

# **Adventist Education Sabbath**

**August 21st , 2021**

## **Elijah is Back: The Role of Christian education today<sup>1</sup>**

***Key Text: Malachi 4:5-6***

### **I. Introduction**

As we observe Christian Education Sabbath today, we will focus on Elijah's message in Malachi 4:4-6 in so far as it is connected with Christian education as an agent for nurturing relationship with God and fellow human beings, and for healing broken relationships in the society.

### **II. Background**

God sent Malachi to Judah to present a charge against the returned exiles from the Babylonian captivity. Inspired by the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the returnees rebuilt the temple. With high hopes they expected years of peace and rapid socioeconomic prosperity to come. However, as time went by, life became extremely hard. Prolonged draughts hit their land resulting in crop failure, famine, pestilence, and economic privation on one hand; on another hand, there were repeated attacks by surrounding enemies, e.g. Samaritans. Frustrated, most of them most of them began to believe that God's promises were not true (Mal 3.10ff). Therefore, most of them became indifferent, doubted God's love, and felt it useless to obey God's commands. After all, they reasoned, the wicked prosper and are prospering. They decided to just appear spiritual but while harbouring selfish interests of all kinds.

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Although the experiences of the returned exiles are remote from our age, they are similar to our own in many ways.

Like the exiles, we too are human beings full of imperfections like those around us. We easily become discouraged when we try and try again, and still seem to fail. We may easily get discouraged and give up when God's promises appear not to be fulfilled and the harsh realities such as poverty, pain, suffering and death come.

Currently schools, some industries and business houses are shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic in many Unions in the SID territory. Such serious trials and temptations attempt us to doubt if God exists and, if He does, whether He really cares. However, we must not give up. We have not arrived to the heavenly Canaan yet; what we shall be is still in future but we soon shall be done with ALL these troubles and trials.

Otto Lilienthal, a German mechanical engineer, failed many times to design an aircraft wing. He completed 2000 flights between 1890 to the time he had a fatal glider crash in August 1896. Each failure brought him closer to his destination - the correct way to design a wing. His perseverance led to a breakthrough and laid a foundation for other engineers to build on.

Likewise, when we have tried harder but failed, when promises seem to delay and hard times befall us, let us remember that God is and will always be with us. He wants us to continue growing towards our real destination—His kingdom of glory where all promises will be fulfilled.

### III. Malachi's Message

Malachi charged his people, the returnees, with six counts:

1. They dishonored God through their worthless offerings and religious appearances (1:2-5);
2. Priests tolerated evils and violated the Lord's covenant (2:10-16);
3. Israelite men failed to respect the covenant with God by marrying idolaters and divorcing their lawful wives (2:10-16);
4. They doubted the justice of God;
5. They withheld tithes (3:7-12);
6. They violated God's law and risked facing dire consequences (3:13-4:5b).

Our message comes from the last charge in which Malachi charges the returned exiles with disobedience to God's Law. Malachi, therefore, makes a prediction about Elijah who would come to prepare the world before the Messiah comes.

This leads us to question who Elijah is, and what his mission is. To answer, this is not a literal return of Elijah the prophet as some Jews thought. Rather, it is a figure of someone who would preach the message in the same "spirit and power" as Elijah did. John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy prior to the first Advent of the Messiah; his prophetic ministry resembled that of the prophet Elijah (Luke 1:13-17; cf. I Kings 17-18). John the Baptist fearlessly denounced the sins of his people, proclaimed the coming of the Messiah and urged for repentance and baptism as symbol of cleansing from their sins [Desire of Ages, p. 104]. The passage, on the other hand, hints on the return of Elijah before the Second Advent of Jesus to restore all things. Preachers of the three angels' message fit here (*SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 4, p. 1134*)

## **IV. Lessons**

In examining Malachi's message, several lessons that speak to the Adventist church in general and also to Christian Education in particular stands out as the end time Elijah of today.

### **A. The message is for God's rebellious people in need of restoration**

This is implied in the Hebrew verb translated "remember" is written in the imperative mood (v.4a). The word expresses a command demanding immediate action to obey God's Law, the Law that was given to Moses in Horeb (*Mount Sinai*). Disobedience of the people had severed relationships between fathers and their children and between God and the nation. The mention of Moses' Law at the close of the Old Testament not only highlights its continuity in Malachi's time but also stresses that obedience to God's law would play a significant role in preparing them for the day of the Lord (SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 4, p. 1134).

Today as then, some of God's people are engaged in the same sins that separated Malachi's people from God and from one another. In our homes, churches and schools, most of us dishonor God by giving Him worthless offerings and maintaining religious appearances. Corporately our pastors, teachers, administrators, elders, and church members tolerate evils and violate the Lord's covenant (Mal 2:10-16). In local churches, Unions, Fields/Conferences, our schools, medical facilities, and other Adventist institutions, some spouses are guilty of infidelity and some have divorced their lawful spouses. Some have joined false denominations for various reasons (Mal 2:10-16).

Because of such sinful practices and many more, we suffer broken relationships, droughts, crop failure, famine, pestilences such as COVID-19 and HIV and AIDS,

cyclones, and poverty. We work hard but remain poor; we eat but never get satisfied; we pray but never receive what we pray for. Why? Because we have neglected the Law of God. The solution is to *remember the Law of Moses*, seek God's forgiveness and healing of our hearts "lest He comes and strikes the earth with a curse", says the Lord (Mal 2. v. 6c).

### **B. The Lord's Day will condemn the wicked and vindicate the just**

This is affirmed by the following contrasting parallels: "... all the proud . . . who do wickedly will be as stubble" (v.1b) but ". . . you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing" (v.2). Of the righteous who "remember the Law of Moses," God says, "They shall be mine. . . On the day that I make them My jewels. . ." (3:17), but the wicked "shall be ashes under the soles of the righteous" (4:3).

Malachi could not be more emphatic about how the Day of the Lord will distinguish between the wicked and the just. The Day will not only condemn the wicked and vindicate the just; it will also bring *eternal separation*. The wicked will be forever absolutely destroyed, "neither root nor branch" of them will remain (v.1d). This message stresses how much God hates evil. It is also a motivation to you, your children, and I "to turn" our hearts to God and "prepare" for His Second Coming.

### **C. God has a mission and a message for Christian Education in these days**

The Hebrew verb translated "will send" (v.5a) indicates the mission that is given to Adventist educational institutions, while the verb "to turn" (v.6a) identifies the message they should teach and the preposition "before" (v.5b) indicates the time frame. Simply put, the text says God has a mission for Adventist education *to turn*

the hearts of the people, especially our young people, to God *before* the great Day of the Lord.

This day being Christian Education Sabbath, what are the implications of Elijah's message to Adventist education? There are several:

- 1. The message affirms the role of Adventist education as redemptive and transformative.***

The verb “to turn” hearts (v. 6a) indicates the redemptive and transformative role of Adventist education. From its inception, the underlying objective of Adventist education has been to “to restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created. . .” (*Education*. 15, 16). Adventist education achieves this objective through a Bible-centered curriculum and belief in a Christian philosophy that points learners to God as creator of the universe; and God as creator of human beings, male and female, in His own image (Gen 1:26-27). Inspired by science and philosophy, non-Adventist schools have embraced a philosophy of education that places human beings at the center of the learning experience rather than God, a philosophy that promotes values that are not consistent with the Bible. Thus, their curriculum is neither redemptive nor transformational.

The transforming role of Adventist education makes a huge difference in the behaviour and character learners and students by developing, promoting and nurturing respect for God and fellow human beings, thereby restoring God's image in them and broken relationships between God and humankind. The redemptive and transformative role of Adventist education was attested in history for example, by one Chief Kamutumwa of Sitoti Village in Barotseland Field, now West Zambia Field, who had heard how some delinquent young people attending an Adventist school elsewhere in the same Field had changed. They no longer drunk beer, beat

up one another, lazy and idle, or disrespect their parents and elders. Therefore, the Chief preferred Adventist missionaries to non-Adventist ones to build a school in his area, namely Sitoti Mission School in 1931 [Pastor Gladstone, “Letter From Pastor Gladstone Ishee Nyuwe” *The Church Officers' Gazette*, October 1930, no. 10, 12]. This story and many similar stories in the various Unions in the SID not only affirm the redemptive role of Adventist education but also inspires confidence in us that Adventist education came by the will of God .

***2. The message implores Adventist families and parents to support Christian education by sending their children to Adventist education institutions***

Adventist education is “a messenger” called by God. In 1872, Ellen White in a vision was shown the “proper principles of education.” Thus, Adventist education came and exists for the purpose of passing Bible truths that prepare children and adults for the Day of the Lord by facilitating the acquisition of worthwhile beliefs, theories, knowledge, skills, and competences that enable them to serve God and fellow human beings faithfully, to live useful lives in society, and to protect them against the corrupting influences that are found in non-Adventist schools [R.W. Shwartz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, p. 123-124).

It is unfortunate, however, that there are many Adventist parents today who, for various reasons, prefer sending their children to non-Adventist schools to sending them to Adventist schools. Consequently, many children and youths from Adventist homes miss out on the Christian values that are necessary to prepare them to live for the Day of the Lord.

Today is the day on which such parents need to prayerfully and honestly reflect on this critical matter. They need to realize and admit that most of the children and the youths who go to non-Adventist schools are exposed to and influenced, if not pressurised, to practise the lifestyles that violate the Law of God. Parents are eloquently warned, “Let not our children, in the very process of obtaining an education, receive ideas that will prove to be seeds of sin” (*Adventist Home*, p. 413). Such parents and individual have to know that in spite of whatever perceptions some have against Adventist education, Adventist schools have been and remain safer places for children and youth from Adventist or non-Adventist homes. Hence, sending children to Adventist schools is the right thing to do.

***3. The message challenges Adventist educators and administrators to see themselves as God’s ministers performing pastoral functions on children and youths in the schools***

The New Testament defines teaching as a divine calling. It does not make any distinction between teaching and pastoral ministry (Rom12:6-8; I Cor12:28; Eph 4:11). This means that teachers, administrators and staff have a double function as *teachers of the truth* and *shepherds of the learners*. To be successful in this calling as today’s Elijahs, Adventist teachers are encouraged to model their lifestyle, their teaching style and methods after Jesus the Greatest teacher of all times. Jesus knew *what* to teach, *how* to teach, *when* to teach and *how* to live what he taught (Kenneth O. Gangel & Howard G. Hendricks, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook*). Christian educators are agents of change to delinquent youths in our schools and communities. They bring hope in hearts where there is despair, healing where there is brokenness and hurt, and preparedness for the Lord’s Day where there is reluctance. “The work of education and the work of redemption are one” (*Education*, p. 12).

## **V. Conclusion**

Elijah's message speaks reconciliation with God and with one another; it speaks forgiveness to the repenting sinner and invites them to obey the Law of God before He comes to judge the world. This is the role that Adventist education fulfills in the Church and society today.

Is it your desire to give your children a chance to learn to serve God and fellow human beings?

Would you like your children to be ready for the Day of the Lord and be together with you in God's kingdom?

Would you let God use you as His Elijah to promoting and supporting Adventist education to enable it turn the hearts of children and the youth to Him?

If these are your desire, can you raise your right hand wherever you are as I pray for you, please.

Amen

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***Source :SID Education Department***