

## **The Spirit of Elijah and Turning Hearts (Malachi 4:5-6)**

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In Malachi 4:5-6, the prophet Malachi stated, “See, I [the Lord Almighty] will send the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers [parents] to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers [parents]; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.” (NIV) I believe that this passage correlates to the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) so I paraphrase Malachi 4:6 like this:

*When the spirit of Elijah is poured out in the end of the end times, the hearts of the older generation will turn in compassion toward the hearts of the younger generation who will respond in kind breaking the curse and releasing blessing!*

I believe that the fulfillment of this prophecy will come at a point in history congruent with the final stage of the completion of the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18-20).

As I am getting older, I am trying to think and pray through how leadership is biblically passed from one generation to the next. Historically, this important transition of leadership has not gone well. Older and younger generations tend to have different worldviews, priorities, and methodologies and have difficulty in understanding one another. Often times, younger leaders feel judged and stifled by older leaders; while older leaders feel judged and disrespected by younger leaders. Biblically, there have only been a few “successful” transitions of leadership from older to younger leaders:

- Moses to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31)
- Elijah to Elisha (II Kings 2)
- Jesus to his disciples (John 13-21)
- Barnabas to Paul (Acts 9 and 12-13)
- Paul to Silas, Timothy, and Titus (Acts 15-16 and I/II Timothy, Titus)

The transitions were not always smooth, but because the primary leader intentionally transitioned positional power to a younger leader with spiritual authority as his base, the transition was much smoother and impacting. Contrast these transitions with those that did not go well:

- Judges (Judges 3-13)
- Eli to his sons (I Samuel 4)

- Samuel to Saul (I Samuel 9-15)
- Saul to David (I Samuel 16-19 and I Samuel 31-II Samuel 2)
- David to Absalom (II Samuel 13-15 and 18-19)
- David to Solomon (I Kings 1-2 and 10-11)
- Solomon to his sons (I Kings 12-14)

Without going into a lot of detail, these transitions were pretty tragic. These stories read more like a soap opera: nepotism, intrigue, betrayal, jealousy, rejection, idolatry, immorality, greed, murder, civil strife and war, etc. Pretty nasty stuff! Failure to make healthy and effective leadership transitions can cause all sorts of personal and organization difficulties. All you have to do is look at the messes caused by poor transitions in the Bible or the corporate world.

With this in mind, let's look at the main character in Malachi's prophecy about God sending "the spirit of Elijah" that leads to the "turning of hearts" or the blessing of the older generation to the younger one.

### **Elijah's Background:**

- Elijah means "my God is Yahweh" (God as covenant keeper)
- Elijah was a Tishbite who lived and served as a prophet during the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (I Kings 17:1)
- Elijah prophesied that there would not be rain for 3 ½ years (I Kings 17:2)
- Elijah hid in the Kerith Ravine where he was provided food by ravens (I Kings 17:3-6) until the brook dried up (I Kings 17:7)
- Elijah went to Zarephath of Sidon where he stayed with a widow and God multiplied flour and oil for making bread (I Kings 17:7-16)
- Elijah confronted Ahab about "abandoning the Lord's commands" and "following the Baals" (I Kings 18:18)
- Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and the fire of God fell on the flooded altar that Elijah had prepared (I Kings 18:19-38)
- The people repented and the prophets of Baal were killed (I Kings 18:39-40)
- Elijah prophesied the end of the draught and raced before Ahab in his chariot as he returned to Jezreel (I Kings 18:41-46)
- Jezebel tried to kill Elijah and he fled to the wilderness out of fear (I Kings 19:1-3)
- Elijah is renewed by God as he ate, slept, and heard the "gentle whisper" of God (I Kings 19:4-13)

- God revealed to Elijah that he was not “the only one left” but that there were 7,000 who have not bowed down to the Baals (I Kings 19:14-18)
- Elijah called Elisha to become his attendant (I Kings 19:19-21)

### **The rest of the story...**

- Elijah confronted Ahab about the murder of Naboth and the theft of his vineyard (I Kings 21:17-19)
- Ahab died during the battle at Ramoth Gilead in fulfillment of Elijah’s prophecy (I Kings 22:37-38)
- Elijah called down fire on two captains and their 50 men (I Kings 1:9-12)
- Elijah prophesied the death of King Ahaziah (II Kings 1:15-17)
- Elisha asked for a “double portion” of Elijah’s spirit (II Kings 2:9)
- Elisha followed Elijah across the Jordan River where Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire (II Kings 2:11)
- Elisha saw that, cried out “my father, my father,” and picked up Elijah’s fallen cloak (II Kings 2:12-13)
- Elisha walked back to the Jordan and used the cloak to part the waters (II Kings 2:14)
- John the Baptist was compared to Elijah (Matthew 11:14, 16:14, 17:10-12, Mark 9:12-13, Luke 1:17, John 1:21-25)
- Malachi referred to the sending of Elijah (or “the spirit of Elijah”) before the dreadful day of the Lord when the hearts of fathers will turn to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4: 5-6)
- Elijah appeared with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3-4, Mark 9:4, Luke 9:30)
- Elijah is possibly one of the two end-time witnesses (Revelation 11:3)

### **Final Thoughts:**

Elijah was certainly faithful and ministered in power during his life and leadership, but he also passed on a “double portion” of his spirit to his younger protégé Elisha. The “spirit of Elijah” was one of faithfulness and power AND of compassion and blessing! When older leaders model and faithfulness while treating the younger generation of leaders with compassion and blessing, it breaks the curse of needing to prove that you are right (and others are wrong). Compassion and blessing opens the door for the next generation of leaders to learn to serve out of grace. This is the “double portion” that will be poured out in the end of the end times to fulfill the Great Commission!