John had his say, Wes gave some encouraging words. Finally, I said, “Hey, why don’t we just come together as a family and decide right here on the side of this mountain that whatever may come, through thick or thin, we’re going to stick together as a family.”

Before that moment was over, we had gathered in a circle as the rain descended on our heads, and we each said a prayer. “Lord, what do You want to do with the Youngberg family? We make this covenant with You and we make this covenant with each other, that come what may, through thick or thin, we’re going to support each other and stick together as a family.” The last “amen” said, the kids were off like a flash as they ran back to the campground. I said to Millie, “Millie, do you think God is going to answer that prayer?”—not that I doubted it, but I wanted to hear her affirm it. Yes, we believed that God would answer that prayer for family unity. It has been a long time since we made our family covenant under a tree in the rain, and we praise God He answered those prayers.

Keeping and Renewing Family Covenants

Is it possible for parents and children to keep their covenants with God and with each other in their own strength? The answer is NO. Only when members take seriously their dependence on God, can they keep their commitments to Him and to each other. For example, when the children of Israel heard what God told Moses on Mount Sinai about keeping God's commandments, they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). However, very shortly after that, they asked Aaron to build a golden calf to worship. They did not yet have the laws written in their hearts. They thought they were going to do right and keep His laws in their own strength.

What makes it possible for individuals and families to keep God's covenant and their covenants with each other? Jesus told His disciples that He is the vine and His followers are the branches. They must abide in Him in order to do His works. He said to them, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). As followers of Christ, we must stay connected to Him as our personal Savior and allow Him to perform His works in us. He is the One who gives us the strength to keep covenants.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Also, Philippians 1:6 assures us, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." The Apostle Paul also stated to the Philippians, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

When we commit our lives to God, Christ gives us His power through His Holy Spirit to keep the covenants we have made with Him and with each other. In John 14:16-17, Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another

Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth.” In John 16:13–14, Jesus continued His discourse to the disciples just before His death, “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”

And in Jesus prayer to the Father before entering the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed not only for His 12 disciples, but also for all His disciples throughout the ages. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ... I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:17, 20–21).

The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end (*The Desire of Ages*, 324).

Covenant—Forsaken or Vibrant and New?

God sometimes spoke of a new covenant that He would make with Israel because they had so quickly and frequently forsaken their covenant with Him throughout their history. In Jeremiah 31:31–33, God says, “Behold, the days are coming ... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the

covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, ... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Paul also echoed these promises in Hebrews 8:8–12 and Hebrews 10:12–17:

But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

Completing these thoughts in Hebrews 10, the author wrote in verses 23–25:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

These Scriptures give us insights as to how we can keep our family covenants and our covenants to God—by continuing in the process of sanctification through His power.

Reflection

Do I think God wants to establish a covenant with my family under His guidance? If so, why? In what ways are God's promises about family heart-turning part of the covenant journey?

What are the relationships between me and my mother and father? Do we hold a mutual family covenant? If not, how can we establish a covenant? Talk it over with members of your family and find an appropriate date to begin.

How can I ensure that I keep my covenants with God and with my family?

Do I feel that God has performed great and mighty things for my family across the generations? If so, tell those blessings and share your experience with someone who will be encouraged by hearing your story.

Chapter 14

Transmitting Our Heritage—Part I

Passing the Torch

How can we transmit our religious heritage to another generation? The family is like a relay race, passing the torch from one generation to another. Certainly we want the torch to be passed on to our children and then on to their children. In the previous chapter, the seven parts of a covenant were outlined as found in the book of Deuteronomy. Also in this book of covenants are seven ways to transmit our heritage to the succeeding generations: Modeling, Teaching, Celebrating, Serving, Disciplining, Decision-making, and most importantly, Loving. The first four will be discussed in this chapter, and the last three in the next chapter.

Modeling

One way to pass on our heritage is by modeling. The parents should do this by showing in their own life experiences that they believe in the Creator and Redeemer of the human race. Deuteronomy 6:4–6 says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.” If the practices are not in the parents’ hearts, their words will not be convincing and the children may not be led to believe them.

A Modeling Story: Following in Another's Footsteps

When I was a teenager, I was camping with some friends in Yosemite National Park in California. One day we decided to go for a hike. The trail crossed the creek in several places, and as we were hiking along, we came to the place where the trail faded on one side and we had to cross to the other side of the creek. It looked a little slippery and dangerous, but I began hiking across on the rocks that peeped out of the shallow, slippery creek bottom. I noticed there was a limb overhead, and I reached up and grabbed ahold of the limb. I hadn't gone very far on the slippery moss when my feet suddenly went out from under me. If I had not been hanging on to that branch, I might have been swept away. A steep waterfall was just ahead of me to my right.

I scarcely reached a tree that marked the other side of the creek when I turned around and saw one of the younger campers coming behind me. He was stepping where I had stepped, with one difference. He didn't hang on to the limb above him. I opened my mouth to warn him, but before I could get a word out, I saw his feet fly out from under him. He was carried by the swift current to the brink of the waterfall, and down he went for 20 feet. I was horrified. Then, I saw him get up and shake himself like a wet hen. I was relieved and very grateful that he was unharmed. I solemnly realized that he had been walking in MY footsteps.

Teaching

Moses in Deuteronomy 6:7 reveals a second way of transmitting our heritage—by teaching. He admonished parents to teach their children to obey the law of God [the Ten Commandments]. “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

What are the contents of the teaching? Children are to be taught God's laws, not only the Ten Commandments and

their duty to God, but also the instructions regarding the daily lifestyle and their relationships with others. Telling age appropriate Bible stories and the parents' own experiences are also very important to relate to the children as they are learning about life, according to Ellen White in the book *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 181. Visual aids, especially those from nature, are useful in arousing children's interest in the stories. Music is another tool for creating interest and riveting the teachings in the memory.

The true teacher can impart to his pupils few gifts so valuable as the gift of his [her] own companionship. It is true of men and women, and how much more of youth and children, that only as we come in touch through sympathy can we understand them; and we need to understand in order most effectively to benefit. (*Education*, 212)

Celebrating

A third way our heritage may be transmitted is by celebrating. The biblical concept of celebration was primarily to remember what the Lord had done for the children of Israel. Deuteronomy 6:10–12 says, “So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, ... when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage.”

Describing how the Israelites should conduct themselves in worship and in their appointed feasts, God told them in Deuteronomy 12:12 and 16:11, “You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, ... the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you.” All these subgroups of people rejoiced and celebrated the feast days together. No one was to be left out.

If you share with me the things you celebrate, I can tell you what is meaningful in your life. When you or a family member achieves a milestone, you celebrate. You

can celebrate even though you hardly have anything to celebrate. Find something or someone to celebrate even if it is just getting through a difficult day. Deuteronomy 12:6–7 suggests that when families join together to worship at the family altar (have morning and evening worship), they are to *rejoice* before the Lord.

A Celebration Story

One memory of celebration at our house was a particular morning at our kitchen table when the children came in to eat breakfast. The table was well decorated with candles and beautiful flowers. Son John looked at Wes and Wes looked at John. “Your birthday? My birthday? No. Well, what is the big deal? Let’s see ... December 5, oh, I remember. This is the date of our baptism.”

Three years earlier our sons had been baptized when their mom, Bonnie, was still alive but suffering from a grave illness. Now Millie and I wanted to celebrate the baptism anniversary. We brought out the baptismal certificates they had signed, remembering their promises to the Lord in their baptismal vows and how God had blessed them both in the years since their baptism. We told the boys how proud we were of them and encouraged them to continue their covenant with God. As a family we had a prayer of dedication. Then the boys said, “That was fun!” Millie had provided one of her wonderful, scrumptious breakfasts. Yes, it was a good day. That day was a true family celebration.

Serving

There is a saying, “What you give, you keep; what you keep, you lose.” A fourth way we should pass on our heritage is by serving.

If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your

hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs ... You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. (Deuteronomy 15:7–8, 10)

As we teach our children to serve others, they will keep those ideals of service in their hearts and be a blessing to those around them.

Reflection

Do I model to the coming generation guiding principles by which to live? If so, how? If someone should walk in my footsteps, will it be all right?

Why is the process of mentoring others so important in our journey with Jesus?

Recall a story of a celebration you had with other family members. *What made the celebration so special?*

What kinds of celebrations can I use to pass on my heritage values to future generations?

Chapter 15

Transmitting Our Heritage—Part II

This chapter discusses three more ways to pass on our heritage to our children. It also considers what can be done if the seven methods of transmitting heritage were minimal in one's upbringing.

Disciplining

The word *discipline* comes from the word disciple. In its truest sense, disciplining is making disciples. A fifth way to transmit our heritage is to teach right doing by encouraging children to practice self-control in their own lives. Although discipline may require punishment at times, this may be infrequent when children are taught to apply wisely the Christian principles they are learning.

In Deuteronomy 6:20–22, 24–25, Moses wrote:

When your son asks you in time to come saying, “What is the meaning of the laws and rules which the Lord our God has commanded you?” Then you shall say to your son: “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household.” ... And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, **for our good always**, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be

righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us. (Emphasis supplied)

During the 40 years in the wilderness, God disciplined the Israelites on one occasion by allowing fiery serpents to bite them. He removed His protection that had kept them from being bitten by these serpents prior to this. They continuously complained about God's leading even though He provided for their every need. He decided to show them that He was caring for them when they were not aware of it and that they could trust Him.

Many people were bitten and were dying when God directed Moses to make a bronze serpent and hang it on a pole. He was then to tell the people that they should look at the serpent and they would live and be cured of the bites they had received. All who looked were healed, but those who refused to look died of their wounds (see Numbers 21).

The serpent on the pole represented Christ, the Innocent Sacrifice, who would die on the cross for humanity's sins as our substitute (John 3:14). We deserved to die, but He took our punishment so that we could live. The clearest demonstration of disciplining in all of history is Jesus' training of His twelve disciples as portrayed in the four Gospels of the Bible. If we are disciples of Jesus and receive His discipline, it will be much easier for us to guide our children to be His disciples also.

Decision-Making

A sixth way of transmitting our heritage is to teach our children decision-making. God has given each individual the power of choice and has invited us to follow Him. However, we may choose not to do so. Then, by default, we have chosen to be on the side of our fallen nature. We have no strength in ourselves to resist the temptation of evil outside of choosing to follow Christ and abiding in Him. Because Adam and Eve chose to listen to Satan's voice in the Garden of Eden, they

passed on to all of humanity their fallen nature, the inability to resist sin.

Satan is a stronger being than we are and will control us even against our will. But when we choose to serve Christ, who is stronger than the evil one, He keeps us by His power from succumbing to Satan's temptations. However, Christ will never force us against our will. Therefore, we must submit ourselves to Him in order to receive power to do right. God has already chosen every human being for salvation. "For this is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

Choosing Christ as our Master and Savior will affect all our other decisions in life. Our daughter or son may ask, "Why does our family do things so differently from what others do?" Our lifestyle as Seventh-day Adventist Christians should be different from the world. It may also be different from the lifestyle of other Christian believers, and even from other Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We should always focus on Jesus, the counsels in the Word of God, and prayer for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit to make our decisions and to explain our choices to our children. Not all professed Christians follow Christ's teachings completely, and they may not be the best examples of what Christ wants from His followers.

God in His love tells us that our choice is between life and death. At the end of Moses' life, He blessed the children of Israel with his last discourse:

But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But

if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish, you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:14–19)

After Moses' death, Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land and encouraged them to continue to follow the Lord's commands that they had received during the 40 years in the wilderness. When Joshua gathered all the tribes together, he related their history, including their backslidings into idolatry, and challenged them to follow Jehovah:

Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:14–15)

In Deuteronomy 27 and 28, God gives 14 verses of impressive blessings on His people for obedience to His laws. These blessings are interspersed with 63 verses of awful curses on them for disobedience.

[If you obey the Lord, He] will open to you His good treasure ... and the Lord will make you the head and not the tail ... if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. (Deuteronomy 28:12–13)

Loving

Finally, the most important way to pass on our heritage—our torch, is by loving God first, which produces love for others, including our children.

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good? (Deuteronomy 10:12–13)

Jesus said:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37–40)

The beloved disciple, John, reveals God's love in these Scriptures:

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:8)

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 John 4:18–21)

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. (1 John 5:1–2)

When the child feels loved and is part of a loving family, the child learns to transfer love to Jesus as well. When children experience love, their understanding of love in action actually increases. The Father in heaven loves each individual on Earth. God desires each person to understand and return His love.

Am I Locked Into the Frailties of My Ancestors?

The answer is a thousand times NO. But what if the seven ways to transmit heritage were minimal in my upbringing? The modern science of genetics clearly shows that, although in this life I will always carry the genetic make-up passed on to me by my parents, around each gene there are epigenes. These epigenes determine which gene is turned on and which gene is turned off. I can, by the power of God in my life, turn off bad genes and turn on good genes. A more complete explanation of genetic transmission and the power of epigenes can be found in the book *Pressing Forward On the Path to Health and Healing, WIN! Wellness—Homes of Hope and Health Book 2* by John and Millie Youngberg and Dr. Wes Youngberg, 2012, 24–39.

Perhaps one's father was an alcoholic and an aunt was a heroin addict. Is that person doomed to be like them? The good news is NO. For those who are willing to accept them, Bible promises may be claimed for victory over hereditary weakness and tendencies. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). "You may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). God's power is stronger than genes.

Reflection

In what ways am I passing on my heritage, including my religious values, to the next generation?

What good genes have I inherited from my parents? Am I willing to turn OFF bad genes and turn ON good genes by claiming God's promises and receiving His power in my life?

God is interested in the lifestyle of each individual. The guiding principles God has commanded are for all of us, young and old. The most effective tool is not to scold, moralize, and give long sermons. The best method is to tell your own story, how you came to know Jesus and how He helped you with your problems. After all the sermons are forgotten, the children will be more likely to remember your life changing stories and pass them on to their children.

Chapter 16

Fun Family Altars

Rebuilding the Altar Daily

The Elijah Message, as registered in 1 Kings 18, tells us that on Mount Carmel Elijah rebuilt the altar that was broken down. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses said specifically that altars were not to be permanent. The instructions said that if a person raised a tool in building the altar, it was already profaned. The altar was always constructed with loose rocks. However, if altars were unused for a time, some of the rocks would fall down due to the elements, and the altar would have to be rebuilt. The lesson for us is that we don't pour our family altar in concrete. For family worships to be fresh, up-to-date, and relevant, they must be repaired daily. For example, the topics discussed should be age-appropriate for the children and relevant to the lives of the family members.

Sometimes in our family altar we are winners and sometimes it feels like we are losers. In the Youngberg home, we would have family worship faithfully twice a day. One of our teenage sons would yawn, lay back, close his eyes, and after worship was over, ask, "Why are worships so long anyhow?" The worships were only ten minutes long, which I thought quite short. Then the Lord brought me into a plan. "Let's get a little participation in worship by the whole family." I said, "Okay, son Wes, would you be in charge of worship tomorrow night? And John, could you have worship

the following night? Millie, could you take Friday night?" We took turns. We discovered that when the kids took their turns, it lasted twice as long.

One strategy we used successfully to make family worship more engaging was to ask each member to recall the best time we ever had as a family and write it down. We came up with a list for sharing. The event that came in first was a family vacation canoeing the Pierre Marquette River, one of the fastest rivers in Michigan. Our canoes capsized and we were waterlogged. It rained ten of the 14 days. Yet, when choosing the best thing that they had ever done, that experience came in number one. Afterward the boys said, "Hey Dad, that was fun. Let's do worship like that again some time."

A pastor from Denmark told this story. He said, "We lived in an apartment over a supermarket. My wife and I always had family worship together. But, one day I was in a big hurry and ran down the stairs to the car. I was getting in the car when suddenly my four-year-old son appeared on the balcony shouting at the top of his voice, "*Daddy, Daddy, come back! We haven't had family worship!*" Not only was Dad reminded that he must have family worship, but people in the parking lot going into the supermarket also heard that this family had worship together. I hope that family worships for you and your family are a fun time, a special time when you can rebuild the stones that are broken down and offer your sacrifices to God.

Keep the Coals Burning

How hot are the embers of a fire? Scientists tell us that gases burn and increase the temperature of the wood to about 1,112 degrees Fahrenheit. When the wood has released all its gases, it leaves charcoal and ashes. Charcoal burns at temperatures exceeding 2,012 degrees. Morning family worships are like embers that can warm our hearts all day long.

We didn't always know how effective the worships were in our home. One year one son was working in the gym. He had to leave the house at 6 o'clock in the morning. That is quite early to begin morning activities. However, we supported his schedule and joined together with him in family worship before he went to work. We were heartened when the work superintendent of one son said, "Your son told us that he didn't feel safe leaving the house in the morning without family worship." Later, one of the sons said, "Family worship is like a pilot light to keep the light of faith burning in my heart."

David and Sue, the busy parents of two preschoolers, set aside Thursday night as "Family Fun Night." Their commitment to this evening communicated to the children that they too were important. Each family member took a turn planning the activity for their fun night. One evening was especially filled with creative energy and laughter. After the evening was over and they were being tucked into bed, one of the children prayed, "Thank You, Jesus, for all the fun time we had tonight. I hope You had fun too." Then he opened up one eye, looked up at Mom and said, "Was it all right to say that to Jesus?" She responded with a smile, "Yes, I'm sure Jesus enjoyed it also." Someone once said, "The family that prays together is more likely to stay together."

Claiming Promises in Family and Personal Worship

In Chapter 7 of this book, "On Carmel's Heights—Part II," we considered the importance of persevering prayer. Elijah prayed seven times before the little cloud came out of the sea and the rain fell, ending the three- and one-half years of drought and famine. But there is another vital element in family and personal worship—claiming the promises of God.

Herbert Lockyer, in his book, *All the Promises of the Bible*, tells the story of Everett R. Storms, a teacher in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada who made a detailed study of Bible promises. During his 27th reading of the Bible, a task

that took him a year and a half, he came up with a grand total of 7,487 promises made by God to humankind. Wow! Who are these promises for? Although many promises were made in a particular historical context, anyone can claim them. The apostle Paul says, “They were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Some of God’s promises are conditional upon the human response to His will. However, God’s unconditional promises are sure and cannot fail of being fulfilled when we want to do His will and claim the promises according to His will. One promise says, “Blessed be the Lord ... there has not failed one word of all His good promise” (1 Kings 8:56). Another promise says, “Jesus our Lord ... has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness ... exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:2–4).

As God completed a thousand years of Old Testament prophecies, He did so with a promise in the book of Malachi. The name Malachi means “my messenger.” The last words of the Old Testament are both a promise to those who accept and claim it and a curse to those who are negligent and indifferent to God’s promises. “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And those mothers and fathers will turn their hearts to their children and the children will turn their hearts to Mom and Dad” (Malachi 4:5–6, author’s gender-inclusive paraphrase).

This had been Elijah’s prayer 430 years earlier on the heights of Mount Carmel—that the “people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts” (1 Kings 18:37).

What Is in a Bible Promise?

A Divine promise provides strength, enabling, and adequate means so that the fulfillment may happen in our lives and/or in the lives of others. When we claim the

promise for the Holy Spirit given by Christ in Luke 11:9–13, empowerment takes place. Our prayers for temporal blessings may not always be answered in the time and way we had expected, but prayers for spiritual blessings (forgiveness, guidance for each day, witnessing, showing Jesus' character to others) are always answered for God's honor and glory.

The problem with Israel in Malachi's day was that they wanted to quibble over the prophet's words instead of obeying them. Eight times Malachi specified the apostasy and sins of Israel, and eight times the people denied any wrong. Upon these people rested the curse as pronounced by God, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:6). But the promises to those who accepted the Elijah Message were wonderful and amazing. Malachi 3:16–17 says:

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "on the day that I make them My jewels."

Thank You, Lord, for the promises of the Bible for our children.

Shall the prey be taken from the mighty ... Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away ... for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children. (Isaiah 49:24–25)

Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! (Isaiah 8:18)

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house [spouse, children, servants], we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

Reflection

Can I remember an occasion when my family had an especially fun time? What was the most fun we ever had in a worship setting? Share your memories of the good times and ask other family members to share their memories.

During the cold war, a dictator ruled Romania, and it was almost impossible to get a job if one faithfully rested on the seventh-day Sabbath. Evangelistic activity was also considered an offense against the government. In this crisis, Seventh-day Adventist church members expanded God's work by inviting their neighbors to join them in their homes for family worship to pray about their needs. Church membership grew rapidly, and soon there were more Seventh-day Adventist Christians in Romania than in any other European country.

Could I initiate a similar outreach to people in my neighborhood?

How well acquainted am I with Bible promises? Do I claim Bible promises often in my prayers?

In these important days, we need to gather in small groups, claim God's promises and pray for one another and especially for our children.

Section III

When God Makes His Last Call

Years ago, Luther Warren, one of two youths who first established an Adventist youth society, grew up and became a well-known evangelist. When the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference was asked to send their best evangelist to Jamaica to hold a series of meetings, Luther was chosen. Arriving in Kingston by ship, Luther brought with him a big tent and all of his evangelistic materials. The first tent meeting for this event was held on Sunday night, January 13, 1907. As the people gathered, more and more arrived until there were hundreds in attendance and the tent was full. People were standing in the aisles and in the back at the entrance.

Warren began to preach. He preached for a while on the second coming of Christ from Daniel 2. During this time, the conference president was backstage listening. Luther spoke on one subject then moved on to another and yet another. The conference president became uneasy. Nervous thoughts ran through his mind. *This man, Luther Warren, sounds like he is going to finish the whole series tonight in just one meeting. I brought in all these evangelists from all over the West Indies to hear and learn how evangelism should be done, and this is the way he has decided to share the gospel message?* The conference president kept listening behind the curtain.

Warren was saying to the people, "I am impressed by the Lord to tell you that for some of you, tonight is your

last chance. Come to Jesus before it's forever too late." Then he made an altar call. Hundreds of people responded and gave their hearts to Jesus. The conference president was astonished and befuddled. He didn't know what to think. He shook his head and thought, *There are things about this meeting tonight that I don't understand.* But before another night arrived, he did indeed understand.

At three o'clock the next afternoon a terrible earthquake shook the city, the famous Kingston earthquake of January 14, 1907. A thousand people were dead in Kingston out of the 50,000 inhabitants, including some who had attended the meeting with Luther Warren. Ten thousand were left homeless. Luther Warren had preached his evangelistic message for only one night, and for many it had been God's last call. There was no second night. There was no third night. The series had begun and ended on the first night.

Section III focuses on the dimensions of the Elijah Message as it will be given in Earth's closing hour, when God makes His last call.

Chapter 17

God Calls Us to Be “Elijahs”

God’s Gathering Time

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he will turn ... hearts.” (Malachi 4:5–6)

These words are in the final verses of the Old Testament—a prophecy that Elijah would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. After a prophetic silence of 430 years, an unbroken silence, prophecy again appeared in the times of Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel quoted to Zachariah the same verse. So the last prophecy of the Old Testament is repeated in the first prophecy of the New Testament. The emphasis of this passage is heart-turning, and it is still relevant today, 2000 years later.

One marriage seminar leader told the following story. “My wife and I praise God that we have seen hearts turned by the heart-turning message of Malachi. This message brings hope to people.” They told about how they were holding a weekend seminar and talking about the Elijah Message and marriage reconciliation. Suddenly one of the participants got up and said, “I slept two nights ago with a pistol under my pillow pointed in the direction of my husband. But now God has brought reconciliation to our marriage.”

Another couple came a long distance to the same seminar but in separate cars. They were estranged and would not ride together. The couple actually sat back to back when they were supposed to be knee to knee during the group dynamic. A year went by, and the couple returned for the next marriage seminar in that location. They exclaimed smiling, "We are back, and we have come in only one car!" They related how thankful they were that their marriage had been saved. God saves marriages. The seminar leaders thanked God that the Malachi message had brought reconciliation to this couple.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is essential when the heart-turning message of Elijah is presented. It is ultimately He who impresses the individuals to receive the message in order to make things right in their families. Earnest prayer to God for the Holy Spirit's influence is a requisite to the successful reconciliations that occur at marriage seminars.

At one seminar, the presenters prayed, "Lord send the Holy Spirit. We know that the Holy Spirit uses us; we don't use the Holy Spirit." During the seminar, the Lord impressed the leaders to do something they usually avoided in marriage seminars, to talk about divorce. They shared from scientific literature an article, "Six Things They Never Told You about Divorce," and then began a group activity.

While the leaders were circulating among the groups, one gentleman who had listened attentively to the difficulties associated with divorce told them, "You just ruined my whole weekend." He revealed that he had left his wife and that they were living separately but were both attending the seminar. He had congratulated himself on being such a good guy because he continued mowing the lawn for poor "wifey," who didn't know how to do such things.

As God worked on their hearts that weekend, they reconciled to each other along with five other couples, who were also considering divorce. That night during testimony time, God poured out His Holy Spirit like the leaders had never sensed before in a marriage seminar. They saw God

doing great things to reconcile His people, turning the hearts of husbands and wives to each other.

God’s “Legion of Honor”

In the Bible, Hebrews Chapter 11 tells about God’s heroes and heroines of faith. This list could be thought of as God’s “Legion of Honor.” But, is it complete? The author of Hebrews says that the list is not complete. Could Mrs. Noah also have been part of this honor roll? Imagine some of the tasks that Mrs. Noah had to do—prepare food for the large group of people working on the ark, transport the food to the workers, assist and encourage her sons, Shem, Ham, Japheth, and her husband, Noah, and much more.

Hebrews 11 reminds the reader of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. She judged God to be faithful in His promise to give her a son in old age. She had faith in God, and God was faithful to her. The list of faithful servants of God surprisingly includes Rahab (Hebrews 11:31), the harlot from Jericho, who married Salmon. Together they parented Boaz, who fathered Obed by Ruth. The great grandson of Boaz and Ruth was King David. These three women are in Jesus’ genealogy (Matthew 1:5–7).

Imagine Ruth, born into paganism, a Moabitess. According to the Lord’s command through Moses in Deuteronomy 23:3–4, a Moabite was forbidden to enter into God’s assembly for ten generations because they were not hospitable to the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. Yet God knew those who were faithful in heart, and Ruth had chosen to follow the Creator God and received this place of honor by Him.

The story of Susanna Wesley illustrates a woman of the eighteenth century who was faithful to God and His calling. Susanna was the mother of 19 children, ten of whom survived beyond infancy. John Wesley, a prominent minister and revivalist was her fifteenth child.

She was a busy mother, home-schooling her own children and organizing women’s groups in the church where her husband, Samuel, was pastor of a large parish. Yet, Susanna

took time for her children. She dedicated one hour to each child each week. Thursday night was John's time when he cherished this undivided attention from his mother. Susanna felt especially called to do something with John because in her mind, he was "a brand plucked from the fire."

It was nighttime when the Epworth Rectory where the Wesleys lived caught on fire, probably set by some of their own parishioners. As the fire raged through the building, Susanna was outside counting the children—1, 2, 3, 4, 5—somebody was missing. Where was John?

Susanna looked up, and five-year-old John appeared at the window on the top story, surrounded by flames. People organized a brigade and made a human ladder as one man stepped onto another's shoulders. John leaped out of the window and into the rescuer's arms just as the whole roof fell in (see Arnold, 2019).

People such as Susanna are God's true nobility, giving of themselves to God first, to their family next, and to the world an enduring legacy. In her time, France was ravaged by revolution. Tens of thousands died. Historians today believe that an important reason the rebellions on the continent did not spread to England was due to the revival of godliness, particularly spearheaded by John Wesley.

In England you can visit the grave of Susanna Wesley. You can visit the place where she had her home in the Epworth Rectory. I look forward to meeting Susanna Wesley in the kingdom of heaven.

Today's Elijahs Herald the Second Coming of Jesus

The King's second coming is now approaching. Today's "Elijahs" are to proclaim to all the world, *The Chariot's A-Comin'*. The time is now, to get ready—to be ready for Christ's return. We are the modern *stratores*, preparing the way for our Lord's return. While some in the world and even in the church are digging potholes and tearing down bridges, someone needs to repair the road.

It is time for God’s followers to proclaim Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! As John the Baptist, referring to Lamb of God, pointed out, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). This is our work also—to call others to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and to call upon God’s people to renew their covenant relationship with Him. Why? As the old Negro spiritual puts it, *Good news, Chariot’s A-comin’*.

Good News! Chariot’s A-Comin’
Sweet News! Chariot’s A-Comin’
Glad News! Chariot’s A-Comin’
And I don’t want it to leave a’ me behind.

The good news is that the “Elijahs” of today make known the message that the darkest night of apostasy is followed by the brightness of Jesus’ second coming. For those who revere Jesus’ name, “The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2). Yes, and the rewards of the Elijah Message (see Malachi 4:5–6) will continue from Earth into eternity. The promises of Isaiah 8:18 and Malachi 3:17 are ours. “Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me!” “They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “on the day that I make them My Jewels.”

Human hearts will never be satisfied until they return to the Garden of Eden, and God makes all things new again.

Reflection

Friends, the last message of the Old Testament and the first message of the New Testament are about God’s gathering time.

*Am I turning my heart to my children, my spouse, and to others?
Have I made a covenant with Jesus to gather a family harvest
for Him at His second coming?*

*Am I among those who are surrendering their hearts to Jesus
daily, asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit?*

Where Are the Elijahs?

Am I one of the men or women belonging to God's honor roll today?

You too, my friend, can be one of God's nobility. May this be your experience is my prayer.

Chapter 18

Mighty Prevailing Prayer

Power in Prayer

What can we learn from the prophet Elijah's prayers that can strengthen our prayer life? We have already studied six of his prayers, and we will consider the seventh prayer in the next chapter. What are the common denominators, the underlying secrets to the power in his prayers? In order to explore the underlying secrets of that power, we will review the first six prayers.

1. That it would not rain, (page 25)
2. For resurrection of the widow's son, (page 29)
3. For fire to fall on the altar at Mount Carmel and for heart-turning, (pages 15, 35)
4. For rain, (page 38)
5. That he [Elijah] might die, (page 41)
6. God's "still small voice" message to Elijah on Mount Horeb about his future work, (page 42) [actually a theophany—God's personal appearance in some form to the one who is praying, and personal communication, at times in an audible voice]

How can Elijah's Prayers Teach the Modern Elijahs to Pray More Effectively?

1. Recognizing that prayer is WARFARE—"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age" (Ephesians 6:12). In prayers one and three, Elijah challenged the prince of this world by exposing the inability of the pagan deity, Baal, to produce either rain or fire. Recognizing the importance of invoking the name of Jesus, Satan and his wicked demons flee when people pray in earnest to the Creator Lord.

"The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit (see James 5:16-18). Notice the descriptors of Elijah's prayer(s)—effective, fervent, availing, earnest.

2. Receiving RESURRECTION power in prayer—In prayer two, Elijah prayed that the lifeless son of the widow of Zarephath might be restored to her through God's power. Few people in history have had this kind of relationship to God in their prayer life. Christ said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). But isn't it just as great a miracle when some poor soul, dead in sin, receives new life in Jesus? This resurrection power in saving souls for eternity is readily available to any praying Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit and through claiming the promises in God's Word.

“It is a part of God’s plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask” (*The Great Controversy*, 525).

3. Seeing the importance of PERSEVERANCE in prayer—Prayers two and four show that Elijah persevered in prayer. Asking only once was not enough. Why did he have to stretch three times—his heart beating close to the unbeating heart of the widow’s son, before the lad received new life? Why did Elijah have to pray seven times before the rain cloud appeared? In his perseverance, Elijah did not cease praying until he received what he had prayed for.

“Faith such as this is needed in the world today—faith that will lay hold on the promises of God’s word and refuse to let go until Heaven hears. Faith such as this connects us closely with Heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness” (*Prophets and Kings*, 157).

4. Practicing PREVAILING prayer—Even when praying according to God’s will, there is still sometimes an apparent delay. Receiving what one has prayed for may involve waiting for the point in time that will bring the greatest spiritual returns and strategic advantage to the kingdom of God. God’s clocks keep perfect time. A delayed answer to prayer may increase the depth of our desire.

Scripture says, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11–13).

5. Understanding God's voice as the ORIGIN of true prayer—The act of praying really begins in heaven. As fallen human beings, we do not know how to pray or what to pray for. Then the Holy Spirit impresses us because of some life circumstance or as we study the Bible or other inspirational literature. Scripture gives us only seven of Elijah's verbalized prayers. We can assume that Elijah lived a life of constant prayer and praise and listened for God's voice to speak to him.

George Müller, evangelist and man of prayer, noticed what God said to Elijah. The Lord said first to Elijah, 'Go hide thyself,' then, 'Go show thyself' (see 1 Kings 17:3, 18:1). In his memoirs, Müller pointed out, "He who does not first hide himself to be alone with God, is unfit to show himself in the public place to move among men" (Pierson, 130). We must listen for God's voice in prayer and through His Word before we can proclaim Him to others.

Christ's and the Holy Spirit's Intercessions in Our Prayers

But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. Likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He [Christ] who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:25-27).

Seventh-day Adventist doctrine includes the ministration of the ascended Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, as outlined in the book of Hebrews.

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us ...

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Hebrews 9:24, 27–28 KJV).

This tells us what Jesus is doing now for humanity.

We can picture Him bending low over His people on earth longing to answer their prayers. Many do not understand the investigative judgment and its implications—that the hour of God’s judgment has come (since 1844) and that our High Priest in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary is examining the records of people’s lives to determine whether they are among the “sheep” or the “goats” (see Revelation 14:6–7; Daniel 8:14, Matthew 25:32).

Probationary time is about to end for all individuals to be saved in His heavenly kingdom. This is the time to accept Jesus invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb, to accept His sacrifice for their sins and to put on the robe of His righteousness to be prepared to meet God.

When the cases of all the living are completely reviewed and decided, then Jesus will come to claim His earthly bride (His people) and carry them to the celebration, the marriage supper of the Lamb in glory. How motivating and joyous to pray to our great High Priest!

Reflection

We don’t need an earth-shaking event—a mountain-shattering wind, an earthquake, a vehement fire—to speak to us. God, in the “still small voice,” the NKJV margin says, “a delicate whispering voice,” (prayer six, page 42) is speaking to me now. *Am I tuned in to hear the “delicate whisper”?*

Sometimes we may be discouraged (prayer five, page 41) but God will meet our needs and send us on our way to deliver His message as He did for Elijah. The simple, believing prayer of even a little child “moves the arm of Omnipotence”! (*Pastoral Ministry*, 180).

Where Are the Elijahs?

Do I desire more power in my prayers? Am I submitting completely to the will of God and humbling myself sufficiently before Him through the Holy Spirit as I make my requests known to Him?

“When men are as devoted as Elijah was and possess the faith that he had, God will reveal Himself as He did then” (*Gospel Workers*, 255). Lord, the current world crises demand my fervent faith and prayers. Accept me, just as I am, and make me what You want me to be now for Your honor and glory. Amen.

Chapter 19

A Double Portion of Elijah's Spirit

The Parting of Elijah and Elisha

“**A** Double Portion of Elijah's Spirit.” This is the seventh and last prayer of Elijah. Think back on the life of Elijah. Eight stages and seven prayers have defined his ministry (see Chapter 2, page 18). **This seventh prayer was a prayer made by Elisha**, but it echoed in Elijah's heart as Elijah participated in its answer during the last moments that he was on planet Earth. And so the two of them, Elijah and his successor Elisha, were walking together. Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to the Jordan.” But then as Elijah neared the end of his earthly sojourn, Elisha pressed ever closer and answered, “As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!” (2 Kings 2:6).

Then:

Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?” Elisha said, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.” So he said, “You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you: but if not, it shall not be so.” (2 Kings 2:9-10)

Elijah and Elisha had just crossed the Jordan River in a miraculous manner as Elijah struck the waters with his

mantle, and the waters parted allowing them to cross on dry land. Elijah and Elisha were east of the Jordan, many miles south of the land of Gilead where Elijah responded to the Divine call decades before.

What thoughts may have run through Elisha's mind? *I remember the day Elijah came by the field where my helpers and I were plowing with 12 yoke of oxen. I remember he placed his mantle on my shoulders and called me to a new life. I left the old life and sacrificed my yoke of oxen and burned up the plow. I answered the call. I am not going back. No, never!*

Rather than ask for earthly power or for his name to be great among men, Elisha pleaded for a double portion of the Holy Spirit, knowing that he could not do the work that God had called him to do in his own power. What a request! His desire was to give God all the honor and glory.

Was the prayer for a double blessing fulfilled? A careful study of Elijah's life in the Bible reveals that he performed 14 miracles through God's power. Further Bible study on the life of Elisha indicates that the number of miracles he performed was exactly 28. This blessing of miracles was a literal demonstration of the double portion request ($14 \times 2 = 28$). But more important than numbers, Elisha prayed for a double portion of the Holy Spirit for his ministry.

When Elijah prayed his fifth prayer under the juniper tree that he might die, his request was not granted. God had better plans for His servant, and this wonderful reward is revealed in the last moments of Elijah's sojourn on Earth. As a force greater than the power of gravity drew him heavenward, Elijah would soon reach the pearly gates of heaven. Elijah is the second and last man in Earth's history to have had this privilege without first seeing death.

As the chariot of fire ascended heavenward, the mantle of Elijah fell earthward to the waiting Elisha. Yes! He would fulfill the commission that this mantle symbolized.

Characteristics of the Elijahs

As we summarize the Elijah Message for today and review the motivational power present in the “Spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17), let us contemplate what we are asking for in this generation. [See also the illustration “Characteristics of the Elijahs of Today” on page 112.]

1. **Double Portion of Holy Spirit Power**—I write the word “Spirit” that gives power to the Elijah Message with a capital “S”—He is the **Holy Spirit**. He is waiting to descend on our ministry today with a “double portion,” of His power for the latter rain.
2. **Repentance**—turn around in our life's walk: an about face, asking forgiveness for past sins, rejecting the Baals/idols of materialism, appetite, and worldly glory; recognizing that our citizenship is in heaven and we are bound for a better land. We pray for and await the latter rain outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our days.

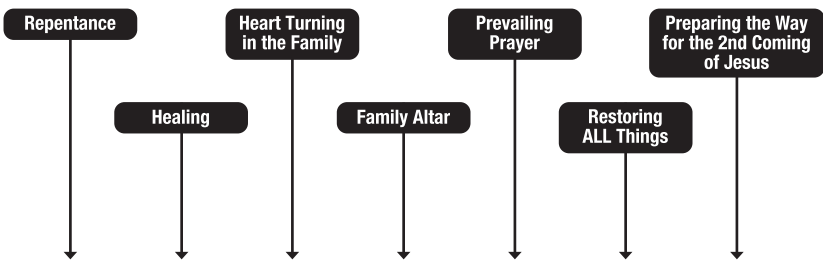
The Holy Spirit leads us to repentance. “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that He may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus” (Acts 3:19–20 NIV).

3. **Healing**—like Elijah who healed (resurrected) the widow's son. We need healing of the body, the mind, the emotions, our relationships, and our marriages.
4. **Heart-Turning in the Family**—Elijah's third prayer, “That this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again” (1 Kings 18:37).
5. **Rebuilding the Family Altar**—where twice a day we can pray, interceding for the salvation of our children, our loved ones, and others on our prayer list.

Where Are the Elijahs?

6. **Prevailing Prayer**—living in an attitude of fellowship and communion with our Creator, Redeemer, and Friend, as well as dedicating more time to praying on our knees.
7. **Restoring ALL things** (see Acts 3:21; Matthew 17:11)—whatever permeates the lives of His followers that is incongruent with God’s will and His law, the Ten Commandments. Loathe the social/cultural sins of our age even as Elijah and John the Baptist hated the sins of their age. “Hate the sin but love the sinner.”
8. **Preparing the Way for the Second Coming of Christ**—this is applied to our day by the Elijah Message, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord [second coming of Christ]. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:5–6).

Characteristics of the Elijahs of Today



Double Portion of the Holy Spirit’s Power

Reflection

Here we are nearly 2,900 years after Elijah asked Elisha the question. "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away?" (2 Kings 2:9).

What do I want to ask God for in these last days of Earth's history?

Do I want a double portion of the Holy Spirit's power so that I can be a double blessing to others?

Am I praying the prayers of Elijah? How can I start right now to incorporate the Elijah Message into my life?

Could Elijah's mantle fall on me to empower me to give the Elijah Message for today?

Chapter 20

The Elijahs of Today Give God's Last Call

Summary of the Elijahs

In the days of the historical Elijah, the Elijah Message spoke to the needs and apostasy of the people of his time, the culture he lived in. The problem of his time was Baal worship. The people made gods of their sins. Indiscriminate sexual indulgence and child sacrifice were acts of worship. Elijah's solution was, "Look to the Innocent Sacrifice," the true Savior.

The second Elijah, John the Baptist, addressed the sins of his culture. The pride of the Pharisees, salvation by works, overcharging, the materialism of the publicans, and the iniquitous relationship of the king were the gods worshipped. John's solution was, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

In our day thousands of Elijahs—all over the world—present the three angels' messages to a world in apostasy and to a languid, lukewarm church more interested in materialistic riches than in self-sacrifice. They are lethargic rather than active in service for God and others. One "Baal" or idol of our time is sexual promiscuity, living for sex and participating in sexual indulgence outside the covenant of marriage. Other idols are the cares of this life, sacrificing our children and families to the world of

entertainment instead of seeking first the kingdom of heaven, listening to the blare of Hollywood instead of to the whisperings of the “still small voice.” The modern Elijahs’ solution is “The everlasting Gospel.”

The Battle for the Mind

The struggle on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the followers of Baal portrays in miniature an even greater battle for the mind near the end of the world. Modern “Baals” and last day idolatry will again be challenged, but this time on a worldwide scope. The Creator God will have a people at that time who are faithful to His Word, the Holy Scriptures.

Many of His people are still sincerely worshipping according to unbiblical Christian traditions in Catholicism and Protestantism or in other world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. They will yet hear God’s voice and take their stand for biblical truths instead of traditions.

Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. ... Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand. ... Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side (*The Great Controversy*, 612).

In the last days of Earth’s history, God is working with His servants who will again fearlessly proclaim in the Spirit and power of Elijah, God’s last call—the three angels’ messages (see Revelation 14:6–12) and the loud cry (see Revelation 18:1–4). These messages in Revelation are proclaimed with a loud voice and are good news! They proclaim the everlasting gospel. This is the only time in the Bible this phrase is used.

“Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity’” (*Evangelism*, 190). Christ’s sacrifice as the Lamb of God is central to the book of Revelation and to the three angels’ messages. The Lamb is mentioned four times in Revelation 14 where these messages are found. Christ justifies sinners when they have faith in His sacrifice for them on the cross. No one can earn justification.

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:6–7).

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation” (Revelation 14:9–10).

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he **cried mightily with a loud voice**, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her my people, lest you

share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:1–4, emphasis supplied).

Only Two Sides in the Battle

The Bible illustrates the final two classes of people that emerge before His second coming, representing the only two sides of the great controversy. One is the harvest of the wheat, the individuals who accept God and His truth and are saved. The other side is the harvest of the grapes, the individuals who reject or are indifferent to God's message of mercy and truth. Each living person must come to the decisive moment—God's side or Satan's side? Elijah's experience on Mount Carmel nearly 2,900 years ago was a small-scale mini representation of the worldwide spiritual conflict soon to take place.

God's faithful people will worship Him as their Creator and not the attractions of this life. They will acknowledge Him as their Redeemer, confessing a story of grace and salvation offered freely to all who will accept Jesus' death on the cross for their sins. The end time Elijah Message calls on us to understand that religion, as it is generally practiced in the world, is “fallen” (Revelation 14:8).

Satan will surely not give up the fight against Christ's followers and Bible truth easily. He has deceived many to think that they are following Christ when they are actually following traditions that have no basis in the teachings of Christ in His Word, the Bible. Everyone must be warned and an attempt made to reveal the fatal errors in his deceptions.

The last warning message to a perishing world divides all humanity into two opposing camps described by Jesus as the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares, the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins, those clothed in heaven's white wedding garment and those clothed in the filthy robes of their own righteousness.

All individuals have the opportunity to choose the side they want to be on. In the last days, just before Christ's second coming, it is crucial that the warning message is presented

to everyone, so that each person can make an intelligent decision. When Christ's intercession for fallen humanity is complete and probation closes on earth, salvation in God's eternal kingdom will no longer be available to anyone.

Today's Elijahs are those who "shall be Mine ... on the day that I make them My jewels ... as a man spares his own son who serves him. Then you shall again discern ... between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him" (Malachi 3:17-18). These verses immediately precede the final prophecy of the Old Testament announcing the return of Elijah and his message, which ushers in the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Three Dimensions of the Last-day Message

Let's examine the three dimensions of the last message that culminates in the final battle between Christ and Satan and ushers in the second coming of Christ. These three dimensions are all centered on the cross of Jesus and His amazing sacrifice. They will converge and swell into the LOUD CRY of Revelation 18:1-4 as the message is proclaimed to every creature under heaven by the Holy Spirit power of the latter rain.

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain (Zechariah 10:1).

The Elijahs of Today Give God's Last Call



Converging Dimensions of the Last-day Message

Dimension 1—The **Three Angels' Messages** (see Revelation 14:6–12) declare the arrival of the pre-advent judgment, the fall of popular Christianity, the final test of truth and error by the seal of God or the mark of the beast (true vs. false worship), and the victory of the everlasting gospel in the faithful who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Dimension 2—The **Elijah Message** focuses on denouncing the sins of the age, repenting for one's own sins, accepting the Innocent Sacrifice for salvation, prevailing in prayer, and restoring family relationships.

Dimension 3—**Isaiah 58** emphasizes love-in-action, meeting the needs of others, beneficence, healing, restoring safe paths to dwell in, and repairing the breach in God's law, especially the Sabbath rest.

In **Matthew 24 and 25** Christ outlines the final events before His second coming and hinges personal salvation on whether one has reached out in love to the poor, sick, and imprisoned. “Inasmuch as you did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40).

The message is true; it is decisive. It brings us back to Ellen White’s question, “WHERE ARE THE ELIJAHS?” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 527).

Where are God’s true messengers, His faithful ones? They will be characterized by keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Revelation 12:17). They have the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy. Revelation 19:10, “Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” In the last warning message and for all eternity, the redeemed will proclaim Jesus, the Innocent Sacrifice, our Substitute. They will “follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb” (Revelation 14:4).

Armageddon

The battle on Mount Carmel was a battle of supernatural forces, the Baal god on Satan’s side, and Elijah on the side of Jehovah God, even though it took place in a specific geographical location in our world. Elijah’s experience on Mount Carmel 2,900 years ago was a small-scale mini representation of the worldwide spiritual conflict to take place at the end of the world—Armageddon, a spiritual battle of supernatural forces. While the battle on Mount Carmel called for the people to make a decision whether to follow Jehovah or not, that decision will have already been made by every living soul when the battle of Armageddon takes place.

Modern Baals and last day idolatry will again be challenged, but this time on a worldwide scope. Ellen White says:

All the world will be on one side or the other of the question. The battle of Armageddon will be fought ... The power of the Holy Ghost must be upon us and the Captain of the Lord's host will stand at the head of the angels of heaven to direct the battle. ... Soon all the inhabitants of the earth will have taken sides, either for or against the government of heaven (*Last Day Events*, 250–251).

“And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16). It is described in the Bible as part of the sixth plague to fall on the unrighteous. The term Armageddon literally means “Mountain of Megiddo.”

Satan will surely not give up the fight easily. Satan's demons, performing miracles, go out to the kings of the whole world, and “gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14). It is the culmination of the battle between good and evil proclaimed in the three angels' messages. The faithful worship God (not the things of this life), acknowledging God as Creator and Redeemer, confessing a story of grace and salvation given freely by Jesus' death on the cross. The unfaithful worship the idols of this world.

The battle of Armageddon does not take place in only one geographical location, but it is everywhere in the world where evil forces are seeking to kill the seventh-day Sabbath keepers, whose allegiance is to the Creator God who gave the world the seventh-day Sabbath at creation. These individuals have received the seal of God and fled from the pursuing armies. Some are in dungeons awaiting execution; others are in secluded places of the earth.

The people of God—some in prison cells, some hidden in solitary retreats in the forests and the mountains—still plead for divine protection, while in every quarter companies of armed men, urged on by hosts of evil angels, are preparing for the work of death. It is now, in

the hour of utmost extremity, that the God of Israel will interpose for the deliverance of His chosen (*The Great Controversy*, 635).

With shouts of triumph, jeering, and imprecation, throngs of evil men are about to rush upon their prey, when, lo, a dense blackness, deeper than the darkness of the night, falls upon the earth. Then a rainbow, shining with the glory from the throne of God, spans the heavens and seems to encircle each praying company. The angry multitudes are suddenly arrested. Their mocking cries die away. The objects of their murderous rage are forgotten. With fearful forebodings they gaze upon the symbol of God's covenant and long to be shielded from its overpowering brightness (Ibid, 635–636).

The battle of Armageddon will be followed by the second coming of Jesus in the clouds of heaven.

Soon like Elijah's chariot of fire, Earth's redeemed millions will be carried heavenward to dwell with Jesus in the mansions He has gone to prepare (John 14:1–3). The redeemed, a great multitude, will say with a voice like the sound of many waters, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" (Revelation 19:6).

Our citizenship is in a better land. On the "sea of glass mingled with fire ... they sing the song of Moses ... and the song of the Lamb" (Revelation 15:2–3). They recognize that the only solution to the sins of our time, the problems of this age, is the merit of the shed blood of the Lamb and risen Savior.

A Prayer

Heavenly Father, as I proclaim the Elijah Message, I am safe and sure under the shadow of the Almighty. Thank You. Wherever You send me—Tishbe, Samaria, the Brook Cherith, Zarephath or as a messenger among the millions

of China, India, Africa, the Americas, the islands of the sea, or wherever—I'll go where You want me to go, I'll be what You want me to be. I do not desire fame or human honor. I only want to reflect Jesus' image and reclaim the Father's lost children. In Jesus' worthy name and for His honor and glory, Amen.

Reflection

Am I a modern Elijah? Can I help to determine the eternal destiny of my loved ones and others whose lives I touch?

What a day of victory Christ's second coming will be.

Will I be one of the redeemed? Will my neighbors be there? Will my loved ones be there?

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John B. Youngberg is currently a Professor Emeritus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Early in his ministry he served as a missionary for 15 years in four countries of South America. Upon returning to the United States, John earned a Doctorate focusing on Family Leadership principles and their application to families in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Almost immediately, he established and directed Family Life International, co-sponsored by the Family Ministries Departments of both the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the North American Division. As chair of the Department of Religious Education at Andrews University, he, with his late wife, Millie, conducted seminars for 25 years, training up to 330 attendees from six SDA world divisions at one time. Captivated by the concept of total wholistic wellness, including family relationships, and based largely on Ellen White's book, *The Ministry of Healing*, John subsequently developed the WIN! Wellness organization. He has given WIN! Wellness Seminars and leadership training for these seminars in five continents, to the glory of God. John has also authored or co-authored more than 35 books, including the missionary book, *JESUS—Who Is HE?*

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