



Type: Journal Article

“The Messenger of Salvation”: The Messenger-Message Christology of D&C 93:8 and Its Implications for Latter-day Saint Missionary Work and Temple Worship

Author(s): Matthew L. Bowen

Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*,
Volume 51 (2022)

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

Page(s): 1-28

Abstract: Several of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations, beginning with Moroni’s appearance in 1823, quote the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 with the Lord “suddenly com[ing] to his temple” as “messenger of the covenant.” Malachi 3:1 and its quoted iterations in 3 Nephi 24:1; Doctrine and Covenants 36:8; 42:36; 133:2 not only impressed upon Joseph and early Church members the urgency of building a temple to which the Lord could come, but also presented him as the messenger of the Father’s restored covenant. Malachi’s prophecy concords with the restored portion of the “fulness of the record of John” and its “messenger” Christology in D&C 93:8 in which Jesus Christ is both “the messenger of salvation” (the “Word”) and the Message (also “the Word”). The ontological kinship of God the Father with Jesus, angels (literally messengers), and humankind in Joseph’s early revelations lays the groundwork for the doctrine of humankind’s coeternality with God (D&C 93:29), and the notion that through “worship” one can “come unto the Father in [Jesus’s] name, and in due time receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:19; cf. D&C 88:29). D&C 88 specifies missionary work and ritual washing of the feet as a means of becoming, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, “clean from the blood of this generation” (D&C 88:75, 85, 138). Such ritual washings continued as a part of the endowment that was revealed to Joseph Smith during the Nauvoo period. Missionary work itself constitutes a form of worship, and temple worship today continues to revolve around missionary work for the living (the endowment) and for the dead (ordinances). The endowment, like the visions in which prophets were given special missionary commissions, situates us ritually in the divine council, teaches us about the great Messenger of salvation, and empowers us to participate in his great mission of saving souls.

INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 51 · 2022 · Pages 1- 28

**“The Messenger of Salvation”:
The Messenger-Message Christology
of D&C 93:8 and Its Implications
for Latter-day Saint Missionary Work
and Temple Worship**

Matthew L. Bowen

Offprint Series

© 2022 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at InterpreterFoundation.org. You can find other articles published in our journal at Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org.

**“THE MESSENGER OF SALVATION”:
THE MESSENGER-MESSAGE CHRISTOLOGY
OF D&C 93:8 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR LATTER-DAY SAINT MISSIONARY WORK
AND TEMPLE WORSHIP**

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: *Several of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations, beginning with Moroni’s appearance in 1823, quote the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 with the Lord “suddenly com[ing] to his temple” as “messenger of the covenant.” Malachi 3:1 and its quoted iterations in 3 Nephi 24:1; Doctrine and Covenants 36:8; 42:36; 133:2 not only impressed upon Joseph and early Church members the urgency of building a temple to which the Lord could come, but also presented him as the messenger of the Father’s restored covenant. Malachi’s prophecy concords with the restored portion of the “fulness of the record of John” and its “messenger” Christology in D&C 93:8 in which Jesus Christ is both “the messenger of salvation” (the “Word”) and the Message (also “the Word”). The ontological kinship of God the Father with Jesus, angels (literally messengers), and humankind in Joseph’s early revelations lays the groundwork for the doctrine of humankind’s coeternality with God (D&C 93:29), and the notion that through “worship” one can “come unto the Father in [Jesus’s] name, and in due time receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:19; cf. D&C 88:29). D&C 88 specifies missionary work and ritual washing of the feet as a means of becoming, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, “clean from the blood of this generation” (D&C 88:75, 85, 138). Such ritual washings continued as a part of the endowment that was revealed to Joseph Smith during the Nauvoo period. Missionary work itself constitutes a form of worship, and temple worship today continues to revolve around missionary work for the living (the endowment) and for the dead (ordinances). The endowment, like the visions in which prophets were given special missionary commissions,*

situates us ritually in the divine council, teaches us about the great Messenger of salvation, and empowers us to participate in his great mission of saving souls.

On May 6, 1833, a portion of the “the fulness of the record of John” was restored through the prophet Joseph Smith (cf. D&C 93:18). In this restored fragment, John bore witness that he saw the premortal Christ:

And he bore record, saying: I saw his glory, that he was in the beginning, before the world was; therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation. (D&C 93:7–8)

John’s language combines the concept of a preexistent, divine, personified “Word” (Greek *logos*), as a development on the idea of a preexistent, divine, personified wisdom or intelligence (see, e.g., Proverbs 8:22–31; cf. Abraham 3:19–28), with the concept of a divine Messenger invested with a fullness of divine authority. John’s description of Jesus Christ with the appositive “even the messenger of salvation” recalls Malachi’s prophecy of the coming of the Lord to his temple and the appositive “even messenger of the covenant” from the 5th century BCE:

Behold, I will send **my messenger** [*mal’āki*], and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the **messenger of the covenant** [*mal’ak habbērīt*], whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:1; 3 Nephi 24:1)

In this article, I will argue for a possible reading of D&C 93:8 and the concept of messenger there, as a part of which I will demonstrate the importance of the messenger prophecy of Malachi 3:1 in Joseph Smith’s early revelations. Within the interpretive framework of Malachi 3:1, D&C 93:8 presents Jesus Christ as both the Father’s “messenger” and his “message” (or “Word”). Relatedly, D&C 93 restores the knowledge of a similar type of relationship between God and humankind: “Man [like Jesus] was also in the beginning with God” — that is, coeternal with God, because “Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be” (D&C 93:29). Thus, humankind has the capacity for eternal enlargement (see D&C 93:19). Joseph Smith’s realization of these truths had important implications for the early missionary work

of the Church — the elders' preaching of an expanding gospel as "the word" — and the emerging concept of worship and temple among the early saints as connected with receiving the Father's fulness.

This discussion will proceed in four parts. First, I will discuss the importance of Malachi 3:1 in Joseph Smith's early revelations, including the meanings of Hebrew *mal'āk* and Greek *angelos* and how the reiteration of the concept of the divine "messenger ... suddenly com[ing] to [his] temple" in Joseph's revelations reinforced the urgency of building a temple. Second, I will explain the christological significance of Jesus Christ as the Messenger. Then, third, I will look at Jesus Christ as the Message. Fourth, I will explain how Latter-day Saint temple ritual and worship began as a means of preparing the early elders to proclaim the gospel message (as messengers, Abraham's "seed")¹ and thus become "clean from the blood of this [wicked] generation" (D&C 88:75, 85, 138). I hope that this approach will help us more fully appreciate the Lord's explanation for giving the fragment of "the fulness of the record of John" in D&C 93: "I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness" (D&C 93:19).

1. "I Will Suddenly Come to My Temple": The Importance of Malachi 3:1 in Joseph Smith's Early Revelations

In 3 Nephi 24–25, Jesus quotes Malachi 3–4 to the Lamanites and Nephites at the temple in Bountiful. Because this prophecy postdated Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, it was not included among the prophecies on the plates of brass and was thus not available to the Nephites and Lamanites.² Nevertheless, Jesus's quotation of Malachi 3:1 in 3 Nephi 24:1 helps us to understand how he interpreted this prophecy and offers a potential hermeneutical guide to its later quotations.

1. See Abraham 2:9–11.

2. Jesus acknowledges this following his quotation of Malachi 3–4 (3 Nephi 24–25), when he describes this text as one of several "scriptures which ye had not with you" (3 Nephi 26:2).

Malachi 3:1	3 Nephi 24:1
Behold, I will send my messenger [<i>mal'ākī</i>], and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord [<i>hā'ādôn</i>], whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant [<i>mal'ak habbērīt</i>], whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.	Thus said the Father unto Malachi [<i>mal'ākī</i>] — Behold, I will send my messenger [<i>mal'ākī</i>], and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord [<i>hā'ādôn</i>] whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant [<i>mal'ak habbērīt</i>], whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.

Jesus's quotation of this text places the prophetic words of Malachi 3–4 in the mouth God the Father. With the Father speaking to Malachi, “my messenger” (*mal'ākī* in the second instance) constitutes a wordplay on the name of the prophet Malachi, but the mention of this sent messenger can hardly have reference to the prophet Malachi himself, but must refer to another messenger as a forerunner to the coming “Lord.” The phrase “messenger of the covenant” *mal'ak habbērīt* also plays on the name Malachi (like the priest as the “messenger of the Lord of Hosts,” *mal'ak yhw̄h šēbā'ōt* in Malachi 2:7), but it has no reference to the prophet Malachi himself and seems distinct from the prophetic “my messenger” who is sent to prepare the way. The messenger of the covenant in whom Israel delights who “shall come” is best identified as *hā'ādôn* — the Lord whom Israel seeks.

In Malachi 3:1, the KJV translators used the word “even” rather than “and” to translate the Hebrew conjunction *û-* (*waw-*) to emphasize what they saw as an appositional relationship between the “the Lord whom ye seek” and “the messenger of the covenant.” The Book of Mormon English translation also retains the word “even” here. Regarding the Malachi 3:1 text and translating the *û-* or *waw* as introducing an appositive, Mignon R. Jacobs writes:

Concerning the clause *yea, the messenger of the covenant whom you desire*, the *waw* in the formulation introduces the appositive that further identifies the Lord (*hā'ādôn*) as the “messenger of the covenant” (*mal'ak habbērīt*). While the *waw* may be the simple conjunction introducing the third figure — the messenger/angel of the covenant — the presence of a third figure seems unlikely in this context. By identifying the “messenger of the covenant” with Yahweh, one identifies the being as divine rather than human. The enforcer of the

covenant in whom the people delight is Yahweh, who will execute justice through judgment.³

The fact that “the Lord whom ye seek” and “the messenger of the covenant” are both the subject of the verb *come* (Hebrew *bô*) heavily implies that they are the same individual. The question posed in Malachi 3:2 (3 Nephi 24:2), “who shall abide the day of his *coming?*”, further suggests that we are dealing with the coming of a Lord also identified as a messenger. In other words, “the images of Mal[achi] 3:2, usually associated with Yahweh, refer to the effects of the day of Yahweh.”⁴ It should be further noted that the resonance of the descriptions “the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple” and “the messenger of the covenant ... he shall come” would have been particularly powerful for the audience present at the temple in Bountiful who were witnessing the literal fulfillment of those words. In quoting this text, Jesus Christ unmistakably identifies himself as “the Lord whom ye seek” and “the messenger of the covenant” who would “come.”

We find the prophecy of Malachi 3–4 thoroughly intertwined with Joseph Smith’s early recorded revelations. Importantly, Joseph Smith stated that Moroni quoted “a part of the third chapter of Malachi” to him four times on the evening of September 21 and the morning of September 22, 1823.⁵ Moroni’s citation of this prophecy in the context of eschatological restoration and other Old Testament (and Abrahamic Covenant) prophecies “about to be fulfilled”⁶ suggests that the “part” of Malachi 3 to which Joseph here alludes may have been, or included, Malachi 3:1–4 and thus, the prophecy of the “messenger of the covenant ... suddenly com[ing] to his temple” (Malachi 3:1).

In 1829, during his translation of the plates of Mormon, Joseph encountered a version of Malachi 3–4 representing what Jesus quoted to the Lamanites and Nephites gathered to the temple in Bountiful, as noted above. Mormon took care to preserve and include this prophecy as the last in a sequence of important Old Testament prophecies Jesus quoted on that occasion (see 3 Nephi 24–25). In his visible, angel-like⁷ descent

3. Mignon R. Jacobs, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 275.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Joseph Smith—History 1:36; see also vv. 45–49.

6. Cf. Joseph Smith—History 1:40.

7. 3 Nephi 11:8: “And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them;

from heaven recorded in 3 Nephi 11:8, his subsequent reorganization of the Church, and the reestablishment of the Father's covenant, Jesus acted in his capacity as the Father's "messenger of the covenant." The Lord whom they sought had "suddenly come to his temple" as messenger of the covenant. This prophecy in its temple context in the Book of Mormon offered Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and their earliest associates some notion of the need for a latter-day temple with a view to the latter-day, pre-Millennial fulfillment of Malachi 3–4.

The earliest explicit quotation of Malachi 3:1 in the canonized revelations that became the D&C also constitutes the first explicit mention of a "temple" in these same revelations. A December 9, 1830 revelation directed to Edward Partridge when he came with Sidney Rigdon to meet the Prophet Joseph Smith, concluded with the Lord's abrupt statement, "I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God; wherefore, **gird up your loins and I will suddenly come to my temple.** Even so. Amen" (D&C 36:8; emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine). The promise, "I will suddenly come to my temple," represents a direct quotation from Malachi 3:1: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: **and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant,** whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." In speaking the promise in the first person, the Savior identifies himself as "the messenger of the covenant" and emphasizes his imminent "coming" to a "temple."

The revelation to Edward Partridge (D&C 36), whose calling as Bishop would directly pertain to the financing of a temple, came almost contemporaneously with the revelation of the Vision of Enoch to the prophet Joseph Smith. In that vision the Lord promised, "righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, **that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle,** and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem" (Moses 7:62). The building of the temple would be vital to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and the establishment of latter-day Zion.

Two months after the revelation to Edward Partridge, on February 9 and 23, 1831, the Lord gave his "law" (D&C 42:2) to the Church through the Prophet Joseph Smith as previously promised

and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them."

on January 2, 1831 and recorded in D&C 38:8. This "law" included the principle of consecration, intended to help the saints achieve the conditions of Enoch's Zion described in Moses 7:18. "[P]roperties in the hands of the church, or any individuals of it, more than is necessary for their support" were to be consecrated to the bishop (Edward Partridge)⁸ "to administer to those who have not, from time to time, that every man who has need may be amply supplied and receive according to his wants" (D&C 42:33). The Lord also instituted this consecration "for the purpose of purchasing lands for the public benefit of the church, and building houses of worship, and building up of the New Jerusalem which is hereafter to be revealed that that my covenant people may be gathered in one in that day when **I shall come to my temple**" (D&C 42:36). Here again, the Lord reiterated the immediacy of his "coming" and laid out the "Zion" conditions that would need to prevail among the saints at that time, including the existence of a temple accepted as "his."

Still less than a year after receiving D&C 36:8,⁹ the Prophet Joseph Smith received a similarly-worded promise at a "time [when] there were many things which the elders desired to know relative to preaching the Gospel to the inhabitants of the earth, and concerning the gathering."¹⁰ The revelation again quoted Malachi 3:1, "**The Lord who shall suddenly come to his temple**; the Lord who shall come down upon the world with a curse to judgment; yea, upon all the nations that forget God, and upon all the ungodly among you" (D&C 133:2). Again, in using the language of Malachi 3:1, the Lord reemphasized his imminent "coming" as messenger of the covenant of the Father (cf. 3 Nephi 21:4; Moroni 10:33, i.e., the Abrahamic Covenant) and that he would "suddenly come" to a temple that he claimed as "his." The intended effect of the revelation upon the implied audience would have been renewed urgency for the building of a temple to which the Lord as messenger of the covenant would suddenly come.

From a theological and christological perspective, Malachi 3:1 and its quotation in Joseph Smith's early revelations is important for several reasons. Like Psalm 110:1 ("The Lord said unto my Lord ..."), Malachi mentions two Lords, one of whom is "sent" as a "messenger" and "suddenly come[s] to his temple." The Hebrew word for "messenger" in Malachi 3:1 is *mal'āk* (*mal'ak*), clearly an echo of the name of the

8. See D&C 41:9–11; 42:10.

9. Joseph received the revelation contained in D&C 133 on November 3, 1831, slightly less than eleven months after he received D&C 36 (December 9, 1830).

10. D&C 113, section heading, 2013 ed.

prophet Malachi.¹¹ Like the Greek word *angelos*, *mal'āk* originally meant “messenger” but came to have the more developed sense of “angel” as describing a class of (heavenly) beings. Malachi 3:1 prophesies the sending of two messengers. First, the prophecy mentions “my messenger [*mal'ākī*] ... [who] shall prepare the way before me,” clearly a reference to a prophet or angel or both (like the eschatological coming of Elijah the prophet promised in Malachi 4:5–6).¹² Second, it mentions “the Lord whom ye seek,” who is specially designated “the messenger of the covenant” (*mal'ak habbērīt*).

The Kirtland Temple was finally dedicated on March 27, 1836, as recorded in D&C 109. In his dedicatory prayer, the Prophet Joseph Smith besought the Lord “to accept of this house, the workmanship of the hands of us, thy servants, which thou didst command us to build” (D&C 109:4). The Prophet further pled, “O hear, O hear, O hear us, O Lord! And answer these petitions, and accept the dedication of this house unto thee, the work of our hands, which we have built unto thy name” (D&C 109:78).

On April 3rd, 1836, one week after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the “messenger of the covenant” — the Lord himself — “suddenly c[a]me to his temple” in the most literal sense, appearing as a glorified resurrected personage “standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit,” which had the appearance of “a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber,”¹³ as if it were the *kappōret* (i.e., atonement-lid) on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the ancient Israelite tabernacle/temple. This event invites comparison to the “paved work of a sapphire stone ... as it were the body of heaven in his clearness”¹⁴ upon which the Lord stood when he appeared to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel on a temple-like mountain in Exodus 24:1–11. As Jehovah, the same God who appeared to Moses, Aaron, et. al, he declared in the newly-built temple: “I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father.

11. See discussion in Matthew L. Bowen, “Ominous Onomastics: Symbolic Naming and Paronomasia in Old Testament Prophecy” in *Prophets & Prophecies of the Old Testament: The 46th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Aaron P. Schade, Brian M. Hauglid, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2017), 41–42; Matthew L. Bowen, “Messengers of the Covenant: Mormon’s Doctrinal Use of Malachi 3:1 in Moroni 7:29–32” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 111–38.

12. See also 3 Nephi 25:5–6; D&C 2:1–2; Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39.

13. D&C 110:2.

14. Exodus 24:10.

Behold, your sins are forgiven you; you are clean before me; therefore, lift up your heads and rejoice. Let the hearts of your brethren rejoice, and let the hearts of all my people rejoice, who have, with their might, built this house to my name. For behold, **I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here**; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house" (D&C 110:4–7). The messenger of the covenant claimed the temple as "his" and the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 stood fulfilled anew (see D&C 110:1–10). The "dispensation of the Gospel of Abraham" was committed to Joseph and Oliver at this time through an "Elias" with the promise "that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed" (D&C 110:12), anticipating the complete eschatological fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

2. Jesus Christ as Messenger: The Messenger of the Covenant as the Messenger of Salvation

Having made a case for Yahweh (Jehovah) as the Lord (*hā'ādōn*) and the messenger of the covenant in Malachi 3:1, and having established the significance of the language of Malachi 3:1 in Joseph Smith's early revelations with the image of the messenger of the covenant "suddenly com[ing] to his temple," we proceed to a discussion of the "messenger of the covenant" as the "messenger of salvation" in the restored prologue of "the fulness of the record of John" (D&C 93:19).

The concept of the Lord as Messenger or Angel has roots in the Hebrew Bible. In his blessing on Joseph's sons, Jacob invokes God as a redeeming Messenger or Angel:

And he [Jacob] blessed Joseph, and said, God [*hā'ēlōhīm*, literally *the* God], before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God [*hā'ēlōhīm*] which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel [*hammal'āk*] which redeemed [*haggō'ēl*] me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. (Genesis 48:15–16)

In this blessing, the Hebrew noun *mal'āk* ("messenger," "angel") is used as an appositional description of the "God, before whom my fathers ... did walk, the God which fed me..." Jacob's blessing echoes his vow at Bethel following his theophany there: "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my

father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God" (Genesis 28:20–21). Jacob's God and redeeming Angel appear to be none other than the Lord himself. The participial Hebrew term rendered "which redeemed" is identical with the term redeemer (*gō'ēl*), which is also an active participle derived from the verb *gā'al*. Regarding this term, Jennifer C. Lane writes:

The best translation of *gō'ēl* is "kinsman redeemer." The kind of redemption that is described by *gā'al* and done by the *gō'ēl* is not generic. It could not be done by anyone for anyone. It is based on familial relationship. The *gō'ēl* was the oldest male member of an extended family who had the familial obligation to restore that which had become unbalanced.¹⁵

The Lord himself was Abraham's, Isaac's, and Jacob's redeemer because of a family relationship confirmed by covenant. Lane continues,

The *gō'ēl* redeemed family members who had become enslaved for whatever reason. Maybe they had been captured. Maybe they had sold themselves or had been sold into slavery. The *gō'ēl* was there to make things right and to bring family members back to their rightful place.¹⁶

In acting as Jacob's kinsman redeemer (i.e., *haggō'ēl*), he was acting in a covenant, familial capacity. In other words, he was acting as "messenger of the covenant."

The function of the theophanic Angel or Messenger that accompanied Israel in the wilderness is similarly covenantal in nature. God promised to send his Angel or Messenger to Israel in the wilderness to "keep [them] in the way" just as the Lord, as Jacob's redeeming angel, kept Jacob "in the way":

Behold, I send an Angel [*mal'āk*, other ancient witnesses: "my angel," "my messenger"] before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel [*mal'ākī*] shall go before

15. Jennifer C. Lane, *Finding Christ in the Covenant Path: Ancient Insights for Modern Life* (Provo, UT: RSC, 2020), 21.

16. *Ibid.*

thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off. (Exodus 23:20–23)

The divinity of the Angel/Messenger is suggested by the statement “my name is in him” (*šēmî bēqirbô*, literally “my name is within him”). In other words, he had full authority to exercise divine prerogatives. As Paul noted, Jesus received the divine “name that is above every other name” (Philippians 2:9).¹⁷ Matthew records that Jesus told his disciples after the resurrection: “All power [*exousia* = authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). Jesus Christ, like the Angel/Messenger in Exodus 23:20–23, exercises divine prerogatives with all divine authority and thus shares an identity with God as “God.” John 1:1 articulates this same concept with the Word being “with God” (Greek *pros ton theon*) and being what God is: “Divine was the Word” (*theos ên ho logos*, translation mine).

The Angel/Messenger’s “bring[ing] Israel in” to the nations occupying the land of promise and “cut[ting]” those nations “off” is in direct fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant and the promise that Abraham’s descendants would inherit that land. Isaiah refers back to this Angel/Messenger and his covenant function as kinsman redeemer in the statement, “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence [*ûmal`ak pânâw*] saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old” (Isaiah 63:9; cf. Abraham 1:15–16). John’s description of Jesus Christ as “messenger of salvation” in D&C 93:8 should be understood within the framework of the foregoing. Moreover, D&C 93:9 clarifies through an additional appositive that Christ as messenger of salvation was also “the light and the redeemer of the world.”

A comparison of the three scriptural versions of the beginning of the Johannine prologue (John 1:1) helps us appreciate the nuances of how

17. In Philippians 2:5–11 Paul teaches the following in what has been described as the Kenotic Hymn, a christological text that may preexist Paul’s letter: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery [i.e., something to be snatched] to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

revelation helped the Prophet Joseph Smith grow in his understanding of this prologue and what it meant in christological terms:

John 1:1 (KJV)	JST John 1:1 (Jan/Feb 1832)	D&C 93:8, 29 (May 6, 1833)
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.	In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.	Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation. (v. 8) Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. (v. 29)

One of the great doctrinal contributions of John 1:1 in the canonical text from a christological perspective is its assertion that Jesus Christ preexisted with divine status — he was *theos/theon* — and in the Father’s immediate presence (“with God,” *pros ton theon*). This picture accords with that of the two divine beings in Psalm 110:1 and Malachi 3:1.

As Jennifer C. Lane and Keith H. Lane have explained it, “the Gospel of John sets out a clear preexistence Christology, beginning by referencing Genesis 1 and the Creation.”¹⁸ They connect this prologue to Isaiah 40,¹⁹ an important divine council text from the Hebrew Bible,²⁰ with members of that council in dialogue with one another. It is probably no coincidence that the Malachi 3:1 prophecy quotes from Isaiah 40:3 (“Prepare ye the way of the Lord”).

Just as there are multiple members of the divine council present in Genesis 1–11 and in Isaiah 40 (among other places), and two divine beings in Psalm 110:1 and Malachi 3:1, there are two Gods in John 1:1 — God the Father and the Word that was also *theos*. Craig J. Ostler writes: “Within this revelation of the D&C, the Savior confirmed that He manifested Himself as ‘the Father because he [the Father] gave me of his fulness’ (D&C 93:4). As a premortal spirit, Jesus was commissioned as the ‘messenger of salvation — the light and the Redeemer of the World’ (D&C 93:8). That is, He was given a fulness of the Father and authorized

18. Jennifer C. Lane and Keith H. Lane, “God Incarnate: The Word Made Flesh,” in *Thou Art the Christ the Christ, the Son of the Living God: the Person and Work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament* (The 47th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium), ed. Eric D. Huntsman, Lincoln H. Blumell, and Tyler J. Griffin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2018), 138.

19. Ibid.

20. Frank Moore Cross, “The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 4 (October 1953): 274–77.

to represent Him in all things pertaining to the plan of salvation.”²¹ And here we do well to note that Jesus’s own given name denotes “Jehovah saves” or “Jehovah is salvation,” a meaning reflected in the title Messenger of salvation. That is precisely who Jehovah, as Jesus, was (and is).

Just as the divine designation Lord (*hā’ādôn*) is augmented by the appositive description “even the messenger of the covenant” in Malachi 3:1 and 3 Nephi 24:1, the divine designation Word is augmented by the appositive description “even the messenger of salvation.” Christ’s role as “messenger of the covenant” of exaltation (i.e., the Abrahamic Covenant, whose promises he would perform to the utmost) and the “messenger of salvation” (i.e., the Father’s plan of salvation, which he continues to carry into full effect) required his receiving a “fulness” of the Father. Similarly, our “com[ing] unto the Father to receive of his fulness,” since we too were “also in the beginning with God,” requires our becoming “messengers” like Abraham (his seed, Abraham 2:9–11) and other prophets, as follows.

One of the most important results of the revelation that Jesus in the beginning “was the Word, even the messenger of salvation” (D&C 93:8), that “Man was also in the beginning with God,” and that “Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be” (D&C 93:29), is that the postbiblical, traditionally assumed ontological difference — the difference in nature, being, or species — between God and Christ, angels/messengers, and humankind collapses. The revelation helps us to better see what Joseph Smith was attempting to convey in the questions and answers recorded in the “Sample of pure Language”:

- Question What is the name of God in pure Language
 Answer Awmen.
- Q The meaning of the pure word A[w]men
 A It is the being which made all things in all its parts.
- Q What is the name of the Son of God.
 A The Son Awmen.
- Q What is the Son Awmen.
 A It is the greatest of all the parts of Awmen which is the Godhead the first born.

21. Craig J. Ostler, “D&C 93: How and What We Worship,” *Religious Educator* 3, no. 2 (2002): 77–85.

- Q What is is man.
- A This signifies Sons Awmen. the human family
the children of men the greatest parts of Awmen
Sons the Son Awmen
- Q What are Angels called in pure language.
- A Awmen Angls-men
- Q What are the meaning of these words.
- A Awmen's Ser~~o~~~~o~~~~o~~~~o~~ts Ministerring servants
Sanctified who are sent forth from heaven to
minister for or to Sons Awmen the greatest part
of Awmen Son. the greatest part of Awmen Son.
Sons Awmen Son Awmen Awmen²²

From this we learn that God, angels, and the human family are all one species (cf. especially Paul's use of Greek *genos* ["family," kind," "race"²³] in his quotation of Aratus' *Phaenomena* 5 in Acts 17:28: "For we are also his offspring [*genos*])." Originally, messenger/angel (Hebrew *mal'āk* and Greek *angelos*) constituted a designation of function rather than an ontologically distinct category or species. The later concept only emerged in the postbiblical period (i.e., after the 4th century BCE). In other words, messenger/angel described the role a being *fulfills*, rather than what a being *is*. Christ and humankind are angels or messengers as they are sent forth by the Father to fulfill missions in premortality, mortality, and postmortality.

3. Jesus Christ as the "Message"

Having explicated the christological presentation of Jesus in D&C 93:8 as the Father's Messenger of salvation (the "Word"), it now becomes necessary to explore his inseparable role as the Message of salvation (also the "Word"). When we ponder the most basic sense of "word" as "a communication whereby the mind finds expression,"²⁴ we can more

22. "Sample of Pure Language, between circa 4 and circa 20 March 1832," p. 144, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/sample-of-pure-language-between-circa-4-and-circa-20-march-1832/1>. Spellings, strikethroughs, and repetitions are as in the original.

23. Cf. Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. by Fredrick William Danker; 3rd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 194–95. Hereafter cited as BDAG.

24. *Ibid.*, 599.

fully appreciate the breadth and depth of what God the Father is trying to communicate to the human family in and through Jesus Christ and thus the significance of the latter's roles as Creator, Savior, Redeemer, Exemplar, and so forth.

Considered together, D&C 93:8 and JST John 1:1 present a picture of Jesus Christ as both the Messenger and the Message in premortality: "Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation" (D&C 93:8); "In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God" (JST John 1:1). As Latter-day Saints today, we tend to underappreciate the implications of both D&C 93:8 and JST John 1:1. From these texts we learn that "the gospel" as a message of salvation was "preached" in the premortal world ("in the beginning"). JST John 1:1 already implies what D&C 93:29 later makes more explicit. If "in the beginning" — meaning, before the creation of the world — "the gospel" was "preached through the Son," premortal humankind must have been the recipients of preaching there much as they are here (see D&C 138:56). We are more accustomed to thinking and speaking of a "plan of salvation,"²⁵ "plan of redemption,"²⁶ "plan of happiness,"²⁷ "merciful plan of the great creator,"²⁸ "the plan of our God,"²⁹ "the great plan of mercy,"³⁰ or some variation thereon. However, viewing "the gospel" as a formulated message — "word" or a *kérygma*, "an official announcement or proclamation"³¹ that Jesus and others who followed him preached in the premortal world — expands our view. We can then appreciate that the "preaching" that Adam, Seth, Enos, Lamech, Enoch, Noah, and others carried out as "preachers of righteousness" (Moses 6:23); the missionary work of Abraham (Abraham 1:5; 2:15; 3:14–15); the prophesying of Isaiah, Lehi, Nephi, and their successors; the teaching of the gospel by the New Testament saints, the saints early in this dispensation, and the labors of missionaries today all represent a continuation of that premortal preaching, with Jesus himself and his doctrine as the essential message (cf. Moses 6:48–68; see also 3 Nephi 27:13–22; D&C 76:40–42). President Joseph F. Smith saw

25. See, e.g., Jarom 1:2; Alma 24:14; 42:5; Moses 6:62.

26. See, e.g., Jacob 6:8; Alma 12:25–26, 30, 32–33; 17:6; 18:39; 22:13; 29:2; 34:16, 31; 39:18; 42:11, 13.

27. See, e.g., Alma 42:8, 16.

28. 2 Nephi 9:6.

29. 2 Nephi 9:13.

30. Alma 42:31.

31. BDAG, 543.

concerning the “choice spirits who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work” who were “among the noble and great ones who were chosen in the beginning to be rulers in the Church of God” that, “Even before they were born, they, with many others, received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men” (D&C 138:53, 55–56). What constituted those first lessons? President Smith’s statement that it involved preparation for the work of salvation, strongly indicates that the Messenger of salvation taught these first lessons, and that they included the message of salvation, the “gospel ... preached through the Son,” from the very beginning (JST John 1:1).

Elsewhere, John saw in vision that the *logos* (Christ, see Revelation 19:13) was the Message — the “word of ... testimony” of the faithful (Revelation 12:11).³² The temporal horizon for the events described in Revelation 12:11 is ambiguous, but it can be seen as the same as that of Revelation 12:7–9; John 1:1; JST John 1:1 and D&C 93:8, namely, the councils held in the premortal existence. In the premortal existence, the faithful adherents to the preaching of the Son defeated Satan through Jesus Christ’s forthcoming atoning sacrifice and the message revolving around that atonement: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Revelation 12:11). Those who hearkened unto the preaching of the Son of God — the Word proclaiming the word — themselves became preachers of the Word. The faithful followers of the Son overcome him in the same way here in mortality: through the power of his atonement and through testimonies proclaimed through consistent righteous choices, or, “choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish” (Alma 13:10).

Just as the premortal war in heaven continues here on earth, and just as we (Jesus and all humankind) came from that realm to this one, so too the gospel message was sent into the world: “And even so I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me” (D&C 45:9).

32. Jesus as “the Word of God” in Revelation 19:13 in connection with the “word of ... testimony” of the faithful in Revelation 12:11 constitutes part of a running theme involving the “word of God” for which the faithful suffer persecution and for which John himself is suffering persecution. See further Revelation 1:2, 9; 3:10; 20:4.

These words came in a March 7, 1831 revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith to the saints amid the "many false reports ... and foolish stories [that] were published ... and circulated ... to prevent people from investigating the work, or embracing the faith." This description in the D&C combines Johannine language with that of Malachi 3:1 (via Mark 1:2; Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:27), Isaiah 11:10, and 49:22. It is no small detail that this revelation personifies the gospel in words which would all be used to describe Jesus Christ himself. He is the Message. He alone can bring to pass every promise in the covenant of the Father, or, the Abrahamic covenant.

In sum, D&C 93:8 and JST John 1:1 offer us an etiology for missionary work with a temporal horizon stretching even further back than the etiology for the organized preaching of the gospel that began as a divine "decree" (Moses 5:15). At the time when organized evil (secret combinations) began to take root, angels or messengers were sent from the presence of the Father to preach the gospel ("And thus the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost," Moses 5:58). This followed the premortal pattern, when missionary work began with the divine Messenger of salvation — the Word — preaching the gospel in the premortal world ("in the beginning"). We might, then, define missionary work as follows: *missionary work consists of divinely sent messengers preaching the Father's message of salvation*, so that all "may come unto the Father in [Jesus's] name, and in due time receive of his fulness" (D&C 93:19), like Abraham and Sarah (see D&C 132:29). This picture considerably helps our understanding of the interrelationship between missionary work and early temple ritual as it emerged among the early saints, first in Kirtland, then later in Nauvoo.

To sum up, the preaching of the gospel here in mortality stands on a continuum. God the Father had the gospel "preached through the Son," the Messenger of salvation. The first lessons learned in the world of spirits included the message of salvation as part of the preparation for those who would preach salvation in mortality, i.e., the children of God did not simply learn the gospel and eternal truth through observation, Christ taught them! "The noble and great ones,"³³ in turn taught others, and continue to do so in mortality. The systematic preaching of the gospel in this world was organized to help offset the influence of secret

33. Abraham 3:22; D&C 138:55.

combinations (organized evil, see Moses 5:58), following the pattern established in the premortal world.

President Joseph F. Smith also saw that “the great latter-day work” of salvation, for which the saints were prepared in premortality, “includ[ed] the building of the temples and the performance of ordinances therein for the redemption of the dead” (D&C 138:54). He also “beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead” and further, that “The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God” (D&C 138:57–58). As we will note below, the latter-day temple endowment, which teaches the saints regarding their premortal identity and prepares them to preach the gospel in mortality and in postmortality, began as a means of preparing the elders to preach the gospel and to become clean from the sins of the world. For Latter-day Saints today, the temple emerges as the great bridge that spans the preaching of the gospel in premortality, mortality, and postmortality. And yet it did not arrive all at once in a sudden burst of revelation.

4. “Messengers” Becoming Like the “Message”: The Interrelationship Between Missionary Work and Early Temple Ritual

In a document dated October 17, 1830,³⁴ Oliver Cowdery asserted that he had been “commanded of God” to go forth as a missionary “unto the Lamanites” and “to rear up a pillar as a witness where the Temple of God shall be built, in the glorious New-Jerusalem.”³⁵ The setting up of pillars as witnesses constituted an important part of concluding covenants and even temple worship in ancient times. For example, the patriarch Jacob, after he had seen the Lord standing above a “ladder” — or rather,

34. Oliver Cowdery et al., *Covenant* (Manchester Township, Ontario Co., NY), 17 Oct. 1830, quoted in Ezra Booth, letter to Ira Eddy, 29 Nov. 1831, in “Mormonism — Nos. VIII–IX,” *Ohio Star* (Ravenna), 8 Dec. 1831. Document reprinted in Michael Hubbard MacKay et al., eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 202–205, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/covenant-of-oliver-cowdery-and-others-17-october-1830/1>.

35. *Ibid.*, 204.

a “stepped ramp” or “flight of steps” (Hebrew *sullām*)³⁶ — that reached to heaven, along with the angels that ascended and descended thereon, and had received the Abrahamic Covenant for himself,³⁷ “was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God [Hebrew *bêt ’ēlohîm* = “house of God”], and this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17). The narrative then records that “Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a **pillar** [Hebrew *maṣṣēbâ*], and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el [*bêt-’ēl* = House of El/God]” (Genesis 28:17–19; cf. 31:13, 45). Through this ritual act, Jacob acknowledged that he had entered into the Abrahamic Covenant and that the place was a temple — literally a “house of God” (Hebrew *bêt ’ēlohîm*, Bethel).³⁸ Genesis 35:9–15 describes a similar experience. Oliver Cowdery’s declaration, coupled with the ritual act of setting up a pillar at an intended missionary destination among the Lamanites, suggests that the interrelated concepts of gathering, missionary work, covenant, temple, and worship existed in the minds of the prophet Joseph Smith and his closest associates even earlier than appears in the canonized revelations of the D&C. The Book of Mormon itself, translated the previous year, had powerfully suggested the importance of the temple as a place of gathering and ritual.³⁹ Jeffrey M. Bradshaw has adduced evidence that Joseph Smith knew a great deal about the temple and its ordinances very early on.⁴⁰

36. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 757–58.

37. Genesis 28:13–16.

38. For more on the significance of this event and other stone monument events, see Richard E. Turley Jr. and Stephen O. Smoot, “Record-Keeping Technology among God’s People in Ancient and Modern Times,” in *To Seek the Law of the Lord?: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 472–75.

39. See, e.g., John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 297–387. See further Book of Mormon Central, “What Does the Book of Mormon Teach about the Temple?” *KnoWhy #9/Doctrine & Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Lesson #18* (May 15, 2017), <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/what-does-the-book-of-mormon-teach-about-the-temple>.

40. Jeffrey R. Bradshaw, “What Did Joseph Smith Know about Modern Temple Ordinances by 1836?” in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored, Proceedings of the 2017 Temple on Mount Zion Symposium* (Temple on Mount Zion Series 3), ed. Stephen

In the same December 9, 1830 revelation, which explicitly mentioned “temple” for the first time, the Lord commissioned Edward Partridge as a messenger to “preach the everlasting gospel among the Nation”⁴¹ (Nation has been changed to “nations” in the canonical text D&C 36:5). With the mention of the Lord coming to his “temple” in D&C 42:36, the Lord foretold, “And behold, it shall come to pass that my servants shall be sent forth to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south” as messengers (D&C 42:63). Similarly, D&C 133, which promises the Lord’s “coming” to his “temple,” describes the Lord “sending forth” the elders of the Church to all the “nations” and “foreign lands” of the earth (D&C 133:7–8), and the “fulness of his gospel, his everlasting covenant, reasoning in plainness and simplicity” (D&C 133:57, cf. vv. 17, 36, 71–72). These examples suggest that that the concept of temple, the Abrahamic Covenant, and missionary work were intertwined from the beginning of the restored Church.

I jump ahead now to the end of 1832 and beginning of 1833. Without question, D&C 88, which the prophet Joseph Smith received on December 27–28, 1832 and January 3, 1833 constitutes one of the most important canonized revelations describing the purpose of the latter-day temple as a place of education or divine tutoring and the concept of the temple as sacred ritual space. To more fully appreciate the unique revelatory contributions of D&C 93, one must understand the function of the temple, laid down in D&C 88, as a divine school and ritual space: a place for preparing messengers.

The early elders were to receive intelligence, wisdom, and truth in the temple such as would accomplish vertical and horizontal at-one-ment: becoming “one” with the Father, with Jesus himself, and with each other. In his recorded intercessory prayers, Jesus prayed that his disciples would become “one” in this way (see especially John 17:11, 21–23; 3 Nephi 19:23, 29). As the Lord explained in this temple revelation:

For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; mercy hath compassion on mercy and

D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation, 2016), 1–123.

41. “Revelation, 9 December 1830 [D&C 36],” p. 48, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-9-december-1830-dc-36/1>. See also, Elizabeth Maki, “Go to the Ohio,” *Revelations in Context*, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/revelations-in-context/go-to-the-ohio?lang=eng>.

claimeth her own; justice continueth its course and claimeth its own; judgment goeth before the face of him who sitteth upon the throne and governeth and executeth all things. (D&C 88:40)

It remains just as essential for Latter-day Saints today to grow in these divine virtues and cultivate oneness with God and each other as it was for those first recipients of the revelation. As the Lord admonished the saints in January 1831, just as revelations on the temple were beginning to unfold,⁴² "be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27).

Like the Lord, the early saints in the restored Church and saints today, were and are to serve as messengers of the Abrahamic covenant, "sanctified and sent into the world" (John 10:36). Ultimately, Jesus Christ himself is the Message (see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 2:2; Titus 1:9). D&C 88, probably more than any other text, helps us understand how and why preaching the gospel and thus having one's "garments ... clean from the blood of this generation" (D&C 88:75, 85, 138) through Jesus's atonement constitutes such an important aspect of worship. In this revelation, which also holds forth the promise of being "quicken[ed] by a portion of the celestial glory" and "receiv[ing] a fulness" (D&C 88:29), Jesus Christ commissions the elders called to serve missions to gather, organize, prepare, and sanctify themselves:

And I give unto you, who are the first laborers in this last kingdom, a commandment that you assemble yourselves together, and organize yourselves, and prepare yourselves, and sanctify yourselves; yea, **purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and your feet before me, that I may make you clean;**

That I may testify unto your Father, and your God, and my God, that you are clean from the blood of this wicked generation; that I may fulfil this promise, this great and last promise, which I have made unto you, when I will. (D&C 88:74–75)

In sanctifying themselves, the elders (and saints today) emulate the Lord Jesus Christ and become more like him. Jesus also prayed in his intercessory prayer: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes **I sanctify myself**, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:18–19).

42. Cf. again D&C 36:8.

In D&C 88:74–5, the Lord enjoins a specific form of self-sanctification through Christ’s atonement. The commandment to “purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and feet before me” fulfilled the ethical and ritual purity requirements for entry into the Jerusalem temple according to Psalm 24:3–4.⁴³ Thus the Lord himself could then “make [them] clean” and “testify” as a council witness (i.e., “one who could offer testimony in a legal setting”)⁴⁴ in the heavenly council to God the Father: “you are clean from the blood of this wicked generation.” Subsequent verses make clear that this would involve the ritual washing of the feet (see D&C 88:138–140 and below). This washing of feet, of course, would serve as the basis for the ritual washings that later comprised part of the fuller endowment revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith and first administered in Nauvoo.

The revelation in D&C 88 further links the issue of ritual and ethical purity through Christ’s atonement directly to preaching of the gospel message and missionary work:

Therefore, tarry ye, and labor diligently, that you may be perfected in your ministry to go forth among the Gentiles for the last time, as many as the mouth of the Lord shall name, to bind up the law and seal up the testimony, and to prepare the saints for the hour of judgment which is to come;

That their souls may escape the wrath of God, the desolation of abomination which awaits the wicked, both in this world and in the world to come. Verily, I say unto you, let those who are not the first elders continue in the vineyard until the mouth of the Lord shall call them, for their time is not yet come; **their garments are not clean from the blood of this generation.** (D&C 88:84–85)

The momentous ethical obligation to deliver the message of the gospel rested upon the “first laborers in [the] last kingdom.” The Lord put it another way in the same revelation: “Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been

43. Cf., e.g., Avram R. Shannon, “‘Come Near unto Me’: Guarded Space and Its Mediators in the Jerusalem Temple,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament (2013 Sperry Symposium)*, ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David Rolph Seely (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2013), 76–79.

44. David E. Bokovoy, “‘Thou Knowest That I Believe’: Invoking the Spirit of the Lord as Council Witness in 1 Nephi 11,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1 (2012): 1–23.

warned to warn his neighbor" (D&C 88:81). In a real sense, the Lord was sending out these early missionaries, like the prophets of old, as "council witnesses." When they preached the gospel, the wicked "are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads" (D&C 88:82). A failure to discharge this duty meant that missionaries still bore some culpability for the sins of those they might otherwise have helped. The effect of the faithful discharge of missionary responsibilities is summed up succinctly by Anti-Nephi-Lehi's statement on how they were freed from "the blood of [their] brethren": through Ammon and his brothers, the Lord "imparted his word [i.e., Christ as the Message] unto us and has made us clean thereby" (Alma 24:15). The missionary efforts of Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni and those who went with them represent marvelous individual and collective acts of consecration and worship (see Alma 27), which produced the same in the Lamanites that believed the preaching of Ammon, Aaron, et al.

The ritual washing of feet apparently indicated that a missionary had faithfully discharged this duty. In D&C 88:138–139 the Lord commanded regarding membership in "the School of the Prophets," which met in the upper room of the Newel K. Whitney store: "And ye shall not receive any among you into this school save he is clean from the blood of this generation; and he shall be received by the ordinance of the washing of feet, for unto this end was the ordinance of the washing of feet instituted." The final verse of the revelation directly ties the Kirtland practice back to the Last Supper when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; it was done "according to the pattern given in the thirteenth chapter of John's testimony concerning me" (D&C 88:141). The washing described in John 13 was also anticipatory in nature. The gospel of John records Jesus imploring the Father during the intercessory prayer, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:17–19). Those first apostles had been washed and pronounced clean ("ye are clean," John 13:10), but would still need to stand as special witnesses to the world.

In a revelation given years later on July 23, 1837, addressed first to quorum president Thomas B. Marsh and then to the entire quorum of the twelve, the Lord reiterated the charge given to missionaries in D&C 88: "But purify your hearts before me; and then go ye into all the world, and preach my gospel unto every creature who has not received it" (D&C 112:28). They were to constitute "special witnesses of the name

of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23, see also D&C 107:26) — very much like “council witnesses” equipped to bear testimony on earth and in the heavenly council — messengers bearing the Message (Christ) throughout the world, emulating the master whom they worship in the very act of bearing testimony. The Lord further reiterated and warned,

For verily I say unto you, the keys of the dispensation, which ye have received, have come down from the fathers, and last of all, being sent down from heaven unto you. Verily I say unto you, behold how great is your calling. Cleanse your hearts and your garments, lest the blood of this generation be required at your hands. (D&C 112:32–33)

Joseph’s time in Liberty Jail (December 1, 1838–April 6, 1839) appears to have focused and amplified his thought in terms of the temple and ordinance work for the dead (i.e., those who had been in a “prison” of their own).⁴⁵ While still in Liberty Jail, Joseph’s language becomes even clearer regarding not only the existence of a divine council, but a plurality of gods. While yet in Liberty Jail, he mentions “the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this was” (D&C 121:32), having already possibly translated Abraham 3 and Abraham’s vision of the premortal heavenly council (vv. 22–28). He would expand extensively upon that concept during the Nauvoo period, from May 1839 until his death on June 27, 1844. The endowment would concomitantly expand during this time.

When a fuller form of the endowment was introduced by the prophet Joseph Smith in Nauvoo during May 1842, the ritual expression of divine council theophanies became even clearer. The elders were divinely commissioned and sent forth to preach as authorized — angelicized⁴⁶ or divinized⁴⁷ — messengers, like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Lehi when they received their prophetic commissions in the divine council (see Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1:1–3:14; 1 Nephi 1:6–15).⁴⁸

Commenting on the function of the endowment, William Hamblin has proposed the following: “[W]e should understand the LDS Endowment as a ritual and dramatic participation in the *sôd*/divine

45. See, e.g., 1 Peter 3:18–19; 4:6; Moses 7:38, 57.

46. Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 52.

47. See, e.g., Neal Rappleye, “‘With the Tongue of Angels’: Angelic Speech as a Form of Deification,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 21 (2016): 303–23.

48. Cf. also Nephi’s vision 1 Nephi 11–14; cf. 2 Nephi 31:13–14, 32:2.

council of God, through which God reveals to the covenanter his *sôd*/secret plan of salvation — the hidden meaning and purpose of creation and the cosmos.”⁴⁹ Thus, for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the divine council becomes the *ritual setting* for the covenants they enter into that make them heirs of the Abrahamic covenant with all of its blessings. Jesus Christ is the messenger of this new and everlasting covenant and “the messenger of the salvation” that the Abrahamic Covenant offers. Indeed, one receives salvation, perfection, and fulness in making this covenant available to others.

Hamblin further remarks, “When we consider the Endowment drama in this way — remembering that in Isaiah the meeting place of the *sôd* of YHWH is in the temple (Isa. 6:1) — the Endowment fits broadly in the biblical tradition of ritually observing or participating in ‘the council/*sôd* of YHWH’ described in these biblical texts.”⁵⁰ In the setting of the divine council, Isaiah received atoning cleansing at the hand of a seraph representing the Lord himself (“thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin **purged** [*tĕkuppār*, literally **atoned**]”) and became like the Lord (“Here am I; send me”), ready to go forth as a messenger of salvation.

As Latter-day Saints today, when we receive the endowment for ourselves or for the dead, we emulate and become more like the Savior when we preach as he preached and live as he lived. In so doing, we worship the Father, in the name of Jesus, in spirit and truth, and we come to better know and identify with them (cf. D&C 93:19) as we labor in their work of saving souls. To this day, we often receive this endowment as we prepare to serve missions — with the name of the Messenger put upon us, with Jesus as the Message — one of the most concentrated periods of consecration and worship that many Latter-day Saints ever experience in the course of their mortal lives.

Considering the foregoing connections, including the christological picture given in D&C 93:8 presenting Jesus as the divine “messenger of salvation” (the “Word”) and the Message of salvation (the “Word”) and humankind as coeternal (D&C 93:29) with the potential to “receive of [the Father’s] fulness,” we can better appreciate the Lord’s words in D&C 84. Steven C. Harper explains that this section “could be described as a revelation on temple ordinances, covenants, the gathering of Israel, missionary work, the law of consecration, and the imminent coming

49. William J. Hamblin, “The *Sôd* of YHWH and the Endowment,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 147–54.

50. *Ibid.*

of the Savior ‘to reign with my people.’”⁵¹ He declared and promised in language that expands upon Malachi 3:1:

Behold, **I send you** out to reprove the world of all their unrighteous deeds, and to teach them of a judgment which is to **come**. And whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for **I will go before your face**. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and **mine angels round about you**, to bear you up. (D&C 84:87–88)

In other words, the Lord promises to go before our “face” as the Father’s “messenger of the covenant” and “messenger of salvation” as we go forth, sent forth as his messengers of the Abrahamic covenant (Abraham 2:9–11). This is a precious promise that Latter-day Saints today should daily strive to claim with the zeal of our forebearers, and in so doing become “clean from the blood of this generation” (D&C 88:75, 85, 138).

Conclusion

Several of Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations, beginning with Moroni’s appearance in 1823, quote Malachi 3:1, which foretells the Lord “suddenly com[ing] to his temple” as “messenger of the covenant.” Thus, Malachi 3:1 and its quoted iterations in 3 Nephi 24:1; D&C 36:8; 42:36; 133:2 not only impressed upon Joseph and the early saints the urgent need to build a temple to which the Lord could come but presented him as the messenger of the Father’s restored covenant, i.e., the New and Everlasting Covenant, or the Abrahamic Covenant.

This presentation perfectly accorded with the picture given in the restored portion of the “fulness of the record of John” and its “messenger” christology in D&C 93:8. This christology envisions Jesus Christ as both “the messenger of salvation” (the “Word”) and the message (also “the Word”). Joseph’s early revelations also describe the ontological kinship of God the Father with Jesus, angels (literally, messengers), and humankind, laying the groundwork for the doctrine of humankind’s coeternality with God (D&C 93:29) and the notion that through “worship” one can “come unto the Father in my name and in due time receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:19; cf. D&C 88:29) like Abraham and Sarah (see D&C 132:29).

51. Steven C. Harper, “Historical Context and Background of D&C 84,” *Doctrine and Covenants Contexts* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2021), <https://doctrineandcovenantscentral.org/historical-context/dc-84/>.

D&C 88, one of the most important revelations on the temple, specifies missionary work and ritual washing of the feet as a means of becoming, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, "clean from the blood of this generation" (D&C 88:75, 85, 138). These ritual washings continued as a part of the endowment that was revealed to and through the prophet Joseph Smith during the Nauvoo period. The foregoing recommends missionary work — of which Jesus Christ himself and Abraham are supernal exemplars — as one of the most important ways in which one can worship. Temple worship today continues to revolve around missionary work for the living (the endowment) and for the dead (ordinances). The endowment, like the visions in which prophets were given special missionary commissions (e.g., Isaiah, Ezekiel, Lehi, and Nephi), situates us ritually in the divine council, teaches us with rich symbolism about the great Messenger of salvation, and empowers us to participate in his great mission of saving souls.

What does it all add up to? Jesus Christ, the Messenger of salvation and the Messenger of the covenant embodies everything we have the hope and capacity to become. He has shown us "how to worship" and "what [we] worship" and how "to come unto the Father in [his] name and receive of [the Father's] fulness." We are of one species with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and angels, and all are coeternal in nature. Jesus marked the path for all God's children in coming to earth and "fulfill[ing] all righteousness" in mortality (Matthew 3:15; 2 Nephi 31:5–6), including undergoing baptism, receiving the Holy Ghost and the holy priesthood, preaching the gospel, enduring to the end, and receiving exaltation, or what Nephi called the doctrine of the Christ. Jesus rose triumphant from the tomb, having conquered death and hell, with a resurrected body, having become "perfect" even as the Father (Matthew 5:48; Luke 16:33; 3 Nephi 12:48), and having enabled humankind to follow him into that perfection (see, e.g., Hebrews 2:10–11). That is the Message, "the Word," the gospel, or glad tidings (see also 3 Nephi 27:13–17; D&C 76:40–43). We become "clean from the blood of this generation" and thus become "pure even as he is pure" (Moroni 7:48; see also 1 John 3:3), and eventually perfect. When we emulate Jesus Christ as the Messenger of salvation, we engage in the truest form of worship. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell put it, "the ultimate form of adoration of Him is emulation!"⁵²

52. Neal A. Maxwell, *The Christmas Scene* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 9.

[Author's Note: I would like to thank Suzy Bowen, Allen Wyatt, Jeff Lindsay, Victor Worth, Tanya Spackman, Don Norton, and Debbie and Dan Peterson.]

Matthew L. Bowen was raised in Orem, Utah, and graduated from Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and is currently an associate professor in religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He is also the author of *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and The Temple in Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018). With Aaron P. Schade, he is the coauthor of *The Book of Moses: From the Ancient of Days to the Latter Days* (Provo, UT; Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2021). He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.