

Behold, I Will Send You Elijah the Prophet

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Brethren, if you've been in the Church of God for any length of time, I'm sure at some point in your life you have studied the subject of prophecy. And if you're like most of us, you probably at different times started digging into particular prophecies and you've looked at different ones and you've speculated different scenarios about how things might be fulfilled and formulated different ideas. Just kind of again batted around different speculations about how things might come to pass. I know I certainly have in my lifetime and it can certainly be a fun thing to do.

However, it's important to realize when we look at speculative situations that for the vast majority of prophecy, our interpretations of it are not a salvational matter. We can be right about it; we can be wrong about, but, again, it really is not a salvational matter in affecting whether we get into God's Kingdom or not.

However, there is a particular prophecy in the Old Testament that a number of individuals and even entire organizations in today's Church of God environment have literally taken their interpretation of that particular prophecy and raised it to a salvational matter. I mean to the point of making it a litmus test as to whether or not you can attend with that organization and literally to the point of making it a requirement for baptism. For a person to be baptized and receive God's holy spirit, they require someone to profess the same understanding of that particular prophecy as they have.

So what we're going to do today is take a very close look at this particular prophecy, look at all the details about it because one of the things we're going to see is this is a particular prophecy that doesn't require much in the way of speculation. The Bible just tells us flat out, very straightforward how it was fulfilled and it doesn't really require much guess work or speculation at all.

So to start off with today, turn over to Malachi chapter 4. We're going to start reading in verse 4.

Malachi 4:4. *"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.*

5) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (NKJV)

And this is the particular prophecy we're going to focus on today. We're going to actually read this section of scripture numerous times today as we go through and analyze very fine details of this in putting together all that the Bible has to say about this, but if you'd like a title for this sermon, it's

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Now as we're going to see today, the New Testament makes it very clear for us that John the Baptist has fulfilled this prophecy. Again, we don't have to guess about that. We're going to see that Christ tells us that a couple of times; the angel Gabriel comes in and says this; Mark in his gospel tells us this. Everybody agrees and everything points back to the same source.

However, there are a number of individuals, and even organizations, that look at this prophecy from the standpoint of duality. And if you study prophecy at all, you realize that duality is certainly a valid concept when you're looking at prophecy. There are certainly a number of prophecies in the Bible where there is an early fulfillment; there's a latter fulfillment of some of the same scriptures. That's certainly a very valid concept.

However a number of individuals will look at this particular prophecy and they will look at it from a dualistic standpoint. In their minds the dualistic fulfillment of this particular prophecy was the ministry of Mr. Herbert Armstrong. And because, as we're going to see later in the book of Matthew, Christ makes the comment that the Elijah would restore all things. They then take that to interpret that that restoration was doctrinal understanding, and, therefore, basically take that to canonize every opinion, every point of view, every speculation or anything that Mr. Armstrong had said at the time of his death in 1986 and basically raised that to the level of scripture. They have literally gone to the point of making their agreeing with that understanding a kind of a litmus test as to whether or not you can attend with that organization and literally saying to be baptized, to receive God's holy spirit, you have to possess this same viewpoint.

Now again, regardless of how you interpret this particular prophecy, I will state very emphatically: "To take a carnal human being and raise them to the level of Jesus Christ, making that a requirement for baptism is downright idolatry because as we're going to see here later even this idea of equating Elijah with Jesus Christ is literally addressed in the Bible. We're going to look at that later today. But again, to make another human being, accepting "their role" a requirement for baptism is essentially making them equivalent with Jesus Christ because that's who we're making a covenant with at baptism and you're accepting as your Savior. And that is just downright idolatry.

What we're going to do today is look at this scripture in a lot of detail, look at the other scriptures in the Bible that talk about this and kind of put together a jigsaw puzzle to understand exactly not only who this is referring to, but the details of how this plays out. And at the very end we'll look at the concept of could this be dualistic or not.

So to start off with, first, I want you to notice in these last couple of scriptures here it starts off with "Remember Moses" and "Look for Elijah."

That's going to become important in a minute here as to why I'm making a point of this.

Also notice here we have the last words inspired in the Old Testament. Now, in most Bibles today, if you look at how the books are ordered, you're going to see that Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. If you have a Bible that has what they call "the original order of the books," you'll know that Malachi is not typically the last book that they put there. But if you look at it from a historical standpoint of when the books were recorded, Malachi is the last inspired words that God gave to Ancient Israel before we get into New Testament times. So this is the last inspired words that God delivered.

Now, with that in mind, turn over to Matthew 17. We're going to look at the story of the transfiguration because we're going to see at the end of this particular story Christ tells us directly who was going to fulfill the prophecies of Elijah that we just read.

Now in this particular story, I can say I've been in the Church of God my entire life and throughout that time I've heard, I guess you might say, a bit of speculating and sometimes head scratching kind of looking at this particular story saying "Why is this in the Bible? What is the point of this story?" And oftentimes those questions revolve around "What is this telling us about Moses and Elijah?" Is this foreshadowing the two witnesses? Is this telling us something about that type of role?" Or "What are the points that this could be telling us?"

Well, I think if we read this story in context what we're going to see is this really isn't about telling us about Moses and Elijah. It's pointing out the role of Jesus Christ, let's just read through this story and we'll see this. It's in Matthew 17:1.

Matthew 17:1. *Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, [and brought] them up on a high mountain by themselves;
2) and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.
3) And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. (NKJV)*

Now, notice first of all that the apostles perceived that this was Moses and Elijah. We know just by virtue of the fact that that happened that they were supernaturally inspired to know who these guys were. How would they have any idea what Moses and Elijah looked like? These guys had been dead for hundreds of years. They didn't have photographs hanging around on the internet so they could recognize who they were. They'd had to be inspired that they would know who that was. So, in verse 4:

4) Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (NKJV)

Now notice what Peter is suggesting here. He's suggesting "Let's treat them all equally" because that's important to understand the story. As we're going to see here later, the apostles had trouble really grasping who Christ was and the magnitude of His role but we're going to look at that here in a minute. What he's suggesting here is "Let's honor

all three of them” and he wants to do an equal honoring to all three of them. And that’s important to understand in this story. In verse 5:

5) While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

6) And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

7) But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."

8) When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. (NKJV)

Now notice what just happened here. Peter suggested, “Wow! We have these three great guys here. Should we build a tabernacle and honor all three of them?” The very next thing that happens is Christ is singled out saying, “Here’s the one you need to hear,” and the other two disappear. So, He’s being singled out as “This is the Son of God. This is the one you really want to pay attention to.”

It’s making a point as to where these guys fall because understand why would Moses and Elijah be in here? What were the last inspired words of the Old Testament, the only scripture these guys had up to this point? “Remember Moses;” “Look for Elijah to come.” And He put these two individuals on there and then make them disappear and go,” This one’s head and shoulders above others,” because this is the God of the Old Testament. These guys were just carnal instruments that He was utilizing. “This is the Messiah; here’s the guy you need to hear. He’s head and shoulders above the rest of them.” That’s what’s being said here.

But if you notice their reaction to this in the discussion that comes, they’re having trouble really grasping this concept. Follow up here in verse 9:

9) Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

10) And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

11) Jesus answered and said to them, "Elijah [truly] is coming first and will restore all things.

12) But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands."

13) Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist. (NKJV)

Again, here we have Christ directly telling us “If you want to know who Elijah was, John the Baptist.” There’s your answer. We don’t have to guess. We don’t have to speculate. We’re going to see multiple times in the Bible it tells us the same answer very straightforward.

But notice what happened here. They've just been told "This is the Son of God. This is the Messiah here." And what's the next thing they say? It's essentially, "Wait a minute! If you're the Messiah, weren't we supposed to see Elijah first? Isn't something out of order here? I'm confused. Wasn't there supposed to be an Elijah before we would see the Messiah?" So, you can see they're not really grasping this idea. And that's why Christ says, "Well, Elijah did come. You just missed him. You didn't know what to look for" because you see John's already been beheaded at this point. He's already dead, but that's just what He's pointing out to them.

I won't summarize a lot of the rest of this for time's sake, but if you just look through their history with Jesus Christ all throughout the time before they were converted through Christ's physically ministry, these guys had a great deal of trouble really grasping and wrapping their head around exactly who Christ was and the magnitude of His role. And just to summarize a few examples of that for you—and again I won't go through each scripture just for time's sake.

But if you remember, there was a time when all of them were in a boat and a storm is coming up. The apostles are getting scared and Christ is sleeping. They go wake Him up. "What are we going to do? We've got this bad storm." And Christ gets up and He rebukes the storm and it stops. And these guys are blown away and go "Wow! Did you see that? This guy commanded the winds and the seas and they obey Him. Who is this guy?" They're not grasping who He is. He's the guy who spoke the winds and sea into existence in the first place. It's not a big surprise He could command them, but they're not really grasping that idea.

If you look through even later in His time, the time that Christ even asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter mouths the right words. "You're the Christ. You're the son of God. You're the Messiah." Just a couple of scriptures later Peter's trying to correct Christ and tell Him He's wrong. He's trying to tell Christ, "No, no. You're mistaken about this. This can't happen." He's not grasping this idea.

Look even at the end of life what happens when Christ is finally taken and crucified and all those trials come upon Him. What do all the apostles do? They wind up scattering in different directions and even denying Him. Even Peter, said, "I'll never deny You. I'm ready to die for You." What's he's doing? He's denying. "I don't know this guy. I'm not with Him. What are you looking at me for?"

Even after He is resurrected and appears to them again, we're all familiar with the story of Thomas. Even when the apostles say, "We saw Christ. He's back again!" "Well, I'm not going to believe that until I stick my finger in the holes in his hands; stick my hand in His side. I won't believe it until then!" Even after all the things that they saw ... they saw this guy bring people back from the dead who were already stinking. Lazarus had been dead long enough he was already starting to stink and Christ brings him back to life. In spite of all of this, these guys were still just having trouble grasping who he was and that sinking in.

There was a reason for that. And the reason for that is—turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 7. See throughout His ministry these guys didn't receive the holy spirit until after Christ was dead and it was the Pentecost after He was killed that they actually became converted and received the spirit. This is why they had so much trouble grasping this. In verse 7, it says:

1 Corinthians 2:7. *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,*
8) *which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
9) *But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*
10) *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*
11) *For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*
12) *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit [which] is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*
13) *These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*
14) *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (NKJV)*

And much of what Christ was teaching, at times He would even explain things to them and say, "You're not going to understand this now, but later when you receive the spirit, you're going to remember this and it will make sense to you. It's because they didn't have the spirit; that's why they didn't grasp it.

The point of this story is not telling us about Moses and Elijah in referring to the transfiguration. He's telling us "These guys were insignificant. You've got the Messiah in front of you. This is the person you need to hear." That's the point of the transfiguration.

But turn back over to Matthew 17. We're going to pick up where we left off here.

As I mentioned here before, Christ gives us specifically the example of who fulfilled Malachi 4:5-6, Christ tells us here directly. We don't have to guess. Again, starting in verse 10 again:

Matthew 17:10. *And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"*
11) *Jesus answered and said to them, "[Truly], Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.*

12) But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands."

13) Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist. (NKJV)

So He's telling us directly who fulfilled this. But notice something else here. By virtue of the question that the apostles asked here, they understood the concept at least that the Elijah would precede the Messiah. Now the reason I'm pointing that out is there is only one scripture in the Old Testament that directly refers to an Elijah to come and that's in Malachi 4 that we just read. However, the concept of the Elijah preceding the Messiah you can't get from that particular scripture. It's a valid concept. You just can't get it from that. I'm going to point out and I'm kind of put together a jigsaw puzzle here with several scriptures and it will make sense at the end why I'm doing this. Just follow us and we see that the scriptures equate with one another.

First of all turn back over to Malachi chapter 4. I just want you to see here in this section of scripture that we read here it tells us about Elijah to come, but you can't get the concept of the Elijah preceding the Messiah from this scripture.

Malachi 4:4. *"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.*

5) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

6) And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (NKJV)

Now again, the Elijah preceding Christ's first coming, you can't get that idea from this scripture. Where you can get this from is from Malachi 3:1. Turn over to Malachi 3:1.

Malachi 3:1. *"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts. (NKJV)*

Here we get that particular concept. What I'm getting at here is to point out the fact that at Malachi 3:1 and Malachi 4:5-6 refer to the same individual and that individual is John. And Christ will tell us that directly here in Matthew chapter 11. If you will, turn over to Matthew chapter 11 and we'll start reading in verse 7.

Matthew 11:7. *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?*

8) But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9) *But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.*

10) *For this is he of whom it is written: ... (NKJV)*

Now notice He's about to quote Malachi 3:1 which we just read.

10b) *... "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You."*

11) *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."*

12) *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*

13) *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*

14) *And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. (NKJV)*

In other words, he tells us directly, "If you want to know who fulfilled the prophecies of Elijah, it was John the Baptist." We don't have to guess. He just tells us that flat out. We just have to take His word for it. But notice He refers to him directly as Elijah. Again, there is only one scripture in the Old Testament that refers to an Elijah to come. That's Malachi 4:5-6. So, He has to be referring to that scripture. And He also refers to and quotes Malachi 3:1. So, what He's telling us is these two scriptures refer to the same person and that person is John. We don't have to guess.

Now notice, if you turn over to Luke 1, we're going to see here that the archangel Gabriel also tells Zacharias who is John the Baptist's father that John the Baptist would fulfill these prophecies.

Luke 1:11. *Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.*

12) *And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*

13) *But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."*

14) *And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.*

15) *For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.*

16) *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.*

17) *He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ... (NKJV)*

Again, he's telling us, "You're going to have a son. His name is John. He's going to fulfill the prophecies of Elijah." We just don't have to guess here. But now notice the rest of the wording here of verse 17.

Luke 1:17b. ... *'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.*" (NKJV)

Now, we're going to come back to the wording of this particular scripture here in a moment to pull some other details out.

But just notice here again, Gabriel is coming to Zacharias and tells him right out "You're going to have a son. His name is John. He will be fulfilling the prophecies in Malachi." Again, we don't have to guess at all and this matches everything that Christ said in the two accounts we just read.

Now, if we turn over to the book of Mark in chapter 1, we're going to see again additional support that comes to this exact same conclusion. So, Mark 1:1.

Mark 1:1. *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

2) *As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You."*

3) *'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'"*

4) *John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*

5) *Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.*

6) *Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*

7) *And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.*

8) *I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."* (NKJV)

Now notice once again here, we have these same prophecies referred to and he's telling us directly this was John, but now notice one other piece and that's a part of the jigsaw puzzle I'm putting together here. If you noticed in Mark 1:2 here where it says:

Mark 1:2b. ... *"Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."* (NKJV)

That's quoted from Malachi 3:1, but now notice in verse 3.

3) *'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'"* (NKJV)

Now what we're going to see here is this is quoting Isaiah 40:3. So, what he's saying here is "Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 refer to the same person; that person is John." So,

just to cover that again, let's turn over to Isaiah 40:3 and just notice that that was a quote.

Isaiah 40:3. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (NKJV)*

Again, this is the scripture being referred to, but my point here is again realizing that Malachi 4:5-6, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3 all refer to the same person and that person is John.

Now that's going to become significant at the end of this sermon, but just understand that we put together than puzzle.

Now let's try to understand the details of what this prophecy's referring to. We know unquestionably these scriptures refer to John the Baptist. Again, we saw that numerous times, but how exactly do the details play out and what exactly does this mean? How did John fulfill this is what I'm getting at. So, let's turn over to Malachi chapter 4. Go back over to Malachi chapter 4; we'll pick up in verse 5 this time.

Mal 4:5. *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*

6) And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (NKJV)

Now what is meant here by "the turning of the hearts?" How are we to understand what this is referring to?

Now I can say, as I mentioned in the introduction, there are a lot of people today that take these scriptures as referring to Mr. Herbert Armstrong. And using that interpretation, the idea that they'll come to is they'll take these words, you might say, at face value. Okay, so "the turning of the hearts," "fathers and children," that's family relationships. Then they point to the Y.O.U. Program that we had back in the days of Worldwide. So, this was program set up to teach the youth God's way of life and say, "Okay, that's a fulfillment of these scriptures."

Now again I can understand how in looking at this, you might say, in terms of face value of what the words are saying, how one could come to that conclusion, but let's let the Bible interpret itself to see exactly what's being referred to here.

Now if you notice when we read from Luke chapter 1 earlier, it quotes directly from this scripture and he's telling us that John's going to fulfill that. But I don't know if you noticed this the first time we read it because we're fixing to look at it in detail. He rewords the second half of the scripture and that gives us some insight as to what is really being referred to here. So, turn back over to Luke chapter 1 because we know without question that John the Baptist is who this is referring to. So, let's utilize that information. It's Luke 1 and we'll start in verse 16 this time.

Luke 1:16. *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.* (NKJV)

Now notice, one of the major things he's going to accomplish is what? Turning people to God. But now notice verse 17.

17) He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' ... (NKJV)

That's the first half of verse of verse 6 of Malachi 4. And notice how it rewords the second half.

17b) ... and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (NKJV)

What it's referring to here is turning hearts to God.

Now, to further support this let me quote for you a section from Jamieson Fausset and Brown. I'm sure it's a famous commentary you've probably heard of. And this is some of the comments they have in regard to Malachi 4:6. And to quote them, it says:

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers - explained by some, that John's preaching should restore harmony families. But Luke 1:16-17, substitutes for "the heart of the children to the fathers," "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," implying that the reconciliation to be effected was that between the unbelieving disobedient children and the believing ancestors, Jacob, Levi, "Moses," and "Elijah" just mentioned (cf. Mal 1:2; 2:4,6; 3:3-4).

If you read through the chapters of Malachi, which we won't take the time to do today, that lead up to that particular scripture, you'll find that these patriarchs are talked about in the context of that. And when we put together all of what this means, you'll understand why it would refer to the patriarchs and those who would come after them as to their hearts being pulled more together.

But again, if you look at this concept, we realize what we're going to see here is that the significance of turning the hearts is dramatically more significant in the plan of God than just a youth program to get families closer together. There is a whole lot more meaning here because not only do we have to look at it in terms of the scriptures we put together, let's also go ask another question.

Why would you refer to John the Baptist as "the Elijah to come?" Obviously, there has to be a significance to that. There has to be parallels between the original Elijah that we have in the book of Kings and what John the Baptist accomplished. If there wasn't, it wouldn't really make a lot of sense. Why not just pull any name? Why not be "The

Abraham to come,” “The Moses to come, “The Daniel to come?” Just pick an Old Testament name. There have to be some strong parallels. Otherwise that wouldn’t make sense to put that together.

So, if you look at the original Elijah in the book of Kings and look for any references of “turning hearts,” there’s basically one reference you’re going to find and it’s consistent with everything else that we’ve discussed. So, turn with me over to 1 Kings 18 and we’ll see what that reference is. I’m going to summarize the context that leads up to this because I’m sure it’s a story that most all of you are familiar with.

You’re probably familiar with the story of Elijah and his showdown with the prophets of Baal. It’s a very famous Old Testament story. As you know, he basically challenges them to a duel. They set up two altars and put animals to sacrifice on them. Elijah even douses his with water. And Elijah challenges them and says, “You cry out to Baal and have Baal show himself. Have him send down fire to consume them.” He even taunts them for a while to try to get them to do this. And, of course, they’re completely unsuccessful.

Then Elijah has a short prayer to God. And, of course, God’s responds and sends down fire and shows who is the true God, but let’s look at the particular prayer he said in doing this. And again, this is going to start off in verse 36.

1 Kings 18:36. *And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.*

37) Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." (NKJV)

Now notice here the only reference we have in the original Elijah of “turning hearts” is not about family relationships. It’s about turning hearts back to God. And again, if we look even more in a broader sense at the role that John the Baptist played, it becomes even clearer how all this ties in again to this very same concept because if we take a broad look at the whole plan of God, what we’re going to see is that John the Baptist is the turning point in the whole plan of God.

What I mean by that is, as you know, for several thousand years throughout the Old Testament time frame, God basically just had a physical relationship with Ancient Israel. He made a physical covenant with them of “I’ll be your God; you’ll be my people. And if you obey the letter of the law, I’ll make life a physical utopia for you,” because salvation was not on the table. It was not part of the equation.

But how did they do in following through on their end of that commitment? We all know from history they failed miserably. They were constantly rebelling against God. They were constantly going off worshipping other gods and being involved in other pagan practices. And God is constantly having to send them in and out of captivity and send

judges and prophets and everybody else to them to try to get them straightened out and He finally just lets them go off into captivity and be scattered because they just failed miserably.

Why was that the case? What was the core problem as to why that happened? Well, it's summed up for us in Deuteronomy 5; we'll pick up in verse 28.

Deuteronomy 5:28. *"Then the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken.*

29) Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever! (NKJV)

What was the problem? It was a heart problem because they had a hard carnal heart in them and this is what kept them from being able to be successful in keeping God's words. The core of the problem was a heart issue.

Now what's the solution for that problem? It's receiving God's holy spirit. If you'll turn with me over to Ezekiel 36, we'll see a prophecy that looks forward to a time when all of Ancient Israel will be brought back up again in the second resurrection and given an opportunity to receive God's spirit but let's notice what's different at that time. It's Ezekiel 3:26.

Ezekiel 36:26. *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

27) I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (NKJV)

Now notice here the problem they had, it was a heart problem. Their hearts turned away from God and would not turn towards God. And the solution to that problem is receiving the holy spirit that enables us to have the mind of God and to obey God because we're not capable of doing it on our own.

What is the defined process that we all have to go through to receive that spirit? Turn with me over to Acts chapter 2 and we'll answer that question. We're going to see this all ties back to John the Baptist once we put it all together.

Acts 2:38. *Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)*

The defined process that we all have to go through to receive the holy spirit is what turns the hearts back to God is baptism. That's a New Testament concept isn't it? That didn't exist previous to what? John the Baptist coming and instituting it—the guy who

got his very name from that very process. He was the guy instituted to bring about this whole process which enables us to receive the holy spirit which is what turns hearts to God.

As you can see this is a much more significant role than a youth program or even than just preaching repentance because a lot of times people look at this like “He came and preached repentance and foretold the Messiah was going to come.” That’s true, but isn’t that most every major servant that God’s ever used? If you look throughout the Old Testament weren’t there a number of people that taught them the need to repent and turn back to God and there’s a Messiah that’s going to come? Or even if you look after John the Baptist at Christ’s second coming, isn’t that what most every major servant of God has done, preached the need to repent and obey God and the Messiah’s going to come and set up His kingdom? Lots of people fit that criteria.

However, if you look at John the Baptist, he plays a very unique role where he fits in the plan of God because we’re going to see here that he’s really the turning point from, you might say, your Old Covenant arrangement to your New Covenant arrangement. Oftentimes we look over him and just look at the ministry of Jesus Christ because obviously Christ was the Messiah. He’s the Savior and it was Him coming and dying for our sins and enabling that to happen that made this major change.

But if you look at what the Bible ascribes to John the Baptist, it really tells us he’s the turning point where all of this changes. To prove that, let’s turn back over to Matthew chapter 11.

Matthew 11:11. *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

12) And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. (NKJV)

Now notice verse 13:

13) For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. (NKJV)

In other words, John is the turning point in the plan of God here. And again, as I mentioned, we oftentimes skip over him and think of Christ’s ministry when He came, which again is true. Christ is the Messiah. He’s the one who enabled the entire New Covenant relationship.

But what does the Bible tell us is “the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?” Let’s turn back over to Mark chapter 1.

Mark 1:1. *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (NKJV)*

Now notice what’s immediately covered after this.

- 2) *As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You."*
 - 3) *'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'"*
 - 4) *John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*
 - 5) *Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.*
 - 6) *Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*
 - 7) *And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.*
 - 8) *I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*
- (NKJV)

Now notice we have here again the idea “the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” was John the Baptist preparing the way for Him. He is the turning point in the plan of God. And again, what was all of this about? Receiving the holy spirit, starting the New Testament Church. And what does that do? Turn the hearts to God. It’s the holy spirit that solves that fundamental problem that we all have, which is a heart problem. We have an evil, deceitful, wicked heart that’s hostile against God, that doesn’t want to turn to God. And receiving the spirit is a solution to that [which] enables us to have our hearts turned back to God and enables us to obey Him. That’s what is so significant about saying, “I will send you this individual. This is what he’s going to do.” He’s the turning point in the plan of God. So when you think about that particular role—again later we’re going to look at this idea, but if you’re going to have a latter fulfillment, it’s going to have to parallel this somehow. But I’m getting ahead of the story here.

So, now we understand what the “turning of the hearts” is. Let’s also get back to understanding what is this reference to the Day of the Lord and the curse that’s talked about because we’ve got to put that part together as well. Let’s turn back over to Malachi chapter 4:5; let’s pick up this piece.

Malachi 4:5. *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*

6) *And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (NKJV)*

Again we understand what the reference to “turning the hearts” is about, but what’s this reference to “the Day of the Lord” and the “curse” being mentioned? How do we fit all of that into this picture? Again, just to pick up on the idea I’ve been covering throughout all of this. The idea that Herbert Armstrong is the fulfillment of this, when that idea was originally developed, it was during the time that Herbert Armstrong was alive.

And we would look this reference to the Day of the Lord and say, “There’s a reference here of being ‘before’ the Day of the Lord.” We logically assumed then that this must mean that it’s right up to and leading into the Day of the Lord. And it was assumed during the time that Herbert Armstrong was alive, that obviously he would live up and see the Day of the Lord happening. So, the logic basically went: It couldn’t be totally fulfilled by John the Baptist because he died hundreds of years ago. It had to be someone who lived up into the Day of the Lord and this would, therefore, make sense.

Think about that logic for starters. At this point now, we’re looking back at the life of Herbert Armstrong. The guy’s been dead almost 30 years at this point. And we still haven’t gotten to the Day of the Lord. We don’t know how much time there is between now and there. So, even though it’s a smaller gap of time, we still have the same logical problem now. We have an individual who came and fulfilled this. Then there’s a gap of time before we get to the Day of the Lord. So, if you’re going to use that logic, we have smaller gap of time, but we have the same issue.

Let’s also notice something else. It says, “Before the Day of the Lord.” Does it say “Leading into the Day of the Lord”? Does it say, “At the time the Day of the Lord is going to happen?” No. It says “Before the Day of the Lord.”

Now let’s look at this from the standpoint of Malachi’s context when he’s writing this. I’m not one that likes to get dogmatic about historical dates because everybody’s got a different version of that and it’s too easy to be wrong, but if you look at different commentaries, which I did in preparing this sermon, they will date the book of Malachi anywhere—and I’m going to make this real broad because again I don’t like to get too detailed on dates—anywhere from the 400s to 500s BC. So, in other words, this is written four to five centuries before John the Baptist comes on the scene. To put that in a modern day context I’m sure most all of you living here in America are familiar with the story of Thanksgiving and Plymouth Rock. I believe 1612 is the date carved on that rock. And if you’re looking at that, that’s about 400 years from there until now. So if you could get that kind of a timeframe that’s the difference to give you a concept of between when Malachi came and when John the Baptist came. From his perspective John the Baptist came before the Day of the Lord. It was hundreds of years before, but still you can see it from that context.

To support this a little more, let’s understand what is meant by “the curse” here because it said if this didn’t happen that God would strike the earth with a curse. What kind of a curse are we talking about here? What exactly does that mean? If we look at this from the Complete Jewish Bible, I think we get a little better idea what’s being referred to here. Now Malachi 4:6 in the Complete Jewish Bible is translated like this:

Malachi 4:6. *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; otherwise I will come and strike the land with complete destruction.” (CJB)*

It's a little different idea than just a curse. We're talking about complete destruction. Now if you strike the earth with complete destruction, what would that mean? That would mean all life being wiped out. That would be basically human life being wiped out on the planet, or, as the New Testament refers to it, "No flesh being saved alive." That probably rings a bell, Matthew 24. If you will turn over to there, we'll see this actually ties in with everything we have discussed.

Matthew 24:21. *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

22) And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (NKJV)

So obviously here, we're referring to our end-time Day of the Lord time frame.

And it says, "No flesh would be saved alive." But what prevents that from happening? The existence of the elect. Who, by definition are "the elect"? That's the firstfruits, those who have God's holy spirit. Right? How do they receive that holy spirit? Being baptized, receiving that, and having their hearts turned back to God.

So you can see again here we have John the Baptist who is the turning point in the plan of God. And what did that work bring about? Again, baptism instituted, and then Christ came and gave the sacrifice so that we could receive the holy spirit. That not only turned hearts back to God that brought into existence this group we refer to as "the elect" because that's the New Covenant Church, all those who have God's holy spirit. That brought them into existence which prevents this curse from happening. So, as you can see, it all ties together in terms of all the symbolism.

Now let's also look at one other idea. We've put this altogether. As I mentioned before, there's this concept of "restoring all things." This is typically referred to—again if people look at this from the standpoint of Herbert Armstrong fulfilling this—the idea is put forth that this restoration is doctrinal understanding. Therefore, if he restored all things, then that means every point of view he ever had, every opinion, every speculation, everything, that's basically canonized; that's equivalent with scripture because it's the restoration of all things and we can now use his teachings equivalent with the Bible.

Let's look where this reference is made in the Bible and then use the Bible to interpret it. Turn back over to Matthew 17:11.

Matthew 17:11. *Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. (NKJV)*

This is where this concept from.

12) But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands."

*13) Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.
(NKJV)*

Notice in mentioning this, He ascribes it to John the Baptist. But what is this “restoration of all things” referring to? Let’s let the Bible interpret that. Where else does the Bible refer to the “restoration of all things” for us? If we turn over to Acts 3, we’ll see a reference to this very phrase that, again, ties back to the meaning of everything else we’ve discussed.

Acts 3:17. *"Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.*

18) But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.

19) Repent therefore and be converted, ... (NKJV)

And what’s required for them to do that? They have to be baptized.

19b) ... that your sins may be blotted out, so that ... (NKJV)

Now notice what this leads to.

19 continued) ... so that [the] times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

20) and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,

*21) whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.
(NKJV)*

So again, here we have the conversion process starting the New Covenant Church and the plan of what that is intended to do. What does this all bring about? The restoration of all things and, again, it ties back to everything we have read thus far. All of it, if you look at all the details, it all uniquely points back to John the Baptist just like the Bible tells us in numerous cases. Again, we don’t have to guess because Christ tells us it was John; Gabriel tells us it was John; Mark tells us it was John; and everybody agrees who it was.

Now let’s look at one other puzzling statement in the Bible in reference to all of this. Turn over to John 1 because John himself makes a puzzling statement that can be a head scratcher when we look at this whole subject.

John 1:19. *Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent [the] priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"*

20) He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

21) And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

22) *Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"*

23) *He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said."*

24) *Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.*

25) *And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"*

26) *John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.*

27) *It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."*

28) *These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (NKJV)*

Again we've seen numerous references in the Bible, two of them coming from Jesus Christ Himself saying, "If you want to know who fulfilled this, it was John." Everyone agrees on that, but then John is asked the question, "Are you Elijah?" And his answer is "Nope, I'm not." Why would he say that?

Let's put together what we do know and then I'm going to give you an opinion in speculating as to why he might have said this. It's important to realize when we do opinions, "My opinion and five bucks will get you a latte at Starbucks." So it's important to realize when we're talking about opinion where we should file that, but let's just look at what we do know for sure.

Notice here when he was asked and he says, "No, I'm not Elijah," they say, "Who are you?" What he quotes here is Isaiah 40:3 and this is why I put that jigsaw puzzle together for you as we were going through this. He quotes Isaiah 40:3 and says, "If you want to know who I am, I'm the guy Isaiah was talking about" and he quotes that scripture.

Now we know from everything else we put together, that is the logical equivalent of saying "I'm the guy in Malachi 4:5-6" because we saw that Jesus Christ Himself said that Malachi 3:1 and Malachi 4:5-6 refer to the same guy. That guy is John. Mark told us Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 refer to the same guy. That guy is John. Here we have John saying, "I'm the guy in Isaiah 40:3 but I'm not Elijah." So how do you understand that?

Also think of this in another context. We also know that an archangel appeared to his father and told him before John was even born, "You're going to have a son. His name is John. He's going to fulfill Malachi 4:6," because he quotes it.

Now, growing up in that household, that story got told around the dinner table more than once. He had to have heard that growing up. Why in the world would he say he's not Elijah?" Here's where we enter into opinion because the Bible doesn't tell us

specifically how to interpret this. And again this is my best guess and this and five bucks will get you a latte at Starbucks.

If you look back in a number of commentaries, one of the things I found in researching this is there was a common belief at the time that this occurred for a lot of the Jews that they weren't just expecting someone to come in "the spirit and power of Elijah," they were expecting Elijah to walk the earth again. Now consider from their perspective why they might come up with that.

There is one scripture in the Old Testament that refers to Elijah to come and that's Malachi 4:5-6. What does it say? It doesn't say "in the spirit and power of Elijah." We have that in Luke 1. It says, "I will send you Elijah the prophet."

Now these are unconverted people without God's holy spirit. How might they interpret that? You could understand them coming up with the idea of taking it very literally. So, again, to me the most logical explanation—and this is a personal opinion and that's all it is—is that John understood their question to mean "Are you literally Elijah?" because notice how they asked him. They didn't say, "Are you the guy in the spirit and power of Elijah?" They said, "Are you Elijah?" And if he understood their meaning to be asking "Are you literally Elijah, the guy we read about in the Books of Kings," the honest answer is "No, I'm not. I'm the guy in Isaiah 40:3. I'm the guy in the spirit and power coming to fulfill this, but I'm not literally Elijah." Now again, that's a personal opinion, but that's the most logical explanation I can come up with because it's hard for me personally to look at this and say, "The guy didn't understand who he was," when he's quoting scripture saying "That's me" and we know all these scriptures are equivalent by virtue of what the Bible tells us.

Now to wrap up one other concept, let's look at the idea I mentioned in the introduction. The concept of duality in prophecy is certainly a valid concept. There are numerous examples we could look to that in the Bible where prophecy has an earlier fulfillment and a latter fulfillment. I won't go through the time of all of that but you can see and I'm sure we're all very familiar that is a very valid Biblical concept.

What we also tend to see is when there is a latter fulfillment of a prophecy when it's dualistic like that, typically that latter fulfillment is a bigger, grander fulfillment.

Just to use an example, if you read through Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, he quotes from Joel 2 and the holy spirit coming. He says, "You're seeing this before your eyes," because a lot of the reaction there is "This must be drunk guys. We hear all this speaking in tongues" and such and we're trying to understand this. Peter is saying, "No, what you're seeing fulfilled here is what Joel was talking about in Joel 2. As you know, Joel says there "poured upon all flesh." That didn't happen at that particular time because it was just a select group and "all flesh" doesn't happen until much later. The point I'm getting at is that latter fulfillment is greater; it is grander.

Now looking at that idea, let's ask the question: Is it possible that this prophecy here in Malachi is dualistic? And again, realize we're getting into personal opinion here and again, that and five bucks will get you a latte at Starbucks." I'll just be making a logical argument here on personal opinion.

If we look at the understanding of what it means in Malachi 4:5-6 when it refers to John the Baptist and in understanding his role, realize this isn't just a guy who came before the Messiah preaching repentance and telling us the Messiah is going to come. Because, again, isn't that every major servant God used in the Bible, whether you're referring to the first or the second coming?

The whole issue of "turning the hearts" ties in very directly to a very unique role that John the Baptist played. In instituting baptism, which brought about receiving ... there is a process we have to go through to receive the holy spirit, which is what turns hearts. Now if we're going to have a dualistic fulfillment of this, wouldn't this latter fulfillment person need to parallel that in some way? Let me just ask this in a question: If that were the case, what would this latter person do that would parallel that? I can't come up with an answer for that as to what they would do to directly parallel that. What would they institute that would be equivalent in turning the hearts in that sense and parallel that and even upstage that? Personally, I can't come up with an answer for what that could possibly be. So, for that reason, I come to the conclusion that probably there is not a dualistic fulfillment of this.

Again, we know absolutely for sure, because the Bible tells us that John the Baptist fulfilled this. There is no debating that issue. We can debate the issue of "Is there a latter fulfillment?" Personally, I don't think there is. I could certainly be wrong.

With that in mind, let me just finish this sermon by turning back over to Matthew 11. I will just end with the words of Jesus Christ here.

Matthew 11:11. *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

12) And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

13) For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14) And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

15) He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (NKJV)