

BIBLE TRUTH

No. 278
April/June 2015



'...Ye shall not have gone over the cities
of Israel, till the Son of man be come.'

Matthew ch.10 v.23



The Day of Elijah

by Colin G Farquhar

Read Malachi ch.4; Matthew ch.17 vv 1-13

‘And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.’

Matthew ch.17 v.11

There is a modern Christian song composed by a popular Christian singer and worship leader from Belfast, called Robin Mark; and it goes like this:

These are the days of Elijah,
Declaring the word of the Lord;
And these are the days of Your servant Moses,
Righteousness being restored;
And though these are days of great trial
Of famine and darkness and sword;
Still, we are the voice in the desert crying,
‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord!’
Behold He comes riding on the clouds,
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call;
Lift your voice, it’s the year of jubilee,
And out of Zion’s hill salvation comes.

It is a great song of hope and expectation, where the mind of the composer was certainly focused on the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Latter Days and better times ahead. These will be times of victory, when the Lord Jesus returns as victor to destroy the enemy, Satan; his angels; the 'man of sin'; the 'false prophet'; and the wicked of this world. He will at this time receive unto himself those of whom have put their trust in him. Jesus Christ our Lord will

restore righteousness in Israel and in the world; and set up a righteous and just government that will be ruled by himself, as is explained in Luke ch.1 v.33, 'And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end'; also from Isaiah ch.9 v.6, 'the government shall be upon his shoulder'.

These are times when the rightful owner Jesus Christ, who made all things, will restore all things to himself; out of the hands of evil men and the Prince of Darkness of this world. Their appointed time will have come to an end in the plan and purposes of God; and a new age of holiness and godliness will be put into place for the benefit of all those whose names are found in the 'Lamb's book of life' (Revelation ch.21 v.27). What a day, what a glorious day that will be!

In this song, the writer implies that we live in the days of Elijah; and suggests an Elijah ministry that is taking place, or is to take place in these last days. He also proposes that we take part in this ministry; a similar one that was appointed John the Baptist as forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ at his first advent. So we, like he, should be the voice in the desert crying 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'

In our first reading from Malachi ch.4, which is the last chapter in the Old Testament, from verse 5 we are told that the Lord is to send 'Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD'. Then from the following and concluding verse of the chapter, it writes of his special mission, to 'turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers'.

This statement at first glance seems quite straight forward, that Elijah at some time, will come: but is it so straight forward? For instance, will Elijah come at the First or Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ? Then, is He to come in person? or will it be an Elijah type ministry? Christians in general are not clear on these questions; and some no doubt, have not even given it a second thought, nor think it important enough to bother their head over. Because of this lack of clarity I have chosen to look into the matter. I treat Bible prophecy with the seriousness that it deserves; after all, it is the Word of God and it has been included that we might be wise to the events that are to take place, as well as those that have already taken place.

Before going further, let us consider this man Elijah. Who was he? Why should he come rather than any of the other prophets of the Old Testament? Why not Moses, Elisha or Daniel, for example? I am sure they were well qualified to perform the task that was expected;

but for reasons known to God alone, Elijah was the man appointed for this particular undertaking.

Elijah was a prophet with great power and authority. He was obedient to the commands of God and operated under the anointing of God's Holy Spirit. There is an account of his exploits in 1 Kings chapters 17-22 and in the first two chapters of 2 Kings.

He performed many great miracles to the glory of God. One was, after he prayed to the Lord, the rain stopped for three and a half years during the time of King Ahab's reign, then king of Israel, the Northern House.

Yet, the greatest and most memorable feat by which he is remembered is his contest with the prophets of Baal at Mt Carmel. Elijah addressed the people saying, 'How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him'. When the prophets of Baal failed in their attempt to invoke their god to send fire, then, 'at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice' Elijah prayed to his God the 'LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel'. 'Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench' (see 1 Kings ch.18 vv 21-38). Thus Elijah proved without doubt that the God he served was the true God.

In this and on many other occasions Elijah proved himself to be a man of obedience to the will of God controlled by the power of God; therefore he was well qualified to accomplish the task God now required of him.

I shall now consider some of the statements made about John the Baptist. First of all, was John the Baptist Elijah? How did John himself answer this question?

The Gospel of John ch.1 vv 19-23 records that when the priests and Levites who were sent by the Jews in Jerusalem asked him, 'Who art thou?' His reply was 'I am not the Christ'. When asked 'Art thou Elias', he replied, 'I am not'. When asked again, 'Art thou that prophet?' He answered, 'No'. When they continued, and asked him, 'Who art thou?... What sayest thou of thyself?' This is what he said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias'. John's reply was in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah (ch.40 v.3), 'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God'.

Also, he is mentioned in prophetic form in Malachi ch.3 v.1 which says, 'Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me'. The verse goes on to talk of the Lord as a messenger, but this time the 'messenger of the covenant', obviously, the 'New Covenant', that was brought in with Christ.

So we see John in these passages as a forerunner of Christ, preparing the hearts of the people and preceding the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How then did Jesus relate to the ministry of John? Did he consider John to be Elijah? This is what Jesus said to the multitude regarding John.

'... What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?... A man clothed in soft raiment?... A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.'

Matthew ch.11 vv 7-10

This is in reference to Malachi chapter 3 mentioned previously. So from this we can deduce that John is 'more than a prophet' and is a 'messenger' to prepare the way of the Lord; which is what he did.

Then Jesus goes on to say, as found in Matthew ch.11 v.14, 'And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come'. So is Jesus saying that John the Baptist was Elijah in another form; a reincarnation of that prophet? Can we imagine Elijah being born again in the flesh and brought up again as a child? Was it really Elijah that jumped for joy while in the womb of Elizabeth at the presence of Mary the mother of Jesus, who was also at that time bearing Jesus in her womb? If it were not, then there must be some other explanation.

Then, continuing from Matthew ch.17 we find Jesus addressing the questions of his disciples as regards Elijah; and said this to them in verses 11 and 12,

'Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things'.

He continues, 'But I say unto you, That Elias is come already'.

Surely it seems, there is a contradiction here and the Bible detractors will be clapping their hands; for Jesus is saying that Elijah will come, obviously some time in the future; but also that he had come. Is it really a contradiction or is Jesus in effect indicating that there will be a second fulfilment of the coming of Elijah when he says 'Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things'; and also, 'But I say unto you, That Elias is come already'?

There is a repeat of these statements from Mark's Gospel ch.9 v.12, where Jesus says, 'Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things'. Then again he says that 'Elias is indeed come' v.13. So what is going on here?

To help understand what Jesus meant, I now turn to the Gospel of Luke ch.1 where the Angel Gabriel instructs Zacharias, John's father, regarding John's divinely appointed upbringing and ministry.

'For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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 ch.1 vv 15-17

In this final verse, we discover that John is not Elijah, but instead was to go before the Lord in the 'spirit and power' of Elijah; and his prophetic commission was, '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'.

Jesus says in Matthew ch.17 v.11 that Elias will 'restore all things' and again in Mark ch.9 v.12 that Elias 'restoreth all things'. Yet, in the instruction given by the Angel Gabriel there is no mention that John the Baptist was to 'restore all things'; and no evidence that he did. So it may be concluded that that was not a part of his commission.

This brings us to the final passage for consideration,

'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse'.

Malachi ch.4 vv 5-6

It may be recognised in verse 6 that John the Baptist was the fulfilment of this verse in accordance with that mentioned by the Angel Gabriel, in turning the 'heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers'.

However, in verse 5 it seems quite definite that the prophet Elijah will come in person, for the prophesy states quite boldly 'I will send you Elijah the prophet'. It makes no mention of an Elijah ministry such as was appointed to John the Baptist.

These verses, though similar in content to the ministry given to John during the First Advent, relate rather to the Second; the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. I say this because verse 5 speaks of the 'great and dreadful day of the LORD', which is the day of judgement mentioned in such places as Isaiah ch.2 v.12; ch.13 vv 6 & 9 as well as ch.34 v.8. This is in contrast to the First Advent, the day of 'grace and truth' as mentioned in John ch.1 v.17 and where Jesus says in John ch.8 v.15 'I judge no man'. Also the whole tenor of Malachi chapter 4 points to the future event of the Lord's return.

Christians who have studied these passages are divided: some believe John the Baptist was the final fulfilment of Malachi ch.4 while others believe there is to be a second fulfilment with another Elijah type ministry similar to that of John the Baptist's. Yet others, like myself, believe there is likely to be a second fulfilment with Elijah coming in person.

Jesus said, 'Elias [Elijah] truly shall come first' (Matthew ch.17 v.11). Is His word not sufficient for us? How Elijah comes is in the hands of God; but that he is coming seems to be beyond doubt.

The Christian song, which commenced this article, says:

These are the days of Elijah,
Declaring the word of the Lord.
Still, we are the voice in the desert crying
'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'

So for believers, take this seriously, think of it not only as Elijah's ministry, but a ministry of our own; calling on people to repent; to be baptised and to prepare themselves for the soon return of the Lord, so as to escape the 'wrath to come' (1 Thessalonians ch.1 v.10).

Then, to those who are not sure where they stand with God: let me ask you these questions, Are you ready for the Lord's return? Have you committed your life to the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you 'born again' of the Spirit of God; baptised in water as a believer and a disciple, obeying the commands of Christ and walking in his ways? Will you escape the 'wrath to come'? Is your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life; and are you saved for all eternity?

If you are in doubt as to where you stand in relation to these questions, it raises doubts concerning your salvation, and an appraisal of your situation in relation to God would be advisable.

The Day of Elijah

For those that are sure of their commitment, discipleship, and eternal security, don't let the Lord find you idle when he returns.

Luke chapter 12 verse 40 says, 'Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not'. These also were the words of Jesus, 'look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together' (John ch.4 vv 35-36).

In other words, there is a harvest of lost souls out there; so whether you sow or reap, make sure you are busy and God will reward you abundantly. The first verse of this hymn puts it clearly.

There's a work for Jesus, ready at your hand,
'Tis a task the Master, just for you has planned.
Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true;
There's a work for Jesus none but you can do. - Amen.
