

INTERPRETER

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A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 21 · 2016 · Pages 1-21

Joseph Smith and the Doctrine of Sealing

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Offprint Series

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)

ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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JOSEPH SMITH AND THE DOCTRINE OF SEALING

A. Keith Thompson

Abstract: Brian Hales has observed that we cannot understand Joseph Smith's marriage practices in Nauvoo without understanding the related theology. However, he implies that we are hampered in coming to a complete understanding of that theology because the only primary evidence we have of that theology is the revelation now recorded as Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants and a few entries in William Clayton's journal. This paper argues that we have more primary evidence about Joseph Smith's sealing theology than we realize. The accounts we have of the First Vision and of Moroni's first visits in 1823 have references to the sealing power embedded in them, ready for Joseph to unpack when he was spiritually educated enough to ask the right questions.

In his comprehensive three-volume work on Joseph Smith's polygamy, Brian C. Hales has drawn attention to the failure of most of those who have written about LDS polygamy in Nauvoo to set the practice in its theological context.¹ For example, he has written that “[o]ne aspect common to most researchers who depict Joseph Smith as practicing sexual polyandry is a lack of attention to his theology.”²

Hales notes Mario S. De Pillis's statement that some authors have “failed to take Smith seriously as a theologian”³ and Danel Bachman's assertion that

[t]o characterize Smith as a parapath and dismiss the “stupendous theological edifice” of Mormonism as merely countermerments [sic] for the expression of sexual passion, is

1 Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013).

2 Ibid, 1:386.

3 Ibid, 3:149, n2 and supporting text.

to underestimate the genuine religious motivation of both the Prophet and his followers.⁴

These recognitions of a separate, independent, and credible Mormon theology are also confirmed by Stephen Webb in his recent *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter*.⁵ Webb has written:

By any measurement Joseph Smith was a remarkable person. His combination of organizational acumen with spiritual originality and personal decorum and modesty is rare in the history of religion. ... He knew more about theology and philosophy than it was reasonable for anyone in his position to know. ... He read the Bible in ways so novel that he can be considered a theological innocent ... yet he brusquely overturned ancient and impregnable metaphysical assumptions with the aplomb of an assistant professor in religious studies.⁶

For Webb, Joseph Smith's identification of

Jesus Christ not only with God but also with both the eternal power that fuels the cosmos and the laws by which that power is regulated ... is truly the beginning of a Christological metaphysics of matter.⁷

Hales has also observed that Fawn Brodie led many other critics in "factor[ing] out God as a possible motivator,"⁸ leaving plural marriage as Joseph Smith's libidinous "way to fulfill a desire for expanded sexual opportunities."⁹ But because Brodie conceded that "[m]any Mormons have believed that Joseph Smith's marriages were entirely spiritual,"¹⁰ Hales has gone to great lengths to explain Joseph Smith's theology of sealing in detail.

In this paper, I do not revisit any of Hales's work on Joseph Smith's theology of sealing and plural marriage, but rather review his observation

4 Ibid, 3:149, n3 and supporting text.

5 Stephen Webb, *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

6 Ibid, 253.

7 Ibid, 254.

8 Hales, 1:410.

9 Ibid, 1:410.

10 Ibid, 1:422.

in chapter 10 of Volume 3, that the only primary evidence¹¹ we have of that theology is the revelation now recorded as Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants and a few entries from William Clayton's journal.

This paper suggests that Joseph Smith's account of the First Vision in 1820 and Moroni's five visits in September 1823¹² were full of temple ordinance and sealing theology. I also observe that Joseph Smith's and Oliver Cowdery's separate accounts of the Restoration of the Aaronic priesthood¹³ include material that predates the revelation on marriage¹⁴ that contributed to Joseph's understanding of the sealing doctrine and temple ordinances.¹⁵

In Part I of this paper, I argue that the essentiality of ordinances and the importance of the sealing power were impressed upon young Joseph's mind during the First Vision. I do so by examining the words Joseph used to record that experience in 1838, after the revelation on plural marriage was received but prior to its discussion with the Twelve in Nauvoo in the early 1840s.

In Part II, I argue that the sealing power was a significant focus of Moroni's instruction during his five visits to the boy prophet in September 1823. I do so by comparing Moroni's version of Malachi chapter 4 with the words used in the KJV Bible that was available to Joseph. I suggest that even though the young Joseph did not understand all those teachings when he first heard them, they were impressive and clear enough that they led him to questions which produced revelations as he pondered them for the rest of his life.

In Part III, I review Joseph Smith's and Oliver Cowdery's separate accounts of the restoration of the Aaronic priesthood on May 15, 1829. I note that Joseph's account as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants

11 Hales has collected considerable secondhand evidence confirming the theology in Doctrine and Covenants 132 with the post-Nauvoo recollections of people who were taught the doctrine personally by Joseph Smith or by authorized church leaders. Hales says Joseph Smith has not left anything else on the subject.

12 Joseph Smith – History 1:30–47, 49, 53. Hereafter “JS-H.”

13 Joseph's account is recorded in JS-H 1:68–72. Oliver's account is recorded as a footnote to JS-H 1:71.

14 The headnote to Doctrine and Covenants notes that the revelation was “recorded July 12, 1843” though “the doctrines and principles involved in this revelation had been known by the Prophet since 1831.”

15 Though the JS-H account has been dated to 1839 (see below n54), the events there recorded date to 1829. Oliver Cowdery's account, which is recorded as a footnote to JS-H 1:71, was published in the *Messenger and Advocate*, 1:14–16 (October 1834).

section 13 and JS-H 1:69 emphasizes that the Aaronic priesthood was temporary and would only stay on the earth as long as was necessary to enable the sons of Levi in Malachi's prophesy to complete and present their righteous offering. Oliver's account enables us to make a connection between the work of the ancient Levitical priests and their modern successors. I then trace this idea from Oliver Cowdery's account through other texts that have developed the LDS understanding of the latter-day offering to be made by the sons of Levi.

I conclude that Joseph Smith's "sealing theology" was more foundational to the restoration than many Latter-day Saints may have realized. When Christ's words from the First Vision and Moroni's four-times-repeated quotations from Malachi 4 are carefully considered, it is clear that Jesus Christ intended the revelation and restoration of temple ordinances to be the foundation and *summum bonum*¹⁶ of all that Joseph Smith did during his short prophetic life.

Part I – Seeds of the Doctrine of Sealing in the First Vision

When the Father and the Son visited Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove early in the spring of 1820, Joseph says that he asked "which of all the sects was right ... and which I should join."¹⁷

[He] was answered that [he] must join none of them, for they were all wrong; ... all their creeds were an abomination in [Christ's] sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."¹⁸

Because we are accustomed to reading these words in the context of different doctrines, it is easy to miss how they also bear upon the sealing power. The meaning is perhaps seen best if words revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith about priesthood power twelve years later are placed beside them:

And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances

16 Doctrine and Covenants 128:11.

17 JS-H 1:18.

18 Ibid 1:19.

thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.¹⁹

When Christ answered Joseph's question about which church he should join, he answered him with words that blended the words of Isaiah with some that Paul had written to Timothy.²⁰ The Isaiah 29 passage has since been identified by Latter-day Saints as forming part of that prophet's vision of the latter-day restoration. The restoration in Isaiah's vision was introduced by the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and using words "the Lord"²¹ would quote when he answered the boy prophet in the First Vision. But it is the Pauline words that Joseph later connected with the higher ordinances of the gospel. Paul had written to Timothy to warn him against apostates in the first century. That prophecy was being fulfilled again in the burned-over district that was upper New York State in 1820:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*; from such turn away (emphasis added).²²

Paul's counsel to Timothy was apt and so Christ quoted it to Joseph. But what was it about the Christian religious practices of the first century at Lystra (part of modern Turkey) and nineteenth-century upstate New York that earned the Lord's characteristically blunt denunciation? How was it that these religious teachers in both the first and nineteenth centuries denied the power of godliness? The answer is found in the words Christ used. According to Joseph, Christ said that the professors of the

19 Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–22.

20 Note too that this also evokes a little of John Wesley in the concepts if not the phraseology. Steven C. Harper has noted Wesley's concern that Methodism "would multiply exponentially in number 'only to become a dead sect, having the form of religion but without the power'" ("Evaluating Three Arguments Against Joseph Smith's First Vision", *Interpreter, A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 2 (2012) 17–33, 20 quoting John Wesley, "Thoughts upon Methodism," in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, vol. 9 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater [Nashville: Abingdon, 1984–], 527).

21 Isaiah 29:13.

22 2 Timothy 3:1, 2, and 5.

churches which Joseph knew,²³ taught “for doctrine the commandments of men,” which teaching had a form of godliness, but denied the power of godliness.

Joseph later taught that the power of godliness was revealed in the ordinances of the Melchizedek priesthood and the ordinances of the Melchizedek priesthood made men and women kings and priests, queens and priestesses in the kingdom of his Father so that they could learn to become gods themselves.²⁴ Christ’s charge was that the Christian teaching that had come down to Joseph’s day had changed the ordinances²⁵ that Christ had originally revealed, so they denied that human beings were of the same species as God and were intended not only to be saved, but also to be exalted with Him.

23 Francis M. Gibbons states that there were “thirteen different religious congregations” “[w]ithin a radius of eight miles of the Smith farm” in Palmyra, “including Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists” (*Joseph Smith, Martyr, Prophet of God* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1977], 28). Note that Terryl and Fiona Givens have observed that Joseph Smith had not come into contact with the Catholic creeds at the time he had his First Vision. It was therefore “the Protestant creeds that were the root of Christianity’s most lamentable errors ... [for Joseph Smith and the early Mormons and in particular] the wording of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) largely incorporated into the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646).” The affirmation that “[t]here is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts or passions ... that was the theological basis for subsequent formulations of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists ... [wa]s the creedal ‘abomination’ alluded to in Smith’s First Vision.” It was an abomination because it suggested “that God was an impersonal being, without a form, inaccessible and incomprehensible [and] unmoved by human suffering” (*The Crucible of Doubt* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014], 86–87). This observation is controversial in Mormonism since it implies that this part of the statement Joseph Smith recorded from the Sacred Grove was his interpretation of the words he heard rather than the words of Jesus Christ himself. The Givens are correct to have observed, however, that this part of Joseph’s summary is not marked with quotation marks in JS-H 1:19 and it is unclear whether the quotation marks that follow are there because Jesus Christ said these exact words or because they are a quotation from the New Testament scriptures which the writer has noted in the text.

24 See for example, the discourse delivered by the Prophet Joseph Smith at the funeral of King Follett. Accounts of the discourse given at a general conference of the church were made by Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton but have not yet been published in the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*. I therefore refer the reader to the record currently provided in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1977), 342–362.

25 Compare Isaiah 24:5, 6.

Thus from the very beginning of the prophetic ministry of Joseph Smith, the Father and Son placed the power of godliness — which is revealed only in Melchizedek priesthood ordinances — at the center of his mission of restoration. But that oblique reference to a power of godliness denied by orthodox Christianity was only the beginning of Joseph’s instruction. When Moroni began visiting Joseph three years later, he repeated many scriptures to him four times so that Joseph would be aware of their importance and would be most unlikely to forget them.

Part II — Moroni’s Instruction: Malachi 4

Moroni’s First Visits – September 1823

During the night of 21 September 1823, Moroni confirmed to Joseph the importance of the keys of priesthood that Elijah would reveal “before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” Joseph recorded that after Moroni introduced himself, he prophesied of Joseph’s own future mission and the publicity that his name would attract and told him of the book and interpreters deposited in a nearby hill. The angel then “commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament,” beginning with parts of Malachi 3 and 4, and then moving on to parts of Isaiah 11, Acts 3, Joel 2 and many others (JS-H 1:33–41).

While his quotation of Acts 3:22–23 was “precisely as [those verses] stand in our New Testament,” the quotations from Malachi in the Old Testament, read “differently,” or “with a little variation from the way [they read] in our Bibles” (JS-H 1:36, 39–40). Joseph Smith’s critics are apt to suggest that these “differences” are the convenient adjustments of a later Joseph, that Joseph Smith reconstructed his memories, wittingly or unwittingly, to suit his developing theology,²⁶ and that the wording we now have in the Pearl of Great Price dates to Joseph’s needs and thoughts in 1838, not 1820. Believers, on the other hand, will likely be willing to accept the Pearl of Great Price account as it stands and consider the possibility that Joseph’s detailed memory of the “differences” is an

26 For example, Fawn Brodie says that differences in Joseph’s accounts of the First Vision should be attributed to his need to create “a magnificent tradition” after the fact (Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, second edition [New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1945], 25). Steven C. Harper has argued that Brodie was influenced by her “hermeneutic of suspicion,” since she failed to objectively revise her original findings following the discovery and publication of 1832 and 1835 accounts of the First Vision before her second edition was published in 1971 (Harper, 22n3).

intentional and significant result of an angelic visit and the repetition reported.²⁷

For the purposes of this paper, it is useful to set out Moroni's version of the relevant passages from Malachi in full beside the King James versions of the same passages. Some of the differences in Moroni's version are italicized.²⁸

<p>Malachi 4:1 (Moroni's version) For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall <i>burn as stubble; for they that come shall burn them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.</i></p>	<p>Malachi 4:1 (KJV) For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.</p>
<p>Malachi 4:5 (Moroni's version) Behold, I will <i>reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of</i> Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.</p>	<p>Malachi 4:5 (KJV) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:</p>
<p>Malachi 4:6 (Moroni's version) And he shall <i>plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.</i></p>	<p>Malachi 4:6 (KJV) And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.</p>

Joseph Smith said that Moroni “offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here.”²⁹ We do not know the reasons why those explanations could not be provided in the now-canonized 1838 account. It may be that Joseph Smith simply did not have the time to record them. It may be that he intended to provide them later and never got around

²⁷ Believers are also reassured by Moroni's record of the Lord's reassurance to him when he worried that his own foibles and his weakness in writing would be a stumbling block that would reduce the effectiveness of the future Book of Mormon as a missionary tool. That reassurance was expressed, “Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness” (Ether 12:23–26). It is evident that responding to the gospel message as communicated by the Holy Ghost to the individual soul has more to do with meekness than it does with erudition.

²⁸ JS-H 1:37–39. See also Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3.

²⁹ JS-H 1:41.

to doing so. Or it may be that he was instructed not to provide them, and there are any number of reasons why he might have received that instruction. For example, these explanations from Moroni may have been intended for Joseph and no one else, or perhaps others were as entitled to them as he was, but seekers would grow and learn more if they were left to receive them personally.

Whatever the reason, we may ask: Why did Moroni quote these verses from Malachi differently than Joseph had them in his King James Bible? The most persuasive reason may be that Moroni's adjustments were necessary so that Joseph Smith would better understand the work that lay ahead for him to do. And if Moroni's version assisted Joseph Smith, then it may assist us as well.

What was Moroni's Understanding of Malachi 4:1, 5–6?

In choosing "Moroni's understanding" as the title for this section, I realize that I take a number of risks. Moroni is a resurrected being³⁰ and presumably walks and talks with Christ and God and others of the ancient prophets, including potentially Malachi himself. Unless Moroni tutored us individually as he did Joseph, and detailed his views exhaustively, we are not going to understand all he understands about Malachi 4:1, 5–6. It will also be difficult for us to stray far from our twenty-first century LDS theological paradigm, which colors our understanding of these often-quoted scriptures. But since even the mortal Christ learned line upon line,³¹ and thus grew from grace to grace,³² we too may hope to deepen our understanding.

They That Come

In verse 1, the difference between the two versions is an emphasis in Moroni's account that it will be "they that come" who will do the burning in the great and dreadful day of the Lord. In Malachi's original account, the emphasis on what will happen in that coming day, and how it will be done, is left out. This thought does not appear in any of the other places in scripture in which Malachi's prophecy (or its earlier source) in chapter 4 verse 1 is quoted or alluded to.³³ Malachi's KJV of the prophecy

30 Ibid. 1:30–33.

31 Isaiah 28:10; 2 Nephi 28:30; Doctrine and Covenants 98:12; 128:12.

32 Doctrine and Covenants 93:12–17.

33 For example Psalms 21:8–10; Isaiah 24:6; 66: 16; Malachi 3:2; 1 Nephi 22:15; 3 Nephi 24:2; 25:1; Doctrine and Covenants 29:9; 64: 23, 24.

is the clear match,³⁴ and it is Malachi's version that Christ restored to the Nephites.³⁵ The only other place in scripture where there is any trace of Moroni's thought that there will be "angels" involved in the destruction attending the Second Coming, is in the Revelation of John. There, during the seventh seal and before the Lord comes,³⁶ John sees that locusts, with power as scorpions to afflict all men (excepting those who had "the seal of God in their foreheads"³⁷) were loosed from the bottomless pit and followed by four angels to slay "the third part of men."³⁸

Neither Root nor Branch; Utterly Wasted

In both versions of the prophecy, we understand that there will be a day when the wicked will be burned so thoroughly that they will be left neither root nor branch. So familiar are Latter-day Saints with the old Hebrew use and meaning of these two words ("root" and "branch"³⁹), that the depth and detail of the meaning is often glossed over. When it is pondered, the temple or genealogical meaning is strengthened. All of us recognize the damage done by bush and forest fires that have devastated many regions of the world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Vast walls of flame that dwarf fire trucks and water bombing aircraft have often been captured on film. Yet when one later visits the scenes of even the most devastating of these fires, there are always burnt stalks left. Some trees have even been shown to require fire to open their cone seeds and germinate. If one visits a few months after a devastating blaze, the profusion of returning growth is stunning.

Malachi's image is of an altogether more destructive burning. Here, he says that among the proud and wicked there will be absolutely nothing left. Indeed, the burning will not only consume the tree trunks and branches; it will burn the roots out of the ground so that they are gone too. In Malachi's image there is no chance of a stem or a rod coming

34 Malachi prophesied after the Psalms were written and after Isaiah prophesied, and the Nephites did not have Malachi's prophecy until the Savior restored it around AD 34.

35 3 Nephi 25:1.

36 Revelations 9 – LDS edition head note.

37 Ibid. 9:2–4(4).

38 Ibid. 9:15.

39 For example, in one of the most famous of Isaiah's messianic prophecies (which Moroni quoted to Joseph Smith in full or in part immediately after he had finished quoting Malachi), Christ is referred to as a "rod out of the stem of Jesse" and then in parallel Jewish fashion, the message is restated with the words "and a Branch shall grow out of his roots."

forth out of the root of any wicked person so marked for destruction. The inference is that the wicked will be totally disconnected and cut off from their ancestors and that they will have no posterity. Moroni's later phrase "utterly wasted"⁴⁰ (i.e., "laid waste") seems completely justified and more graphic than the mere concept of a "curse"⁴¹ in the King James translation.

I will Reveal the Priesthood

In Moroni's version of Malachi 4:5, he introduces the idea that Elijah's return before the great and dreadful day of the Lord has a priesthood purpose. While careful Christian students could surmise some greater purpose in this visit, since Elijah appeared with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, all that was known of Elijah's second return before 1836 was that it was a sign that must precede the Messiah's appearance in glory. Moroni says, "I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."⁴² He does not say, "I will restore the Priesthood by the hand of Elijah." He says he will "reveal" it. This choice of word strongly suggests that either Elijah or what follows his visit, will explain the purpose of God's priesthood in a way that was then unknown on the earth. It would not be unreasonable to connect this statement with the words of Christ that Joseph had heard three years earlier in the First Vision — "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrine the commandments to men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."⁴³ The phrasing may even have intended to call the Lord's previous words to the prophet's mind. If this is the proper reading, then in the first two events of the unfolding restoration we have prescient references to latter-day priesthood practice in the temple. Even the best Christian scholars of the nineteenth century had no inkling of any of these perspectives.

40 JS-H 1:39. See also Doctrine and Covenants 2:3.

41 Malachi 4:6.

42 JS-H 1:38. See also Doctrine and Covenants 2:2.

43 JS-H 1:19.

Planting the Promises in the Hearts of the Children

In Moroni's version of Malachi 4:6, he talks only about the hearts of the children being turned to the fathers. The reference to the hearts of the *fathers* being turned to their *children* is gone but not forgotten, for as previously mentioned, Malachi's own words are those which were given to the Nephites around AD 34. Why does Moroni omit the reference to the fathers' hearts being turned? It seems that Moroni knew the purpose for which he came to the prophet. For example, Moroni told Joseph that "the time that [the plates] should be obtained had not yet been fulfilled" but that Joseph was to come and meet him at Cumorah in "precisely one year" and that such meetings between them would continue "until the time should come for obtaining the plates."⁴⁴ What Moroni knew and Joseph did not was that Joseph would be intimately involved in the revelation of priesthood through Elijah, which would seal the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. But the fullness of Joseph's work lay in the future and was initially to involve work on the children's side of the veil. Moroni was to be Joseph's personal tutor as he prepared to fulfill that role. It is noteworthy that in 1842, when Joseph quoted this same verse of scripture as part of his letter about baptism for the dead (which later became Doctrine and Covenants 128), he preferred Malachi's version, though he said he "might have rendered a plainer translation" of the verse (Doctrine and Covenants 128:17–18).

It is likely that Joseph was not immediately familiar with Malachi 4:1, 5–6, and that he only noticed the differences in Moroni's version of those verses later on when he read and pondered them. That night, however, Moroni had come to teach Joseph by scripture, by commentary, and by repetition. So effective was Moroni's teaching that Joseph appears to have been able to remember many of the words verbatim years later. But there was more than just this emphasis on the children that was different in Moroni's version of Malachi 4:6. He also:

1. spoke of the promises made to the fathers;
2. used the word "plant" to describe the effect of the pre-millennial visit of Elijah; and, as already noted,
3. used markedly more graphic language to describe the fate of the earth at the great and dreadful day of the Lord, if the promises made to the fathers were not planted in the hearts of the children such that their hearts turned to their fathers.

44 Ibid.1:42, 53.

He said that the earth would not just be cursed, but that it would be “utterly wasted.”

Bearing in mind that the spirit teaches by comparing spiritual things with spiritual⁴⁵ and by bringing all things to our remembrance,⁴⁶ Moroni knew that Joseph did not need to understand all he taught during that first night of instruction. Though there are those who might ask why Moroni gave Joseph so much information in one lecture, Moroni knew what he was doing. These verses from Malachi were given first for good reason. Moroni focused on the essential core of Joseph’s foreordained responsibility. The work that Joseph was called to do would prepare the earth for the great and dreadful day of the Lord that would usher in the millennium, which was to be his next subject, as evidenced by his choice of Isaiah 11 as his second text.

Moroni’s reference to Acts 3 and Joel 2 deal with the same proximate period in this world’s mortal existence, but the Malachi quotations focused on the work of preparation as the foundation.

For the purposes of this paper, the point is not so much the novelty of the concepts, but that Moroni placed Elijah at the forefront for Joseph from the very beginning. Moroni may not have used the word “keys” to describe how Elijah would minister or what he would restore, but Joseph knew that Elijah’s mission concerned priesthood and that it was very important. We do not know if there were additional connections between these things Moroni said (and perhaps others that Joseph did not record⁴⁷) and the other things Christ had communicated to Joseph during the First Vision.⁴⁸ But when we look back on those events with the benefit of hindsight, we can see the Lord’s design in it and we can recognize that Joseph was taught what he needed to know in the Lord’s time-honored way: line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little,⁴⁹ with milk before meat.⁵⁰

I will now discuss what Joseph learned about the latter-day mission of Elijah when the Aaronic priesthood was restored.

45 I Corinthians 2:13.

46 John 14:26.

47 JS-H 1:41.

48 Ibid. 1:20.

49 Isaiah 28:10; Doctrine and Covenants 98:12; 128: 21.

50 I Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12-14; Doctrine and Covenants 19:22.

Part III — Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood

There are many places in the Book of Mormon where questions about priesthood keys and the prophecies of Malachi might have come to mind,⁵¹ but the questions that led to the restoration of the Aaronic priesthood, came as Joseph and Oliver were translating the 3 Nephi account of the Savior's visit.⁵² Though the Melchizedek priesthood keys are considered the more important, we have virtually no record of what took place or

51 For example, there are allusions to Malachi's prophecy in 1 Nephi 22:15 where the words "wickedly" and "stubble" appear together in the same verse. But the apparent anachronism is readily explained by the fact that these concepts were not original with Malachi. Isaiah uses them in Isaiah 5:23, 24. A similar reference appears in 2 Nephi 15:24 and, of course, chapters 3 and 4 of Malachi were restored to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 24 and 25 where Joseph Smith translates them exactly as they appear in the King James Bible.

52 Oliver Cowdery, quoted in JS-H 1:71, footnote; from a letter from Oliver Cowdery to William W. Phelps, Sept. 7, 1834, Norton, Ohio, published in *Messenger and Advocate*, Oct. 1834, p. 15. Joseph and Oliver's questions about baptism apparently came when they translated 3 Nephi 11 where the risen Lord gave the Nephite Twelve authority to baptize. Perhaps this account and the mass baptisms which followed (3 Nephi 19:10–13) seemed strange to Joseph and Oliver since the Nephites had an authorized church and the ordinance of baptism since at least the time of Alma the Elder (Mosiah 18). But Christ was explicit in his explanation of the ordinance of baptism and the authority that was required to perform it in the 3 Nephi account. Those who performed the ordinance would be empowered to do so and it would be done by immersion and with a set prayer so that there would be no more disputation on the subject (3 Nephi 11:21–30). Though our present version of the Book of Mormon discusses the ordinance of baptism in 2 Nephi 31 before both the establishment of a church among the Nephites and Christ's detailed instructions concerning the ordinance during His resurrected ministry, it is likely that the small plates of Nephi including 2 Nephi 31 were not translated until after the translation of Mormon's abridgment of the Large Plates of Nephi (Mosiah to Moroni) was complete. This theory holds that after the 116 pages were lost, the translation continued from Mosiah to Moroni and only later circled back to the Small Plates of Nephi from 1 Nephi to Omni, and then the Words of Mormon. See: *Stan Larson, "A Most Sacred Possession": The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon* (Ensign, September 1977), 87–91. There are many other proponents of the "Mosiah First" theory including *Matthew Roper, "A More Perfect Priority?," Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6 (1): 362–78*, <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/review/6/1/S00011-51b10a54017b211Roper.pdf>.

Note that many of the early Latter-day Saints were rebaptized to rededicate themselves and not as a consequence of church discipline (see H. Dean Garrett, "Rebaptism," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 3:1194, <http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Rebaptism>).

of what was said on its restoration.⁵³ That informational void stands in significant contrast to the visit of John the Baptist. The official version of the restoration of the Aaronic priesthood,⁵⁴ on 15 May 1829, says that while laying his hands upon their heads, John said,

Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.⁵⁵

The words of the ordination have significance beyond our standard LDS understanding. While we like to recite examples of modern apostles who enjoyed the ministering of angels while they held only Aaronic priesthood office,⁵⁶ we seldom consider why John the Baptist chose to quote Malachi 3:3 in the blessing. It is perhaps even more significant that the only words from Malachi chapter 3 that John the Baptist chose to quote match material that Moroni had quoted over and over again, six years earlier.⁵⁷

The promise that the Aaronic priesthood will remain is both a prophecy that there will be no further general apostasy before the earth's temporal existence is wound up, and a prophecy that ordinances

53 Referenced only in passing in Doctrine and Covenants 27:12 and Doctrine and Covenants 128:20.

54 The earliest known record of these specific words was made some ten years after the event in the Manuscript History of the Church Book A-1, page 17 and was written some time between 11 June and 3 November 1839 by James Mulholland acting under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Robert J. Woodward, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants," PhD thesis, Brigham Young University, Department of Ancient Scripture, 1974, p 236). Oliver Cowdery's account with slightly different wording, was first published some five years earlier in the *Messenger and Advocate*, 1:14-16 (October 1834) and is discussed below.

55 Doctrine and Covenants 13. See also JS-H 1:69. The two references are identical and both come from the Manuscript History of the Church referred to above at n54.

56 References to the ministry of angels to Wilford Woodruff during his first mission as a recently ordained priest in the Aaronic priesthood, are a favourite among Latter-day Saints. For example, *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, sel. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946), pp. 297-98, as quoted in Aaronic Priesthood Manual 3, Lesson 22: Duties of Priests, <https://www.lds.org/manual/aaronic-priesthood-manual-3/lesson-22-duties-of-priests?lang=eng>.

57 JS-H 1:36.

administered under the authority of the Aaronic priesthood will play a part in preparation for the great and dreadful day of the Lord. There are many commentators who have stated that the reference to a latter-day righteous offering by the sons of Levi is a reference to their offering blood sacrifices in righteousness as part of the restoration of all things.⁵⁸ Though Joseph Smith discussed this issue,⁵⁹ it appears that he also understood that Levitical priests would minister in temples in the last days as part of the work that Moroni had taught him about from Malachi. Of what then was John the Baptist prophesying when he said that the Aaronic priesthood would remain on the earth until the sons of Levi did offer again, an offering in righteousness? Oliver Cowdery's

58 See for example, *Doctrines of Salvation, Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, compiled by Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1956), 3: 94.

59 The words below are taken from the Manuscript History of the Church Book C—1, addenda page 18 (referencing page 1104) and were written sometime between 24 February and 3 May 1845 (drawing from Joseph Smith's letters, discourses, diary entries; meeting minutes; church and other periodicals and journals; reminiscences, recollections and letters of church members and other contacts between 2 November 1838 and 31 July 1842) in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock. As the same material also appears in a document entitled "Instruction on Priesthood page 10," attributed to Joseph Smith and written by Robert B. Thompson on 5 October 1840, it would appear that is the date when it was created and from which the Thomas Bullock material compiled between 24 February and 3 May 1845 was drawn. The same material appears in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 171–173. Note that Joseph Smith does not here say that blood sacrifices will be restored as performed under the Mosaic law at Solomon's Temple. He clarified:

It is not to be understood that the law of Moses will be established again with all its rites and variety of ceremonies; this has never been spoken of by the prophets; but those things which existed prior to Moses' day, namely, sacrifice, will be continued.

It may be asked by some, what necessity for sacrifice, since the Great Sacrifice was offered? In answer to which, if repentance, baptism and faith existed prior to the days of Christ, what necessity for them since that time? (173)

This teaching prefigures modern temple ordinances where the law of sacrifice is administered in symbolic terms under the authority of the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood. For further discussion and sources on the restoration of sacrifice by the sons of Levi mentioned in the restoration of the Aaronic priesthood, see Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. *Creation, In God's Image and Likeness 1: Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve*, updated ed. (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), pp. 609–610.

1834 account of the words recited by John the Baptist on 15 May 1829 is a little different than the later account repeated in both Doctrine and Covenants 13 and JS-H 1:69. That difference may be explained by the context of Oliver's account where he was explaining the joy that filled his soul on the occasion of the Baptist's visit, and his further effort to explain what he understood by the words uttered. Or it may be that Oliver's recollection of what John the Baptist said is more accurate because he wrote his account closer in time to the event. Whatever the reason, he recorded the Baptist's words thus:

Upon you my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.⁶⁰

Oliver Cowdery's words shed additional light in two ways. First, because he confirms that John did indeed quote the same words from Malachi's prophecy which Moroni had quoted to Joseph in 1823. And second, because there are later references in modern revelation to the forthcoming "offering in righteousness" that would be made by the "Sons of Levi" and which are quoted below. Joseph Smith's accounts of the Baptist's words seem to emphasize the word "until" in the final sentence. Such emphasis draws attention to a time in the future when the Levitical priesthood (and temples) will again be taken from the earth. That is not the only possible reading, though it is surely a part of the reason why there has been an expectation of a restoration of blood sacrifices instead of a recognition that the law of sacrifice restored in temple ordinances is the same law of sacrifice that exalted the ancients, including Abraham. When Oliver Cowdery's use of the word "that" to explain what he heard and felt during the joint ordination by John the Baptist as well as Joseph's "until" are read beside the references to the "sons of Levi" in later revelations about that offering, a more complete understanding of the nature of the latter-day offering that Malachi had in mind seems likely. In simple terms, that meaning may be that the priesthood has been restored so that worthy latter-day saints may work in latter-day temples to prevent the whole world being cursed.⁶¹

⁶⁰ JS-H 1:71, footnote.

⁶¹ That work is now commenced in every case by a baptism administered under the authority and keys of the Aaronic priesthood restored by John the Baptist on 15 May 1829.

Let us now trace and understand the many times this allusion to Malachi's prophecy has been expressed in modern revelation, particularly through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The other references to Malachi's prophecy which have been included in the Doctrine and Covenants since John the Baptist's visit to restore the Aaronic priesthood are found in section 84:31 (18–34), section 124:39 and section 128:24. These references are set out below and then discussed briefly.

Doctrine and Covenants 84:31

Therefore, as I said concerning the sons of Moses — for the sons of Moses and also the sons of Aaron shall offer an acceptable offering and sacrifice in the house of the Lord, which house shall be built unto the Lord in this generation, upon the consecrated spot as I have appointed.

Doctrine and Covenants 124:39

Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her municipalities, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name.

Doctrine and Covenants 128:24

Behold, the great day of the Lord is at hand; and who can abide the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap; and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purge the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present it in his holy temple, when it is finished, a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptance.

The connection between the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy and temple ordinances and worship is plain. What is it that is done in holy temples by modern "sons of Levi"? It is temple ordinances. That work includes baptisms, confirmations, and ordinations to the priesthood. No other ordinances can be done for the dead until this preparatory work is complete. The work is now most often commenced by the vicarious baptism of worthy Aaronic priesthood holders and young women of corresponding age.⁶² The ordinances performed by vicarious latter-day "Levites" create a temple record for each individual, for whom they thereby make salvation and exaltation possible. It is the completed record of temple ordinances performed for the dead that will be the offering deemed worthy of all acceptance⁶³ when the work is done. This work has been prophetically foreseen and is a representation of all else that is added upon it in by further temple ordinances. For Joseph Smith, the righteous offering that Malachi saw made by worthy, purified Latter-day Saints on behalf of the entire human race was vicarious temple work, symbolized from the very outset by the symbolic purification that is unmistakable in baptism itself. As Elder Maxwell reminded us, paraphrasing Christ, worthy baptism requires the offered sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, the acceptability of which is witnessed by the baptism of fire and with the Holy Ghost.⁶⁴

62 There have been a number of changes to the practice of baptism for the dead by Latter-day Saints since it began in the 1840s. A summary of these changes is provided in H. David Burton, "Baptism for the Dead: LDS Practice," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:95–96, http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Baptism_for_the_Dead. Most of the early baptisms were performed by adults on behalf of deceased ancestors, whereas now Latter-day Saints (mostly youth) can also be baptized for other persons unrelated to them, but identified through the name extraction program.

63 Doctrine and Covenants 128:24.

64 3 Nephi 9:20. See also Doctrine and Covenants 20:37. Elder Maxwell's observation was that "real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal in us upon the altar and letting it be consumed! Such is the "sacrifice unto the Lord . . . of a broken heart and a contrite spirit," (Doctrine and Covenants 59:8), a prerequisite to taking up the cross, while giving "away all [our] sins" in order to "know God" (Alma 22:18) for the denial of self precedes the full acceptance of Him ("Deny Yourselves of All Ungodliness", general Conference, April 1995, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1995/04/deny-yourselves-of-all-ungodliness?lang=eng>).

Conclusion

In this paper I have suggested that Joseph Smith was introduced to the sealing doctrine and the essentiality of temple ordinances from the very moment this dispensation opened. Following the Father's introduction of the Son, Joseph asked which church he should join,⁶⁵ and Jesus Christ's answer included His statement that the Christianity of the nineteenth century had become corrupted, denying what Christ called "the power of godliness."⁶⁶ As the dispensation unfolded, Joseph learned that the power of godliness to which Christ referred is enabled by his atonement and is the power to exalt human beings after they have been saved by his grace.⁶⁷

The angel Moroni became Joseph Smith's personal tutor three years later.⁶⁸ During the first twelve hours of their association, Moroni carefully repeated his instructions to Joseph four times to help him remember and emphasize his teachings' importance.⁶⁹ Prominent among the scriptural passages that Moroni presented to Joseph was Malachi's prophecy of the soon-to-be fulfilled latter-day mission of Elijah. But Moroni did not simply quote Malachi's words as Joseph could have found them in the family's King James Bible. Moroni altered the words to emphasize the priesthood and sealing purpose of Elijah's mission. Angels would come and burn the earth at the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and those who were not saved by the priesthood power that Elijah would reveal would be left without root or branch — cursed so that they would remain totally disconnected from their ancestors and posterity in eternity.

While it is unlikely that Joseph understood very much of the burden of those instructions when he was seventeen years old, the repetition ensured that he remembered them and the differences between Moroni's explanation and the simple verses which had come down to Gentile America through the King James Bible. Those differences are a part of the context for his questions about family relationships in the world to come. Joseph was given enough information to provoke his curious mind to ask more questions, and when he asked questions with all the faith that he could muster, the heavens were opened and he was given revelation upon revelation.⁷⁰

65 JS-H 1:18.

66 Ibid. 1:19.

67 Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–22.

68 JS-H 1:27.

69 Ibid. 1:30–47, 49.

70 Doctrine and Covenants 42:61.

That process continued as he translated and brought forth the Book of Mormon. Why did the Nephites all need to be baptized again when Christ ministered personally among them after his resurrection?⁷¹ Had not Alma₁ established a church with priesthood authority from God? While Joseph did not record the exact questions he and Oliver offered on 15 May 1829, they have both separately recorded accounts of the vision that answered their prayer.⁷² John the Baptist appeared, conferred upon them the Priesthood of Aaron, and told them that it would remain on the earth until the sons of Levi had offered their offering in righteousness — the same offering that Joseph could have recognized from Moroni’s scriptural quotations from six years earlier.

While it is true that Joseph Smith did not record his understanding of the theology of sealing and family relationships in the world to come in a scholarly treatise, we do have more from his own words than Doctrine and Covenants Section 132. For, as he wrote himself in Doctrine and Covenants 128, obtaining the powers of the priesthood so that family relationships could be bound in heaven, was the “*summum bonum* of the whole subject matter.”⁷³ Restoring the sealing power was the burden of his entire prophetic ministry.

[*Editor’s note:* The author wishes to acknowledge and appreciate the considerable editorial and other assistance provided by Gregory L. Smith and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, which have improved this paper. The author notes, however, that any errors that remain are his own.]

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71 See above n52.

72 For Joseph’s account see JS-H 1:68–72. For Oliver’s account see JS-H 1: 71, footnote.

73 Doctrine and Covenants 128:10, 11.

