

ELIJAH IS COMING
Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." —Malachi 4:5–6

Elijah is seen as one of the most important figures in all of Judaism. He is the forerunner of the writing prophets to Israel, thus the first of the prophets who often confronted the kings of Israel and Judah. Elijah played the role of calling Israel back to her faith as revealed in Moses. Thus, Elijah was already yoked together with Moses as an embassy of the Lord in calling Israel back to the Mosaic Law as the basis of God's rule over the nation. Elijah's past career paves the way for his future ministry, along with Moses, in calling the wayward nation of Israel back to faith in the Lord during the future tribulation. Elijah's future role is illustrated in modern Judaism by the fact that during the annual Passover meal an empty chair is set at the table to demonstrate that if Elijah were to show up during that meal then he would be welcome.

ELIJAH'S FUTURE MINISTRY

Malachi clearly teaches that Elijah will make a visit during the tribulation to the nation of Israel (Mal. 4:5). Elijah will be joined by Moses, as the two from the past who appeared at Christ's transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). It should be noted that the verse preceding the Elijah prophecy says the following: "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel" (Mal. 4:4). Thus, even in the Malachi prophecy about Elijah coming, Moses is mentioned in the context, which provides support for the notion that Moses is one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 along with Elijah.

Like Enoch, Elijah was translated to heaven without dying. 2 Kings 2 records this interesting event with an emphasis upon the mode of Elijah's transportation to heaven. 2 Kings 2:1 says he was taken "by a whirlwind to heaven." In 2:11 the whirlwind is further described as "a chariot of fire and horses of fire." No doubt this was an appearance of the Shechinah glory of God since Hebrews 1:7 says, "and of the angels He says, 'Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.'" God objectively marked Elijah as a genuine prophet by identifying him with the glory of God and his rapture to heaven. Enoch was raptured before judgment while Noah remained and was preserved through the judgment. Elijah was raptured while Elisha remained behind.

Malachi 4:5-6 foretells of an important role that Elijah will play in relation to the nation of Israel. Such language teaches that Elijah will play a future role during the tribulation in the conversion of the nation of Israel, before the second coming of Christ. Since Malachi's prophecy makes it clear that Elijah will play a role in end-time events, it is almost certain that this return of Elijah during the tribulation will be as one of the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation 11:3.

Malachi 3:1 says, 'Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts." Isaiah 40:3-4 is a parallel passage of John the Baptist who is said to be, "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley.'" This passage provides the predicted role for John the Baptist to play as the one who would precede and prepare the way for Jesus at His first coming (Matt. 3:1-6). Elijah will prepare the way for Israel before Christ's second coming, since Israel rejected Jesus at His first coming.

There are some who teach that the ministry of John the Baptist was a fulfillment of the prediction of the coming of Elijah from Malachi 4:5 at Christ's first coming. This is not the case. John the Baptist fulfilled a different prediction, that of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3-5. Yet, John the Baptist was said to be "a forerunner," who would come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk. 1:17). Christ told His disciples concerning John the Baptist "if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come" (Matt. 11:14). But Israel did not accept Jesus as their Messiah at His first coming and therefore the kingdom did not arrive. In fact, when John the Baptist was asked directly, "Are you Elijah?" He clearly said, "I am not" (John 1:21). Thus, because of Israel's rejection, John the Baptist was John the Baptist (My messenger) and not Elijah. So Elijah is still to come.

ELIJAH WILL COME

Elijah will come "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" for the purpose of restoring "the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:5-6). The point of the end-time role of Elijah is to prepare Israel for accepting Jesus as their Messiah, something that did not occur at Christ's first coming. Therefore, the ministry of Elijah is that of restoration of the Jewish family, which will prepare them for the second coming of the Messiah. The phrase "the great and terrible day of the Lord" is probably a reference to the second coming event that will occur just after the tribulation period. Even if this phrase is a reference to the tribulation as is the lesser term "day of the Lord," Revelation 11 sets the context for the ministry of the two witnesses.

Elijah will fulfill his ministry as one of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:3, which says: "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." According to Revelation 11:3-14, there will arise two unique witnesses proclaiming the gospel for a period of 1260 days during the tribulation. Their supernatural ministry is related to Jerusalem and the nation of Israel, in which they perform a special witness to God's program of judgment. In support of Elijah, the passage says, "These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying" (Rev. 11:6a). Elijah performed a similar miracle during his ministry in the Old Testament before he was taken up to heaven in the fiery chariot (1 Ki. 17:1; 18:41-45).

I believe strongly that these two witnesses will be Moses and Elijah, even though the early church consensus was Enoch and Elijah. Enoch, instead of Moses, is still a popular view held today on the basis that these are the only two who did not die but were translated to heaven. It is argued that they were raptured because they were to be brought back into history during the tribulation as I have described. However, the

multiple reasons given for Moses as the other witness with Elijah trump the single notion that it will be Enoch who will team with Elijah as the two witnesses during the first half of the tribulation.

Both Moses and Elijah were involved in the transfiguration, which anticipated the second coming of Jesus Christ (Matt. 17:3). These two individuals, specially sealed by God to be witnesses to Jerusalem and Israel, will arise during the first half of the tribulation. Like the prophets of the Old Testament (see Rev. 11:4 and compare with Zech. 4), the two witnesses will be able to perform miracles and they will be protected by God against those who try to harm them until their mission is complete. For three and a half years they will minister in Jerusalem without being harmed. Perhaps they will oversee the rebuilding of the tribulation temple during the first half of the tribulation since they will have the supernatural authority to call down fire upon anyone who would mess with them. This would enable them to protect the function of the temple service until they are taken out of the way and the beast (antichrist) will then be able to enter into the rebuilt temple at the mid-point of the tribulation and defile it (Dan. 9:26–27).

The two witnesses will be clothed in sackcloth (Rev. 11:3) which is symbolic of the fact that they are prophets of doom (cf. Isa. 37:1-2; Dan. 9:3). While Jerusalem is not mentioned by name as the city of their ministry, Revelation 11:7 says that their dead bodies will lie "in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." The reference to the crucifixion clearly places these two witnesses in Jerusalem. The reference to Sodom and Egypt implies that during this time there will be licentious behavior and Jewish persecution in the city.

At the end of the 1260 days, God will remove their special protection so that the Antichrist will then kill them and their bodies will be left in the streets of Jerusalem for three and a half days after which God will resurrect them and rapture them to heaven. Once they have ascended to heaven, a great earthquake will occur, destroying a tenth of Jerusalem killing 7000 people. Revelation 11:13 says, "the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." The rest are contrasted with the rebellious earth dwellers and I think refers to the Jews of Jerusalem who are converted to Jesus as their Messiah as a result of the ministry of the two witnesses. As new converts to Jesus, they would readily follow His command to flee to the wilderness when they see the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15). Thus, the ministry of Elijah is complete. Maranatha!