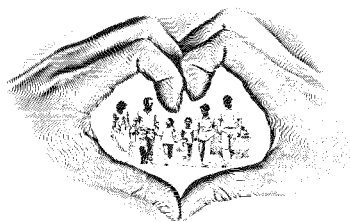


# Turning Hearts *in the* End Time



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Kings 16:29–17:24; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 3:2; 11:14, 15; 17:10; 18:20-45.*

**Memory Text:** “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (*Malachi 4:5, 6, NIV*).

**The Week at a Glance:** In the closing verses of the Old Testament, a heart-turning work by Elijah is predicted before the day of the Lord.

A boy ran away from home. After years of no word from him, the parents got a postcard. He was coming their way and wanted to see them. “I’ll be riding the train that runs behind our house,” he wrote. “If it’s OK for me to stop and see you, hang a white handkerchief on the fence, and I’ll get off at the next station. If it’s not there, I’ll just keep riding.”

As the train hurtled toward his boyhood home, he wondered, *Will the handkerchief be there?* Finally, the fence came into view, covered with handkerchiefs, towels, bedsheets, and pillowcases, not only on the fence but on the shrubbery and the trees—a great mass of white, saying WELCOME HOME!

The point should be obvious.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 25.*

## The Prophecy of Turned Hearts

**Compare** the prediction of the coming of Elijah with New Testament references to this event. *Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 11:14, 15; 17:10; Mark 6:15; Luke 1:17.*

In the days of Malachi, God's appeal to the nation, "Return to Me, and I will return to you," met with the arrogant response, "In what way shall we return?" (*Mal. 3:7, NKJV*). The frustrated prophet announced that one further opportunity for revival would be given. Recalling the heart-turning reform begun by Elijah (*1 Kings 18:37*), Malachi predicted his coming again to "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (*Mal. 4:6, NIV*).

A Jewish tradition developed that Elijah would appear personally as the herald of the Messiah (*compare Matt. 17:10, Mark 6:15*). However, the New Testament presents John the Baptist as a fulfillment of the prophecy (*Matt. 11:14, 15; Luke 1:17*).

**What** do you think the phrase "turn the hearts" means?

Several applications are possible for these texts: *It refers to the reconciliation of the people of Israel with the Lord. God as Father (Isa. 63:16) has turned from His wrath toward His children (Mic. 7:18, 19) and calls them to return to Him (Isa. 44:22, Mal. 3:7). It refers to the reconnecting of later generations with their faithful ancestors through covenant renewal. The prophetic call for God's people to follow the faith of the patriarchs was given repeatedly in the Old Testament. Whether the land continued as a blessed dwelling place was directly related to covenant faithfulness (Deut. 4:29-31). It refers to the restoration and renewal of family relationships. Parent-child relationships are a practical expression of covenant faithfulness with God. Here, too, fulfillment of responsibilities to parents and children interweave with continued inheritance of the land and God's blessing (Prov. 2:21).*

**What is the connection between a restored relationship with God and restored relationships in our families? Why must one precede the other?**

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## Family Reunion

The introduction of Baal worship into Israel by Jezebel, the Sidonian wife of King Ahab, hastened the nation's downward moral slide. The teachings of God that uplifted marriage, family, and sexuality were overshadowed by practices such as incest, prostitution, and other sexual perversions. Into this arena of conflict over worship stepped Elijah, whose very name, "Jehovah-is-my-God," rebuked a belief in Baal.

**What** experience of Elijah associated him with overturning heathen beliefs and bringing new life to families? *1 Kings 16:29–17:24; compare Luke 4:25, 26.*

Elijah was a marked man after announcing the curse of drought upon the land. God sheltered him in an unlikely place—at a poor widow's dwelling in Zarephath of Sidon, near Jezebel's hometown. Elijah greeted the widow with a grim test, to use her last bits of kindling, oil, and flour to feed him and to trust God for her future. Her faith became legendary. Jesus Himself would later commend her (*Luke 4:26*). As her oil and meal stretched out over many days, the woman came to understand more about Jehovah. Then, tragically, her only son fell sick and died. In expressing her grief to Elijah, she reflected the familiar religion around her, the perverted beliefs that now engulfed Israel, in which one's sin could require child sacrifice (*1 Kings 17:18; compare Jer. 19:5, Mic. 6:7*).

**What** effect did the reunion with her son have upon the Phoenician widow's spiritual experience? *1 Kings 17:24*. **What** can we learn from her comments?

The mother's response reveals the effect of the Elijah message. Faith in God and His Word arises in the heart as, by His power, life is restored and the family is reunited. Many today may give assent as doctrines are preached but are lukewarm in their spiritual experience. However, when the truths of God's Word are experienced personally and revival and restoration occur in home relationships, conviction comes ever so much more powerfully upon the heart.

**What** are some family reunions that you are still waiting for? **What** promises of God are you clinging to that give you hope of that reunion?

## Turning Hearts at the Altar

**Read** 1 Kings 18:20-45. Write out what essentially this whole episode is about. Though the context is totally different, how can the principles seen in this story apply to family life?

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On Mount Carmel, Elijah longed for covenant renewal on the part of his nation, a turning back to the faith of their fathers that would bring healing to their lives, their homes, and their land.

*The hour of the evening sacrifice.* After the heathen priests' failure with their sacrifice, Elijah took his turn. He was deliberate. The time of day drew attention to God's redemptive plan revealed in the sanctuary service (*compare Exod. 29:41*). The invitation " 'Come near to me' " (*1 Kings 18:30, NKJV*) reminds us of the Savior's welcoming sinners (*compare Matt. 11:28*). Parents who are pained at the waywardness of a child can be assured God loves him or her as truly as He loved the Israelites. God works unceasingly to draw wayward ones to Him.

Elijah's focus on Jehovah's altar finds its equivalent in our time when Jesus and His saving grace are uplifted in families. Family worship is an opportunity to talk to Him in prayer, to speak of Him to one another, to receive anew His free gift of salvation, and to give our hearts time to reflect on His teachings.

The response Elijah requested would signal that God had taken them back to Himself. First Kings 18:37 says, " 'That this people may know . . . You have turned their hearts back to You again' " (*NKJV*). We cannot turn our hearts to God; we can only respond to His grace, and that He freely gives.

The all-consuming fire fell, not upon the guilty but upon the sacrifice, pointing forward to Jesus, who was made "sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*). Confession and praise burst from the people's lips. Because they did not respond to God's call, the false priests were executed. Then refreshing rains ended the curse upon the land.

**In what condition is your home altar? What specific ways can you *rebuild* the altar in your home, if indeed it needs some rebuilding?**

## Turning Hearts at the Jordan

Alongside Gabriel's prediction (*Luke 1:17*) and Jesus' confirmation of John the Baptist as the predicted Elijah (*Matt. 11:14; 17:12, 13*), the Gospel writers affirm that he was the "messenger" who would prepare the way of the Lord (*Matt. 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27; compare Mal. 3:1*).

**Note** the main aspects of John's message. In what way is his message one of heart-turning? *Matt. 3:2, 8; 14:4; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14.*

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Like a farmer who plows hard ground to prepare it to receive seed, John denounced sin and urged sinners to repent. Human nature is such that, without self-examination, without an awareness of one's true condition, no need is felt for something better. His message turned people toward the holiness of God's requirements and their need of His perfect righteousness. Genuine repentance is always marked by humility and looking to God for help to change one's behavior. By exposing the shallow, self-centered hypocrisy of those who claimed Abraham as their father, he sought to open the deeper meaning of the faith of their fathers.

**How** did the message of John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus? *John 1:35-37, 3:27-30.*

John had been shown that Jesus was the Lamb of God. When he introduced Jesus this way (*John 1:29, 36*), he literally turned people to the Lord. Andrew and another of John's disciples, John—the Gospel writer who wrote the account of that day—left the Baptist's side and became the first of Jesus' disciples. Not only does the Elijah message point to the need for repentance; it identifies the One who saves from sin, generates excitement about Him, and introduces people to Him.

**If John the Baptist were to step into your home, what do you think he would be saying to you?**

## Turning Hearts in the Last Days

In a sense, we as Adventists see ourselves in the role of John the Baptist. The herald of reform and repentance sought to prepare the way for the first coming of Jesus; we, as a movement, see ourselves doing the same for the Second Coming.

**Read** prayerfully Luke 1:17. How do these words capture our message?

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The heavenly Father has turned the hearts of His children back to Himself and has turned the hearts of His children to one another through the Cross of Christ. The Elijah message pleads with families to believe this incredible good news (*2 Cor. 5:18-21; compare Eph. 2:11-18*) and to be people filled with grace as His Spirit yields a harvest of love in them.

The world needs desperately a demonstration of unselfish caring, lasting commitment, and unswerving devotion to God. By God's grace Christian families can provide such a demonstration. Yet, we must remember that the message we have for the world is also for ourselves. Until the principles of gospel, of unity, of love, of self-sacrifice are made manifest among us, especially in our own families, we will be powerless to share this message with others. All the eloquent sermons, all the logic and biblical presentations, aren't enough: The world needs to see manifest in our lives, especially in our family lives, the repentance, the turned hearts, the love, and the commitment we preach about. Just as John the Baptist had a power that changed lives and made his preaching effective, we can do the same through the grace of God, but only to the degree in which we are willing to cooperate.

We are, through Jesus, part of the family in heaven (*Eph. 3:15*). Thus, whether we are a family of one or more, we are called to be witnesses for the God we profess to serve, and nothing can make our witness more effective than to show the world what a family, regardless of its size, can be through the power of the gospel.

**What can you do, in a special way, to show those closest to you, whether immediate family or others, that you love and care about them?**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “Carmel,” *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 143–154; “The Voice in the Wilderness,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 97–108.

*A message to prepare a people.* “Our message must be as direct as was that of John. He rebuked kings for their iniquity. Notwithstanding the peril his life was in, he never allowed truth to languish on his lips. Our work in this age must be as faithfully done.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss the relevance of the Elijah message to your local church. What can you do to help your church understand the message and its role in helping to spread it?
- ❷ Have those who are willing share with the class their own personal experiences of having their hearts turned. What changes came about? What difference did this experience have upon their lives and the lives of their families?
- ❸ If we see ourselves in the role of John the Baptist, what should we expect to happen to us? What is the implicit message in that answer?
- ❹ As a class, work on a paragraph, a kind of “Declaration of Family Principles,” that best encapsulates what the biblical idea for a family is. Be prepared to share it with the whole church.

**Summary:** An appeal for faith in God and acceptance of His reconciling gospel of grace is going forth today just before Christ returns. A positive response to this good news alone secures the bonds of earthly children to the heavenly Father, as well as parents and children to one another.

# The Late Visitor

by ELIJAH ANGELOV

I was a pastor in a charismatic church in Bulgaria for years. Then the Adventists held evangelistic meetings in my village. I was sure that Adventists did not have the Holy Spirit, for they did not speak in tongues. But I decided to attend the meetings, just to hear what these people said about God.

I was shocked by the compelling Bible truths that were presented, that Saturday is God's holy day and that the soul does not go directly to heaven or hell after death. The subjects were clearly presented and backed by Bible texts.

As I searched the Bible, I became convinced that what the Adventists teach was the truth. Others tried to convince me that Adventists are wrong, but they could not back their statements from the Bible. I continued praying and studying the Bible.

My wife, Zoya, attended the meetings too. She noticed my distress and asked me, "Are you thinking about what the Adventists teach too?"

"Yes I am," I told her.

We did not join the Adventists during those meetings, but we continued studying the Bible and struggling over what God wanted us to do. Then one day months later, Zoya told me, "I am convinced that the Sabbath message is correct."

I asked her how she came to that conclusion.

"I asked God plainly," she said. "I told God that if the Adventists are His people, and if I am wrong, then please send Sister Nina to our home to tell me, 'Do not waver, the Sabbath is God's truth.' If this happens, then I will be convinced that Adventists are right. But send Nina today. Otherwise I will know that Adventists are wrong.

"The hours dragged by," Zoya continued. "Noon passed, and Sister Nina had not come. Dinner was over, and still she had not come. Soon it was time for bed, and Nina was not there. I decided that the message the Adventists teach is wrong.

"I was ready for bed when someone knocked at the door. It was Nina. She did not mince words, but said, 'Sister Zoya, do not waver. The Sabbath is God's truth.' I started to cry and shout, 'Praise the Lord!'

"Then Nina told me she had resisted an impulse to come see us all day. But finally she could not wait any longer, so she came."

I praised God, too, for opening our minds and showing us His power and His truth.

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*The Holy Spirit*, our study for the next quarter, is based on a previously published Bible study guide, written by the late Arnold V. Wallenkampf. While the lessons will present a doctrinal picture of the Holy Spirit, they also will emphasize the daily and practical aspect of His work in our lives. The powerful reality of His work is manifested not only in our personal experiences but in the life and power of the church. Thus, we deal extensively with the vivifying power of the Spirit as we seek to present Him as God's regenerating Agent.

## Lesson 1—The Personality and Divinity of the Holy Spirit

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Triune God

MONDAY: God the Holy Spirit

TUESDAY: God the Holy Spirit: Continued (*Acts 5:3, 4*)

WEDNESDAY: The Unity of God (*Matt. 28:19, 2 Cor. 13:14*)

THURSDAY: Evidences of the Spirit's Personality

**Memory Text**—*Matthew 28:19*

**Sabbath Gem:** This week we'll concentrate on one often misunderstood aspect of the Holy Spirit: His Divinity. The Holy Spirit is not just some impersonal force that emanates from God. Instead, He is God, one of the three Persons who make up the Godhead of the Christian faith.

## Lesson 2—The Holy Spirit Symbolized in Scripture

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Dove (*John 1:32*)

MONDAY: Water (*John 7:37-39, RSV*).

TUESDAY: Oil (*Matt. 25:1-4*)

WEDNESDAY: Seal and Guarantee (*2 Cor. 1:22, RSV*)

THURSDAY: Light and Fire (*John 1:9*)

**Memory Text**—*John 3:8*

**Sabbath Gem:** The Spirit is frequently alluded to through the use of a variety of symbols. It only is through an acquaintance with the symbols, emblems, or illustrations used for the Spirit that His work and ministry in the believer's life can be adequately understood.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired:** The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.