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Straight-Legged People: Elijah's Message to Revelation's Remnant¹

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God is looking for straight-legged people. God is also looking for crooked-legged people who are willing to be transformed into straight-legged people. Listen to the message of Malachi 4:

“Surely **the day** is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. ‘Not a root or a branch will be left to **them**. But for **you** who **revere** my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with **healing** in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be **ashes** under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘**Remember the law** of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the prophet **Elijah** before that great and dreadful **day of the LORD** comes. He will **turn the hearts** of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”²

Ellen White writes “Elijah was a *type* of the *saints* who will be living on the earth at the time of the second advent of Christ . . .”³

We are here to study eschatology, “The Day of the Lord,” and there are interesting parallels between the Day of the Lord and the ministry of Elijah which will help us understand what God is asking of us now and in the days to come.

¹ The following was the Sabbath sermon given at the Boston Temple to the Adventist Theological Society and guests at the ATS fall conference, 1999.

² All Scripture citations are from the New International Version, and all emphasis is added.

³ *Prophets and Kings*, 227, emphasis added.

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Elijah's Last Day Message

With the first mention of Elijah in the Bible, we are in the midst of the action, almost as if *his life didn't matter until it mattered for God*, until he was willing to be God's messenger. The story begins, "Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, *there will be neither dew nor rain* in the next few years *except at my word*'" (1 Kgs 17:1).

Notice the echoes of this verse in Rev. 11:6, which is about the two witnesses: "*These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain* during the time they are prophesying." In both cases God has given to His prophets the power to stop the rain, according to His will. The echoes suggest that the story of Elijah and the Last Days have something in common.

Jesus told worshipers at the synagogue in Nazareth that for "*three and a half years*" there was no rain in the days of Elijah (Luke 4:25).

Those 3 1/2 years of famine remind us of Revelation 11 and 12. Rev 11:2-3 reads: "But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for *42 months*. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy **for 1,260 days**, clothed in sackcloth." Rev. 12:6 also mentions 1,260 days, while v. 14 calls the same time period *3 1/2 times*, indicating 3 1/2 prophetic years. 3 1/2 times, 42 months, 1,260 days: they are all equivalent to the 3 1/2 years of famine in the days of Elijah.

God says to Elijah:

"hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. (1 Kgs 17:3-6)

Compare this with Rev. 12:6: "The woman fled into the *desert to a place prepared for her by God*, where she might *be taken care of* for 1,260 days."

Rev. 12:14 "The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the *place prepared for her in the desert*, where she would *be taken care of* for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach."

God provides Elijah's food and water during the famine in his day. Likewise, during the 1,260 days, the woman, representing the church, the people of God, is "*taken care of*." Her sustenance and salvation come *from God*, not from her own hand.

Note too where this sustenance is found. God tells Elijah to go to a specific brook in a thirsty land. The text says, "*he did what the LORD had told him*." In Malachi 4, a few sentences before He promises that He will send Elijah, God commands His people to "*Remember the law*," and again "His people" must *do what the LORD tells them*. Like Elijah, God's church is also *sent to a specific*

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place, to “the place prepared for her in the desert,” to “a place prepared for her by God.” It is *here* she receives sustenance. What if she says, though, “I want to do it my way. God will honor His servant wherever she might be, whatever she might believe, however she might obey”? If God says, “I will provide food for you in a rocky cave in the Piedmont of Italy,” and she says, “I will eat in a banquet hall in Rome,” eat she may, but will the food be provided by God? Will she be the pure woman of Rev. 12, or the fallen woman of Rev. 17?

A Famine for God’s Word

In Amos 8:11 we find these words: “The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a *famine of hearing the words of the LORD.*”

In Elijah’s day there was “a famine of hearing the words of the LORD” because the prophet was in hiding from a wicked king and a wicked people. There was a time when this “famine of hearing the words of the LORD” was due to the words being kept from the people, kept in a foreign language, and to the people not knowing how to read. I remember Gerhard Hasel telling about how during World War II his family nearly starved, despite having a cupboard full of canned ham, because they refused to eat what was unclean. Today as well there is “a famine of hearing the words of the LORD,” even though the Bread of Life is in the cupboard, on the bookshelf, on the coffee table. It goes untouched, unread, uneaten, undigested, as if it too were unclean. There is “a famine of hearing the Words of the LORD” in our churches, as well, and as a result, many who come seeking the nourishment of the Word of Life leave unfilled. Often in my home church the scripture reading is only one or two verses. A time of tribulation is coming when yet again, even among us, there will be “a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.” Unless, that is, we can say, with the psalmist, “Thy word have I hid *in mine heart*, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11).

When it suits God’s purposes, Elijah’s water runs short, and God sends him into the jaws of the enemy, into Sidon, homeland of Jezebel, bastion of Baal worship. How this must have puzzled and astonished Elijah. God sends Elijah to the village of Zarephath, to a starving widow, a woman who has not accepted the God of Israel as her God (1 Kgs 17:12). Jesus says, “I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon” (Luke 4:25–26).

In the last day tribulation God may rescue us by means of those who seem to have no part with us, and He may use us to rescue those to whom He sends us. Because of our faithfulness, many who do not know God may come to love Him. God may hide us not only in the wilderness, but in the enemy’s own terri-

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tory. In the wilderness we ourselves may draw close to God, but in the cities of the enemy there are others whom we might help to find their Savior.

“If the LORD is God, Follow Him!”

Jon Paulien, writing in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, tells us that the most likely meaning of the word “Armageddon” is “mountain of Megiddo,” referring to the Carmel Range in Israel, which begins a few hundred yards from the city of Megiddo.

Rev. 16:16 echoes the Elijah story when it says, “Then they *gathered the kings together to the place* that in Hebrew is called *Armageddon*.” Elijah said, to Obadiah, “Now *summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel*” (1 Kgs 18:19). He also called for “the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah” (v. 19).

It was a showdown on Mount Carmel. On one side Yahweh, creator of heaven and earth and personal protector of His faithful ones; on the other side, Baal, the master, the god of the storm and father of fertility. On one side all who were willing to follow Yahweh, whatever the cost. On the other side those seeking a pleasant religion, a popular religion, a religion that tolerates and even condones sin, a religion of ecstatic singing and shouting and dancing, all those who say, as God accuses them of saying, in Mal. 2:17, ““All who do *evil* are *good* in the eyes of the LORD, and he is *pleased* with them.”” This is the primary heresy of apostate Christianity.

The time was at hand. It was time to choose. Elijah shouted out the summons to salvation: “How long will you waver between two opinions? It the LORD is God, follow *him*; but it *Baal* is God, follow *him*.” And how did the people of God answer? The Bible says, “But the people said *nothing*” (1 Kgs 18:21).

And that is where we are today. Far too often, for far too long, we have “said nothing.” God says “Decide now.” We say nothing. God says, in 2 Tim 2:19, ““Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must *turn away* from wickedness.”” We say nothing. God says, in Rev 18:4, “*Come out* of her my people, lest *you* share in *her* sins.” We say nothing. Rev 13:13 says of the beast from the sea whose deadly wound is healed, “And he performed great and miraculous signs, *even causing fire to come down from heaven* to earth in full view of men.” In Elijah’s day only God sent fire from heaven, but in the days to come the priest of Ba’al will call fire from heaven in yet another “showdown on Mount Carmel.” What will we say? Will we again say nothing?

But Elijah had decided. Elijah stood for God. And because Elijah stood absolutely straight and true for God, risking death or disappointment or utter disgrace if God let him down, God was able to do great things. Elijah’s *faithfulness* freed God to work *miracles*.

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Turning Their Hearts

You know the story, but I want you to notice Elijah's prayer in 1 Kgs 18:36–38: “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that *you* are God in Israel and that I am your *servant* and have done all these things at *your command*. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will *know* that *you*, O LORD, are God, and *that you are turning their hearts back again*.”

“*Turning their hearts back again*.” What does God say about the *return* of Elijah in Malachi 4:6? “He will *turn the hearts* of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.” The turning of hearts connects Elijah with the Elijah message of Malachi, just as the word “Armageddon” connects the showdown on Mount Carmel with eschatology and the Last Days.

And what of those whose hearts are turned? God says, in Mal. 3:17, “I will *spare them*, just as in compassion a man *spar*es his son who *serv*es him.” There is a parallel process here. If our hearts are not turned to our fathers and our children in compassion and in seeking their salvation, our hearts are not truly turned to God. If our hearts are not truly turned to God by His Holy Spirit, our hearts cannot be truly and effectively turned to our fathers and our children. And bear in mind that “fathers” and “children” here refers to all God's chosen ones who are older or younger than we are. That means just about everyone.

Elijah Ran Away!

Who, having witnessed such a wonderful miracle, having seen the LORD's deliverance, could ever doubt God again? Yet Elijah *doubted*. 1 Kgs 19:3 tells us that when Jezebel threatened Elijah with death, “Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.” He despaired. He pleaded with God to take his life. Elijah was *unfaithful*! After receiving an overwhelmingly powerful sign that God was who Elijah thought He was, Elijah was *unfaithful*!

Excuse me if I say that I'm so *glad* that Elijah was unfaithful. Because I have *also* received sure proof of God's love and mercy, yet I too have been unfaithful at times. I too have run away at times when I should have stood firm and seen the deliverance of the LORD (Exod 14:13). By running away Elijah may have kept God from delivering him from Jezebel in a powerful way. Perhaps I too, by running away, have kept God from a demonstration of deliverance that would have brought many to serve Him.

When Elijah finally reaches the Mountain of God, Mount Horeb, he actually *whines* to God. 1 Kgs 19:10 says, “He replied, ‘I *have* been *very* zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the *only one left*, and now they are trying to kill me too.’”

Are you ever tempted to think you are the only one left? Are you ever tempted to think Seventh-day Adventists are the only ones left? Are you ever

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tempted to think members of the Adventist Theological Society are the only ones left who are still faithful? Think again!

Listen to God's answer to Elijah, in v. 18: "Yet I reserve *seven thousand* in *Israel*—*all* whose knees have *not bowed down to Baal* and all whose mouths have *not* kissed him."

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Elijah says "One!" God says "Seven thousand!" Seven, the number of holiness, times a thousand, the number of multitudes. A multitude of holy people who have not bowed the knee to Baal!

Straight-legged people! People whose knees do not bend to false gods. God is looking for straight-legged people, "people who cannot be bought or sold, people who are as true to duty as the needle is to the pole, people who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."⁴

God is looking for straight-legged people like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, people who will say, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. *But even if he does not*, we want you to know, O king, that *we will not* serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan 3:17–18). God is looking for people who say, "We are going to be so faithful to your Word, Lord, that we will free you and force you to prove Yourself faithful to us, that all the world might know that you are indeed God."

God is looking for straight-legged people like Job, who says, "Though he *slay me*, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15), who says, "I *know* that my Redeemer *lives*, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet *in my flesh I will see God*; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart *yearns* within me!" (Job 19:25–27).

God is looking for straight-legged people who will not worship false gods, who will not "bow down themselves to them nor serve them" (Exod 20:5), whether those false gods be Baal or Molech, Krishna or the Buddha, new cars, new furniture, new wives, new jobs, new computers, Monday Night Football, the World Series, or the Oprah Winfrey Show.

God is looking for straight-legged people who will "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4), who will open the Word of God, and say, with the Israelites in Exod 24:3, "Everything the LORD has said, *we will do*."

The LORD says, in Malachi 3:5, "So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice." Straight-legged people say, "We will obey."

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Education*, 57.

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Paul writes, in Galatians 5:19–21, “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that *those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*” There may be some of us here right now who at the least are guilty of, say, jealousy, or ambition, or dissension, or factions, or envy. But straight-legged people, those who want to inherit the kingdom, will give up these sins, even if it means praying with and for some theological “enemy” who is not “sound” on this or that doctrine.

Jesus says to John, in Rev. 22:15, that outside the gates of the city are “those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” Straight-legged people say, “By God’s grace we will *not* be among *that* number.”

It is straight-legged people who “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17).

Rev. 14:12 says of the time of trouble that “This calls for *patient endurance* on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.” This calls for straight-legged people, for those who will not bow the knee to Baal. Rev. 12:11 says, describing straight-legged people, “they did *not* love their lives so much as to *shrink from death.*”

God is looking for straight-legged people like Stephen, who died rather than betray his Lord. Straight-legged people like Deborah, who stand firm, then proclaim the Lord’s deliverance. Straight-legged people like the virgin Mary, who saw her plans and reputation destroyed before her eyes, yet said, “I am the Lord’s servant” (Luke 1:38).

The Great Physician Straightens Legs

Have you bowed the knee to Baal? Of course you have. Perhaps you have bowed the knee to Baal through one of the sins mentioned above. Perhaps you have bowed the knee to Baal by following interpretations of the Bible which steal God’s glory from Him. Perhaps you have bowed the knee to Baal by trying to hold “dual citizenship,” by trying to be a citizen of both this world and the kingdom of God. Perhaps you have bowed the knee to Baal by devoting yourself to earning your daily bread rather than to the Bread of Life. Perhaps you have bowed the knee to Baal by practicing theology rather than by seeking God with all your heart and devoting your life to spreading the Gospel to your students and to the world.

The good news is that by the blood of Christ God forgives, wipes away, and restores.⁵ If you have bowed the knee to Baal, then repent, turn away from

⁵ “God saves man through the blood of Christ alone, and man’s belief in, and allegiance to, Christ is salvation. It is no marvel to angels that the infinite sacrifice made by the Son of God was ample enough to bring salvation to a fallen race, but that this atoning sacrifice should have been made is a wonder to the universe. . . . The image of Christ will be perfected in every soul who

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the world and turn back to God, and “He will abundantly pardon” and will straighten out your crooked, crippled legs.

Of course, after the Great Physician does the wonderful spiritual surgery that straightens your legs, He may want you to go through a bit of physical therapy so your now-straight legs will grow strong, so you can stand ever firmer against the evils that surround us.

Physical Therapy for Straightened Legs

How can you do that? What exercises can you do that will help you be the straight-legged person you want to be, the straight-legged person God wants you to be?

If you want to be a straight-legged person, ask God to create in you a longing to commune with Him in prayer, to share with Him throughout the day and night whatever you are thinking, and to think only what you aren't ashamed to share with Him.

If you want to be a straight-legged person, turn off the television and open your Bible. Make a covenant with God that every day you will spend at least one hour reading His love-letters to you. Make a covenant with God that for every hour you spend watching or reading something secular, you will spend two hours in the Word.

If you want to be a straight-legged person, determine that you will not only be a faithful church member, but you will learn as much about the Bible as possible, so you will be always ready to give a reason for your hope and your obedience.

If you want to be a straight-legged person, go to the person you have hurt or the person who has hurt you and be reconciled.

If you want to be a straight-legged person, break off that relationship you know displeases the Lord, whether it be a relationship with a man or a woman in the flesh or in your mind or one you meet on the internet in a chat room, whether it be a relationship with your car or your computer, whether it be a relationship with gnostic ideas or the Jesus Seminar.

If you want to be a straight-legged person, revolt against the pride and elitism that turn theologians into Pharisees, put your mission ahead of your career, and be a Bible scholar who writes and says what the saint in the pew and the student in the classroom need to hear and can understand.

If you want to be a straight-legged person, pray this prayer every morning: “Lord, if there is anyone nearby who needs to hear from You, send that person to me and give me the words to say.” Ask God to give you the courage and wisdom to share the Good News with those around you.

accepts the gift of his grace, and those who are perfected through his grace, will stand before God equal in elevation, in power and purity, to the angels, and will be honored with them before the eternal throne.” Ellen G. White, “What Was Secured by the Death of Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, 30 December 1889.

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Who Can Stand?

Malachi 3:2 asks, "But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?" *We can*, by God's grace!

Elijah ran away, but God straightened his legs again, then sent a fiery chariot to carry him to heaven. In Rev 11:12, the two witnesses are resurrected and called up to heaven in a cloud. Soon our Savior will be coming in the clouds to take us to heaven, too, and many of you listening to these words, I believe, will if you are willing be translated and glorified like Elijah, without tasting death.

I stand before you by God's grace to say that I want to be, now and forever, whatever the cost, a straight-legged man, completely faithful, completely dedicated to doing God's will.

If it is your desire to commit yourselves completely and irrevocably to being straight-legged people who refuse to do the will of Baal, completely surrendered to our Lord Jesus Christ, completely devoted to doing His will, and *only* His will, I invite you to stand with me now as we pray.

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