

Malachi

Ep 183: CFM

Overview¹

To the Nephites and Lamanites the risen Savior quoted sections of the prophecies of Malachi, stating that the Father himself had commanded him to do so. The reason, he stated, was "that they should be given unto future generations" (3 Ne. 24:1; 26:2). Those generations were the righteous children of Lehi who established the perfect society after the coming of the Lord.² Those people needed the words of Malachi in order to understand the new dimension which the work of the Lord took, now that he had fulfilled his mortal mission. Up to this time most of the preparation had been for his first coming. **From that point on, it would be for his second. The words of Malachi reveal not only key events but also the nature of the work that would prepare for that coming.** Therefore, the Savior used the words of Malachi as the basis on which he expounded "all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away" (3 Ne. 26:3).

Further emphasizing the importance of the writings of Malachi was the angel Moroni's use of them. When he instructed Joseph Smith during the night of 21-22 September 1823, he quoted portions of Malachi to introduce the extent and nature of the work which had to be accomplished before the Lord would come in glory. In doing so, he laid the foundation for the work in which the latter-day Church would be engaged. Thus, we see that **Malachi's prophecies were necessary not only for the Nephites but for the Latter-day Saints** as well.³

The exact dates of Malachi's ministry are not known. From his written work it is clear that the temple had been rebuilt and the ordinances involving animal sacrifice were being performed. This places his ministry after 515 B.C., the year when the temple was dedicated. The abuses he castigated were the among those that the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah were designed to correct. Because those reforms do not appear to have been in effect yet in Malachi's day, it is likely that his writings precede them. Therefore, his ministry would fall before 458 B.C., and was probably closer to 500 B.C.⁴ Malachi's name is unique in the Hebrew cannon. It means "my messenger,"⁵ or "my angel," but it may be a shortened form of "the Lord's messenger."⁶ Although we know very little about him and his life's history, latter-day

¹ Much of this overview comes from Richard Draper, "The Book of Malachi" *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 4: 1 Kings to Malachi, Deseret Book, (ed. Kent Jackson), 2004.

² It is doubtful that the Lord was referring to any other people. For those living in the last days, the writings of Malachi have been preserved in the Bible. The essential purity of the biblical text of Malachi is attested in the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith's translation of the Savior's quotations, which uses the same language as that in the KJV. It would seem, therefore, that the Savior intended his transmission of the text to be for the Nephites. **The preservation of Malachi's text in two sets of scriptures, like that of Isaiah, underscores its importance.**

³ To read this discussion, see Kent P. Jackson, "The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith," in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Two: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, Randall Book, 1985.

⁴ For the dating of Malachi's ministry, see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1969, p. 960-61.

⁵ מְלַאֲכִי "my messenger," from the Hebrew noun מְלַאֲךָ "messenger," or "representative." The Greek renders it ἀγγέλου or messenger.

⁶ See D. Guthrie, *The New Bible Commentary*, Eerdmans, 1970, p. 806.

revelation makes it clear that he was an important individual who labored with Judah as one of her great prophets (D&C 138:46).

We essentially see this nuance in the very beginning of the book. In Malachi 1.1 we read:

The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi (Mal. 1.1 KJV).

The Hebrew reads as follows:

מִשָּׂא דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיַד מַלְאָכִי “The burden of the word of Yahweh which is to Israel by the hand of Malachi/my servant” (my translation).

The Greek reads a bit differently. It reads: λήμμα λόγου κυρίου ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραηλ ἐν χειρὶ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ θέσθε δὴ ἐπὶ τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν “The receipt of the word of the Lord upon Israel in the hand of my messenger which you all are to take to heart” (my translation).

Note that the Greek does not call out Malachi’s name, rather he is described as “my messenger.” A careful reading of the King James rendering of the Book of Malachi will show that Malachi’s name appears nowhere else in the text. So this, to me, is significant as it lends itself to the idea that perhaps we are just talking about “my messenger,” and perhaps the name of the messenger is something other than Malachi.

Esau have I hated: Malachi 1.2-3

וְאֶת־עֵשָׂו שָׂנֵאתִי וְאֵשִׁים אֶת־הַרְיֹו שְׂמִמָּה וְאֶת־נַחְלָתוֹ לְתַנּוֹת מִדְּבָר וְאֶת־יְרֵכָה וְאֶת־הַרְיֹו שְׂמִמָּה וְאֶת־נַחְלָתוֹ לְתַנּוֹת מִדְּבָר “And Esau have I hated, and I have placed his mountains and his inheritance a desolate waste to the dragons from the wilderness” (my translation).

LXX: τὸν δὲ Ησαυ ἐμίσησα καὶ ἔταξα τὰ ὄρια αὐτοῦ εἰς ἀφανισμόν καὶ τὴν κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ εἰς δόματα ἐρήμου

“And Esau have I hated, and I have put his mountains into destruction, even his inheritance into the wilderness” (my translation).

Both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint reflect this idea of God hating Esau. What are modern readers to do with this?

Perhaps seeing this text through the lens of the Ancient Near East will help. **Few literary genres from the ancient world stand out so prominently as the Near Eastern vassal treaty.** Scholars have shown that these political contracts formed between vassal kings and suzerain provided the conceptual background for the book of Deuteronomy.⁷ “The assumption is that Israel conceived of its relation to Yahweh as that of subject peoples to a world king and that they expressed this relationship in the concepts and formulas of the suzerainty treaty.”⁸ **In the Near Eastern treaty, vassals were required to love their superiors:** “If you do not love the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal,” warns the Assyrian treaty of Esarhaddon, “[then] may Ashur, king of the gods, who determines the fates, decree for you an

⁷ A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy: New Century Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1979), 33; and Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Eisenbrauns, 1992), 60-61.

⁸ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Fortress Press, 1985), 205.

evil, unpropitious fate.”⁹ In this ancient context, “loving the king with one’s entire heart signified the severance of all contact with other political powers.”¹⁰ Hence, Israel’s command to “love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,” presented in the book of Deuteronomy, *seems to refer to a political commitment rather than an emotional attachment* (Deuteronomy 6:5).¹¹

*Scholars in recent decades have shown that in the biblical world the word love often represented a covenantal devotion to one’s superior, while its opposite, namely hate, at times signified the status of an individual outside of this affiliation.*¹² While the connotation of these words for Westerners usually signifies an intense emotional charge, in the ancient Near East, love and hate often carried the aforementioned unique covenantal connotation.¹³

“All their [the Ephraimites’] wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house” (Hosea 9:15). As demonstrated in this biblical passage, the Ephraimites’ wickedness resulted in their loss of the blessing associated with having the God of Israel serve as their sovereign. *The Lord hated the Ephraimites “for the wickedness of their doings” because in the context of ancient Near Eastern treaties these acts were tantamount to a political insurrection.* As a result, the Ephraimites were removed from God’s covenantal house or family. “I will love them no more,” declared the Lord: “all their princes are revolvers” (Hosea 9:15). Thus, the words love and hate in the biblical world often carried a deliberate connotation of political alliance (or lack thereof).¹⁴

The Dishonor of Israel (Mal. 1-2)

One of the main problems faced by Malachi was the lack of faith the Jews felt toward Jehovah. This problem expressed itself in four specific ways: questioning the Lord's love, offering impure sacrifices, marrying outside the covenant, and lack of diligence in keeping the commandments. The prophet addressed each of these.

The Lord gave the Jews evidence of his love for them. Judah's cousins, **the Edomites** (descendants of Esau), were among *her most bitter enemies*. They had even assisted Judah's other enemies from time to time and had benefited greatly from Judah's fall in 587 B.C. by usurping part of her land. During the ministry of Zerubbabel, however, they had suffered a setback. Through Malachi, the Lord stated that this would actually prove their demise; they would never rise to power again.¹⁵ Their empty land would be proof of the Lord's care for Israel and would vouchsafe his right to demand their love and loyalty in return (Mal. 1:2-5).

⁹ As cited in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton University Press, 1969), 537, 538.

¹⁰ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 81.

¹¹ William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 77-87, emphasis added.

¹² N. Lohfink, “Hate and Love in Osee 9, 15,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 417, emphasis added.

¹³ This would explain why the Lord says that he loves Jacob (Israel) but hates his brother Esau (Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:13).

¹⁴ Day, [Love and Hate in Helaman 15](#).

¹⁵ The Arabs were successful in taking over Edom by the fifth century and even began to mingle with those who had fled into southern Palestine. Eventually a new people, called the Nabateans, gained control of Edom. See Guthrie, p. 806.

In the meantime, Judah was not excused for doubting God's love nor profaning the sacrifices which she was hypocritically offering the Lord. Sick and blemished animals were used, against the Levitical law. And the priests, who should have guarded the rights of the Lord, not only turned a blind eye to these infractions but seem to have fostered them, probably out of self-interest (Mal. 1:6-14). All this was but a symptom of the real problem: a faithlessness by which "ye have corrupted [i.e., broken] the covenant" (Mal. 2:8). This last charge was leveled especially against the priests, whose duty it was to declare the law of God and guard his rights. In this they had failed and now stood in danger of bringing cursings upon the people. The Lord castigated the Levites for breaking the "covenant of Levi" their father—that is, dishonoring the priesthood with which the Lord had blessed their family. Their Aaronic Priesthood calling could have been a covenant of "life and peace" (Mal. 2:5). Because they dishonored it, however, the Lord would curse them and their work (Mal. 2:2-3, 8-9).

It appears that Israel in general had lost the privilege of eternal marriage at Sinai (D&C 84:23-27). But they had not forfeited the responsibility to marry within the covenant. Marriage to non-Israelites had proven to be the seedbed of apostasy; for this reason the Lord had forbidden it.¹⁶ In Malachi's day, the men of Judah and Levi had turned to foreign women and taken them as wives (Mal. 2:11, 13-15). Many had divorced their Israelite wives in order to accommodate their unrighteous desires. Malachi expressed well the Lord's hatred for this practice and its result: the rejection of all offerings made to him and the forfeiture of the consequent blessings (Mal. 2:12, 16-17).

Partial in the Law (Mal. 2.8-9).

Malachi states that the people have gone away from following the Lord:

Ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law. (Mal. 2.8-9).

President Packer warned of those who do this, saying, "The gospel might be likened to the keyboard of a piano—a full keyboard with a selection of keys on which one who is trained can play a variety without limits; a ballad to express love, a march to rally, a melody to soothe, and a hymn to inspire; an endless variety to suit every mood and satisfy every need. How shortsighted it is, then, to choose a single key and endlessly tap out the monotony of a single note, or even two or three notes, when the full keyboard of limitless harmony can be played...Some members of the Church who should know better pick out a hobby key or two and tap them incessantly, to the irritation of those around them. They can dull their own spiritual sensitivities. They lose track that there is a fullness of the gospel...They may reject the fullness in preference to a favorite note. This becomes exaggerated and distorted, leading them away into apostasy."¹⁷

The Coming Purification (Mal. 3:1-4)

The people had wearied the Lord with their claim that he delighted in evil because he had not come out against their enemies (Mal. 2:17). They ignored their own faithlessness and insisted that a good God would have done something to avenge them. Malachi warned them that the full vindication of the

¹⁶ Jehovah had specifically forbidden the practice for this very reason (see Ex. 34:15-16; Deut. 7:3-4), and the history of Israel had proved his wisdom (e.g., 1 Kgs. 11:1-11).

¹⁷ Boyd K. Packer, "The Only True and Living Church," *Ensign*, Dec. 1971, 41-42.

Lord's righteousness would be revealed in the Day of Judgment. But if the Jews expected the Day of Judgment to come in their own generation, they were very mistaken. Like so many Old Testament prophecies, Malachi's would take millennia to be fulfilled.

The Messenger (Mal. 3.1-4)

A key to understanding Malachi 3:1-4 is in identifying the messenger who would herald the day of judgment.¹⁸ The Savior identified John the Baptist as that messenger: "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Matt. 11:10). John's excellent service during the Lord's mortal ministry fulfilled the prophecy but only in part, because the context of the prophecy is with Jesus' second coming. John seems to have understood that his role would extend beyond his mortal ministry. When asked who he was, he stated, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias" (John 1:23), referring to Isaiah 40:3. The context of Isaiah's words, like Malachi's, does not correspond with the events of the first coming of the Lord. They speak, rather, of the second, when "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isa. 40:5). ***John would thus be the Lord's messenger twice, once to prepare the way for his first coming and then again for his second.*** The latter-day fulfillment was when John bestowed his powers upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, allowing them and those whom they commissioned to be further messengers in preparing the way for the Lord.¹⁹ Perhaps the prophecy will be, or has been, fulfilled in other ways as well.²⁰

Malachi noted that two important events would yet transpire: the Lord would come to his temple (Mal. 3:1), and the sons of Levi would be purified and then make an acceptable offering before the Lord (Mal. 3:3).

The Lord came suddenly to his temple on 3 April 1836, as described in Doctrine and Covenants 110.²¹ His coming inaugurated the great latter-day work of the house of the Lord: "This is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people," he proclaimed (D&C 110:10). His appearance was followed by that of others, including Elijah, whose coming fulfilled another prophecy in Malachi (D&C 110:13-16; Mal. 4:5-6).

As seen in chapters 1 and 2, much of the message of Malachi concerns the unrighteousness of the Levites, who had violated the priesthood stewardship with which the Lord had blessed them and had brought their ministry under a curse (Mal. 2:2, 8). It is thus significant that a later son of Levi, John the Baptist, would be foretold in Malachi's record. John's ministry typified the lesser priesthood perfectly, since it would "prepare the way before" the greater ministry which was to come (Mal. 3:1).

¹⁸ Jackson, "The Appearance of Moroni," pp. 348-50, and "Teaching from the Words of the Prophets," in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight: Alma 30 to Moroni*, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Deseret Book, 1988, p. 198-201.

¹⁹ JS-H 1:68-72; D&C 13. Of these commissioned messengers, none would be greater than Joseph Smith himself, who was the prophet of the Restoration and was specifically commissioned to prepare the way for the second coming of the Lord. See also: Day, [Malachi – My Messenger](#).

²⁰ Jackson, "Teaching from the Words of the Prophets," pp. 198-99.

²¹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-56), 3:12-13. It is likely that the prophecy in Mal. 3:1 is not limited solely to that appearance. See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), pp. 693-94.

But Malachi had more to say about the future of the sons of Levi. The Lord would yet purify them collectively and accept a righteous offering at their hand (Mal. 3:3-4). How will the sons of Levi be purified? In the same way that the sons of Ephraim, the sons of Lehi, and the Gentiles are purified: by forsaking their sins and the false traditions of their fathers, by accepting the gospel, and by being baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. How will they "offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness"? (Mal. 3:3). Joseph Smith, speaking concerning Malachi 3:3, taught that in order for "the restitution of all things" to be complete, the ordinance of animal sacrifice must be "fully restored." It "will be continued when the Priesthood is restored with all its authority, power and blessings." "Then shall the sons of Levi offer an acceptable offering to the Lord." This will take place, he said, "when the Temple of the Lord shall be built, and the sons of Levi be purified."²² The Prophet did not give further details concerning this ordinance, nor do the scriptures. But it is safe to conclude that it will be of sufficient duration to fulfill the prophecies and to signify that the sons of Levi acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and are thus worthy again to be numbered among the covenant people.²³ And it will be of sufficient quality and sincerity to lift from them the curse of which Malachi wrote (Mal. 2:1-3, 8), which they received when their offerings were unworthy of the Lord's approbation.

The Lord's Challenge (Mal. 3:5-18)

After showing how the offerings of the sons of Levi will become acceptable to the Lord in the last days, Malachi turned to the evil practices of his own day. He promised Judah that in spite of any future blessings, Jehovah would come against them in fury for the grievous sins they were then committing. Only if they would immediately return to him would they stave off destruction (Mal. 3:5-6).

To the question, "Wherein shall we return?" the Lord responded by specifying that they start by offering unto him tithes, which are his due (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21). As in every dispensation, this was a demand for faith. Judah was to quit trusting in her own arm and place her trust fully in the Lord. In a rare instance of challenge, the Lord demanded that the people test him in this matter, and he promised that blessings would flow from heaven in great abundance (Mal. 3:8-11). The result would be that even the Gentile nations would have to proclaim that Judah was blessed of God (Mal. 3:12).

"With Healing in His Wings" (Mal. 4)

Malachi again turned to the future day of judgment. He noted that it would be a day of distress, devastation, and sorrow for the wicked (Mal. 4:1). The major cause of the anguish would be that wickedness would no longer prevail. Indeed, the wicked will be consumed from off the face of the earth at the time of the Savior's great coming.²⁴ But for the righteous, it will be a great day of deliverance and joy in which they will at last prevail against those who oppress them (Mal. 4:2-3).

²² Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., 2d ed. rev., edited by B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957), 4:211. See also Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938), pp. 172-73.

²³ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:93-94; McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 666; Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979-81), 1:128. For another interpretation, see Sidney B. Sperry, *The Voice of Israel's Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1952), pp. 438-39.

²⁴ From the reading of this verse in JS-H 1:37, it appears that the wicked will be destroyed by the glory of those who come with Christ. This verse (Mal. 4:1) is referred to three times in the Doctrine and Covenants (29:9; 64:23; 133:64), which gives some indication of the importance of this event. See the discussion of Mal. 4:1-4 in Jackson, "The Appearance of Moroni," pp. 350-52.

But once again the prophet noted that the great day would be preceded by the coming of one sent from God (Mal. 4:5-6). This was to be Elijah. His mission would be twofold: first, to restore certain priesthood keys, and second, to plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to their forefathers, such that the hearts of the children would be drawn to their fathers.²⁵ Elijah has already come to fulfill Malachi's words. He appeared in the Kirtland Temple on 3 April 1836 and conferred the keys of the sealing power upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (D&C 110:13-16).

The keys which Elijah restored are most significant. They rounded out those already received so that the priesthood could then function in its fullness.²⁶ One of the blessings that grew out of this power was eternal marriage and the resultant blessing of the sealing of children to parents. By extension, it also allowed generations to be linked together back over the course of the history of the earth. The blessings of the gospel and the sealing power are thus granted to those righteous people who were born during periods of apostasy. A byproduct of this process is that those on the earth are sealed to those in heaven and can draw assistance from them.²⁷

So important is this work that the whole purpose of the earth would be frustrated if it were not done. Modern revelation explains why. Each generation needs to be welded to the one before it, such that a whole, complete, and perfect union can be made. One of the first things necessary for that union is the organization of the righteous from every dispensation into one eternal family. In this way all the keys, powers, and glories from the days of Adam to the present are brought together to prepare the earth for the return of its great King (see D&C 128:18). In a very real way, the dead cannot be made perfect without their latter-day descendants doing the necessary temple work. Similarly, those living in the last days cannot receive all the power necessary for salvation until the links are fully complete. The fathers were promised that their posterity must save them in order to save themselves. As the children come to understand how dependent they are upon the fathers, their hearts turn to them. As the welding links are fully formed, the family of God is established and prepared for exaltation. In this way the earth fulfills its purpose.

The prophecies of Malachi show the responsibility that the prophets of the former day and the Saints of the latter day have in the work of the Lord. They testify to the dependence each generation of righteous people has on those who came before and those who will come after. But most of all, Malachi's words testify of the glorious work of God in the salvation of all his children.

Another Way to Read Malachi 4.2

Malachi 4.2 "Healing in her wings": The Masoretic, Septuagint, Syriac, and Joseph Smith Translation

Although Joseph does not elaborate, there is something noteworthy in Malachi 4 that we will find come to light in Nauvoo as Joseph teaches the Saints more about Heavenly Mother. [Malachi 4.2](#) in the King James Version reads as follows:

²⁵ This verse was significantly altered by Moroni so that Joseph Smith would fully understand the teaching of Malachi (JS-H 1:38-39). See the discussion by Jackson, "Teaching from the Words of the Prophets," pp. 202-3.

²⁶ Joseph Smith taught that Elijah brought the power for revelation, ordinances, and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood. See Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:250-51.

²⁷ Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:252.

But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and spring forth up as calves of the stall

Reading this text in the original Hebrew²⁸ can render a more nuanced meaning to this text.

[In the Hebrew text of Malachi 4.2](#) (The Masoretic Text²⁹) we read the following:

הָרָחֵק לָכֶם יְרֵאִי שְׁמִי שֶׁשָׁמַיְךָ הַיּוֹם וּמִרְפָּא בְּכַנְפֶיהָ וְיִצְאֲתֶם וּפְשָׁתֶם כְּעֶגְלֵי מִרְבֵּק

And to you³⁰ that fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness³¹, **she will come forth with healing in her wings**, and you³² will go forth, and grow up **as calves of the stall**.

The Greek version of the text reads: καὶ ἀνατελεῖ ὑμῖν τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά μου ἥλιος δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἴασις ἐν ταῖς πτέρυξιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξελεύσεσθε καὶ σκιρτήσετε ὡς μοσχάρια ἐκ δεσμῶν ἀνειμένα.

My translation of the Greek text of Malachi 4.2: “And to you all that fear my name, will **the sun of righteousness arise** even **with healing in his wings**³³, and you all will go forth and you all will leap **as calves** released from bonds.

²⁸ I must acknowledge that I do not think that an urtext of Malachi is available at this date.

²⁹ Masoretic text, (from Hebrew masoreth, “tradition”), traditional Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible, meticulously assembled and codified, and supplied with diacritical marks to enable correct pronunciation. **This monumental work was begun around the 6th century AD and completed in the 10th** by scholars at Talmudic academies in Babylonia and Palestine, in an effort to reproduce, as far as possible, the original text of the Hebrew Old Testament. ***Their intention was not to interpret the meaning of the Scriptures but to transmit to future generations the authentic Word of God.*** To this end they gathered manuscripts and whatever oral traditions were available to them. The Masoretic text that resulted from their work shows that *every word and every letter was checked with care*. In Hebrew or Aramaic, they called attention to strange spellings and unusual grammar and noted discrepancies in various texts. Since texts traditionally omitted vowels in writing, **the Masoretes introduced vowel signs to guarantee correct pronunciation**. Among the various systems of vocalization that were invented, the one fashioned in the city of Tiberias, Galilee, eventually gained ascendancy. In addition, signs for stress and pause were added to the text to facilitate public reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue. When the final codification of each section was complete, the Masoretes not only counted and noted down the total number of verses, words, and letters in the text but further indicated which verse, which word, and which letter marked the centre of the text. In this way any future emendation could be detected. **The rigorous care given the Masoretic text in its preparation is credited for the remarkable consistency found in Old Testament Hebrew texts since that time.** The Masoretic work enjoyed an absolute monopoly for 600 years, and experts have been astonished at the fidelity of the earliest printed version (late 15th century) to the earliest surviving codices (late 9th century). The Masoretic text is universally accepted as the authentic Hebrew Bible. [Masoretic Text, Jewish Bible, Britannica.com](#), accessed 11.9.2022.

³⁰ “You all,” = masculine plural.

³¹ Sun of Righteousness (הַיּוֹם שֶׁשָׁמַיְךָ) has some interesting connections here. Shamash, a God of the Ancient Near East, god of justice, morality, truth, corresponding to Sumerian [Utu](#). Akkadian *šamaš* is cognate to Syriac [ܫܡܫܐ](#) *šemsā* or *šimsū* Hebrew [שֶׁמֶשׁ](#) *šemeš* and Arabic [شمس](#) *šams*.

³² “You all,” = masculine plural.

³³ The genitive masculine singular is used here - αὐτοῦ. If it read καὶ ἴασις ἐν ταῖς πτέρυξιν αὐτῆς, it would read “even with healing in her wings.” I must add that αὐτοῦ is also the neuter genitive singular, so this verse can also be read as “with healing in its wings,” rendering a neuter translation, so either “his” or “its” works in this instance in the construction of the Greek grammar. But **the feminine reading does not hold** in the Greek translation of Malachi 4.2.

Other texts read this verse differently. The [Peshitta³⁴ translation](#) reads as follows:

And The Sun of Righteousness shall arise to you worshippers of my name, and healing is on his tongue, and you shall go out and you shall jump like calves of the herd.

In the passage of the Masoretic Text the “Sun of Righteousness” is feminine, שֶׁמֶשׁ צְדִיקָה *shemesh tsedâqâh*, which can have many meanings, but is certainly feminine with the suffix at the end of *tsedâqâh*. In one sense this can be speaking of God in a feminine way. I see this as the fulfillment of the Great Lady, meaning the church of Jesus Christ which will bring forth the kingdom of God as found in several passages in Revelation 12.³⁵

The verb “arise” (וַיִּזְרַח) is feminine as well, (literally, “she shall arise”) and the pronominal suffix “Her” for “Her wings” is feminine as well בְּכַנְפֵיהָ “in Her wings.”³⁶

One scholar gives another approach to this very peculiar text:

Evidence from Ancient Ugarit confirms the identity of **the king’s heavenly mother who was clothed with the sun**. Their sun goddess, whose two aspects were named Athirat and Rahmay, gave birth to the two aspects of the king named Morning Star and Evening Star... A stela from Ugarit depicts the scene when the king approaches the heavenly throne, under the wings of the sun disc, who represents his heavenly mother. **The sun goddess despite being mother of the royal heir, was known as the Virgin** (KTU 1.15.ii.), as well as the ‘Great Lady who tramples the sea’ and the ‘Creatrix of the gods’ (KTU 1.4.iii.34-35). The seventy sons of El, the gods of the nations, were her children, and she was the consort of El Elyon who appears in Genesis 14.20, 22 as God Most High served by the priest-king of Jerusalem named Melchizedek. The fragment of Deuteronomy 32.8-9 found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (and appearing in newer translations such as the NRSV), shows that Israel had known the sons of El. It prompts the question how

³⁴ The Peshitta (Syriac: “simple” or “common”) [Syriac version of the Bible](#), the accepted Bible of Syrian Christian churches from the end of the 3rd century CE. The name “Peshitta” was first employed by Moses bar Kepha in the 9th century to suggest (as does the name of the Latin Vulgate) that the text was in common use. **The Old Testament Peshitta is second only to the Greek Septuagint in antiquity, dating from probably the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.** The earliest parts in Old Syriac are thought to have been translated from Hebrew or Aramaic texts by Jewish Christians at Edessa, although the Old Testament Peshitta was later revised according to Greek textual principles. The earliest extant versions of the New Testament Peshitta date to the 5th century CE and exclude the *Second Letter of Peter, the Second and Third Letters of John, the Letter of Jude, and the Revelation to John*, which were not canonical in the Syrian church. [Peshitta, Syriac Bible, Britannica.com](#), accessed 11.9.2022.

³⁵ The Joseph Smith translation of Revelation 12 helps to demonstrate what I am talking about here. In it we read: And there appeared a great *sign* in heaven, *in the likeness of things on the earth*; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And *the woman* being with child, cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. *And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God and his throne...And the dragon prevailed not against Michael, neither the child, nor the woman which was the church of God, who had been delivered of her pains, and brought forth the kingdom of our God and his Christ.* ([Joseph Smith Translation, Revelation 12.1-3, 7](#), emphasis added.

³⁶ The verb “arise” (וַיִּזְרַח) is feminine, (transliteration: *wezarehah*. From the root זָרַח (H2224) – Hebrew: Conjunction; verb qal sequential perfect third person feminine singular. English: arise). [Ellicott’s Commentary](#) for English Readers gives us the following: Wings – Figurative for rays. The fathers and early commentators have understood Christ by the Sun of Righteousness, and they are so far right that it is the period of His advent that is referred to; but there can be no *personal* reference to Him in the expression, since “sun” is feminine in Hebrew; **and the literal rendering of the word translated “in his wings” is “in her wings.”**

there came to be two versions of such a sensitive text, since this longer version must have been the one used by the translators of the LXX, i.e. it is the older text:

When the Most High apportioned the nations
when he divided humankind
he fixed the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number of the gods
The LORD'S own portion was his people,
Jacob his allotted share. (4QDeut.q)

A millennium and more separates the Ugaritic evidence from the Book of Revelation, but not from the cult of the first temple. **The Woman clothed with the sun** is not the Ugaritic goddess, but **the Hebrew goddess** who was worshipped in Jerusalem until the temple purges in the seventh century BCE. **She is the Queen of Heaven**, the consort of the King, the LORD of Hosts, whom Isaiah had seen in his vision (Isaiah 6.5). The eighth-century prophets, however, spoke of her as the *'almah*, (which the LXX understood to mean Virgin), the mother of the royal child, Immanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7.14) and as the woman who would give birth in Bethlehem to the mighty shepherd of Israel (Micah 5.2-4). **When Malachi warned of the Day of the Lord, he promised that the Sun of Righteousness would rise up with healing 'in her wings'** (Malachi 4.2, usually translated 'its wings'). In the Book of Revelation she gives birth to her son and then flies away on eagles' wings into the desert, to escape the ancient serpent ([Revelation 12.14](#)).³⁷

What does all of this mean? To me, there is certainly several ways that we can analyze this text. I find myself developing new and interesting ways to interpret this. For starters, I acknowledge the difficult translation issues! Certainly the authors of the Book of Mormon plate text had an understanding of these complex issues, and yet in our modern version of the Book of Mormon, we basically have this KJV text in our Book of Mormon.³⁸ It has been argued by some critics of the Book of Mormon that since Malachi came after Nephi left Jerusalem, in no way could any of his words be used by him or those that came after him in the Americas. For example, in 1 Nephi 22.24 the phrase "calves of the stall" is used. This also occurs in the KJV of Malachi 4.2. Since Malachi came 200 years after Nephi, this is seen as an anachronism by critics. John Tvedtnes demonstrates why this is not the case:

The Hebrew term rendered "calves of the stall" in the Malachi passage is *eglēy marbēq*. It is also found in other Bible passages, such as Jeremiah 46:21 and 1 Samuel 28:24, where the same Hebrew words are rendered "fatted bullocks" and "fat calf" (singular form *ēgel marbēq*), respectively, in the King James version (KJV) of the Bible. But the word *marbēq* refers to an animal stall and does not mean "fat" or

³⁷ Margaret Barker, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)*, Continuum International Publishing; 1st edition (May 1, 2000), p. 200-201, emphasis added.

³⁸ See [3 Nephi 25.2](#). It is worth noting that it reads as follows: "But unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall." There is some discussion as to this text being a scribal error of translation, as the words son and sun are homophones in English, but radically different in Hebrew – son being *ben* and sun being *shemesh*. See Sidney Sperry's commentary "The Book of Mormon and Textual Criticism," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995): 181–82. See also 2 Nephi 25.13 where we read that Jesus will "rise from the dead, with healing in his wings."

“fatted.” The Samuel passage predates Nephi by a few centuries, while the Jeremiah passage is contemporary with him. So the term would have been known to Nephi. Also predating Nephi was the prophet Amos, who wrote of *āgālīm mit-tōk marbēq*, “calves out of the midst of the stall” (Amos 6:4).^[16] From Tvedtnes’ explanation, we can see that the phrase “calves of the stall” was used by earlier authors of scripture, (though not readily seen in the English translation of the text) and that their works would have been available to Nephi as he studied the Brass Plates record.

So if we acknowledge the complex nature of this passage, I would like to suggest a couple of things for our consideration. The idea of a goddess giving birth to a dying and rising god is not uncommon, as Barker and others have demonstrated.³⁹ We also see this in the story of Osiris/Horus and the mother Isis in the older Egyptian religion. The Great Lady that tramples the sea could very well be [Asherah](#), a deity that was clearly venerated by the Israelites in the First Temple period. This goddess went by many names in the Ancient Near East, but in many cases she seems to be doing many of the same things. She is clearly found throughout the Old Testament, though later editors tried to eliminate evidence of her presence.⁴⁰

So in one sense those that “fear (God’s) name” will meet Heavenly Mother, who has healing in her wings, and they will “grow up as calves,” meaning that they will continue in their progression, away from the storms of mortality and in a place of safety. This to me, is a resurrection type of teaching or ritual. It is a sacred **heavenly embrace** [think “wings” also being outstretched arms]⁴¹ with our Heavenly Mother. Heavenly Mother as an embodied exalted being of brightness like the sun is a strong possibility here in this particular verse, especially when we look closely at how Asherah was the embodiment of the Tree (or the Tree of Life!) and how Lehi incorporated the Tree in his vision in 1 Nephi 8-11. Note how Lehi describes the Tree and the superlatives that he uses in his vision of the Tree.⁴² The entire verse is drenched in the feminine and to me it reads this way. ***This is certainly one approach to the text.***

Another consideration would be that if we read this verse in the context of Revelation 12, the woman is the church, which is going to (according to the Joseph Smith Translation) bring forth the political kingdom of God which will “rule with a rod of iron” (JST, [Revelation 12.3,7](#)). In the context of Malachi’s prophecy, the church will come in the name of Christ, bringing healing to all who revere the name of God. Certainly the principles taught in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bring the healing needed for a sick world. The Church is the tool the Lord is using in the latter days to “make his name known.” The Church spends countless treasure and time in the effort to heal the nations, despite the opposition mustered against it. The Church is the heavenly kingdom of God waiting in anticipation for the earthly kingdom of God to fulfill its destiny where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns as king of kings.

From a ritual perspective, those that revere “the name” (Malachi 4.2), will be healed by the “sun of righteousness,” a divine being (in the feminine in the Hebrew text), being brought into safety. This is **the**

³⁹ See: Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: Dying and Rising Gods in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns; 1st edition, November 1, 2017.

⁴⁰ William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*, Eerdmans, 2005. See also: Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, Wayne State University Press, 1990.

⁴¹ Wings in this verse come from the word [kanaph](#). The word קנף can be translated as wing, skirt, borders, corners, ends, extremity, feathered, or skirt, corner of a garment. The image of wings outstretched could denote the precursor to an embrace, see [Mormon 6.17](#) where we are told that Jesus stands with open arms to receive us.

⁴² Superlatives include: Most sweet, most white, most beautiful, and most precious. See 1 Nephi 11.7-9.

embrace of God,⁴³ the perfect symbol for the **Atonement of Jesus Christ**, the word atonement being the same word for “covered.” We are “covered” or embraced by our Heavenly Parents, and in the context of Malachi 4, we are all tied together in sealing covenants with our parents and our children in a family tree – the same symbol for the “sun of righteousness,” [at least as it applies to Asherah](#). So we are back to the [Tree](#). **Note that the Old Testament begins and ends in the imagery of a tree**. The same can be said of the New Testament. The message should not be missed: God is our Father. We have a Heavenly Mother. We are all children of Heavenly parents, and to the 17-year-old Joseph, these ideas are present in the text of Malachi that Moroni is quoting on a September night long ago. The roots of temple liturgy are already showing the first signs of growth before the Book of Mormon is even published!

⁴³ The embrace is a perfect symbol for the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The word atonement appears only once in the New Testament, but 127 times in the Old Testament. . . In the other Standard Works of the Church, atonement (including related terms atone, atoned, atoneth, atoning) appears 44 times, but only 3 times in the Doctrine and Covenants, and twice in the Pearl of Great Price. The other 39 times are all in the Book of Mormon. This puts the Book of Mormon in the milieu of the old Hebrew rites before the destruction of Solomon’s Temple, for after that the Ark and the covering (kapporeth) no longer existed, but the Holy of Holies was still called the bait ha-kapporeth. . . . It has often been claimed that the Book of Mormon cannot contain the ‘fullness of the gospel,’ since it does not have temple ordinances. As a matter of fact, they are everywhere in the book if we know where to look for them, and the dozen or so discourses on the Atonement in the Book of Mormon are replete with temple imagery. From all the meanings of *kaphar* and *kippurim*, we concluded that the literal meaning of *kaphar* and *kippurim* is a close and intimate embrace, which took place at the *kapporeth*, or the front cover or flap of the tabernacle or tent. The Book of Mormon instances are quite clear, for example, ‘Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you’ (Alma 5:33). ‘But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love’ (2 Nephi 1:15). To be redeemed is to be atoned. From this it should be clear what kind of oneness is meant by the Atonement—it is being received in a close embrace of the prodigal son. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, p. 566-67.