

Let's continue our study. We're looking at Malachi chapter 4, where the prophecy is made that God will send the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day. Elijah is mentioned here in chapter 4, verse 5: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." And so, looking at Elijah to see what his function was helps us understand why it is Elijah who will be sent and not Joseph to once again deliver the people out of bondage, or Moses. Actually, Joseph delivers them from famine; Moses delivers them from bondage. Joshua accomplishes military victory to take them into the land; David, as their first great king. None of these individuals are going to precede the great and terrible day. It is Elijah.

And so my question is, of all possible people, what does God's choice of Elijah to send tell us? So, if you return to 1 Kings chapter 18, we've already seen Elijah's coming seemingly out of nowhere to address the grotesque Baal worship instigated by Ahab and Jezebel. And the initial judgment is not violent. It isn't miraculous in the sense of something that has never been seen before. What happens in 1 Kings chapter 17 when Elijah appears? Elijah says the rain is going to stop. This, of course, is a disaster in an agricultural economy, and certainly in the ancient Near East, everything depends on the rain. And it is not a proactive judgment; it is the withholding of provision.

We have Scriptures that tell us that the rain falls on the just and the unjust, but to make a point, the rain does not fall on the just or the unjust. And in Israel, it's largely the unjust. Up in Sidon, it's the pagans and the Asherah and Baal worshippers. But there will not be dew nor rain, not even dew. And this inevitably reminds us of the conditions before Noah, when the rain did not fall but the dew and moisture came up from the ground and watered the earth. So there will not be rain and there will not be dew.

You want to talk about a dry heat. Not enough moisture. If you've studied dew point and humidity and all of that, you understand that even when there's no rain, you can still get condensation of the moisture in the air. But there will be none. You think about Gideon's fleece: the ground is wet, the fleece is dry; the fleece is wet, the ground is dry. And you think about the properties of the moisture that is in the air and God's control over these things. It is normally a provision that is granted indiscriminately, but there have been droughts and concomitant famines throughout human history, haven't there? And they seem to be a part of the normal functions of nature, where we don't have such a consistent natural balance that there is the same number of inches of rain every month in a given area. It is unpredictable. It is subject to the vagaries of air currents, sea currents, the El Niño and La Niña, and the jet stream, and the tilt of the earth's axis, solar heating, and various parts of this greenhouse effect create conditions in the atmosphere, create conditions in the oceans that affect these weather conditions. There is generally an average of these that we call climate, and the Sahara Desert is typically dry, the San Fernando Valley is typically wet, Barstow is typically dry, and so on. The Amazon Rainforest is typically wet.

So when he proclaims this drought, this is a direct withholding of the normal natural function by God. It is a judgment by subtraction. There is not fire coming from heaven. There are not hailstones. It's not 186,000 waking up dead in a morning. It isn't disease. It's not an earthquake. It's not a flood. It is withholding a very simple provision, and this is additive over time.

The key to this judgment, in my view, one of the keys to understanding it, is that it is cumulative. The first three days of no rain is not a big deal. Maybe the first three weeks of no rain is not a big deal.

If you go three months and you start interfering with the pattern of the former and the latter rains in Israel, that's going to be noticeable. Seed that is planted is not going to sprout. The crops that are harvested in the spring, the barley harvest, the Feast of Firstfruits, and Pentecost, and the sheaves that are waved, and all the rest of it, aren't going to take place if there is zero rain, and you're not close enough.

The wadis are going to dry up. There's no real way to irrigate. Pulling water out of a well is going to be to sustain human life and animal life at a fairly minimal level, but there's not enough water to irrigate. You might be able to grow a small kitchen garden for a few essential vegetables, but the crops and so on are not going to be coming in. This accumulates over time.

It is cumulative by way of a judgment. This is going to last three years. Now, in Menander's Phoenician history, they had a one-year drought. It started in a month and ended in the same month, and evidently was annual, which means that rain, if true, this drought was really restricted to the nation of Israel, and up in Tyre and Sidon, evidently it didn't last that long. But the measure of time is very similar to sand running through an hourglass.

Elijah goes to the brook, and initially the brook runs and provides him with drinking water. The ravens are able to bring him food from places where it grows or where it is to be found. But as the drought continues for a year and then two years and into a third year, the brook dries up. Notice that God has sent Elijah out of the land because these brooks and food sources are not going to be as poorly off as inside Israel. This thing is centered on Israel, and it's interesting that in Tyre and Sidon, evidently, they had a drought, but it wasn't as severe or as long-lasting. And in the region of the brook Cherith, it wasn't as severe or as long-lasting, but it did have an effect, and that brook slowly dries up.

So once, verse 7 of chapter 17 of 1 Kings, after a while, the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. So the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Arise and go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."

What's interesting to me is we tend to remember the widow of Zarephath. We don't tend to remember that Zarephath is not in Israel. The widow of Zarephath is a heathen. She's a non-Israelite. She is Sidonian. Remember the Syro-Phoenician woman? Well, this woman is like that. Zarephath is like a suburb of Sidon. Where did Menander say that the drought only lasted a year? Sidon. She is up in Sidon. God sends Elijah to where he knows there's going to be a little bit of sustenance.

So he went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water, water is still dear and scarce, in a cup that I may drink." As he was going to get it, he called her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." She said, "As the Lord your God lives, only a handful of flour in a bin and little oil in a jar. I'm gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in, prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die."

Flour and oil have become so scarce because wheat is not growing, olives are not growing. This is the last of what was stored. She's going to eat it and die. Elijah said, "Do not fear. Do as you have said. Make me a small cake from it first and bring it to me. Afterward, make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel: The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth."

So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah. She and her and her household ate many days. This is an expression of faith in the word of God. And this is a pretty fair expression. This is active faith. Remember when we talked about turning that results in action, in the same way that love of the agape type results in action, returning and doing something. She expresses a faith here that is expressed in an action. This food is the last that she's got. And she gives to the prophet first on his promise that there will be a supply of flour and oil. And because of her faith, she is delivered. And she is a non-Israelite Sidonian widow, a Gentile widow.

And you remember the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. His sickness was so serious there was no breath left in him. You remember this story. Wish we had time to review it all. But there are prophetic implications of this where Israel is under judgment. The Gentile, Gentile widow receives provision through Elijah. Elijah, the Old Testament prophet, Old Testament revelation benefits a Gentile widow who expresses faith. This is a part of the Elijah picture.

So when John the Baptist comes in the spirit and power of Elijah and proclaims the Lamb of God, what is he looking for? Repentance, change of mind. "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance" is a big part of John's message. The expression of faith before the Lord Jesus is revealed in his own ministry is expressed in the baptism ritual in the Jordan River.

And there is this call to prepare the way of the Lord. John evidently did not explain what this was going to look like. He didn't spend time preaching at the Jordan saying, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and he's going to grow up and he's going to bear our sins on a Roman cross." He just says, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight, bear fruit in keeping with repentance." John does not provide a lot of new information related to the coming of the Lord or the great and terrible day of the Lord. What does John do? He just says, "Pay attention to the Lord and bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Your life ought to look like God is first.

Which is kind of like when Jesus said, or John says, "I do not give you a new commandment. I give you an old commandment, which was from the beginning, to love one another." John learned that from the Lord Jesus, but it's in his epistle. But in the same way, John says, "I'm not giving you a new commandment. I'm reminding you

of the old commandment. Change your mind and live your life with respect to the Lord and to his commandments. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.”

Here's my point. When the prophet comes in the spirit and power of Elijah, he doesn't reveal new information, but he is a harbinger of judgment. He says the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and judgment will begin at the house of God. He is a harbinger of judgment for information you already have. How much prophetic information did Elijah provide in the end of 1 Kings and the beginning of 2 Kings? Is he like Isaiah? Is he like Ezekiel? Is he like Daniel? Is he like Malachi? Is he like Joel or Hosea or Habakkuk? Does he describe future events to indicate that God is the God who tells you what's going to happen beforehand?

What is interesting about Elijah the prophet is he prophesies nothing. He declares there will be no rain. He declares the judgment, but he's not predicting that there will be no rain. He says, “There will be no rain except at my word.” This is a command. This is the policy of God that is now going into effect. It's not eschatological in any sense. Here's what's going to happen: God says no rain.

John the Baptist doesn't reveal any new information. He says there's one coming whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to loosen, but that's not new information. The Old Testament is replete with prophecies of a coming one and that the Lord is coming and that his forerunner will prepare his way. So what about the prophet Elijah who comes before the great and terrible day of the Lord? What will he do? What are the things that we have seen so far about the prophet Elijah?

First of all, he is the first of a set of two. In 1 and 2 Kings, you have Elijah and then you have Elisha. My question before the break is, John the Baptist as Elijah, who is his Elisha? There are two men in the Gospels who are described as having the Holy Spirit out from their mother's womb, filled with the Spirit from the very beginning. Who are they? John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus.

If it isn't explicitly stated about Jesus, you can imagine that it is implicit. He is conceived by the Holy Spirit, but John is filled with the Spirit out from his mother's womb. But would you say that the Lord Jesus had approximately a double portion of the Spirit that rested on John? John was able to proclaim. John was able to identify. John saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on the Lord Jesus. There is a strong element of the Spirit that characterizes and unites John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus where? In the waters of the Jordan River that Elijah and Elisha crossed for the double portion of the Spirit to be conferred on Elisha.

Like Elisha, there is no sin or error ascribed to the Lord Jesus. The other place that we've seen this, interestingly, was in the book of Job, where after Bildad and Zophar and Eliphaz speak, then comes Elihu. And when Elihu speaks, there is no error in his words. And when God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind and speaks to the three friends and says, “My servant Job needs to offer a sacrifice on your behalf,” Elihu is not included in the group. Even though Elihu's got a couple of chapters of great information, he's not in the group that needs sacrifice and needs repentance, because he's a picture, in my view, of the Lord Jesus Christ. Elisha is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, if Elijah is going to come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, who is the Elisha that follows that? Well, I would submit that John the Baptist was a humble forerunner, dressed like Elijah in the hairy garment with the belt, locusts and honey. The garb of a prophet seems to have originated, the uniform seems to have originated, with Elijah. And it is not purple robes. It is not power and thunder and lightning, which is something to keep in mind.

The forerunner prepares the way. How does he prepare the way? How does the forerunner prepare the way? What does Malachi chapter 4 say? He will split the earth with thunder and lightning, he will call down fire from heaven, he will bring forth hailstones, and he will take the tops off of mountains. Elijah called on the name of the Lord, and fire took off the top of the mountain. Did Elijah do that? We need to read that story real quick.

So, if you turn back to chapter 18 of 1 Kings, the episode on Mount Carmel begins in verse 20 of chapter 18. So, after the challenge is issued up above, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table. So you've got 950 prophets. I would say one for every successful year of the millennial kingdom.

Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. Elijah came to the people and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions?” Falter, vacillate, waffle. What's the message in the book of Malachi? Even God's people are beginning to question the wisdom of being faithful and obedient,

because the wicked prosper, and it seems that God blesses the unrighteous and penalizes the righteous. And we've seen that in great detail.

Elijah says, "How long are you going to vacillate between two opinions? Either serve Baal or serve God. Pick one. Don't use the name of God. Don't bring sacrifices, but they're hollow, they're faulty, they're corrupt. You're going through the motions. You despise the table of the Lord. You don't enjoy the fellowship meals that these were designed to reflect and to involve and to participate in fellowship with God and fellowship with one another, fellowship with the priests. It's all gone by the wayside. It's a hollow sham. Just pick one."

"I wish that you were cold or hot. You're lukewarm. You're not anything. You're in the middle. Be cold and refreshing. Be hot and therapeutic. Don't be nothing. You're vacillating between two opinions." The people answered him not a word.

So Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left, a prophet of the Lord. Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men," and of course there's another four hundred Asherah prophets. "Therefore let them give us two bulls." You know the story. Prepare the bulls. These guys have all day. When they get no action, they start gashing themselves. They are hurting themselves in the interest of trying to bring about this result. And Elijah actually mocks them. They spend all morning.

Verse 29: midday was passed. They prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. There is no voice, no one answered, no one paid attention. Notice Elijah is aware of the law of Moses. There is a time for sacrifice in the morning, and there is a time for sacrifice in the evening. Evidently, Baal would take a sacrifice any time he wanted to make it. It's free form. Why have structure? Why have rules? We'll just do it whenever we want. And of course it's false in every respect, including that.

Elijah purposely waits until the time of the evening sacrifice. This is a time designated by God for sacrifice. This is not only faith in God, but it is obedience to God in the performing of the sacrifice. He takes twelve uncut stones, which is the proper way to make an altar. Verse 31: "According to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, Israel shall be your name." Not an accident. Israel shall be your name. Why is Jacob mentioned here? Twelve stones, according to the number of the sons of Jacob, to whom God said, "Israel shall be your name." It's a covenant.

Do you remember what we saw in the heart of the book of Malachi about divorce as a metaphor and a picture of Judah, the remnant of the nation of Israel, having left treacherously the wife of his youth and married the daughter of a foreign god? How would you describe Jezebel, the daughter of the priest of Ashtar and king of the Sidonians? Daughter of a foreign god. Ahab surpasses Omri, who surpasses Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, because he openly embraces and marries, literally, the daughter of a foreign god. It's Ahab.

Elijah is sent in the days of Ahab to challenge people who accept this king, who is their representative, the same way Herod is the representative of people in John the Baptist's day. And he can't make up his mind. He imprisons John. He won't set him free. He won't respond to his message. But he won't do away with him either. He just puts him on hold, keeps him in the prison. And it isn't until Salome does the dance of the seven veils and Herod's wife forces the issue that Herod finally executes John the Baptist. He is sort of led to do so by his wife, the way Adam was led to eat the fruit by Eve, the way Ahab was led to promote this worship far more than he probably would have on his own. And he's going to take Nebat's vineyard at her behest. It's all a picture of this impetus of the daughter of a foreign god. That's why the divorce picture is centered in Malachi. You have broken covenant faith.

So that's the picture of Elijah. And before we go to the future Elijah, let's look again at Malachi chapter 4, verse 5, in terms of why Elijah is mentioned here. "I will send you Elijah the prophet." Why? He is going to bring the culminating challenge about this daughter of a foreign god business. What is going to happen during the tribulation period? Do you remember Revelation chapter 17? It's a woman riding the seven-headed, ten-horned beast. When you ride the beast, you control it. You direct it. You provide its impetus. You tell it where to go. And this is going to be what happens during the time of the beast and the false prophet and this loving and practicing a lie and believing the lie that is those days.

There is a call to prepare the way of the Lord before the coming of the great and dreadful day when he is going to return and judge the scarlet harlot, judge those who have followed her, Mystery Babylon, Babylon the great, mother of harlots. But it reflects back to Jezebel. It reflects back to the days of Elijah. And you know the great

bitter hatred that Jezebel develops for Elijah. And you get this in 1 Kings when Elijah comes back and talks to Obadiah. You remember that story? And I keep turning away from 1 Kings. I don't know why I'm doing that.

In 1 Kings chapter 18, after the Mount Carmel episode, God's power is demonstrated by fire. There is water first, then fire. Water first, then fire. Drown the sacrifice with water, then the fire of the Lord comes. The earth was judged with water in the days of Noah. It's going to be judged by fire in the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Water, then fire.

The drought ends in verse 41. There's the sound of the abundance of rain. Ahab went up to eat and drink. Elijah goes up and he sends his servant to look. And after seven times, look at verse 44 of chapter 18 of 1 Kings. First Kings 18:44. It came to pass the seventh time that the servant goes to look. There is a cloud as small as a man's hand rising up out of the sea. Go say to Ahab, "Prepare and go down before the rain stops you," because the rain is going to come and end the drought after seven looks.

After the seven final years of the age of Israel, after the judgment of fire on idolatry and Jezebel's prophets, the rain will come. It's a foreshadowing. I think these seven trips that the servant makes to look for the return of God's provision and God's grace and God's looking out for his people. You've got seven years, the final seven years of the age of Israel.

So if Elisha follows Elijah, if the Lord Jesus is introduced by John the Baptist, and in this age, we represent the Lord Jesus, we have a double portion of the Spirit that was available to Old Testament believers. It was available, but it was by request. It was for specific purposes. It had limited and specific functions. In many cases, we have the Spirit and power on us because of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are his body. He is our head. We are connected eternally to him and we are connected to God through him. We have a ministry of the Holy Spirit that never leaves us.

When we leave and that which restrains is taken out of the way and the man of sin is revealed, what kind of ministry of the Spirit will there be? Well, the ministry of the Spirit in the Old Testament was not sufficient to restrain the kings of Israel. It wasn't sufficient to restrain the evil that ran rampant to the extent that God had to judge his own people and take them out of the land, take his glory out of his own temple, destroy his own capital, and so on. And that level of Spirit presence is going to pertain in the last seven years. The double portion that Elisha enjoyed, the double portion that the Lord Jesus enjoyed in his humanity and that we share in through him, will leave. And that's why if those days were not shortened, no flesh would survive. A captivity isn't going to fix it. A judgment on the Assyrians or on the Babylonians isn't going to fix it, because Satan is going to be unleashed in a way never before seen. It is the time of Jacob's trouble, and it is so severe.

But God says, "I will send Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord." And what is he going to do? If you read Malachi chapter 4, verse 5, he is going to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. And you have that word shuv in verse 6. Now, if you try to make sense of this and say, "Well, the fathers are just going to care for their children in a new and special way. They're going to really value their kids." Unbelievers do this. It's not like, well, Israel has been judged because they didn't care about their children enough. You could try to make a case that, well, but they idolatry, Moloch, that's not this.

Here's my suggestion to you very quickly. When Elijah the prophet comes before the great and dreadful day, as the prophecy foretells in Luke, Gabriel says he will turn the hearts of the children to the fathers. Remember that? And then it stops. What does that mean? Who are the fathers? We think, well, in this room, we've got Father's Day coming up, right? So you've got fathers and you've got children, and that the children are going to turn to their fathers and the fathers are going to turn to their children. Who are the fathers in Malachi? Think back to the covenant with Levi and the covenant with Judah. What did God say in the middle of this book? You have not honored me like the fathers did: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Shuv not only means to turn; it means to return. Remember we saw it translated again. It means to return. He will return the hearts of the fathers. He will return the kind of heart that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had to the descendants. When Elijah comes and preaches his message, there is going to be a renewed heart of faithfulness and obedience, of repentance, and fidelity missing in this generation that has divorced the wife of its youth and has married the daughter of a foreign god. The debauchery and evil that characterized the days of Ahab and Jezebel, when Elijah comes before the judgment, there is an opportunity to return and develop the kind of heart that the fathers had.

What does Paul say about Israel in Romans 9, 10, and 11? Even though they have been disobedient and broken off, why are they beloved by God? For the sake of the fathers. There is a remnant in Israel for the sake of the fathers so that God can fulfill his covenant promises to those faithful forebears, the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. I submit to you, the fathers here in verse 6 are the patriarchs. Elijah is going to, through his preaching, call out those who developed this heart that the fathers had. And the hearts of the children will return to being like the hearts of the fathers. This is through the ministry of Elijah.

"I will send you Elijah. He will turn these wondering hearts, these hearts that are vacillating between two opinions." That's what Elijah did at Mount Carmel, right? He said, "Look, make a choice. You're vacillating. You're in the middle. Choose you this day whom you will serve," as Joshua says. You're vacillating.

So Elijah is going to come and galvanize. And those who will return to the hearts of the fathers, and the hearts of the fathers will return to being in those people, they're going to be delivered. If they don't, if they don't return to having the kind of heart that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had, God is going to smite the land with a curse. It is their choice. Deliverance or destruction. Millennial joy or weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. The light and the banquet and the feast, or the slam door and the darkness which is outside.

This choice is going to be sparked by prophetic preaching in the spirit and power of Elijah. Just as John the Baptist did, what happened to that generation? He confronted them to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus. And when the Lord Jesus came, there were some who accepted him and recognized him. Most didn't. That same thing is going to happen again.

So who is going to perform that function? Is it the two witnesses? This is only one witness. He doesn't say, "I'm going to send you Elijah and Elisha," or, "I'm going to send you Caleb and Joshua." He says, "I'm going to send you Elijah." It's a singular individual. And as a result of that convicting preaching, this choice is going to be made. It's either repentance or it is a rebellion. You either develop the heart that the fathers had, or I'm going to smite the land with a curse. One or the other.

Who is that Elijah going to be? Who is going to come with a double portion of the Spirit and the power? Is it the actual Elijah, raised up? When will it take place? Answers the question, who is it going to be? And we'll save that answer for next time.

What is our application? Just as we look at Israel in every other phase of their history, as goes the nation, so goes the individual. Do we have a heart like the fathers? Do we look forward in hope to a city whose founder and builder is God? Do we say that God is our God and we're resting in his promise, even when we can't see how things are going to turn out?

If we have that heart, we will be blessed. We will be delivered. We will enter into joy, unspeakable and full of glory. If we vacillate, if we reject, we're going to suffer the curse. And it's really just that simple. What it boils down to is, can I identify those choices in my day-by-day existence? Do I recognize that my challenge this morning or this afternoon, my challenge tomorrow morning or tomorrow afternoon, is a chance to express this heart? What kind of heart do I have? It's all about the heart.

He doesn't say, "Mend your ways," in this context, does he? He says, "Your heart needs to return." This is a challenge to believers to return to what it was at the beginning. It's easy to be distracted. It's easy to be discouraged. It's easy to be deflected. It's easy to be deceived. How easy is it to have the heart that these great fathers of the faith had, those who are first mentioned in the great Hebrews chapter 11: by faith Abraham?

So that's our challenge. It's a reflection. It's an observation and application for us, but it is no less true for us than it is for them, past and future. Well, we'll take a final look at this and conclude our Malachi study next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how powerfully it speaks. The universal testimony, Old Testament and New, is the response that we have to your initiation of grace, of love, your offer of deliverance, ultimately through the Lord Jesus Christ, our potential, our opportunity to participate in your plan for the ages, your plan in human history, your demonstration before the angels and before all of humankind, that we really do bear responsibility for our own choices. You have granted us autonomy to choose.

We pray that after having seen these things in your word, that your Holy Spirit will impress them on our hearts in such a way that we can see clearly to make the positive choice, that we will have the hearts that the faithful

have always had to take refuge in the cleft of the rock, to claim your promises by faith, and to enter into all of the wonderful benefits and blessings that you have promised for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.