

lesson thirteen

JUNE 22–28

Turning Hearts in the **End Time**

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 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 smite the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5, 6, NKJV).



The three angels' messages ring throughout the world in the last days. From the book of Revelation, this last-day message is to turn hearts before the coming of Jesus Christ.

Mal. 4:5

Introduction*What Is a Turned Heart?*

The original family template that God designed was perfect. God created both man and woman in His own image and gave them distinct roles. To Adam, God granted spiritual responsibility and authority, while Eve was to be a helpmate, of equal value with Adam. Therefore, the family was a single unit with an exceptional role to give glory to God.

The family institution today needs direction, encouragement, and hope.

However, when sin happened, it disrupted God's perfect design for the family. Sin brought conflict and strife to the family institution, making it fragile, violent, and even shattered. Today's family traces its roots to the Garden of Eden, where sin distorted God's perfect design.

However, God has provided a means to restore the family to its original, perfect state. This can happen only through God's love, unveiled in Jesus Christ, who offers hope and grace to the troubled unit. The family institution today needs direction, encouragement, and hope. Wisdom is needed to pray for the children and guide them in God's Word. And husband and wife need constructive dialogue to remain united and happy.

God's desire is to help us take courageous and decisive steps to overcome the lie that there is no hope in marriage and the family unit. God's intention for us is to improve our families, to repair the broken bonds, and to foster healthy families after His original plan.

For that reason, God promises to send an "Elijah the prophet" to turn the hearts of people in troubled families just before the end time. In Ezekiel 36:26, the Bible speaks of a "new heart" and a "new spirit." Sin hardened the hearts of humans and made them unreceptive to God's precepts. After sin, the hearts became destitute of spiritual vigor. Humans began craving the desires of the world.

However, through the grace of God displayed in Christ Jesus, we are able to have new hearts and reclaim our original position with God. Through the living faith in our souls, we are able to look upon the crucified Savior, who offers complete salvation.

This week's lesson will help us discover God's promises, especially as they relate to turning hearts in the end time, as we prepare to meet Christ upon His second coming.

Logos *Turning Hearts*

1 Kings 17:13; 18:21;
Matt. 17:10;
Luke 1:17;
John 1:29–37; 3:27–30

The Prophecy of Turned Hearts (Matt. 17:10)

God ordained prophets to play a key role in informing people about His will. Prophets such as Elijah played a leading role in Israel. They were appointed to the prophetic office to teach the people about God's commandments and foretell the future.

Malachi 4:5, 6 mentions a forerunner, likened to Elijah, who turns the hearts of men and women "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." The disciples reference this prophecy in Matthew 17:10. In response, Jesus indicates that Elijah already came in the person of John the Baptist, who turned the hearts of many people before the coming of the Messiah.

Each time we shift our focus from the living God to some worldly, sensual gratification, we plunge into sin.

With a powerful message of repentance, John, as had Elijah, called people to Christ. However, many of the prophets' hearers opposed them and their messages. The messages of John and Elijah pointed people to Christ, who is the ultimate fulfillment of God's prophetic message. Genuine messengers of God perform a noble task of turning the hearts of people to Christ in preparation for the kingdom of God.

Family Reunion (1 Kings 17:13)

The story of Elijah and the widow at Zarephath highlights the fact that in many instances, to accomplish His purposes, God uses what man has neglected. In a drought-stricken land, He provides a means to feed Elijah, His prophet. For quite a while, Elijah survived on food brought to him by the ravens while drinking water from the brook Cherith. As the drought persisted, the brook dried up, but Elijah believed that God would provide. God directed him to a widow in Zarephath, a woman whom the prophet did not know.

In dire situations like that of Elijah, God surrounds His people with His love and protection. God had already spoken, but not to the rich men and women of Sidon; He had spoken to a poor widow to host His messenger. God goes before His messengers.

"It is God's way, and it is his glory, to make use of, and put honour upon, the weak and foolish things of the world."¹

The widow obeyed Elijah's words even though she did not believe in his God. Her obedience yielded unfathomable blessings, which included the miracles of multiplication and resurrection. As we look forward to the second coming of Christ, we should remember that one act of kindness accorded to God's mes-

senger could be the opportunity to turn our hearts to God and His promises.

Turning Hearts at the Altar (1 Kings 18:21)

The contest at Mount Carmel clearly illustrated the stark difference between light and darkness, evil and truth, God and Satan. In this situation, Elijah calls people's attention to the fact that life involves choices that people have to make on a daily basis. Moreover, all choices have consequences. Therefore, each time we make a choice, we must be ready to own the results of our decisions. Some choices can have life-time consequences, while others may seem insignificant.

On Mount Carmel, Elijah implored Israel to make the right choice. During that time, the Israelites had embraced the worship of Baal, shifting their focus from the promises of the everlasting God. Each time we shift our focus from the living God to some worldly, sensual gratification, we plunge into sin. The contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal teaches us that God is sovereign and He places His agents strategically to win against the devil.

The action taken by Elijah in this situation teaches us that God requires us to stand up for Him, to boldly confront evil and speak the truth. Above all, God is able to protect and deliver us from all troubles that work against His will.

Turning Hearts at the Jordan (John 1:29–37)

When John referred to Christ as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, NKJV), he was alluding to the purpose of the sacrificial lamb mentioned in the Old Testament (cf. Lev. 1:10; 3:8).

John refers to Christ as the Lamb because He bore the sins of the world upon Himself at Calvary (1 Pet. 2:24). Christ accomplished what the traditional offerings could not do.

Another important lesson of this Scripture is the significance of meeting Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments proclaim Christ and reveal great truths about Him. By discovering Jesus, the disciples shifted their focus to something new. They discarded their past sins and started a new life with Christ.

To enter a lasting relationship with Christ, we first need to trust Him as the sacrificial Lamb of God who is able to cleanse us of our sins and to put us right with God. This happens when we first recognize that we are sinners before God, in need of forgiveness, and ready to start a new life with Him. It is all about turning our hearts to Christ.

REACT

1. At what point in our lives should we acknowledge that we are sinners?
2. Why is Christ a better sacrifice for our sins than the offerings of calves and lambs?
3. After Christ's death on our behalf, what do we need to do as sinners to attain full acceptance before God?

1. “First Kings 17:8–16,” *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*, accessed July 13, 2018, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_kings/17-13.htm.

Testimony

The Noble Work of Turning Hearts

John 3:27–30

“Among the mountains of Gilead, east of the Jordan, there dwelt in the days of Ahab a man of faith and prayer whose fearless ministry was destined to check the rapid spread of apostasy in Israel. Far removed from any city of renown, and occupying no high station in life, Elijah the Tishbite nevertheless entered upon his mission confident in God’s purpose to prepare the way before him and to give him abundant success. . . .

“In order to fulfill his mission, he must have a sound physical constitution, and mental and spiritual strength.”

“As Elijah saw Israel going deeper and deeper into idolatry, his soul was distressed and his indignation aroused. God had done great things for His people. He had delivered them from bondage and given them ‘the lands of the heathen, . . . that they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws.’ Psalm 105:44, 45. But the beneficent designs of Jehovah were now well-nigh forgotten. Unbelief was fast separating the chosen nation from the Source of their strength. Viewing this apostasy from his mountain retreat, Elijah was overwhelmed with sorrow. In anguish of soul he besought God to arrest the once-favored people in their wicked course, to visit them with judgments, if need be, that they might be led to see in its true light their departure from Heaven. He longed to see them brought to repentance before they should go to such lengths in evil-doing as to provoke the Lord to destroy them utterly.”¹

John the Baptist had a similar experience: “John was to go forth as Jehovah’s messenger, to bring to men the light of God. He must give a new direction to their thoughts. He must impress them with the holiness of God’s requirements, and their need of His perfect righteousness. Such a messenger must be holy. He must be a temple for the indwelling Spirit of God. In order to fulfill his mission, he must have a sound physical constitution, and mental and spiritual strength. Therefore it would be necessary for him to control the appetites and passions. He must be able so to control all his powers that he could stand among men as unmoved by the surrounding circumstances as the rocks and mountains of the wilderness.

“In the time of John the Baptist, greed for riches, and the love of luxury and display had become widespread. Sensuous pleasures, feasting and drinking, were causing physical disease and degeneracy, benumbing the spiritual perceptions, and lessening the sensibility to sin. John was to stand as a reformer.”²

1. Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 119, 120.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 100.

1 Kings 17:17–24

Evidence *Turning Hearts in Hard Places*

The story of Elijah and the widow at Zarephath illustrates the turning of hearts in hard places. Geographically, Zarephath is a Phoenician country on the north coast, somewhere between Tyre and Sidon. This region is a hotbed of idolatry, with all respect and loyalty given to the rain god Baal.

Elijah had been staying with a widow of Zarephath on God's direction (1 Kings 17:9). Even though she had only enough ingredients to make one meal, the widow obeyed Elijah's word and made a meal for the man of God (verse 15). This led to the miracle of multiplication in which, contrary to all expectation, neither the flour nor the jar of oil ran out (verse 16). This was the first opportunity for the widow and her son to turn their hearts to God.

God, in His power, is able to intervene in the course of our lives in ways that we do not understand.

Suddenly, a bigger problem comes up—her son dies (verse 17). Here is a woman who has lost a husband in a land ravaged by famine and drought. With the death of her son, the predicaments reach their climax. However, even in the face of this terrible situation, God offers hope, grace, and comfort. The presence of Elijah in her house was an opportunity to turn her heart to Jesus. In the end, Elijah does the unthinkable and raises the little boy from the bed of death (verses 21–23).

Many times, we find ourselves in similar situations where worldly predicaments can physically separate us from our loved ones. Elijah raising the boy from death is an illustration that family reunion is possible with God, despite the previous circumstances. Therefore, instead of asking, “God, why have You done this?” we should remember that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).

God, in His power, is able to intervene in the course of our lives in ways that we do not understand. If we turn our hearts to God, He will intervene in the problems of our homes, lives, businesses, and families. God is the Creator of families, and He has the power to restore them even in the face of problems.

When troubles come, we may not understand why they happen in our lives. However, such situations could be an opportunity to turn our hearts and come closer to God.

REACT

1. Suffering is painful, but how can we use a painful moment to draw closer to God?

2. Must we wait for a hard time to befall us in order to believe in God? Why, or why not?

Mary Brenda, Kisii, Kenya

How-to Response From a Turned Heart

1 Kings 17:24

Even in the worst of circumstances, God never leaves us alone. He leads us, equips us, and provides for His children. Elijah did an extraordinary thing in bringing the widow's son back to life. By praying to God twice, he took upon himself the woes of the widow and brought them to the Lord in supplication and reverence (1 Kings 17:20, 21). The act of Elijah in this situation teaches us the power of prayer. In many instances, we think of prayer as the last thing to do when we are overwhelmed by situations. Many of us think of prayer as something secondary or peripheral. For Elijah, prayer came first, before anything else. Prayer was all he did to restore the boy to life.

“Not one instant’s unnecessary pang will He permit.”

In His infinite love for His children, God is ever determined to protect us. That is why He allows trials and temptations to come to us. As one writer puts it, He “puts His precious metal into His crucible. But He sits by it, and watches it. Love is His thermometer, and marks the degree of heat; not one instant’s unnecessary pang will He permit, and as soon as the dross is released so that He sees Himself reflected in the fire, the trial ceases.”¹

We worship a God who hears and answers our prayers. He heard the voice of Elijah and listened to the very tone of his voice. God answered Elijah’s prayer on behalf of the widow and her son. When our hearts turn to God, we remember the following:

God loves us (John 3:16). When we experience a saving relationship with Jesus, we realize that God loves us more than we love ourselves. He forgives our sins and adopts us into His household and family.

Christ is an expression of God’s love to us. God gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us and to take the penalty for our sins. Christ became our substitute and bore the wrath that our sins deserved. When we turn our hearts to Him, we undergo spiritual transformation and accept the message of salvation.

Prayer brings results. Affirmative prayer yields positive results. When we learn to call upon God in every situation, learn to trust His ways even when we cannot understand, we will lean upon His everlasting arms, knowing that God is in control of every situation in which we find ourselves.

REACT

Why does God sometimes work against our wishes? How can we shape our wishes to concur with God’s?

1. Arthur T. Pierson, *The Bible and Spiritual Life* (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1923), p. 377.

Matt. 3:2, 8

Opinion

Turning Your Heart Is About Repentance

John called the people of Israel to repent, “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). *Repent* is an action word applicable to both believers and nonbelievers. To get the point of John’s message, we may look at repentance as two-dimensional.

First, to repent means you have made the decision to change your direction or mind-set. For a believer, repentance may entail turning the heart to God from a situation of spiritual coldness and indifference. This is in line with Christ’s message to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. For a nonbeliever, repentance implies accepting Christ as the Savior of your life. Both instances involve turning your heart to Jesus by first recognizing that you are a sinner.

Turning your heart means that you have shifted your focus from one thing to another.

Turning your heart means that you have shifted your focus from one thing to another. In this case, you turn your heart from sin to the everlasting message of salvation brought by Christ. You must exercise faith in Christ to turn to Him and to repent of your sins.

On the other hand, repentance should come with a genuine sorrow. Genuine repentance enables us to recognize Christ as the Ruler of heaven and earth. Above all, it enables us to recognize the weight of our sins that Christ carried on the cross.

John called the people of his time to repentance, citing that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). We can join the kingdom of Christ only by faith. We become part of the kingdom when we accept the message of salvation and develop a special relationship with Christ.

John 14:15 describes the love relationship that takes place between Christ and us when we turn our hearts to Him in repentance: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” John called his hearers to repentance so that they could prepare the way for the Messiah. Repentance involved leaving their wicked ways and turning their hearts to Christ.

Today, we can prepare to meet Christ at His second coming by getting our lives right with God.

REACT

1. Since Christ took the penalty for our sins, why does it take us so long to accept the message of salvation?
2. What are the signs that we have turned our hearts to Christ?

Exploration

Time to Turn Hearts, Shall We?

Luke 1:7

CONCLUDE

During Elijah's time, there was rampant idolatry in Israel, which led to violence and division within families. Both Elijah and John came at the right time to turn people's hearts to God. The prophets aimed to divert the attention of the people away from the causes of their differences and bring the people to spiritual unity. As John and Elijah restored peace to families of their times, so we have the responsibility to point people to Jesus before His second coming.

CONSIDER

- Sharing with a trusted member of your Sabbath School class a problem that you face in your family. Invite this person to share with you biblical ways to solve the problem.
- Writing a list of problems that affect families today. For each problem, come up with a solution based on what we have learned this week. Memorize a verse from this week's lesson that reminds you of what is truly important.
- Meditating on areas in your life where you feel called to make sacrifices in order to turn the hearts of others to Christ. Ask God to empower you through the Holy Spirit to achieve this objective.
- Calling your village or neighborhood to repentance as John the Baptist did. Arm yourself with biblical reasons to convince people to leave their wicked ways and turn their hearts to Christ.
- Performing a play, with a group of friends, about the contest at Mount Carmel. Use the play to convey the message of 1 Kings 18:21.
- Planning a family fun day with your family in which you can spend time together. Use the opportunity to turn your hearts to Christ and to create memories.
- Volunteering to preach to people in unfortunate situations like hospitals, prisons, refugee camps, and disaster-stricken areas. Share the message that Christ is with them even in their struggles and they can feel the love when they turn their hearts to Him.

CONNECT

Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 4:6; Matthew 14:4, 5.

Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, chaps. 9–13; *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 10.

Peter Machoka, Nairobi, Kenya

“The Least of These”: Ministering to Those in Need

If you have not yet received a copy of CQ for third quarter 2019, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 God Created

Logos: Genesis 1–3

Memory Text: “He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy” (Prov. 14:31, NKJV).

Key Thought: Remarkably, our world continues to be something that God loves, even despite millennia of sin, violence, injustice, and outright rebellion. And even more remarkably, while God set in motion His plan for redeeming and re-creating the world, He has given us, as believers, roles to play in the fulfillment of His larger plans. Yes, we are the recipients of His grace; but, from the grace we have received, we have been given our work to do as collaborators with our Lord.

Lesson 2 Blueprint for a Better World

Logos: Exod. 3:7–21; 20:13, 15; Lev. 25:8–23; Deut. 14:22–29

Memory Text: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18, NKJV).

Key Thought: In His mercy, God has always had people with whom He has maintained a special relationship. In the stories of the Old Testament, we see God yearning to rebuild the broken relationship with human beings. But this was not just for the benefit of these few individuals and their families. When they were connected with God and blessed by Him, it was part of a larger plan to repair that relationship and share the blessing with others. With the creation of the people of Israel, God was now working with an entire nation. So, He set about giving them laws, regulations, festivals, and practices that would be a way to live so that those who were blessed by God would be able to bless others, as well. No doubt this principle still exists today.

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