

WHY MUST ELIJAH FIRST COME?

by Don E. Haney

Why do you suppose God would end the Old Testament with a warning of judgment by Fire and an admonition to remember God's Statutes and Judgments; and why tie that all in with the Elijah work – lest God come and smite the earth with utter destruction? Remember, this prophecy is of Christ's 2nd coming, i.e., a prophecy for the **New Testament era, in today's time!** And WHY must Elijah first come? Let's see:

Mal 4:1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.

3 You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this," says the LORD of hosts.

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." (NKJ)

In this last chapter in the Old Testament, God's prophet was inspired to write about a future New Testament JUDGMENT, HOPE, LAW, FAMILY, AND ELIJAH! These things are herein all listed together because they ARE ALL TIED TOGETHER!

- JUDGMENT because WHEN THE LAW OF GOD IS NOT TAUGHT TO OUR CHILDREN AND PRACTICED, THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIETY BREAKS DOWN (THE FAMILY), and the result is utter sin and utter destruction.
- HOPE because for those who do fear God and remember His law, Christ will come with healing and blessings.
- LAW – not just any law, but the least remembered, least kept and least esteemed (BY MEN) of God's laws – His Statutes and Judgments! (Notice verse 4; "*with the*" is in italics, showing these words were added by the translators and was not in the original inspired text. More on this later.) Only Statutes and Judgments are actually mentioned here not the Decalogue.
- FAMILY, because when we teach our children God's laws and STATUTES, and the truth about a time of judgment, it helps turn the hearts of the children to the fathers and the fathers to the children – but EVEN MORE, it helps turn our children's hearts to God – and God responds in kind!
- ELIJAH, because THAT IS WHAT ELIJAH HISTORICALLY DID – he brought repentance and turned the peoples hearts back to God.

Malachi 4 is a beautiful description of one of the main benefits of God's Statutes – turning our hearts to God and binding families closer to each other – through teaching our children God's loving Statutes and merciful Judgments!

God's Decalogue was part of the foundation of His law. The great 10 were and are a window into the character of God's mind. But the Statutes are MUCH MORE than merely the "fleshing in of the details of the Ten Commandments." They also include many additional helpful loving commands of God that teach us how to show love and respect toward our neighbor, and toward God.

They regulate human conduct between man and man, AND they aid in bringing man toward God by teaching him Godly traits and precepts. God's laws always point to and lead us to Christ (Gal.3:24), as well as show us what sin and its destructive result is (Rm.7:7). As Paul put it, God's laws are a law of Love (Romans 13:8-10).

Just like in order to teach the full extent and spirit of God's 10 commandments, Christ expounded them showing their deeper spiritual intent, so He also did with His Father's Statutes, which must be understood in spirit as well (Matt.5). While the 10 commandments can be memorized and taught quite easily – the Statutes of God require much more family teaching and study time. That is, the father and mother must INVEST MORE TIME to teach their children God's Statutes. This process not only brings families together (hearts of fathers to children and hearts of children to fathers), but it is part of TURNING OUR CHILDREN'S HEARTS TO THE FATHER MOST-HIGH!

When we don't teach the laws of God to our children, the fabric of the family – which is the fabric of society – breaks down. Children become lawless, disrespectful to their parents and to authority and worldly. But MUCH WORSE than that – when we don't teach God's laws to our children – THEIR HEARTS HARDEN AND TURN AWAY FROM GOD. They disobey, DISREGARD and DISRESPECT Him – and in His correction. Thus God removes His presence and blessings from them so they and all can see the result of their own way of life, and they are destroyed! Sin is not winked at.

Is this my idea – or is this passage in Malachi a summery of the part God's Laws play on our RELATIONSHIP with our God as our Father, and of His judgment for those who don't turn back to Him?

To begin with, let's look at the word "fathers" here in Malachi. The word "father(s) is 'ab- (like abba). Theyer's says 'ab means 1) "the father of an individual" or 2) "used of God as Father of His people".

The translators used the plural term father(s) here, but the word in the Hebrew is primarily singular in it's original use here. While it certainly includes the fathers (plural) of the children of Israel and the world – it applies even the more to our children's hearts NEEDING to be turned TO God! In turn, God's Heart would have compassion on His children, thus "turning" to them. The first step in this process, God has already done by sending His Son to save us! God through Christ made the way of reconciliation open. Now we too must seek God with our HEARTS. Is that what God is saying when He says "you will find me when you search for me with all your **HEART**" (Jer.29:13)?

When children don't have God's laws and Statutes taught to them or the fact that God will JUDGE them for their actions, the boundaries between right and wrong kind of disappear, and the family unit, both spiritually and physically, becomes lawless and BREAKS DOWN!

Let's see now what God was reminding us of in Malachi 4, when God's Precepts were first widely instructed to God's people:

Deut 4:8 "And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?

9 "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. **And teach them to your children and your grandchildren,** (emphasis mine throughout article)

10 "especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' (NKJ)

God's instructions were to TEACH the Statutes and righteous Judgments to our children and grandchildren. Then notice (verse 10) wherein God himself gave the 10 commandments to the people, with His own voice. Again:

Deut 4:12 "And the LORD spoke to **you** out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice.

13 "**So He declared to you** His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, **the Ten Commandments**; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

14 "And **the LORD commanded ME at that time to teach you statutes and judgments**, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess. (NKJ)

God Himself gave the 10 commandments to His people. But He gave us the Statutes through Moses! It is the STATUTES that Malachi 4 is referring to! "*With the*" was added by the translators. It is these STATUTES, with the truth about Judgment for the incorrigible that we are told to remember – IN ORDER TO TURN OUR HEARTS BACK TO GOD OUR FATHER! In the process of teaching God's Statutes to our children – our hearts will both be bound to one another as a strong family unit, and collectively turned to God as well! Time and time again, God gives us the command to TEACH STATUTES AND THE DECALOGUE TO OUR CHILDREN (Duet.6:1-9)! God tells us to "teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." "Bind them as a sign," God says. "Write them on your door posts" etc... In other words the intent is to have them ALWAYS ON YOUR MIND ALWAYS ON YOUR HEART!

Christ came to magnify the law, not to do away with it! He said: "Do not think I have come to destroy the law or the prophets." (Malachi was a prophet). "I have not come to destroy but to fulfill." Then Christ went on to expound the spiritual intent of the law – going beyond the mere letter. Let's see what Jesus Himself taught.

Matt 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

18 "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

19 "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (NKJ)

QUESTION: Which of the commandments is "the least"? Certainly not any part of the Ten Commandments that God Himself directly spoke to His people (Ex.20)! The term "least of these commandments" must then be referring to one of the lesser Statutes! Which one? I am not a judge of the law, and so cannot say. But God here, in essence, is pronouncing a blessing on those who both keep and teach others even the seemingly least of His Statutes! That blessing is to be called one of the "greatest" in God's Kingdom! I want that blessing! Do you?

Then Christ went on to expound the law emphasizing the spiritual intent of the law of love:

Matt 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.

22 "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment..." (NKJ)

Matt 5:27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'
28 "But I say to you whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (NKJ)

Jesus gave the spiritual intent or meaning behind His laws. Something the letter is limited to do. In Matthew 5, Christ expanded both the Statutes and the 10 commandments to illustrate this point. Later the apostle Paul also expounded the **spiritual principle of God's Statutes** in the same way. Actually Paul often used God's Statutes to prove his point and to teach the Church how to conduct herself. For example, Paul used the Statute of not muzzling the mouth of the ox while it treads out the grain (Duet.25:4), to show his right to receive tithes from the church in Corinth.

1 Cor 9:9 For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?

10 Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

11 If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? (KJV)

How could someone say Paul taught that God's laws – even His Statutes – were done away, when Paul himself often quoted them and taught them to the Gentile congregations to prove his points? Can you look at God's Statutes the way the apostle Paul did? Can you magnify them in your mind and see the awesome spiritual principles that are behind the letter, like Christ, Paul and the other apostles did?

Exod 23:5 "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it. (NKJ)

If you look only at the letter, and one were to see his neighbor's horse fall down under too heavy a load, he would not help. It was a horse, not a donkey. But if we apply the spiritual intent of this Statute, we see the beauty and love God is teaching us. This Statute shows the principle of loving even your enemies – like Christ did. Further, the intent of this law applies today. If you see your neighbor stranded along side the road, or your neighbor's tractor stuck – do you offer to help him? The beauty of God's laws are expanded and deepened in their spirit or intent!

The point God makes in Deuteronomy and reminds us of in Malachi is that we are to be DILIGENT to teach our children the laws of God – all of them! Also, we must be DILIGENT to practice them in our household. The best teacher is always by way of a good example. By doing this, family ties will be stronger. There will be respect and love for the father and mother, strengthening the family bond, and society will be the better for it. The family unit is the backbone, the fabric, of any lasting society. But most of all, by diligently teaching the spirit of God's Statutes to our children – their hearts will be turned back to God! THIS WAS THE SINGLE GREATEST THING ELIJAH THE PROPHET DID!

ELIJAH AND THE SHOWDOWN OF THE PROPHETS:

In 1 Kings 18, there is the story of the prophet Elijah and the prophets of the Baals in a showdown. Things had gotten so bad in Israel under the pagan gentile queen Jezebel and king Ahab that the people were unsure as to whom God really was. Elijah said to the people "how long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord is God SERVE HIM. But if Baal, follow him (1 Kg.18:21)." Elijah further challenged the people saying, "you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God." The people answered, "well said" (1 Kg.18:24).

After a long ritual dance with loud prayers and a desperate ritualistic cutting of their flesh by the priests of Baal, nothing happened. Then Elijah repeatedly poured water all over his offering and said one prayer. Do you remember or know what he said in that prayer?

"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** (I King 18:37)."

Now do you see why Elijah must first come again – before Christ returns! John the Baptist came in the “spirit and power of Elijah”, to prepare the people for Christ’s 1st coming (Luke 1:17). He taught the people REPENTANCE from sin, and demanded that they demonstrate their repentance by their fruits (Matt.3:8)! But the prophecy in Malachi is a prophecy for the 2nd coming of Christ. John the Baptist was a type – this prophecy is yet to be completely fulfilled. Those who will, must have their hearts TURNED BACK TO THEIR FATHER MOST HIGH! The same thing Elijah did for Israel must be done again before the end, to facilitate God turning the hearts of the people back to God their Father.

The reason why Malachi tells us of this commission to Elijah in the context of remembering God’s Laws, is because one important way we have our hearts turned back to God is through teaching God’s laws AND STATUTES to our children. This also aids in building a strong society and family built upon love and respect God and for one another – and is the fulfillment of the 5th commandment! This is the fabric of any lasting society!

Christ came to pay the penalty for our sins on our behalf. This was a tremendous act of love and mercy. But while Christ was in the flesh, He also taught us to keep the commandments – so that we would not go astray again! “Go and sin no more.” He told the woman caught in adultery (Jn.8:11). When the young man asked Christ what he must do to have eternal life, Jesus told him to “keep the commandments” (Mt.19:16-19). He then offered that man discipleship. But because of to strong a love of money, he turned it down. He was not really keeping all the commandments. It appears this man’s money was more important to him than following Christ as one of His disciples! During their dialogue, Jesus reiterated some of the Decalogue to the young man and then told him of the Greatest Commandments of all – which are not part of the Ten Commandments – as they are STATUTES! Jesus referred to these Statutes of God as being the foundation that all of the rest of God’s laws (including the Decalogue) depend or “hang” on – the great foundational laws or STATUTES of (Lev.19:18) and (Duet.6:4-5). Notice:

Matt 22:36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

38 "This is the first and great commandment.

39 "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (NKJ)

God’s Statues are much more than just filling in some details of the wonderful 10. God’s Statutes run the range of being some of the “lesser” parts of God’s Laws, to the greatest commandments of all that form the foundation of God’s Laws. And Elijah must come again; to teach the Statues and Judgments of God once again, and to turn the hearts of the children back to God their Father, as well as to their fathers in their homes – to bring at least some to humble repentance, lest perversion, lawlessness, sin and the denigration of the family run so rampant that God must again destroy society!

Paul referred to God’s Statutes as laws and said they ARE the way of love (Rm.13:8-10)! But in the end time, Jesus said; “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold (Matt.24:12).”

When a society becomes lawless (devoid of God's laws), THEIR LOVE GROWS COLD! LAWLESSNESS IS THE CAUSE OF THE DESTRUCTIVE HATEFUL CONDITION OF INSUFFICIENT LEVELS OF GODLY LOVE! And this is the rotten *false "Gospel"* that many churches teach – a "Gospel" that says Christ came to do away with His father's Laws. Such is a false lawless "Gospel" of death and tending toward disrespect towards God and His Laws. That false, so-called, "gospel" leads to destruction! When we persist in disobedience to God, there is only left JUDGMENT. When we repent and turn to God in our hearts, He is ever merciful and forgiving. He knows our hearts.

GOD HIMSELF taught the Decalogue to Israel and the Gentiles with them. MOSES was given the STATUTES to give to Israel (See Duet. 4 & 5)! But many think that the "law of Moses" was done away with. The *ceremonial* laws delivered through Moses were indeed replaced by the one they pointed to – Christ the Lamb of God and ultimate sacrifice that cleanses us from all sin (Heb.9:12, 10:10). But the **Holy Spirit writes God's laws on our HEARTS, not only the letter written on stony tablets and doorposts** (Heb.10:16-18). That law of the New Covenant written on our hearts by God's Spirit will certainly include God's Statutes!

Ezek. 11:19 And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:

20 That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (KJV)"

The final point of the old covenant scriptures in Malachi is to remind us to "REMEMBER THE LAW OF MOSES, MY SERVANT – STATUTES & JUDGMENTS." The context this is said in is the TIME OF THE END – a time of fiery judgment, because if we persist in lawlessness, our love will grow cold, our families will fall apart, and our hearts will be turned *away from* God, and un-repentant of, His heart may turn away from us! We don't want that to happen! Now is the time for us all to TURN TO CHRIST and To our Father. Now is the time to stop rebelling against and OUR Father laws! Now is the time to study and teach God's Statutes [which are a loving Royal Law (James 2)], to our children and to show our love to God by our obedience. As John said, "this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3). (KJV)

The time is at hand, and the time is far spent. Let's be sure we are not living a life of rebellion against God's loving royal law and contributing to the breaking down of the fabric of society. Can you see that's what lawlessness is bringing upon society and most families today? Read 2 Tim.3:1-5!

In Ezekiel 22:5-15, it speaks of sexual child abuse, adultery, and of a society that "makes light of the mother and father". Broken families! This brings a lot of pain and destruction! Can we see WHY God says Elijah must come and help TURN THE HEARTS of God's children to their fathers – and TO HIM – lest He come and smite the Earth with utter destruction?

How will our hearts be turned? "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant – STATUTES and Judgments (Mal.4:4)."

Again, God speaks of HIS STATUTES AS BEING PART OF THE NEW COVENANT? This is beautiful – God's Laws AND STATUTES being written on our hearts by His Holy Spirit! WOW!

Ezek 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (KJV)

Other passages speak of having the 10 commands written on our hearts as part of the new covenant. Here it speaks of having the STATUTES written on our hearts as part of the New Covenant. Remember; those of who have the spirit of God today have the New Covenant NOW. When Paul was teaching the Gentile church at Corinth how to keep the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread (Remember, God's annual Holy Days are called Statutes) he quoted Christ when He said "This cup is the NEW COVENANT in my blood." "This do" He said, "...in remembrance of me (1 Cor.11:25). How are we doing?

God's Statutes don't need to be some big difficult thing we can't understand or keep. No one can keep them perfectly. That's why we have the blood of Christ. But Christ came to take sin away – not to perpetuate it! We can learn the Statutes and Laws. Ask God for help and understanding. His Holy Spirit is called the helper and teacher.

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He (it) may abide with you forever – the spirit of truth."

Paul taught us all that we can do all things through Christ (Phil.4:13). It's not about just trying to save oneself. It's also about learning to live in a Godly way, and it's about getting to know God and showing love to God. Many claim to know God, but it is through learning to live a Godly way of life that we get to know what God is like, as we become more like Him. This is why God's Word says, "He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (I Jn 2:4)."

Consider the PRINCIPLE or SPIRIT of God's Statutes. Consider how often you see Paul, James, Christ and the other apostles referring to them as something we ought to practice in the New Testament. See the beauty in them and begin to study them as part of your regular scripture study. More than that – TEACH THEM DAILY TO YOUR CHILDREN, and to your grandchildren! How? How can we do this?

HOW CAN WE TEACH THE STATUTES TO OUR CHILDREN?

As we have already seen, we are to teach not only the Decalogue, but also God's Statutes to our Children. This will help them avoid the Judgments (which are the penalties for breaking the Statues). This process will greatly aid in turning your children's hearts to greatest Father - God! God' says we are to do this when we rise up, and as we go to bed, as we walk along the way...etc. In other words let them be always on your tongue! Use every day opportunities to teach them. Don't just tell your children not to leave a pit uncovered. Take the time to teach them it is because of the Statute of God that the pit must be covered up, so someone does not accidentally fall in it and become harmed, as that would not be loving and it would bring guilt upon the one who left the pit dangerously exposed (Ex.21:33-34). Don't just preach, but PRACTICE!

Teach your children from God's Statutes, in both word and by example, the importance of keeping your safety banister railings in good shape, for the welfare of others (Duet.22:8).

The apostle Paul used the Statute from Deuteronomy 22:10 of not yoking an ass and an ox together, to show the principle of not mixing things that don't belong together – such as a Christian marrying outside the faith of believers (2 Cor.6:14-16)! We too can learn to show the spiritual intent of God's wisdom bringing Statues as we study them and teach them to our children.

Teach your children the Statute that says when you burrow something, if you break it or loose it, you are responsible to replace it in as good or better condition as when you burrowed it, as that is how you show love and respect to your neighbor (Ex.22:14).

Teach your children God's etiquette – God's manners. Teach them the principles behind God's Statute of showing respect by rising up before the old gray head, when they enter the room (Lev.19:32). Again, don't just preach it to them – practice it with them!

Of course Judgment belongs to God, but with repentance, mercy will triumph over judgment (James 2:13). We are not to be judges today.

We understand the ceremonial and sacrificial laws that were fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ and which always pointed to Him. Instead of physical circumcision, the Gentiles were told (as we all are) to be spiritually circumcised of heart through baptism (Rm.2:28-29 & Col.2:11-12)! Or as Paul told the Gentiles:

1 Cor 7:19 “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. (NKJ)”

Circumcision always pointed to a covenant of obedience to God – it still does! In addition to simply being ready to teach God's Statutes as things come up through out the day, take some formal time in a positive enjoyable atmosphere to teach God's laws and Statutes to your children. Take some time each day and read some of the Statutes to your children, taking time to explain the spiritual principle to them as you go. Have them read some too, and ask them what they think it means, always being careful to teach them in a positive joyful atmosphere – so they are attracted to God and His loving wise Laws – and not repelled. Teach them to THINK and how to apply God's good Laws. By doing this, Jesus said, you will be called the greatest in the Kingdom of God, and you will be helping teach your children good behavior (Matt.5:19). By daily teaching my children the Statutes, they have grown in wisdom and Godliness and kindness and truth. They are much smarter as a result, and have fewer problems in life, as God's Statutes are not only our heritage – they are our wisdom (Deut.4:5-10). But by far the greatest benefit is that they are close to God and we are close as a family. This is God's gift, and it is available to us if we will.

By teaching our children of God's laws as well as His plan for mercy and salvation, we prepare their hearts to turn to God not in word only BUT IN DEED! We teach them basic respect and the family is stronger for it. O how good are the ways of the LORD!

Why must Elijah first come? – because the people have forgotten whom God is and how to live. Satan, the real god of much of this world has blinded them (2 Cor.4:4). The Gospel most often heard, is not the Gospel that Christ spoke (Mk.13:6). Therefore, the family, the fabric of society has broken down. Children rebel, parents are too busy, and so many have become lawless! Their hearts are not turned to God. Elijah must come again, and show a distinction. This will be a time of judgment for the real fruits and habits of our lives. So please, as well as receiving Christ, let's heed God's warning for our society today:

Mal 4:4 “Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel – Statutes and Judgments.” By doing so we can avoid the judgment and bring a blessing.

Let's do it!

END