

The Spirit and Power of Elijah

by David Lin

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Malachi 4:5-6.

These closing words of the Old Testament were understood by the Jews to be a prophecy awaiting literal fulfillment. So when John the Baptist appeared, they asked him, "Art thou Elias?" and he said, "I am not." After John was martyred, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?" Jesus answered, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." Matthew 17:10-13.

Here we have a literal fulfillment of a specific prophecy plainly confirmed by our Lord. There is no symbolism here. Just a straightforward statement: "I will send you Elijah." And another one saying, "Elias is come already." However, our interest in this prophecy lies in its second and final fulfillment, which we have good reason to expect. Because the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" is still future, but not far away; so this second and complete fulfillment should logically occur in the "time of the end," which we traditionally take to be the period after 1798.

An analysis of the first fulfillment of the prophecy will help us better to understand its second one. To begin with, the first fulfillment was not spectacular. John drew the attention of the people, but his work was an apparent failure. Nothing tangible resulted from it, as judged by human standards, for his work was not endorsed by the religious authorities of his day. Second, John was not recognized as Elijah, either by the people or by his own followers. If Jesus had not made His explicit statement, perhaps we would even now be divided in our interpretation of Malachi 4:5-6. Third, John himself did not claim to be Elias.

Regarding this third point we make the following observation: John was no doubt fully aware of his divine appointment since childhood, for he was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." Luke 1:15. So the words of Gabriel to Zechariah, his father, must have been strongly impressed on his memory: "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 1:17. These words must have been a powerful factor in guiding John's thinking and behavior through the years of preparation in his wilderness retreat. Only a man possessed with the strong conviction that he was fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi 4:5 could go about his task with such zeal and devotion. Yet, the words of Gabriel were a sacred trust, not to be carelessly disclosed to the unbelieving. He would not give that which is holy unto the dogs, nor cast his pearls before swine. So when the "generation of vipers" (Luke 3:7) asked him, "Art thou Elias?" he said, "I am not." John 1:21.

Jesus likewise did not reveal John's true identity to the multitude, but only in private to His trusted disciples. Delicate truths like this require careful handling, and are not to be thrown into the pool of questions for general debate. Jesus had no burden to prove His point. He simply said, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Matthew 11:14. A confidential statement like this is enough for the honest enquirer, but no further disclosure is made to satisfy the curious and doubting.

Now we are ready to discuss the final modern fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6. We should not be surprised--in fact we should expect--to find that it too, like the work of John, was not of a spectacular nature. The disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration had just seen Elijah appear in person--a most sensational manifestation! So they thought this must be the fulfillment of that prophecy, but no, Jesus corrected them promptly, telling them that Malachi 4:5-6 was not fulfilled on the Mount of Transfiguration, but in the martyr who died a cruel death in Herod's prison.

Now we are ready to face an equally unexciting proposition: Malachi 4:5-6 finds its final fulfillment in the work of Ellen G. White. What? This frail, unimpressive woman is Elijah? Yes, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which is for to come," even though they knew her not. If you will not receive it, I have no burden to force it on you, but please examine the evidence:

1. Evidence of time: "Before the great and dreadful day of the Lord." As pointed out above, the appearance of Elias should be in the time of the end--after 1798. The gift of prophecy manifested in the work of Ellen White extended from 1844 to 1915.

2. Evidence of message content: "To turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers." It is a fact that a large portion of the *Testimonies* written by Ellen White dealt with family relations--the Christian home, for that is where the basic character of every individual is formed.

3. Evidence of kinship of spirit: John was not Elijah, but manifested the spirit and power of Elijah. That can also be said of Ellen White. Despite her physical frailty, the spirit she revealed was not in the least effeminate. When facing the Kellogg crisis she saw in a dream the iceberg looming up ahead. She communicated the command to meet it head on, and let the boat shiver from stem to stern. Ellen White was no coward because she spoke not from herself, but in God's name. She was brave and courageous insofar as she was possessed by the Holy Spirit.

We should not forget that Elijah was at one time discouraged and fled for his life when Jezebel uttered her threat. That was when his human frailty gained the better of him.

Ellen White had her low points too, but the main tenor of her lifework accords well with the words, "In the spirit and power of Elias."

Why did God choose to place a frail, unlearned woman on this end of the line of prophets? He gives the answer in 1 Corinthians 1:27:

"God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."

Ellen White often quoted these words: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." 2 Corinthians 4:7. In this age of scientific advancement and high intellectual attainments, it pleased God to choose "the weakest of the weak" to confound the strong. The spirit of modern scholarship is no match for the spirit and power of Elijah.

No Worldly Recognition

Like John the Baptist, Ellen White received no worldly recognition, and she sought it not. Her chief concern was to deliver the message God had given her. That is the mark of every true prophet. As in the days of Elijah, the world gives recognition to false prophets. In the 1946 edition of the *Columbia Encyclopedia* there are 26 biographical entries under "White," but E. G. White is omitted. Mary Baker Eddy's story is presented in 39 lines, and Joseph Smith gets 45. In the 1975 edition, only 12 lines make up a brief sketch of E. G. White, while 25 lines introduce Amy Semple McPherson.

Like John the Baptist, Ellen White did not claim to be a prophet, but she was God's messenger. She said, "This is my work--to give to the people the light that the Lord gives me. I am commissioned to receive and communicate His messages. I am not to appear before the people as holding any other position than that of a messenger with a message." *Testimonies*, vol. 8, 237.

Like John the Baptist, Ellen White exalted the Lamb of God. This prevailing theme in her writings is appreciated by all who read her writings. She never exalted herself, but always uplifted the crucified and risen Saviour.

Like John the Baptist, Ellen White spoke the truth. "John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true." John 10:41. . . .

The Plummet in the Hand of Zerubbabel

Elder G. B. Starr testified (by oral communication) that Ellen White once saw an angel point to Zechariah 4:9-10, and tell her that it applied to her work:

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel."

We invite all critics of Ellen White to examine the work of this inspired architect of God's house. The angel tells us that the foundation of our modern "temple" was laid by her hands. Would you believe it? It is a historical fact. If it were not for her inspired counsels on medical evangelism, we would not have one-tenth of the medical institutions we operate today. The same applies to our schools and missionary establishments in 208 countries. No honest student of the history of our church can deny the truth of this statement: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house."

Then there are the more valuable, though less tangible, results of her work--that of building Christian character. He "which searcheth the reins and hearts" (Revelation 2:23) places an infinitely higher estimate on moral beauty than on outward attraction, and values our work not in terms of statistical figures, but of spiritual attainment. Here the gift of prophecy has been quietly accomplishing solid and enduring good in the hearts of men and women--hewing, fashioning, and polishing them after the similitude of a palace.

The Spirit of Prophecy has been a plummet to keep our thinking straight ever since the Bible conferences of the first generation of Adventists. Point by point, the important truths which form the foundation of our faith were confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the visions given to Ellen White. Today, when men are trying to topple the edifice of truth, we still need that plummet. "All who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White and has given her a message, will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days." *Selected Messages*, book 3, 84.

Her Hands Shall Finish It

Ellen White was laid to rest in 1915, but her writings have continued the work of building God's house, and "shall also finish it." If our lives are spared, we shall witness the final fulfillment of these words. By that time, the men who have spent so much time, money and energy gathering material to prove that Ellen White was a plagiarist and deceiver, will one day stand dumbfounded before the gorgeous edifice of "this house" glistening in the beauty of holiness, and the angels of God rejoicing to see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.

The day of final reckoning will render the verdict as to who has done the most good--Ellen White or her critics.

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