



the spirit of Elijah: an expanded view

Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶

“Understand:^a I am going to send ’ēlîyâ, the prophet, to you before the coming, totally awe-inspiring^b day of YHWH. He is to restore^c the love^d of parents for children and the love of children for parents so that when I arrive, I need not strike the earth with annihilation^e (author’s translation).

Introduction

To my knowledge, this passage from Malachi is the only passage to appear in each of the LDS standard works. These same standard works subject the passage to alternative readings and translations. These alternative readings and translations occasion different understandings and interpretations of the text.

In my view, the LDS interpretation of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ and the scope of its implied “spirit of Elijah” is woefully inadequate. The passage and the spirit of Elijah have been subject to misinterpretation and mischaracterization. They have been viewed with far too narrow a perspective. If it were only a matter of esoteric knowledge and doctrine, this narrow perspective would be of no consequence. But the narrow interpretation effects behavior. It is, at least in part, responsible for some unfortunate attitudes and behaviors that, in fact, often run contrary to the meaning and importance of the passage and of the true and broader meaning of the spirit of Elijah.

We will begin this homily by examining the alternative readings/ translations found in the four LDS standard works and the significant differences between them. We will examine the interpretations that flow from the alternative readings/ translations, including what I call the

too-narrow LDS interpretation of the passage. We will propose a broader interpretation of the passage that is, it seems to me, truer to the spirit of Elijah. We will demonstrate how the too-narrow interpretation negatively impacts behavior and threatens to bring about the threatened “curse,” or “extermination” of Malachi 4.⁶. We will then demonstrate how a broader interpretation positively impacts behavior and leads to the true exaltation of humankind.

the alternative readings/ translations

We must begin our examination of the readings and translations with what is for the LDS audience the original: the KJV translation of the Hebrew as it is found in the Old Testament, the first standard work of the LDS Church.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 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.”¹

Although I might object to the KJV translation of the final Hebrew word, *ḥērem*, the KJV is a perfectly accurate and acceptable translation of the Hebrew text as we have it—a Hebrew text whose accuracy we have no reason to question.

We next find the passage, or a portion of it, quoted in Luke’s Gospel as the angel Gabriel visits Zacharias.

“And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, *to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”²

While Luke’s “to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children” matches the KJV translation

¹ Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶. In the Hebrew Masoretic text, these same verses are 3.²³⁻²⁴, as there is a different chapter and verse division than that found in the KJV.

² Luke 1.¹⁷

of Malachi, his “and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just” is a significant departure from the KJV “and the heart of the children to their fathers.” It is also a significant departure from the Hebrew.

This change gives new meaning to the passage, which we will discuss later. If we read Luke’s final, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord,” as an interpretative reading of Malachi, then Luke has departed even more radically from the Hebrew text. This departure considerably softens the blow of the original, “lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” It is considerably more positive than the original.

It is possible that Luke’s final phrase is his own interpolation. However, the softening found in Luke’s reading is consistent with Jewish practice. These verses represent the final verses of the Old Testament. Many Jews have found it jarring to end the entire Old Testament with talk of cursing—to end the Old Testament on the note of this final word: *hērem*, “extermination.” Thus, when this passage is read in synagogue, it is common practice to read as follows (we will use the KJV for the benefit of our audience):

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 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. *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet.*”

The coming of Elijah is much more pleasant than the imagery of an entire world depopulated of its once numerous human inhabitants.³

The Book of Mormon is the second of the LDS standard works.⁴ We find Malachi quoted in

³ We should also note that the LXX adds another whole verse in which Israel is reminded that God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Horeb with the expectation that the nation would obey it. This keeps the Hebrew Bible from ending on the note of extermination.

⁴ In my mind, the Old and New Testaments are sufficiently different to be considered as two separate “standard works,” thus making the Book of Mormon the third “standard work.” But, with early Christians’ combining the Old and New into one book, the Bible, the two texts have been thought of as

it as well. Because Malachi lived after Lehi and his little band of wanderers left Jerusalem, they would have been unaware of his existence, let alone his message. However, deeming Malachi's message of great importance, Jesus quoted this portion of Malachi to the Nephites during his visit to them, thus making them aware of the man and his message.⁵ The quotation as found in the Book of Mormon is exactly the same as the KJV.⁶

We come, now, to the third LDS standard work, the Doctrine and Covenants, the second Section. This reading was delivered by Moroni, to Joseph Smith during the former's visit to the latter in 1823. This same reading is recorded in Joseph Smith's History, thus representing the quotation of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ in the fourth LDS standard work, the Pearl of Great Price.⁷

“Behold, 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. And he shall 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.”

Obviously, this reading of Malachi is significantly different than that found in the KJV (a reading faithful to the Hebrew text), the Book of Mormon, or in Luke. It gives impetus to a new interpretation, an interpretation that in my view narrowed considerably. We will have more to say on that later.

We should note that portions of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ are quoted elsewhere in the DC. In DC 110, we read, “... turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse...”⁸ This reading is only slightly different than the KJV. In DC 128.¹⁶, perhaps the most extensive examination of the LDS perspective on the spirit of Elijah found in the Doctrine and Covenants, we find the entire passage quoted exactly as it is

one, thus forming the “first standard work” of the LDS Church. No big deal. Just not how I think of it or would have done it.

⁵ 3 Nephi 25.⁵⁻⁶

⁶ Here is a good place to note that in Joseph Smith's “translation” or “revision” of the Bible, he made no changes to Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶, but left it as it is in the KJV.

⁷ JSH 1.³⁸⁻³⁹

⁸ Verse 15.

found in the KJV. We find a paraphrase of the passage in DC 27.⁹ without significant alteration from the KJV. DC 98.¹⁶ represents another quotation of Malachi without significant deviation from the KJV. However, here the passage is found in a surprising context. We will look at this passage later in our homily, as it comes closest to the expanded and broader meaning we find in Malachi's original utterance.

Some thoughts and questions on the alternative readings

Here, I would like to make a few simple observations and ask a few questions concerning the alternative readings found in the LDS standard works.

1. It is possible that Joseph Smith read Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ before his encounter with Moroni, but he gives us no reason to think that it made any greater impression on him than any other Biblical passage—and certainly not the impression that James 1.⁵ made. Thus, his encounter with the passage during Moroni's visit is likely the first time that the passage was made to stand out in his mind. With the thousands upon thousands of Biblical passages available for quotation, the fact that Moroni selected this one undoubtedly suggested to Joseph's mind that it was a particularly important passage with a particularly important message. Thus, it would be surprising if Joseph's mind was not called back to the passage over and over again in the years immediately following Moroni's visit.
2. It is unclear when Joseph first recorded his visit with Moroni or the words that passed between them. Section 2, containing Moroni's quotation of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶, was not included in the Book of Commandments, published in 1833, or in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. It was first included in the Doctrine and Covenants with the 1844 edition. It seems, then, that the first record of Moroni's quotation of Malachi is to be located in the Joseph Smith History found in today's Pearl of Great Price and written in 1838.

This account was written some 15 years after the visit. I will let the reader decide how likely it is that Joseph Smith remembered the exact manner in which Moroni quoted

Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ all those years later. Imagine having the passage quoted to you in 2004. How likely are you to quote it today exactly as you heard it in 2004? How likely is it that Joseph would have been uninfluenced by things he had thought and heard in the intervening years—especially if, as we suggested, the passage was considered of particular importance and thus returned to over and over again? It seems most likely to this writer, that this reading is Joseph Smith’s own and is based on the thoughts and perceptions he had had over the intervening years.

3. The Book of Mormon quotation of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ is exactly the same as the KJV. Why? The KJV did not exist when Jesus visited the Nephites. Does Jesus’ quotation of the passage as it is in the KJV imply that the KJV translation is the most accurate? If the KJV is most accurate, why did Moroni quote it differently? If Joseph had heard Moroni quote Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ differently—more accurately and “originally”?—in 1823, why did this reading not find its way into the Book of Mormon, published a little more than a half-dozen years after Moroni’s visit?
4. In 1830 and 1831, Joseph Smith worked on what has come to be known as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. In that revision, Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ remained unchanged from that of the KJV translation. This work was conducted after Joseph had reportedly heard Moroni’s alternate reading of this text. If Moroni’s reading is somehow superior to that of the KJV, why did he leave the KJV untouched and uncorrected in this revised Bible?
5. Outside of DC 2, whenever the Doctrine and Covenants quotes Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ or any portions of it, the quote utilizes that of the King James Bible without significant change. Nowhere else in the DC is the “Moroni version” used or alluded to. Why?

As we consider these observations and questions, we conclude that we are justified in relying on the Hebrew text of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ and translations dependent upon it as we seek to examine and explicate its meaning as well as the meaning and scope of the spirit of Elijah.

I have already expressed my skepticism about the province of Moroni’s reported quotation of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶. We have no record of Joseph recording this quotation until 1838, some 15 years after Moroni’s visit. It seems unlikely that he could have called the quote up verbatim after all that time. In addition, other than DC 2, the “Moroni version” of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ plays no role in discussions of the passage or of the spirit of Elijah. It seems likely that the quotation found in the JSH and then again in DC 2 represents Joseph’s own interpolation of the text after years of thought and consideration.⁹ More certainly, Moroni’s reading of the passage lends itself to the narrow LDS view of this passage and of the spirit of Elijah.

No doubt, at this point the reader wishes to know what I mean by a too-narrow LDS reading and interpretation of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ and of the spirit of Elijah to which it points. In addition, they will want to know what I find in the JSH and DC 2 translation that is too-narrow a reading of the passage. Without further ado, then, let me respond to these two justifiable concerns.

In this section, I will address the second question and look at the differences between the JSH/ DC 2 reading of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ and the KJV translation based upon the Masoretic Hebrew text. I will address the first question in the next section where we will discuss what I consider to be a too narrow interpretation of the passage, the too narrow meaning and scope of the spirit of Elijah it encourages, and an example of the sorts of false attitudes of behavior it can engender.

Here, then, is the KJV once more.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 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.”

⁹ This is not intended as a criticism. This is what one would expect from someone serious about understanding and applying scripture—a constant shifting and sifting and refining.

And here is Moroni's version.

“Behold, 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. And he shall 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.”

At this point, we wish to point out just one important difference in the two versions. It is a difference with important ramifications. In the King James translation, the direction of feeling and concern runs in two directions. First, we have “the heart of the fathers.” As my own translation suggests, “hearts” can here be thought of in terms of feelings, specifically the feeling of love and concern. Thus, Elijah restores the fathers’—or, in my translation, “parents”—love and concern, for their children.

“He is to restore the love of parents for children...”

Then, we have “the heart of the children.” Their hearts are turned toward their “fathers,” or “parents.” Thus, in addition to restoring the feelings that parents have for their children, Elijah restores the feelings that children have for their parents.

“He is to restore... the love of children for parents.”

The point is, in the KJV translation, and consistent with the Hebrew text, feelings of love and concern are mutual, two-way, and flow back and forth between parents and children as the result of Elijah's spirit and power.

Now, have a look at the flow found in the reading of DC 2.

“And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.”

Do you see? Do you feel the difference?

In this reading, just as in the KJV, “the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.” Elijah restores the love and concern of children for “fathers.” But what of the fathers? What are the fathers’ “hearts”—their thoughts, feelings, and concerns toward their children—in Moroni’s reading? No idea.

Unlike the KJV, there is no mention of the “hearts of the fathers.” In Moroni’s reading, no mention is made of any love or concern the fathers might possess for their children. The only feelings of love and concern mentioned in Moroni’s reading are those of the children for the fathers. Unlike the KJV, when it comes to relationships and feelings, Moroni’s is a one-way street.

Moroni’s fathers seem distant. But, of course, in the narrow, traditional LDS reading this makes perfect sense; for the “fathers” are, after all, dead. They are “ancestors,” long gone. Thus, they remain passive in the present. All that remains of them are unspecified promises made to them that the children take to heart in some manner. In the end, the children do not so much have a relationship with the “fathers” themselves as they have an interest in “the promises made to the fathers.” Here, “the fathers” are less human, more representative of *something* than *someone*. Elijah does not do anything *to* the fathers—i.e., restore their heart—so much as he does something *for* the fathers; for, being dead, someone else must do for them. In Moroni’s reading, “ancestors” feels far more appropriate than “parents.”

All of this, of course, is consistent with the LDS view of the spirit of Elijah. The living must act in a proxy role in behalf of the ancestors, who are dead and helpless. There is no relationship between the living and the dead but what an ordinance creates. We will have more to say of this later.

This one difference between the KJV reading—a reading consistent with the Hebrew text and most often utilized in the DC—and “Moroni’s reading” is significant and stark. It goes some way to explaining the too narrow LDS reading of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ and of the meaning and scope of the spirit of Elijah. Here, then, as promised, is my understanding of the orthodox and too narrow LDS interpretation of the passage and of the spirit of Elijah.

The orthodox LDS view is that this passage points to the massive latter-day genealogical work that is taking place outside LDS temples and the work of sealing or linking generations of relatives—past and present—through the ordinances performed within LDS temples. By and large, living individuals work to discover direct line ancestors to whom they are then sealed or linked through ordinance. Children are linked to parents who are linked to their parents who are linked to their parents, etc., etc., etc. These generational linkages—children to parents, parents to grandparents, grandparents to great grandparents, great grandparents to great, great grandparents, etc.—are added, one upon another, to form a great chain link¹⁰, which, it is hoped, will go back all the way to the original progenitors, Adam and Eve.

The spirit of Elijah, then, is about dead people being saved through linkage with living people and living people being saved through linkage with dead people. It is made necessary because of the passivity, the helplessness of the dead . Because of this helplessness, the living must play an active, proxy role in behalf of the dead.

Now, I do not deny the necessity of linkage. I believe very, very much in the importance of human linkage. It is, indeed, at the heart of Elijah’s spirit, and more importantly, of Jesus’ work of at-one-ment. I also believe deeply in God’s commitment to the dead. But this view of the spirit of Elijah is far, far too narrow.

I wish, at this point, to make a few observations about this too narrow view of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ and the too narrow view of the scope of the spirit of Elijah. First, in this view, Elijah only

¹⁰ See DC 128.¹⁸

seeks to bring about linkage between the living and the dead. Little if any thought is given to linkage between the living and the living. This is not consistent with what I understand to be the far more comprehensive ministry of Elijah, the far more expansive nature of the linkage he seeks, or the linkage necessary to enduring life and enduring society.

Second, according to this view all linkage between the living and dead—the only linkage to which it gives thought—is accomplished through ordinance. Without ordinances, there is no linkage. Linkage between human beings is purely legalistic and technical. Real, actual, impactful relationships between thinking, feeling human beings—the stuff that constitutes meaning and happiness—plays little if any role in linkage. This too is inconsistent with what I understand the more comprehensive ministry of Elijah to entail.

Third, the common focus of linkage is on direct line ancestors. As more and more individuals are linked, the chain grows longer in a linear fashion. However, with so many people, there are many interconnected “lines” or “chain links.” It begins to look more like a tree than a chain. But, even the “family tree” does not do justice to the complexity and intricacy of the human linkages that in fact exist. Neither does it capture the expansiveness of the linkage that the spirit of Elijah seeks to reveal. In fact, the complexity of human linkage is much more like a web than a tree. Every single point on the web is connected to every other point on the web; everyone on the web being “family.” Both the chain link metaphor and the tree metaphor portray “family” in far too narrow terms.

As I have suggested, this two narrow understanding of the spirit of Elijah and the too narrow view of “family,” carries with it real misperceptions and even evils. It ignores human linkages that the spirit of Elijah is meant to reveal and enliven.

For example, the member who sits right next to me in sacrament service week after week after week never thinks of him or herself as being sealed or linked to me, because, from their perspective no ordinance has linked us and, from their chain link perspective, I am not in their family chain. Oh, sure, at some point, often distant, I might get linked in at some 6th or 10th or 21st degree of separation. But, really, we are not “related.” We are not family as we

are led to think of family through the chain link metaphor that flows from the too narrow interpretation of the spirit of Elijah. Even the newer, more expansive “family tree” imagery is still too narrow a view to allow them to think of me as someone for whom they have a familiar responsibility.

Then again, in their interactions with the dozens of individuals with whom they come in contact on a daily, weekly, monthly basis—grocery store clerks, car salesmen, waiters and waitresses, nurses, doctors, teachers, mechanics, neighbors, etc.—LDS people relate in an “unlinked” manner. None of these individuals are linked to them by ordinance. None of them are “family.” The church member’s obligations toward all these non-family individuals are limited and entirely different than what they feel toward “family.” In the end, because of the absence of a perceived linkage, individuals who are outside the family, worthy of varying degrees of appreciation, respect, and love, can in good conscious be sacrificed for the good of the more fundamental “family.”

If you don’t believe me, I would have you consider the behavior of millions of LDS mothers and fathers during the COVID pandemic and, indeed, to this day. Some complain about my coming back to this event so often. But it has become, for me, a water shed moment. It has served as a true and disappointing revelation of the character of millions of Mormons and thus, to some extent, of Mormonism itself. The pandemic, and the behavior of millions of LDS people, can serve as a kind of metaphor. In the present instance, it is a metaphor for the too narrow interpretation of the spirit of Elijah and the linkage he intended “lest the whole earth be utterly wasted at his coming.”

Let me explain.

It cannot be denied that LDS mothers and fathers feel, as a corollary to the spirit of Elijah, linked to their children. Some might argue that because of temple ordinances, LDS parents feel this linkage even more strongly than parents who do not have the advantage of temple ordinances and the boost those ordinances give to “family.” However, during the pandemic and in response to the pandemic, millions of LDS mothers and fathers felt linked to their

children and acted upon that linkage in precisely the same way as millions of non-LDS mothers and fathers who have no ordinance to support or enhance their feelings of linkage with children.

LDS moms and dads complained right along and in full harmony with non-LDS mothers and fathers about the oppression of mask wearing expected of their children. They resisted mask wearing themselves and resisted the mask wearing of their children. This, it was vigorously asserted, was an attempt to “protect” those with whom they felt the closest linkage. When it came time to be vaccinated, they resisted vaccination for both themselves and their children. All this resistance was acted out in the name of “protection,” “freedom” and “family.” This resistance was seen, by many, as a sign of one’s love for their children.

Bologna.

This resistant to common sense remediations intended to save lives is a parade example of the too narrow understanding of the spirit of Elijah. Such resistance is, in fact, contrary to the true spirit of Elijah. In resisting commonsense measures to save lives, they gave little or no thought to “protecting” anyone outside their “family.” In doing so, they put everyone else around them at risk. It is almost a certainty that they brought death to others. How could they do this, you ask? Because those around them aren’t “family.” Elijah has not linked them with these non-family outsiders. “Family,” as they have so narrowly and wrongly and wickedly defined it, is all that matters. It is the end all and be all of everything.

Such attitudes are contrary to the true spirit of Elijah. They are tantamount to idolatry. And the sad fact of the matter is, Church leaders have been assisting in the perpetuation of such attitudes for decades, if not longer. Oh yes, “Love your neighbor.” Love your neighbor enough to be a “member missionary,” certainly. But, of course, when the neighbor refuses the invitation, they remain an outsider. They have no linkage to us or we to them. Elijah’s spirit of human linkage has no role to play in our relationship with such people.

It is more than ironic that it is just these sorts of attitudes and behaviors that the spirit of

Elijah came to do away with. It is just the sort of “spirit” that leads to mass death and finally extermination. In the case of the pandemic, this is literal. If everyone on the planet acted like these millions of LDS mothers and fathers, resisting masks and vaccines, deaths would have multiplied exponentially. If everyone on the planet acted like these millions of LDS fathers and mothers, rejecting masks and vaccines, death would still be running rampant through the population. If such attitudes persisted, and then were applied to other health and safety challenges, extermination does not seem so farfetched.¹¹

The response of millions of LDS mothers and fathers to the COVID pandemic and its aftermath is but one example of many that could be cited of the wicked behaviors that flow from the too narrow and false beliefs concerning the spirit of Elijah and the interpretation of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶.

This is, no doubt, a hard saying for many. It is, however, no less true for its hardness.

We must now turn to the broader meaning of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ and of the spirit of Elijah to better see and appreciate the wickedness that is too often found in the too narrow reading—wickedness that, itself, must become extinct if humanity is to endure, here and in eternity.

the broader view

My example of the COVID pandemic and the response of millions of LDS mothers and fathers to that pandemic provides a hint as to my understanding of the broader meaning that should, indeed must be assigned to Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ and the spirit of Elijah. But hints are not enough. So, it is time to delve into the broader meanings. Here, again, is Malachi’s statement.

“Understand: I am going to send ’ēliyâ, the prophet, to you before the coming, totally awe-inspiring day of YHWH. He is to restore the love of parents for children and the love

¹¹ Given the virus’ efficient ability to mutate, the jury is still out as to the extent of suffering and death these selfish and misguided deniers will cause.

of children for parents so that when I arrive, I need not strike the earth with annihilation.”

The spirit of Elijah involves the “returning,” or, as I have translated, the “restoring” of “hearts,” or “love,” as I have it, between parents and children.¹² Humans are known for their tendency to disconnect from each other. Love can easily turn cold and disappear. Jesus, himself, warns that “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”¹³ Paul warns that in the future individuals will live “without love” and become “heartless.”¹⁴

Malachi’s language, with its emphasis on “parents” and “children,” has caused LDS interpreters to focus exclusively on “families.” But, even within the confines of LDS interpretation of the passage and the spirit of Elijah, this focus on “family” as traditionally conceived is too narrow.

We spoke earlier of the linkage sought in the name of the spirit of Elijah. One generation after another is linked together to form a long chain of links. However, in reality the doctrine does not form chain links. It forms a network. A complicated and intricate web of connections.

The fact is, the doctrine, even the “family history” it inspires, reveals that everyone is linked to everyone. Everyone is a family member of everyone. If you don’t believe me, just try this experiment. Print out your “family tree” going back as far as you can. Then get 10 of your friends, people “unrelated” to you, do the same. Bring the printouts together and look at

¹² Some might feel that I am taking liberties when I translate “love” rather than “heart.” We would make two points. First, it is clear that “heart” can mean love, not only in English, but in Biblical Hebrew. Second, they do not understand that they too replace heart. The traditional LDS interpretation of the passage surely calls for Elijah to produce “thoughts,” “interests,” “concern,” “curiosity,” etc. for “the fathers” on the part of the children. Certainly, these thoughts or interests are not hostile, but caring, we might reasonably say, “affectionate.” The “children’s” curiosity isn’t simply intellectual, surely, but aimed at helping, which, again, implies appreciation, concern, and love. The Hebrew “heart,” may not be replaced in LDS translation, but it is in thought and interpretation.

¹³ Matthew 24.¹²

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 3.³. The LDS footnote referencing “sexual immorality” is wholly unjustified, but, given that sexual sin is the only sin recognized by the sex-obsessed culture, understandable. One really must consider the possibility that the culture’s obsession with all things sexual stems from a deep unresolved psychological guilt over the questionable polygamy found in its past.

closely at them. Within 6, 8, 10, 12, generations, you will begin to note connections, links, between your “lines” and theirs. The further back you go, the more connections. As you begin to put them together, you will soon see that you are not part of a tree but of a complicated web on which you are connected to hundreds, thousands, millions of individuals whom you think of as “unrelated” to you. Indeed, you are linked to everyone who ever walked the globe—and beyond.

This expanded web of connections is part of the broader view of the spirit of Elijah. The spirit of Elijah is about far more than nuclear families of moms and dads and kids with grandparents, great grandparents, great, great grandparents, etc. To think of it only in terms of nuclear or even the traditional “extended family” is just wrong. The spirit of Elijah aims to link every human being with every other human being—both dead and alive. It aims to teach us that we are all connected—not simply through ordinances, but in actual fact.

Through the spirit of Elijah we come to understand, accept, and act upon the realization that just as a child depends on the parent for survival and just as the parent finds meaning and fulfillment in nurturing and loving their children, we all depend upon each other for survival and find meaning and fulfillment only in nurturing and loving each other. Without this awareness, and without acting upon this awareness, love does wax cold, and individuals do grow heartless until love is extinguished—the response of millions of LDS parents to the very real COVID pandemic is an illustration of this coldness and heartlessness. It is then only a matter of time before survival is impossible. Only extinction remains, just as Malachi warned.

As we talk about this expanded linkage of all to all, we should bring the Greek translation of Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ (*LXX*, 3.²²⁻²³) into the discussion. Here is a translation of the Septuagint.

“Pay attention! I am sending to you Hēlias, the Thesbite, before the coming, hugely revelatory day of the Lord. He will restore a parent’s heart of their child [lit., “father’s heart to his son”] and a human being’s heart to his fellow human being lest I come and

smite the entire world.”¹⁵

The Septuagint captures the broader spirit of Elijah with its expanded conception of human “linkage.” It well demonstrates the wickedness of narrower perspectives that permit the sorts of disconnected and uncaring, even deadly behavior that were all too common during the COVID pandemic.

Now, one might consider the Septuagint to be the outlier. However, we might detect its spirit in other passages. We think, now, especially of DC 98.¹⁴⁻¹⁷ to which we referred earlier and to which we promised to return.

“Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me.

Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children; and again, the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews; lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, and all flesh be consumed before me.”

The Lord’s expansion of Malachi’s original warning/ threat is obvious in this passage: “lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, *and all flesh be consumed before me.*” But the Lord’s expansion of the meaning behind the spirit of Elijah might not be quite so obvious. But consider it again,

“Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children...”

What are we to make of the smooth transition between renouncing war and proclaiming peace to seeking “diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of

¹⁵ Author’s translation

the fathers to the children”? Surely these two things are unrelated.

Not so.

The spirit of Elijah includes the renunciation of war and the proclamation of peace between all men, however “unrelated” other individuals may seem; for, in fact, all are related and the spirit of Elijah extends to relationships that exist between the living as well as the dead. Indeed, the second, “therefore,” connects the renunciation of war and the proclamation of peace with “covenant.” Here, we remember that the Old Testament patterned the covenant that exists between God and humans after 2nd millennium B.C. international peace treaties that sought to restore peace and “linkage” between nations that had previously been at war and “unlinked.”

Furthermore, we should consider that of the many covenants into which we enter today, none are of any greater consequence than those found in the temple. Isaiah has this to say about the temple, with its teachings, performances, and covenants.

“This is what Y^eša‘yāhû ben ’āmô ş perceived about Y^ehûdâ and Y^erûšālāyim.

In days to come

the Mountain on which stands Yahweh’s temple
will be fixed above any other Mountain;
lifted above any other height.

All nations will come streaming to it;

many peoples will come, saying:

Come! Let’s go up to Yahweh’s mountain;
to the temple of the God of Ya‘qōb̄.

He will teach us his ways,

and we shall walk in his paths.

For Torah will come out of Şîyôn,

and the word of Yahweh from Y^erûšālāyim.

Then will He mediate between nations;
He will reconcile many peoples,
so that they will retool their swords into plow blades
and their spears into pruning instruments.
One nation will no longer lift the sword against another,
nor will they any longer train for warfare.

Come, Oh House of Ya‘qōb, and let us walk in Yahweh’s light.”¹⁶

The temple, bound heart and soul with the spirit and power of Elijah, is about the establishment of world peace through doctrine and the formation of linkages—linkages that exists as much between the living and the living as between the living and the dead. The temple is the place above all other places where the connectedness, the linkage between all members of the human race are best taught and exemplified. You see, again, why the behavior of so many millions of LDS parents during the pandemic must be seen as a violation of their covenants with God, their temple covenants, and their rejection of the spirit of Elijah. The wicked reactions to the pandemic denied linkage and one’s responsibility to anyone not “family.” But there is no one on the planet who is not family! Such violation and rejection carry a stiff price, as Malachi warned.

We have covered a good bit of ground in this homily. It has turned out to be longer than I anticipated. So, we need to wrap things up. Before turning to our conclusion, however, I would like to make one final observation. We have not yet considered Luke’s reading of Malachi’s statement.

In blessing his son, John, Zacharias discerns that his son will minister with and in the same spirit and power as Elijah before him. He would, like Elijah, seek to “restore the heart of fathers to children.” In addition, and in connection with that work, he would restore “the disobedient [the unconvinced, disbelieving, unconverted] to the understanding of the

¹⁶ Isaiah 2.¹⁻⁵

righteous.”¹⁷

Luke’s reading demonstrates that the spirit of Elijah is about far more than generational and ancestral linkage. It is about human behavior and about changing and improving human behavior. It is, among other things, about restoring to the disobedient and unbelieving a proper view of their relationship, indeed, their connectedness with every other occupant on the planet—and beyond. The spirit of Elijah exposes and corrects all behavior that causes division and leads to hatred, violence, and war that, if left unchecked, leads to extinction. The “disobedient” are in large part those who reject their linkage to all and act in ways that dismisses, devalues and, often sacrifices others. The “righteous” are in large part those who accept their linkage to all and seeks to act in ways that exalts all around them—the grocery store clerk as well as the child.

Conclusion and benediction

Malachi 4.⁵⁻⁶ is the only passage to appear in each of the LDS standard works. This is, in itself, evidence of the passage’s importance and the importance of Elijah’s mission and spirit. Jesus’ interest in quoting the passage during his visit to the Nephites adds to our sense of its importance.

The spirit of Elijah to which it points is far, far more expansive than is often recognized. Too often we associate the spirit of Elijah and its associated priesthood ordinances with the linkage of a too narrowly defined “family.” We think of it only in terms of creating linkage between the dead and living—linkages that would and could not exist without ordinances.

But the spirit of Elijah is about more than forming familiar linkage through priesthood ordinances. The spirit of Elijah with its linking ordinances seeks to point our minds and hearts to the greater, more expansive reality: we are linked to everyone, the dead and the living. This linkage exists whether we like it or not. The spirit of Elijah does not so much

¹⁷ Author’s translation.

“create” linkages that would not otherwise exist as it reveals links that naturally and inevitably exist—and which we too often ignore and deny in thought and action.

The spirit of Elijah is as applicable in our relationship and behavior toward the store clerk, our child’s elementary teacher, our doctor, or any one of the countless others with whom we associate as it is with “family members.” It seeks to reveal the actual, living, and loving relationships that must exist between all people if we are to survive, both here and in eternity. The spirit of Elijah calls us to acknowledge and live according to the reality of our vast linkage.

If the spirit of Elijah and its ordinances do not change in the here and now our attitudes, our relationships, and our behaviors toward everyone who enters our life, dead or alive; if they do not persuade us of our linkage to others and our responsibility for and to them, the ordinances themselves become as dead a religious work as any religious performance that has ever existed. Being dead in the here and now, they possess no power to link in the then and there of eternity.

Denying or abandoning this more expansive view of the spirit of Elijah for a too narrow view is not only wrong-headed. It leads to bad, even wicked human attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, denying the more expansive view of the spirit of Elijah allows the proliferation of every wicked act of human hatred and violence and abuse and war that has ever existed anywhere in the universe. Settling for anything short of this expansive view of the spirit of Elijah leads to wicked human attitudes and behaviors that, if left uncorrected and unchecked, result in suffering, death, and, eventually, extinction. Human beings cannot endure on this planet or in eternity without the understanding and linkage that the spirit of Elijah brings to all human and eternal beings and their relationships.

The spirit of Elijah seeks to restore the realization that we are all connected. That no one of us can live without everyone else, and that everyone else cannot live without any one of us. Any rejection of this reality—either through attitudes or actions—is not only a violation and rejection of our shared humanity, it is a violation of baptismal and, more significantly, of

temple covenants. It can only result in the extinction of life on this mortal planet and, apparently, in the cosmos. It is ok to say that the work of linkage begins in the home. But it does not end with the home. It is not limited to the home. Like a giant network, it extends the world over and reaches out into the cosmos.

God, Himself, is a connected or linked Being. He is, as the great Hebrew Shema witnesses, One. He too, lives and acts according to the spirit of Elijah. His living of the spirit of Elijah is how and why He endures in eternity. His linkage to all is how and why He endures. It is how and why we will endure. It is key to an enduring and exalted life. Without it, no one and no thing endures. Without it, the universe collapses in on itself, leaving, finally, only nothingness and extinction.

^a Hebrew, *hinnēh*.

^b Literally, “great and awesome.” But I take the two words as a hendiadys.

^c Hebrew, *šûb*. Not simple “turn,” but “turn back,” “return.” One of the most common words in the Old Testament, it is also a word with as great a wealth of meanings as any in the Old Testament.

^d Literally, “heart.”

^e Hebrew, *hērem*. There are other words indicative of “destruction,” most notably, *’abad*. But *hērem* is an intense word indicative of “total and complete destruction.”