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# Joseph Smith and the Messiah: Prophetically Linked

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Links from Old Testament prophets to Book of Mormon prophets and to the modern-day Prophet Joseph Smith span place and time: Old World to New World and antiquity to modern day. Ancient prophecies that were quoted by Book of Mormon prophets and later personally delivered by Moroni to the boy Joseph Smith bear witness of Christ, the One who sees all the dispensations of time before Him. These holy men testified that Jesus is the Messiah and that Joseph Smith is one “like unto Moses” who was “raised up” as a “choice seer” to restore the gospel that makes ready the way for the Savior’s return. These men also stand as witnesses of the prophetic link between Christ and Joseph. Through the Book of Mormon, we learn that the Holy Messiah and Joseph Smith are inseparably connected both in the visions and words of ancient prophets. A hymn selected by Emma Smith indicates that the first Saints of this dispensation clearly understood these links:

Those holy men minutely told,  
What future ages would unfold,  
Scenes God had purpos’d should take place,  
Down to the last of Adam’s race.

He prophesied of this our day,  
That God would unto Israel say,  
The gospel light you now shall see,  
And from your bondage be set free.

He said God would raise up a seer,  
 The hearts of Jacob's sons to cheer,  
 And gather them again in bands,  
 In latter days upon their lands.

He likewise did foretell the name,  
 That should be given to the same,  
 His and his father's should agree,  
 And both like his should Joseph be.

This seer like Moses should obtain,  
 The word of God for man again;  
 A spokesman God would him prepare,  
 His word when written to declare.

According to his holy plan,  
 The Lord has now rais'd up the man,  
 His latter-day work to begin,  
 To gather scatter'd Israel in.

This seer shall be esteemed high,  
 By Joseph's remnants by and by,  
 He is the man who's call'd to raise,  
 And lead Christ's church in these last days.<sup>1</sup>

I will discuss Joseph Smith first as the “chosen seer” who would be “raised up” as prophesied of Joseph of Egypt, then as a “rod, branch and root” as prophesied by Isaiah, and finally as the latter-day Elias who makes possible the connecting of root and branch as prophesied by Malachi.

### **Joseph as a “Choice Seer,” “Raised Up,” and “Like unto” Great Prophets**

In the patriarchal blessing that Lehi gave his son Joseph, we learn that God foreordained Joseph Smith to be a seer long before Joseph was born (see 2 Nephi 3). Lehi obtained these “great prophecies” concerning Joseph Smith from the brass plates. From these records, Lehi learned that God showed Joseph of Egypt his posterity, including Joseph Smith. The Lord promised Joseph of Egypt that a branch of his posterity would be righteous, broken off from the house of Israel, and guided to a new promised land. Further, He promised that in the latter days, this branch would learn of covenants with God by a “choice seer” whom the Lord would “raise up” (see 2 Nephi 3:5–7). Joseph of

Egypt knew that this latter-day seer and the seer's father would have his same name, "Joseph" (see 2 Nephi 3:15). Interestingly, Joseph Smith Jr. is not the oldest son but is the third son, yet he is the one who carries his father's name.

The Lord promised Joseph of Egypt that the latter-day Joseph would be "great *like unto Moses*," for He said, "And I will make him great in mine eyes, for he shall do my work; and he shall be great *like unto him* [Moses] whom I have said I would *raise up* unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel, out of the land of Egypt" (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:29; 2 Nephi 3:9; emphasis added).

Although not mentioning Joseph Smith by name, the Pearl of Great Price gives a clear focus to the mission of the man who would be *like unto Moses*. Speaking to Moses, the Lord promised that "in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou [Moses] shalt write, behold, I will *raise up* another *like unto thee*; and they shall be had again among the children of men—among as many as shall believe" (Moses 1:41; emphasis added).

Joseph of Egypt was further told that "he shall be *like unto you* [Joseph of Egypt]; for the thing which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand shall bring my people unto salvation" (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:33; 2 Nephi 3:15; emphasis added).

From these scriptures, we learn why Joseph Smith would be called a "choice seer." The latter-day Joseph would be *raised up* and would be great, *like unto* both Moses and Joseph of Egypt, and he would bring salvation by restoring "the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back" (1 Nephi 13:32).

The phrases "raise up" and "like unto" are used several times in the scriptures. For our purposes, the most relevant prophecy is one spoken by Moses found in the Old Testament, New Testament, and Book of Mormon: "A prophet shall the Lord your God *raise up* unto you, *like unto me* [Moses]" (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22; 1 Nephi 22:20; emphasis added). Nephi identified this prophet: "And now I, Nephi, declare unto you, that this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel" (1 Nephi 22:21). From this scripture, we learn that the Holy One of Israel, the Messiah, was *raised up* just as Moses was *raised up* and was to be *like unto Moses*.

The Doctrine and Covenants explains how Moses, Joseph of Egypt, the latter-day Joseph, and Jesus Christ are alike: "And again, the duty of the President of the office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be *like unto Moses*—behold, here is

wisdom; yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church” (D&C 107:91–92; emphasis added). Hence, we can see the importance of Moroni’s quoting to Joseph Smith the Apostle Peter’s recounting of this prophecy, “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God *raise up* unto you of your brethren, *like unto* me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:22–23; see also Joseph Smith—History 1:40). Moses, Joseph of Egypt, and Joseph Smith were blessed with “all the gifts of God” to make them *like unto* Christ, enabling them in helping to bring salvation to the Lord’s children.<sup>2</sup>

### Prophets Aid in Redemption

These three prophets, Joseph of Egypt, Moses, and Joseph of the latter days, are linked to the Savior by their work in helping to redeem His children (see Moses 1:39). Joseph of Egypt helped bring spiritual and temporal salvation to his family who fled the famine in Canaan; spiritually, he assisted them in repenting of their sins against him, and temporally, he gave them grain and obtained land for them (see Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 48:8–9, 11). Moses helped bring temporal and spiritual salvation to the children of Israel by leading them out of bondage in Egypt to the promised land and then giving them the law to bring them to Christ (see 2 Nephi 3:10; Jacob 4:5). Likewise, the latter-day Joseph “in the Spirit of power” brought Israel “out of darkness into light . . . and out of captivity unto freedom” (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:25).

Joseph of Egypt saw the latter-day Joseph’s works of salvation in his translation of the Book of Mormon, the writings of Lehi’s ancient posterity for his modern posterity. The Lord further promised that these writings, in conjunction with the writings of the tribe of Judah (the Bible), were for the “confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions.” These writings would also establish peace, bring knowledge of forefathers and the covenants of God, and restore the house of Israel (see 2 Nephi 3:12–13), thus aiding Christ in the redemption of all His children.

Both Lehi and Joseph Smith were descendants of Joseph of Egypt through his sons Manasseh and Ephraim, respectively. From his reading of the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt on the brass plates, Lehi knew that the tribe of Ephraim would one day bless his posterity, a branch

of the tribe of Manasseh (see 2 Nephi 3:7, 11). Hence, he joyfully exclaimed, “For behold, he [Joseph of Egypt] truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater. And he prophesied concerning us, and our future generations” (2 Nephi 4:2). Joseph Smith as a “choice seer” helped restore covenants that aid Christ in redeeming this future generation of Israel. In so doing, Joseph became “like unto” Christ.

### **The Olive Tree: Rod/Branch and Stem/Root**

Isaiah also saw the important work that Joseph Smith was to accomplish in the latter days. Isaiah 11 is particularly noteworthy in this respect. The recitation of Isaiah 11 at the beginning of the Restoration gives some indication of its significance. In the fall of 1823, the prophet Moroni repeated it four times to young Joseph. Anciently, it was copied from the brass plates and engraved twice on the small plates of Nephi (see 2 Nephi 21; 2 Nephi 30:9–18). In these latter days, interpretive keys to its symbols were revealed and recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 113:1–6.

Although this chapter of Isaiah is especially important to Latter-day Saints because of its relevance to the Restoration, Christians and Jews alike have appreciated its magnificent poetry and message. As one Christian scholar observed, “Few texts in all of biblical literature are better known or loved than this one.”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, biblical scholars have puzzled over its meaning, while revelation to Joseph Smith clarified specific words and verses. One part of this chapter will be discussed in this article: the literary unit that links the Messiah to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Nephi loved the writings of Isaiah. However, he recognized that Isaiah wrote poetry with complex literary devices and images familiar only to those of Isaiah’s era and region. In contrast to Isaiah, Nephi wrote in plain language. Nevertheless, his condensed version does not elaborate on the “choice seer” to be raised up in the latter days. Hence, we must make the effort to tease out of Isaiah’s writings the meaning of the images, allusions, and references to the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Messiah (see 2 Nephi 25:1, 4–6).

*Isaiah 10.* The last two verses of Isaiah 10 serve as an introduction to Isaiah 11: “Behold, the Lord, the Lord of Hosts shall lop the bough with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down; and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forests with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one” (Isaiah 10:33–34). It is the Lord’s day of judgment. Isaiah uses the metaphor

of a forest being cut down by a lumberjack. The “Mighty One” who wields the ax is the Messiah. He is clear-cutting a forest of mature trees that have become too tall. He is the Divine Forester, for who else could choose to devastate the glory of His kingdom except the one to whom the trees belong? Once the forest is cleared, a single majestic and beautiful tree can flourish and produce fruit.<sup>4</sup>

*Isaiah 11.* Isaiah continues to use the same imagery of a tree, but this time as a messianic symbol: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1).<sup>5</sup> After the clear-cutting of the forest, Isaiah 11:1 begins with this image of a single stubby tree trunk from which shoots and branches grow easily. The olive tree aptly fits the description of this tree; it is “the most plastic of trees, surpassing even the willow in its power to survive the most drastic whacking and burning . . . and the new shoots do come right out of the trunk.”<sup>6</sup>

The allegory of Zenos describes the same phenomenon of regrowth in an olive tree, clearly identified as symbolic of the house of Israel (see Jacob 5:3).<sup>7</sup> The allegory represents the Master’s “response to Israel’s spiritual death.”<sup>8</sup> In this allegory, the Master of the Vineyard labors diligently to save the tree by digging, dunging, pruning, and especially by grafting. Thus, all who are to be part of the house of Israel experience individual tutorials, spiritual nourishment, painful experiences, and converting events.<sup>9</sup> Unlike other trees when left with only roots and stump, the olive tree will rise again and become glorious and fruitful (see Jacob 5:3, 75).

Like Isaiah, Zenos wrote of “young and tender branches” growing out of an olive tree (Jacob 5:6). In Zenos’s allegory, the great desire of the Master of the Vineyard was for the branches of the olive tree to be laden with good fruit. In speaking about the tree, the Master sees that “it had brought forth much fruit; and he beheld also that it was good.” He then tells His servant to “take of the fruit thereof, and lay it up against the season, that I may preserve it unto mine own self” (Jacob 5:20). This is a reference to the Messiah’s work and glory in bringing about the exaltation and eternal life of man (see Moses 1:39).<sup>10</sup>

We can hear echoes of this messianic prophecy in Christ’s own words when He identified Himself and His disciples: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5). Nephi brings together the metaphors of the true vine and olive tree when he says, “Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true

vine? Yea, will they not come unto the true fold of God? . . . Yea; they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, into the true olive-tree” (1 Nephi 15:15–16).<sup>11</sup>

The Apostle Paul also used the messianic symbol of the olive tree: the tame olive tree represents the house of Israel, and the branches of a wild olive tree represent the Gentiles. Referring to the allegory of the olive tree, Paul taught that if the root were holy, it would produce first-fruits and branches that are holy (see Joseph Smith Translation, Romans 11:16). Thus, he prophesied that just as wild olive branches grafted into a tame olive tree can bring forth good fruit, so also can the Gentiles who accept the gospel be adopted into the house of Israel and make covenants with the Lord (see Romans 11:13–24; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Romans 11:15–19, 23–24).

*Rod/Branch and stem/root.* Isaiah specifically identified what grows out of the stump of this tree: a rod from its stem and a branch from its roots. This is a synonymous parallelism—in other words, two phrases that have the same connotation but use different words to clarify and expand the meaning, which is a common technique employed by Isaiah.<sup>12</sup> With this interpretation, *stem* and *root* are synonymous, as are *rod* and *branch*. What or whom do the *rod/branch* and *stem/root* symbolize? Both biblical commentators and Joseph Smith had ideas about this symbolism.

A few biblical commentators identify this passage as messianic;<sup>13</sup> however, they are silent or have varying interpretations in identifying the *root*, *rod*, *stem*, and *branch*.<sup>14</sup> Others do not recognize the verse as messianic and appear to have rejected the idea of Jesus Christ as fulfilling the role of the Messiah in favor of a more liberal explanation, assuming a human could perform the magnificent role described by Isaiah.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps most telling is the speculation that “this text expresses the promise of a messiah” rather than “the Messiah.”<sup>16</sup>

The Prophet Joseph Smith, in response to three questions about this chapter of Isaiah, asked God and received an answer regarding the interpretation of these symbols (see D&C 113:1–6).

“Who is the Stem of Jesse spoken of in the 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th verses of the 11th chapter of Isaiah?” The *stem* or *root* of Jesse is Christ (D&C 113:1–2; see also Revelation 5:5; 22:16). Thus, in the eighth century B.C., Isaiah identified the mortal Messiah as a descendent of the royal line of David who was the son of Jesse, a point emphasized by both Matthew and Luke in the New Testament genealogies of Christ (see Matthew 1:5–6; Luke 3:32; see also Micah 5:2).

“What is the rod spoken of in the first verse of the 11th chapter of Isaiah, that should come of the Stem of Jesse?” The *rod* or *branch* is “a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power” (D&C 113:3–4). From this brief description alone, it is difficult to determine who this is.

“What is the root of Jesse spoken of in the 10th verse of the 11th chapter?” The description of the *root* of Jesse begins with the very same lineage as the *rod* and adds “unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days” (D&C 113:5–6). Thus, the *root* from verse 1, which is Christ, is different from the *root* in verse 10.<sup>17</sup> The root in verse 1 is Christ, but who is the *root* in verse 10, and who is the *rod* in verse 1?

*Joseph Smith as a branch.* Some Latter-day Saint commentators believe that both the *stem* and *branch* refer to Jesus Christ, citing Jeremiah 23:3–6 and Zechariah 3:7 and 6:12 as evidence. In Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, the King James translators capitalized the word *Branch*. The Joseph Smith translation did not correct any of these capitalizations. Thus, without a closer look, we might conclude that they all refer to Christ. However, while Jeremiah and Zechariah identify Christ as the Branch in context, they are not necessarily analogous to the *branch* in Isaiah 11:1. As further evidence, the word *branch* is translated from two different Hebrew words in these passages. In Jeremiah and Zechariah, the Hebrew noun is *semah*, whereas the Isaiah passage uses the Hebrew noun *nesev*. Additionally, Isaiah refers to *nesev* as the branch the Lord plants so that He might be glorified—not Christ but what He plants (see Isaiah 60:21). Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated, “Joseph Smith is the chief branch for our day.”<sup>18</sup>

*Joseph Smith as a rod and the other root.* In the revelation regarding the meaning of these symbols, no definitive person or persons are named to specify who fulfills the descriptions of the *rod*<sup>19</sup> and the other *root*. However, we can look at other prophecies to determine that the rod in Isaiah 11:1 and *root* in Isaiah 11:10 are none other than Joseph Smith.<sup>20</sup> His patriarchal blessing, the receipt of priesthood keys, and divine declaration make it clear that the Prophet held the keys of the priesthood by birthright and the authority by divine dispensation and declaration (see D&C 86:8–9).

Joseph Smith’s patriarchal blessing, given to him by his father, Joseph Smith Sr., proclaims the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joseph of Egypt and further announces that Joseph Smith Jr. was the one of

whom it had been prophesied would restore covenants and lead the gathering of Israel in the last days:

“A marvelous work and a wonder” has the Lord wrought by thy hand, even that which shall prepare the way for the remnants of his people to come in among the Gentiles, with their fullness, as the tribes of Israel are restored. I bless thee with the blessings of thy fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and even the blessings of thy father Joseph, the son of Jacob. *Behold, he [Joseph of Egypt] looked after his posterity in the last days, when they should be scattered and driven by the Gentiles, and wept before the Lord; he sought diligently to know from whence the Son should come who should bring forth the word of the Lord, by which they might be enlightened, and brought back to the true fold, and his eyes beheld thee, my son; his heart rejoiced and his soul was satisfied and he [Joseph of Egypt] said, As my blessings are to extend to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills; as my father’s blessing prevailed, over the blessings of his progenitors, and as my branches are to run over the wall, and my seed are to inherit the choice land whereon the Zion of God shall stand in the last days, from among my seed, scattered with the Gentiles, shall a choice Seer arise, whose bowels shall be a fountain of truth, whose loins shall be girded with the girdle of righteousness, whose hands shall be lifted with acceptance before the God of Jacob to turn away his anger from his anointed, whose heart shall meditate great wisdom, whose intelligence shall circumscribe and comprehend the deep things of God, and whose mouth shall utter the law of the just . . . and he shall feed upon the heritage of Jacob his father: Thou [Joseph Smith, Jr.] shalt hold the keys of this ministry, even the presidency of this Church, both in time and in eternity, and thou shalt stand on Mount Zion when the tribes of Jacob come shouting from the north, and with thy brethren, the Sons of Ephraim, crown them in the name of Jesus Christ.*<sup>21</sup>

This blessing reaffirms Joseph of Egypt’s knowledge of Joseph Smith and identifies the Prophet as the “choice seer,” a powerful servant of Christ who would bless his (Joseph of Egypt’s) posterity, as well as help gather the house of Israel.

The Lord sent His prophets to Joseph Smith to restore all the keys of authority necessary to make the olive tree (house of Israel) flourish and produce good fruit, thus giving Joseph the power to accomplish his important mission. In various sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, the following keys are listed as being given to the Prophet Joseph: the keys to the record of the stick of Ephraim (D&C 27:5), the keys of the restoration of all things (D&C 27:6), the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood (D&C 27:8), the keys of the binding of hearts (D&C 27:9), the keys of the Abrahamic covenant (D&C 27:10), the

keys of the Melchizedek and Apostolic Priesthood (D&C 27:12), the keys of the dispensation of the fulness of times (D&C 27:13), the keys of the mystery of sealed things (D&C 35:18), the keys of the kingdom of God (D&C 65:2), and the keys of the gathering of Israel (D&C 110:11). Joseph Smith's mission as prophet, seer, revelator, and head of the dispensation of the fulness of times demanded that all the keys of the ancients be restored to him, fulfilling the description of the root "unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood and the keys of the kingdom" (D&C 113:5–6).

As further evidence of Joseph's role, the Lord gave a parable about His vineyard that had been destroyed by the enemy. In the parable, the Lord called one of His servants and commanded the servant to redeem His vineyard by destroying His enemies so the Lord could possess again the land (see D&C 101:43–62). Regarding this parable, the Lord declared that Zion, His vineyard, must be redeemed by His power: "Therefore, I will raise up unto my people a man, who shall lead them *like as Moses* led the children of Israel. For ye are the children of Israel, and of the seed of Abraham, and ye must needs be led out of bondage by power, and with a stretched-out arm" (D&C 103:15–17; emphasis added). The Lord identified Joseph Smith as the servant who would redeem His vineyard (see D&C 103:21). Thus, the priesthood by birthright, the receipt of keys of authority, and the clear declaration of the Lord leave little doubt concerning the one to whom Isaiah was referring.<sup>22</sup>

Sidney Sperry wrote that undoubtedly Moroni, like Isaiah, knew that young Joseph was both the *rod* and the *root* and explained this to Joseph on his first visit.<sup>23</sup> If this is true, then how is Joseph both a *rod* and a *root*, especially considering that the *root* in Isaiah 11:1 was identified as Christ? The use of this imagery in Isaiah 11 is particularly appropriate because a rod, or green shoot, accurately describes a young Joseph restoring from an ancient source the pure and pristine gospel of Jesus Christ to a church organization that, although of ancient origin, was in his dispensation also young and inexperienced. Joseph and the restored gospel connect to the original root as new growth that produces shoots, branches, and fruit. Just as roots sink down deep into the soil and then spread out, so has the gospel of Jesus Christ restored through the Prophet Joseph spread throughout the world. The covenants, as restored through The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are now in many nations and in time will go to all the world (see D&C 42:8). Kent Jackson explains, "Just as the 'rod' or twig grows

out of the stem and derives its strength from it, so also do Joseph Smith's prophetic attributes, callings, and authorities stem from those of his Master."<sup>24</sup>

### A Latter-day Elias

Deeper insight into the meaning of these symbols unfolds as we review what Moroni taught Joseph prior to quoting Isaiah 11—the prophecies of Malachi.<sup>25</sup> Moroni quoted part of Malachi 3; however, the part is not specified. It is probable that he quoted at least verses 1 through 4, since they prophesy of latter-day events.<sup>26</sup> He also quoted Malachi 4, although with a little variation from the King James Version (see Joseph Smith—History 1:36). Interestingly, these are the very chapters of Malachi that Christ gave to the Nephites and commanded them to write into their record for future generations (see 3 Nephi 24, 25, 26:1–2).

In Malachi 3, the Lord declared, among other things, two significant events: (1) a messenger was to come to prepare the way before the Lord and (2) the sons of Levi must make a righteous offering to the Lord (see Malachi 3:3).

*Joseph Smith as an Elias.* A messenger or forerunner has the title of Elias. John the Baptist was the Elias of Christ's first coming, sent "to prepare the way" and "make his paths straight" (Isaiah 40:3; 1 Nephi 10:7–8; Matthew 3:3). Although many heavenly messengers have assisted in the Restoration, including John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Elijah, Moroni, and others, "the closest analogue to John the Baptist, the ancient messenger who was sent to prepare the way for the Lord's first coming" is Joseph Smith.<sup>27</sup> As confirmation of this responsibility, Joseph recorded the following: "I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of his purposes in this glorious dispensation."<sup>28</sup>

Joseph Smith is an Elias of Christ's second coming.<sup>29</sup> The Doctrine and Covenants links the messenger to the message restored through him: "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). Thus, the forerunner, messenger, or modern Elias is both Joseph Smith and the gospel covenant that was restored through him, making an acceptable offering possible (see D&C 45:9).<sup>30</sup> Modern-day revelation declares that part of that acceptable offering would be "a book containing the records of our dead" (D&C 128:24).

*An acceptable offering.* Moroni then quoted the Lord in Malachi 4:1, saying, “All that do wickedly shall burn as stubble; for they that come shall burn them, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, the unrighteous will be utterly destroyed with “no hope of sprouting again to life,” unlike the olive tree or house of Israel.<sup>32</sup> The “right to the tree of life” is obedience to the commandments (see Revelation 22:14). Christ stated, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the *root* and the *offspring* of David, and the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16). He was declaring His royal lineage and stating that access to the living tree is only through Him.

Moroni also echoed Malachi 4:5: “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.” As the gospel covenants were being restored through Joseph, he received essential keys for governing the kingdom. The keys held by Elijah that allowed for the fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers were particularly essential for accomplishing the purpose for which the earth was created (see Malachi 4:6). Those promises include sealing families together in an unbroken chain back to Adam. Hence, one of the most significant roles performed by the *root* and *branch* foreseen by Isaiah is to connect past and future, ancestry and posterity, or *root* and *branch*.

As an instrument of the Lord in restoring gospel covenants and promises, Joseph provided the means by which mankind could have both *root* and *branch* by being grafted into the main root and stem, Christ. That Joseph understood the significance of linking together the roots and branches of man’s family tree is clear from this declaration: “The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead. The Apostle says, ‘They without us cannot be made perfect;’ (Hebrews 11:40) for it is necessary that the sealing power should be in our hands to seal our children and our dead for the fullness of the dispensation of times—a dispensation to meet the promises made by Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world for the salvation of man.”<sup>33</sup> As head of the dispensation of the fulness of times, he was the essential link, restoring the past to the present and this world to the next. He prepares the way for the Second Coming of Christ by making possible part of the required offering—a book tying together the generations of man. Thus, Joseph could be symbolically portrayed in Isaiah as a *rod*, the synonymous term for *branch*, and a *root* (see Isaiah 11:1, 10).

*Joseph Smith as an ensign.* Isaiah 11 further declares that this root “shall stand for an ensign of the people” and that this root “shall set up an ensign for the nations.” It is to this ensign that Gentiles and Israel will gather (see Isaiah 11:11–12). What is an ensign?

Anciently, ensigns were distinctive banners representing each tribe of Israel. As the nation of Israel journeyed from Egypt to the promised land, each tribe had an assigned marching position next to the ark of the covenant. They raised a distinctive ensign, or banner, to which the members of the tribe were to gather (see Numbers 2). Just like Moses and ancient Israel, the Prophet Joseph Smith raised a unique banner or “standard” (see Numbers 2:2) around which modern Israel is to gather. The standard that Joseph raised has been defined in scripture as (1) the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 29:2), (2) the light of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (see D&C 115:3–5), and (3) the restored covenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ to which the nations of the world will gather (see D&C 45:9).

Joseph both raised the ensign and, as the messenger, stands as an ensign. As previously established, the messenger and the message he restored are a united forerunner preparing for the Second Coming of Christ. “The restored gospel of Jesus Christ is, in the fullest sense, the ‘ensign for the nations,’” yet Joseph’s role as prophet, seer, revelator, and restorer in the last dispensation “cannot be separated from the message itself.”<sup>34</sup> Hence, Joseph was told that “the ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name,” and he explained, “My name should be had for good and evil among all nations.” His name is inseparably connected with the ensign he raised, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon, and the covenants of Christ (D&C 122:1; Joseph Smith—History 1:33).

Isaiah’s final promise to Joseph, the latter-day Elias and ensign, was a glorious rest. The “rest of the Lord” is identified as a state of happiness and peace and the “fulness of his glory” (Alma 40:12; D&C 84:24). Joseph’s temporal life was one of turmoil, with persecutions from both inside and outside the Church. He knew poverty, disappointment, hardship, and upheaval. He experienced sadness in the death of his children as well as the pain of betrayal by close friends. Yet the spiritual outpouring he received from God was continuous and reflected the fulness of God’s promised glory. Joseph’s life was difficult. However, the Lord sustained him so that he could fulfill his divine commission by reminding him that he was known of Him and known by prophets of old.

## Conclusion

In his first meeting with Moroni, it was vital for Joseph Smith to glimpse his sacred commission from the Lord—the restoration of the gospel and covenants of Jesus Christ. We have a hint of the significance of this message in the announcement by Moroni to Joseph Smith: “It [the prophecy of Isaiah] was about to be fulfilled” (Joseph Smith—History 1:40). Joseph was the *choice seer* who saw into the eternities and brought together past and future. Joseph was the powerful servant *raised up* for the latter days. He was the one *like unto* Joseph of Egypt and Moses, foreordained to help bring salvation to the children of God by restoring plain and precious truths. He is the high priest who presides over the last dispensation and the latter-day Elias sent to “make ready the way” for the Second Coming of Christ. As a result of his great work, the olive tree is beginning to produce an abundance of good fruit.

From patriarchal blessings given to Joseph, son of Lehi, and to Joseph Smith Jr.; from witnesses in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon; and from the prophecies of ancient seers—Joseph of Egypt, Isaiah, and Malachi—we see the Lord’s hand reaching through generations of time to bring salvation to “his seed.” Isaiah testified that the work of the Messiah and the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith are connected like the trunk and branches of a tree. However, their relationship is even more intimate; their roots have intertwined. Therefore, it is not surprising that Elder John Taylor would exclaim, “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it” (D&C 135:3). As the head of this final dispensation, Joseph Smith stands as the preeminent prophetic revealer of Christ and the plan of salvation. The Lord delegated to Joseph Smith the responsibility to restore His covenants in the latter days that all might have roots and branches grafted into the “true vine” and the “true olive tree,” who is Christ. Clearly, Joseph Smith is inseparably connected with the Messiah in the work of salvation. ■

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## Notes

1. Hymn no. 72, verses 3–10, in *A Collection of Sacred Hymns*, sel. Emma Smith (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams and Co., 1835; reprint, Herald Heritage, 1973).

2. See also Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 7:3, “And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood [Melchizedek] are made *like unto the Son of God*” (emphasis added).

3. Gene M. Tucker, *The New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 2001), 6:139.

4. John D. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 24:163, 165–66. The King James Version (KJV) interprets the Hebrew verb *yipreh* as “shall grow,” referring to the shoot that comes out of the roots. However, the word has the connotation of bearing fruit (see Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2000], 826).

5. The Hebrew word *hoter*, translated as rod in the KJV, could also have been translated “branch” or “twig,” meaning an offshoot or green sprout. The Hebrew word *geza*, translated as “stem,” could have been translated “stock” or “trunk.” In the case of a tree that had been cut down, “stump” would also be appropriate.

6. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 269–70.

7. Elder Bruce R. McConkie compares Zenos with Isaiah as being one of the great prophets who testified of Christ. “I do not think I overstate the matter when I say that next to Isaiah himself—who was the prototype, pattern, and model for all the prophets—there was not a greater prophet in all Israel than Zenos.” (Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrinal Restoration,” in *The Joseph Smith Translation, The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, ed. Monte Nyman and Robert Millet [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985], 17).

8. M. Catherine Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory: The Mystery of Christ,” *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen Ricks and John Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 12.

9. Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory,” 17.

10. Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory,” 17.

11. Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory,” 15.

12. Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 168.

13. Price identifies “the Messiah as a Shoot from the stem (stump) of Jesse, and a Branch from Jesse’s family roots” (Ross Price, *Beacon Bible Commentary* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1969], 4:69). Another source clearly identifies the passage as messianic: “They need the very incarnation of God’s life in the Messiah” (Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1976], 87. Wesley believes that the stem or stump “clearly implies, that the Messiah should be born of the royal house of David” (John Wesley, *John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible*, URL: [bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries](http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries); see also The 1599 Geneva Study Bible. [bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries](http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries). Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown argue that the Messiah arises from the stump and is also the root in verse 10 (Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary: The Old and New Testaments* [Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1878], 131). Matthew Henry identifies Christ as the Messiah who is called both a rod and a branch (Leslie F. Church, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible by Matthew Henry* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1960], 845).

14. Clarke identifies the chapter as messianic and “represented as a slender twig shooting up from the root of an old withered stem,” but he does not attempt to identify the root or stem (Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary* [London: Butterworth, 1810–25], 1:72).

15. Oswalt writes of an “anointed descendant of David . . . somehow super-human . . . which is linked to the Messiah’s reign” (John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1986], 278). Delitzsch writes of a “remnant of the chosen royal family. . . . Jehovah acknowledges Him, and consecrates and equips Him for His great work” (Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1949], 281–82). *Broadman Bible Commentary* describes primarily characteristics of the messianic king (Page H. Kelley, *Broadman Bible Commentary* [Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1971], 5:231–33). Watts refers to an anointed king from the lineage of Jesse and focuses on God’s work through the king (Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 170–71).

16. Tucker, *The New Interpreters Bible*, 139. Tucker also makes this statement: “To capitalize ‘Branch’ and ‘Spirit’ tends to impose Christian theology upon the text” (Tucker, *The New Interpreters Bible*, 143).

17. The Hebrew word for root, *sores*, is the same in verse 1 and verse 10.

18. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 333; see also Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 192–93.

19. Heber C. Kimball stated that the keys, power, and authority of the kingdom of God were in the lineage of Joseph Smith and others of the “Twelve” (Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* [Salt Lake City: Kimball Family, 1988], 33; and *Journal of Discourses* [London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86], 4:248).

20. Several Latter-day Saint scholars also believe the powerful servant is Joseph Smith Jr. (see McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah*, 330–40; Sydney B. Sperry, *The Message of the Twelve Prophets* (Independence, Missouri: Zion’s Printing, 1941), 241; Sydney B. Sperry, *Voice of Israel’s Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 35; Monte S. Nyman, *Great Are the Words of Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 71, 74; Kent P. Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 2: Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall, 1985), 353. Ludlow believes Joseph Smith may not be the only “root of Jesse” in these last days (see Ludlow, *Isaiah*, 170–74).

21. “The Seed of Joseph,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, October 1932, 175; emphasis added.

22. Perhaps the men with whom Joseph was speaking understood that Isaiah’s prophesy referred to him, but because of the sacredness of this relationship to Christ and his special calling he did not name himself.

23. Sperry, *Voice of Israel’s Prophets*, 35; see also Sperry, *The Message of the Twelve Prophets*, 240; Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” 347, 355.

24. Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” 354.

25. The Malachi verses that Moroni quoted to Joseph Smith are slightly different from the KJV. The quotations used in this paper reflect those differences and are from Joseph Smith—History.

26. Sperry, *The Message of the Twelve Prophets*, 239.

27. Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” 348–49; see also Sperry, *The Message of the Twelve Prophets*, 240–43.

28. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 214.

29. Joseph was the Elias referred to in John 1:21; see also McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah*, 336; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps., *Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), 370.

30. Sperry, *The Message of the Twelve Prophets*, 240–41.

31. This is similar to Isaiah's prophesy concerning the kingdom of Babylon: "For I will rise up against them . . . and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew" (Isaiah 14:22).

32. William M. Greathouse, *Beacon Bible Commentary, Minor Prophets* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966), 5:440.

33. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 356.

34. Jackson, "The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith," 354.