

49. Defining Fathers and Sons (Malachi)

Malachi's prophecy of Elijah's turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers (Malachi 4:5–6) has thus far been interpreted almost exclusively in a context of performing saving ordinances for the dead. Lost from sight has been the covenantal definition of "fathers" in relation to "sons" (Hebrew *banim*; KJV "children") within the intended context of the Davidic Covenant and its significance for the house of Israel's physical protection from calamities during the coming "Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5)—God's Day of Judgment upon a wicked world. Hence, the prophet Joseph Smith's announcing long after the Kirtland era in church history that Elijah would come and "reveal the covenants of the fathers in relation to the children, and the covenants of the children in relation to the fathers" (*TPJS*, 321).

The role of end-time "fathers"—of proxy saviors who minister as kings and priests—nuances Malachi's prophecy that a bond must be created between fathers and sons to prevent the earth from being smitten with a curse at Jehovah's coming. A variation of Malachi's prophecy states that "Elijah was to plant in the hearts of the children the *promises* made to their fathers . . . lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse and [be] utterly wasted at his coming" (Doctrine & Covenants 138:47–48).

God's "promises" to Israel's fathers Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and others included an endless posterity (Exodus 32:13; 2 Nephi 3:16; Doctrine & Covenants 27:9–10), for which they acted as "fathers" or proxy saviors by sacrificing all things. Called the "gospel of Abraham," this doctrine teaches that "in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed" (Doctrine & Covenants 110:12; cf. 124:58; Genesis 18:18; 22:17–18; 26:4; 28:14; cf. Isaiah 61:9).

God's unconditional "promises" of that kind, however, pertain to individual covenant relationships with him that start conditionally and progress from Isaiah's son/servant level to that of seraphs. In these relationships, "fathers"—proxy saviors—intercede with God on behalf of their "sons," whether living or yet unborn. Thus, God blesses and preserves their "sons" *for the sake of* their "fathers," fathers who rely on God's "promises"—on the terms of his covenant—knowing that God will perform his part when they perform theirs.

We observe this savior role in King Hezekiah's relationship to his people, whom he calls his "sons": "It is in my *heart* to make a covenant with Jehovah, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce wrath may turn away from us. My *sons*, be not now negligent, for Jehovah has chosen you to stand before him to serve him, and that you should minister to him" (2 Chronicles 29:10–11). Like Enoch, Melchizedek, and Moses, Hezekiah turned away God's wrath from his people so that they were not smitten with a curse. Apart from the remnant of God's people that sought refuge with Hezekiah in Jerusalem, the known world at that time was indeed "utterly wasted" by the Assyrians during their conquest of all nations (2 Kings 19:11–13; Isaiah 37:18–20, 33–36).

As with Isaiah's mediatory role that operated on a higher level than Hezekiah's, the end-time version of these events includes ministering in the priesthood according to the holy order of God. That appears in yet another variation of Malachi's prophecy: "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” (Doctrine & Covenants 2:1–3). While on the surface Malachi’s prophecy deals with *temporal* salvation—with God’s physical protection—a high priest’s role of proxy savior additionally begets a degree of *spiritual* salvation. Both stem from covenant relationships between “fathers” and “sons” as under the terms of the Davidic Covenant that create the conditions under which salvation can occur.

In short, on both Isaiah’s son/servant and seraph levels “fathers” answer for their “sons” disloyalties to God in the pattern of emperor–vassal relationships when seeking the physical protection of those to whom they minister. Their proxy functions involve “fathers” suffering *for the sake of* their “sons”—as did King Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:1–6)—on account of covenant curses or penalties that may have accrued from their “sons” transgressions.

In an end-time context, for example, “sons” from among Israel’s natural lineages of the house of Israel who are newly converting to Israel’s God require “fathers”—proxy saviors—to vouch for them before God until such time as they themselves ascend spiritually to become just men made perfect and members of the Church of the Firstborn. If it is “in the hearts” of end-time “fathers” to do so, and if it is “in the hearts” of those to whom they minister to heed their counsel, then God’s “promise” is that he will preserve their lives at the very time the rest of the world is being “smitten with a curse” and “utterly wasted.”

Persons who qualify as end-time “fathers” on the seraph level include certain spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:23), saviors on Mount Zion (Obadiah 1:21), angels who gather God’s elect (Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27), and the 144,000 servants of God who are sealed with the Father’s name written in their foreheads (Revelation 7:4; 14:1–5)—all of whom are candidates for one and the same category of high priests according to the holy order of God (cf. 2 Nephi 10:9, 18; Doctrine & Covenants 77:11; 86:8–11). To those who comprise their “sons,” these kings and priests at first minister spiritually before delivering them physically. Their “knowledge” of God’s promises—of the terms of the Davidic Covenant—assures them that by “bearing the iniquities” of their sons, they, like God’s end-time servant, will “vindicate many” (Isaiah 53:11). As guarantors of their “sons”’ loyalties to God during their sons’ tender phase, these “fathers”—their proxy saviors—obligate him to deliver them according to his “promises.”

Central to divine protection—in the end-time as anciently—is that it takes place solely within the framework of the covenants God makes with his people and with individuals. Simply stated, outside of God’s covenants there exists no provision for deliverance from a mortal threat. To remove God’s “covenants” from the equation, therefore, is to remove “plain and precious parts” from God’s Word (1 Nephi 13:25–26)—to destroy the foundation of God’s relationship to humanity and to negate his promises to the “fathers” concerning his deliverance of their “sons.”

While the Davidic Covenant provides a pattern for all proxy salvation on every spiritual level, its prototype in ancient Near Eastern emperor–vassal covenants is in actuality preceded by God’s covenants with the “fathers” from Adam to Enoch to Melchizedek to Abraham (Doctrine &

Covenants 84:14–16). Nevertheless, all of God’s covenants with such proxy saviors—though they may operate on different levels in different ages—follow the same model.

In conjunction with turning “the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children” appears a scriptural directive to turn “the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews” (Doctrine & Covenants 98:16–17; cf. Malachi 4:6). The parallel positioning of these verses—which equates the “prophets” with the “fathers” and the “Jews” with the “children”—implies two things: (1) that the Jews are descendants or “children” of the “prophets”; and (2) that at some point the Jews will have “fathers”—proxy saviors—who are “prophets” to minister to them. Both meanings are valid though our discussion has centered on the role of *end-time* “fathers” toward *end-time* “sons.” In other words, the hearts of the Jews will indeed turn to the covenants and promises God made with their ancestral “fathers.” But they will also turn to those spiritual “fathers” in the priesthood according to the holy order of God who minister to them those same covenants and promises.