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## Elias: Prophet of the Restoration

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Jan Francisco

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# ELIAS: PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

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Scholarship on Elias relies on a limited pool of primary source material, so it is understandable how scholars are left to ultimately conclude: “When Elias, the man, lived, and what he did in his life, must for the present remain in the field of conjecture.”<sup>1</sup> This paper is an attempt at viewing the prophet Elias with a lens that unifies the scriptural sources in a cohesive narrative with the prophet named Elias at the center of all the work done in his name by different actors in different dispensations. This is a different interpretation than the one found in the Bible Dictionary and other publications from The Church of Jesus Christ of

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1. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, combined single-volume edition, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 243–44, <https://archive.org/details/evidencesreconci0123john/page/242/mode/2up>.

Latter-day Saints.<sup>2</sup> Rather than a Greek model of making a point and then proving that point, this essay follows the Hebraic path of finding relevant details in a spirit of curiosity and investigation. The resulting web of information and interpretation presents an interesting paradigm shift of who Elias could be and how he is working in our time.

*Elias* is the Greek version of *Elijah*, an ancient Hebrew name meaning “the Lord is God” or “Jehovah is God.”<sup>3</sup> *El* means God and *Yah* means Jehovah or Lord. Both names have the same origin and etymology — *Eliyyahu* in Hebrew is *Elijah* in English and *Elias* in Greek. Most Bible translations have replaced all “Elias” references with “Elijah,” thus erasing a separate Elias from Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Without the revelations from Joseph Smith regarding a prophet named Elias, he would be totally forgotten.

While there are times when it is obvious that the subject in the New Testament is the prophet Elijah, there are many references (especially in the Joseph Smith Translation) that should not be changed to Elijah, most in connection with John the Baptist and on the Mount of Transfiguration.

While the rest of the world has erased Elias, Joseph Smith’s teachings have kept him in our religious consciousness. It is instructive to trace back through the decades to examine how our present understanding of the doctrine and of the person of Elias has formed.

### **Transformation of the Elias Doctrine**

Joseph Smith taught that there is a distinct individual named Elias who endowed others with “a spirit and office” to prepare the way — a role which echoes the preparatory nature of the Aaronic priesthood. In a sermon about Elias, Elijah, and Messiah, Joseph Smith said:

The Spirit of Elias was a going before to prepare the way for the greater, which was the case with John the baptist. . . The spirit of Elias is to prepare the way for a greater revelation of God, which is the Priesthood that Aaron was ordained unto. And when God sends a man into the world to prepare for a greater work, holding the keys of the power of Elias, it was called the

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2. The Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Elias.” See also George A. Horton, “Elias,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 2:449.

3. Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Elias.”

4. Out of the 64 English versions of the Bible available at Bible.com, only four include “Elias” as a term distinct from “Elijah”: The Geneva Bible, the King James Version, Douay-Rheims Challoner Revision (1752), and Darby’s Translation (1890).

doctrine of Elias, even from the early ages of the world. . . The person who holds the keys of Elias hath a preparatory work. . . This is the Elias spoken of in the last days, and here is the rock upon which many split, thinking the time was past in the days of John and Christ and no more to be. But the spirit of Elias was revealed to me, and I know it is true.<sup>5</sup>

In his sermon, Joseph describes the spirit of Elias, the priesthood of Elias, the keys of Elias, the doctrine of Elias — variations on the theme of Elias’s power and authority being transferred and used by others doing preparatory work. Elias’s mission is laid out straightforwardly as a forerunner for the Lord, the messenger of the covenant who would make the paths straight. The doctrine of Elias as a forerunner is well understood today, but there is more to his mission. Joseph Smith also taught that Elias was to gather Israel.<sup>6</sup> He compared the responsibilities of Elijah and Elias with an analogy about building the temple:

This power of Elijah is to that of Elias what in the architecture of the Temple of God those who seal or cement the stone to their places are to those who cut or hew the stones the one preparing the way for the other to accomplish the work. By this we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise i.e. Elijah.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Elias brings the stones to the temple and Elijah cements them together. Elias is a gatherer, whereas Elijah is a sealer; the two are linked in their offices. Members of Christ’s church progress through the preparatory ordinances first (Elias) and then move on to the higher ordinances (Elijah). The gathering aspect of Elias’s mission is part of the larger picture of Elias preparing the world for Zion’s return, though this facet has not been passed on through the decades after Joseph Smith. Elias as a forerunner, however, was well-understood and the doctrine of Elias became synonymous with this role as a messenger who prepares the way. In the early 1900s, John A. Widtsoe wrote:

It is concluded from this and other passages (D&C 77:9, 14) that the mission and spirit of the prophet Elias are to do the necessary preparatory work whenever the gospel dispensation

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5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002), 347–48.

6. *Ibid.*

7. “Discourse, 10 March 1844, as Reported by Franklin D. Richards,” 33, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-10-march-1844-as-reported-by-franklin-d-richards/2>.

period is about to be opened. This is in full accord with the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith that “The spirit of Elias is to prepare the way for a greater revelation of God, which is the Priesthood of Elias, or the Priesthood that Aaron was ordained unto. And when God sends a man into the world to prepare for a greater work, holding the keys and power of Elias, it was called the doctrine of Elias.”<sup>8</sup>

The doctrine of Elias and the idea of an individual prophet, Elias, are addressed by Widtsoe as interrelated subjects. Widtsoe begins his section on Elias by focusing on the Elias who comes to the Kirtland Temple to commit the gospel of the dispensation of Abraham to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.

From this reference to “the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham,” it has been concluded that Elias was a prophet who lived near the time of the patriarch, Abraham. Really, nothing more definite is known about the person Elias and his activity on earth. It is very evident that he was a personage of importance, for he held the “keys” of authority in a mission of vital importance in carrying out on earth the plan of salvation.<sup>9</sup>

He then acknowledges that other students of the scriptures thought that the individual named Elias who bestowed priesthood keys at the Kirtland Temple was Noah, or Gabriel, and that “this inference may or may not be correct.”<sup>10</sup> At this point, the doctrine of Elias seems to eclipse the individual Elias, with the uncertainty of his identity precluding further investigation into that topic.

Following Widtsoe’s explanations, Joseph Fielding Smith wrote:

As previously stated, the restoration of the Gospel did not come through just one messenger, but there are several who came and bestowed their keys of authority and power. The name Elias, is a title. This we have been taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith. Is it not possible, therefore, since so many ancient prophets had a hand in the restoration, that in speaking of the Elias who was to come and restore all things,

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8. Widtsoe, *Evidences*, 243–44. Here Widtsoe cites *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 335–36.

9. Widtsoe, *Evidences*, 243.

10. *Ibid.*, 244.

do we not have a composite picture of several Eliases, rather than one single individual?<sup>11</sup>

Joseph Fielding Smith begins the shift away from an individual named Elias to a group of people doing Elias's work — operating under the *title* of Elias. The doctrine of Elias, which Joseph Smith taught, includes the preparatory actions and ordinances within the gospel, acted on by various individuals who were endowed with the spirit and power of Elias. So, in a sense, a group of people doing Elias's work is correct; however, without the keyholder Elias directing the work, it seems incomplete.

Following Joseph Fielding Smith, Bruce R. McConkie wrote with certainty about the multiple actors of Elias in *Mormon Doctrine*, in the Bible Dictionary, and his ideas are echoed in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*.<sup>12</sup> The current understanding is that Elias is four different things: 1) the Greek form of Elijah; 2) a title for a forerunner; 3) a title for others with specific missions or restorative functions; and 4) a man who lived in the days of Abraham, about whom we have no information.<sup>13</sup> McConkie seems to have codified the previous teachings, which is how Elias is presented in the Church today. Indeed, Joseph Smith taught about the preparatory nature of Elias' work and that many were endowed with the spirit of Elias (including the Prophet Joseph when John the Baptist came to him), and our current understanding of the *doctrine of Elias* follows Joseph's inspired teaching.

A piece of the puzzle went missing when Elias the individual disappeared. Since we have no clear explanations of who he was or when he lived, the specific identity of the prophet Elias has been fragmented. Joseph Smith taught about Elias, Elijah, and the Messiah — three distinct individuals, keyholders who operated in the heavenly realm, bringing ordinances and priesthood power to the earth. His sermon teaches that Elias was an individual who then engaged others in his work, just like Elijah and the Messiah. He spoke of Elias as an individual, and that others were endowed with the *spirit of Elias* or the *power of Elias* — a spirit and power bestowed upon them from the original Elias. In the same way that we speak of the spirit of Elijah bringing blessings to those

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11. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1947), 2:71. Smith references *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 355.

12. Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Elias"; Horton, "Elias;" and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 219.

13. Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Elias."



engaged in family history and temple work, the same diffusion of power from Elias is transmitted to those gathering Israel and preparing for the Lord's second coming.

As far as what Joseph Smith taught about the identity of the individual prophet Elias, it is difficult to say with certainty, as only a small percentage of what he said or thought made it on a written page.

Contemporary scholars have wondered if there even is a specific person named Elias. Samuel Brown investigated the issue and concluded:

To my eye the debate about whether Elias is a separate individual — indeterminate except by fiat or faith — misses a crucial point. Whatever their genesis, there can be little doubt that Joseph Smith saw Elijah and Elias as distinct entities. I believe that they both arise from Elijah, that Elias assumed the traits of the standard Christian Elijah, and that understanding the bifurcation sheds light on early Mormonism's approach to the conquest of death.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars and Church leaders may or may not be correct, but in respectful transparency concerning our history and doctrine, we can acknowledge that in our unfolding restoration, not everything has always been known in its fullness, and there is room for more clarity on this issue. Disregarding the traditional, inherited view of Elias and looking at the scriptural evidence of an individual named Elias allows for a fresh look at the man and a view of the breathtaking scope of his mission as the archangel of the restoration of all things.

Evidence of Elias as a separate individual from Elijah, and more than a group of men doing similar jobs, is evident in three ways. The first evidence is that he is documented as distinct from Elijah in D&C 27 and in the Kirtland Temple (D&C 110). The second is in the teachings of Joseph Smith on the complementary roles of Elias and Elijah.<sup>15</sup> The third is the affirmation of his identity, purpose, and individuality in D&C 27:6–7. Revelations received by Joseph Smith hold the keys to discovering the identity of the invisible prophet Elias.

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14. Samuel M. Brown, "The Prophet Elias Puzzle," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 3, (Fall 2006): 2, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1030110>.

15. "Discourse, 10 March 1844," 33.

### **Elias the Restorer**

Elias the keyholder is identified in scripture as the messenger who came to Zacharias: the angel Gabriel. This is the main foundation upon which this article will build.

And also with Elias, to whom I have committed the keys of bringing to pass the restoration of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began, concerning the last days; And also John the son of Zacharias, which Zacharias he (Elias) visited and gave promise that he should have a son, and his name should be John, and he should be filled with the spirit of Elias. (D&C 27:6–7)

The language is unambiguous — a specific individual named Elias holds “the keys of bringing to pass the restoration of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began, concerning the last days.” This Elias is identified in the next verse, which is a continuation of the same sentence, so it is not likely that the Lord is indicating a different individual. Elias, the keyholder of the restoration of all things, is the angel Gabriel, who visited Zacharias and promised him that he would have a son (Luke 1:17).

Joseph Smith had this insight into the identity of Gabriel:

The priesthood was first given to Adam, ... He is Michael, the Archangel, spoken of in the scriptures — *Then to Noah who is Gabriel, he stands next in authority to Adam in the priesthood; he was called of God to this office and was the Father of all living in his day, and To him was Given the Dominion. These men held keys. first on earth, and then in Heaven.*<sup>16</sup>

The angel Gabriel is the premortal name of Noah, who then may have acquired the title or name of Elias at some point after the flood. The three names — Noah, Gabriel, and Elias — are used in this paper to refer to the same individual. When the scriptures or their mission dictate a particular name, that is how they will be represented in the paper, though they all refer to the individual holding priesthood keys. Larry Dahl wrote about Noah’s priesthood keys as well:

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16. “Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839–A, as Reported by Willard Richards,” The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-4-august-1839-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/1#facts>. Emphasis added.

Standing next in authority to Adam, then, places Noah in a key role in the plan of salvation, in priesthood functions pertaining to this earth, and in the restoration of the gospel and priesthood keys to the earth in various dispensations, including our own.<sup>17</sup>

Noah-Elias was commissioned to shepherd in the restoration of all things pertaining to the last days. The remainder of the paper will investigate his actions as Elias, which paints a picture of his broad mission on the earth. To set the stage of Noah-Elias's work, it is helpful to review the details of his mortal life.

When Noah was born, he was given a meaningful name that was symbolic of the role he would play as a bridge between worlds and throughout dispensations. As the great-grandson of Enoch, the prophet of Zion, Noah was the promised link between the old world and the new. His name meant “rest” or “comfort.”<sup>18</sup> His birth provided the continuation of the family of Adam, through which line the Messiah would be born: “And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall *comfort us* concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed” (Genesis 5:29).

The promise of Noah's birth brought great relief to his forebears. Enoch and other righteous saints had already been removed from the earth; they were translated with their great city of Zion (Moses 7:42–47). In the covenant that God made with Enoch he was promised that his posterity would continue through Noah until the meridian of time when the Son of Man would come and atone for the world.<sup>19</sup>

Enoch's vision of his descendants — the line from himself to Noah to Christ — comforted him. If not for this branch of his family staying behind while the rest went to Zion, there would have been no survivors during the flood. With no family of Adam living on the earth, the Messiah could not have come through the Adamic bloodline to save the human race. Methuselah (Enoch's son), Lamech (Methuselah's son), and

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17. Larry E. Dahl, “Noah, Who is Angel Gabriel, is Next to Adam in Priesthood,” *Church News*, 12 March 1994, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/1994-03-12/noah-who-is-angel-gabriel-is-next-to-adam-in-priesthood-140465>.

18. Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Noah.”

19. Matthew L. Bowen, “This Son Shall Comfort Us: An Onomastic Tale of Two Noahs,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 23 (2017): 263–98, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/this-son-shall-comfort-us-an-onomastic-tale-of-two-noahs/>.

then Noah (Lamech's son) were the self-sacrificing volunteers that kept the little bridge of humanity open between the old Zion of the Patriarchs and the coming Zion of the Millennial earth. This brought great relief to Enoch and his people. The name meaning "rest" or "comfort" seems to fit Noah's role, though providing Enoch comfort in his posterity was only the beginning of the "rest" Noah would give.

The infant Noah was exceptional from birth. In the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, Lamech was concerned with the appearance of his infant son, Noah, and asked his father, Methuselah, to discern what to make of it.

And now, my father, hear me: unto Lamech my son there hath been born a son, the like of whom there is none, and his nature is not like man's nature, and the color of his body is whiter than snow and redder than the bloom of a rose, and the hair of his head is whiter than white wool, and his eyes are like the rays of the sun, and he opened his eyes and thereupon lighted up the whole house. And he arose in the hands of the midwife, and opened his mouth and blessed the Lord of heaven.<sup>20</sup>

Lamech went to Methuselah with the previous description, who then went to Enoch. Enoch gave this reassurance about the glorious baby:

And I, Enoch, answered and said unto him: "The Lord will do a new thing on the earth, and this I have already seen in a vision, and make known to thee that in the generation of my father Jared some of the angels of heaven transgressed the word of the Lord. And behold they commit sin and transgress the law, and have united themselves with women and commit sin with them, and have married some of them, and have begot children by them. And they shall produce on the earth giants not according to the spirit, but according to the flesh, and there shall be a great punishment on the earth, and the earth shall be cleansed from all impurity. Yea, there shall come a great destruction over the whole earth, and there shall be a deluge and a great destruction for one year. And this son who has been born unto you shall be left on the earth, and his three children shall be saved with him: when all mankind that are on the earth shall die [he and his sons shall be saved].

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20. David R. Hocking, ed., *Annotated Edition of the Book of Enoch* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legend, 2021), 98.

And now make known to thy son Lamech that he who has been born is in truth his son, and call his name Noah; for he shall be left to you, and he and his sons shall be saved from the destruction, which shall come upon the earth on account of all the sin and all the unrighteousness, which shall be consummated on the earth in his days. And after that [the Flood] there shall be still more unrighteousness than that which was first consummated on the earth; for I know the mysteries of the Holy Ones; for He, the Lord, has showed me and informed me, and I have read (them) in the heavenly tablets.<sup>21</sup>

Apocryphal embellishments notwithstanding, Noah was special. His spirit was strong and bright, even in infancy. The glory of the angel Gabriel, second in the heavenly hosts encased in a tiny, fragile human body. The Bible describes him as “just and perfect” (Genesis 6:8–9). He received his ordination to the priesthood at the age of ten. His fathers and grandfathers all received it at much more advanced ages, only Enoch is close to Noah — he received it at 25 — but even that is the difference between a man and a child. Noah was trusted with great power and authority in his earliest days (D&C 107:52).

His role in the flood is well known and understood. It was a baptism, a renewal, a fresh start — cleansed from the blood and sins of Noah’s wicked generation, and “to fulfill all righteousness,” like the Savior (Matthew 3:15).<sup>22</sup> Noah became, like Adam, the Father of all Living.<sup>23</sup>

The waters receded, plants bloomed, the animals offloaded, his vineyard planted, and Noah had a conversation with the Lord about what was next: “And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I will establish my covenant with you, which I made unto your father Enoch, concerning your seed after you. (Genesis 9:15 JST). This begins his role of the “restorer” of all things.

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21. Ibid.

22. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Stephen O. Smoot, “Was Noah’s Flood the Baptism of the Earth?,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life’s Work of Robert L. Millet*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2016), 163–36, <https://rsc.byu.edu/let-us-reason-together/was-noahs-flood-baptism-earth>.

23. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel* (Salt Lake City, Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 283, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/reprint-igil2-5-in-gods-image-and-likeness-2/>.

And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant, which I made unto thy father Enoch; that, when men should keep all my commandments, Zion should again come on the earth, the city of Enoch which I have caught up unto myself. And this is mine everlasting covenant, that when thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward, and all the heavens shall shake with gladness, and the earth shall tremble with joy; And the general assembly of the church of the firstborn shall come down out of heaven, and possess the earth, and shall have place until the end come. And this is mine everlasting covenant, which I made with thy father Enoch. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will establish my covenant unto thee, which I have made between me and thee, for every living creature of all flesh that shall be upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant which I have established between me and thee; for all flesh that shall be upon the earth. (Genesis 9:21–25 JST)

Joseph Smith’s translation adds meaning and depth to the covenant of the rainbow that is absent in Genesis.<sup>24</sup> The rainbow represents the everlasting covenant that God made with Enoch: The promise of Zion’s return, an inheritance on the earth, a righteous posterity receiving the truth, not simply a promise not to flood the earth again.

This covenant with the Lord could be the reason why Noah-Elias was chosen to hold the keys of a restoration of all things. Enoch, in Zion, was promised that he and his city would return. Meanwhile, Noah, on earth, received the same covenant — that Enoch and Zion would eventually return. He will prepare the earth for the restoration of Zion, and he will oversee the earth finally coming to “rest” (Moses 7:48, 54, 58, 60–61). Enoch’s concern that the earth would finally rest was potentially the deeper meaning to Noah’s name, and this would not be achieved until the last days.

Noah-Elias’s actions through the dispensations show the scope of what it means to direct the restoration of all things in the last days. As Gabriel, he heralded the births of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, their mortal missions preparatory to their millennial missions. As Elias, he

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24. W. Jeffrey Marsh and Thomas E. Sherry, “Precious Truths Restored: Joseph Smith Translation Changes Not Included in Our Bible,” *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 5, no. 2 (2004): 57–74, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol5/iss2/7/>.

restored the covenant associated with Abraham and directs the effort of his righteous posterity gathering and being endowed with power so that they can “be taught the truth and look upward” to initiate the return of Enoch’s church of the Firstborn (Genesis 9:22 JST). Hence, Elias’s work is multi-faceted — he will be a restorer of Zion, a forerunner of Christ, a gatherer of Israel, and an endower of patriarchal power to the House of Israel. All these missions look forward to the great event of Zion’s restoration and the earth’s ultimate rest under Christ’s Millennial reign. In some of these duties he acts himself, in others he has enlisted assistants and endows them with “the spirit and power of Elias” to accomplish the work.

### **Elias the Forerunner**

When Zacharias was officiating in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared and announced that Zacharias and Elisabeth would have a son, and he would be given the “spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:5–19).

The first part of the promise sounds like he may be given the spirit of Elijah rather than Elias, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.” The rest of it, though, points to the role of a forerunner, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” When Zacharias’ tongue was loosed at the birth of his son, he expounded on the infant’s role:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; *As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began* that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember *his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham*, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear. . . And thou, child, shalt be called *the prophet of the Highest*: for *thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways*; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the *remission of their sins*. (Luke 1:68–77)

Zacharias’s words echo the description of Elias’s key in D&C 27:6–7, “the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.” References to baptism and the Abrahamic Covenant round out the

Elias-specific language. Zacharias understood that his son would be the forerunner for the Lord, the witness prophesied of in Malachi 3:1.<sup>25</sup> This role of the messenger was unique to John the Baptist, and, as an agent of Elias — endowed with the spirit and power of Elias by the original Elias — he was also called an Elias.

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him: Who art thou? And he confessed, and *denied not that he was Elias*; but confessed, saying: I am not the Christ. And they asked him, saying: How then art thou Elias? And he said, *I am not that Elias who was to restore all things*. And they asked him, saying, Art thou that prophet? And he answered no. . . And they asked him, and said unto him; Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias who was to restore all things, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying; I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is of whom I bear record. He is that prophet, even Elias, who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose, or whose place I am not able to fill; *for he shall baptize, not only with water, but with fire, and with the Holy Ghost*. (John 1:20–28 JST)

John the Baptist confessed that he was the Elias, the one who came beforehand to witness of the Messiah, but there would be another Elias who would come to restore all things.

And Jesus answered and said unto them, *Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things, as the prophets have written*. And again I say unto you that Elias has come already, concerning whom it is written, Behold I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me; and they knew him not, and have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them. But I say unto you, *Who is Elias? Behold, this is Elias, whom I send to prepare the way before me*. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of *John the Baptist and also of another who should come*

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25. “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 3:1).



*and restore all things, as it is written by the prophets.* (Matthew 17:10–14 JST)

John was the one prophesied to come before the Lord in Malachi 3:1. He was so important as “the prophet of the Highest” that each one of the gospel writers begins their narrative with John in the wilderness, before reporting on Christ’s teachings and life (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 1:76; John 1:15). He and the Savior were linked in their missions, Gabriel even visited their parents in order — first Zacharias and Elisabeth, then Mary and Joseph. John was to come before Jesus.

John’s mission echoes the mission of Noah on a micro-scale: Both preside over baptisms of water to prepare for the baptism of fire. As Noah-Elias is working towards the baptism of fire for the whole earth at the second coming of the Savior, so John-Elias is working towards the baptism of fire for individuals, as he presided over the ordinance of baptism of water for his dispensation and ours (D&C 13). Noah-Elias ordained John to bear the keys of the Aaronic priesthood and do the work of the forerunner of the Messiah; he has continued that mission to the present day.

John the Baptist was killed by Herod and Herodias near the beginning of Christ’s ministry (Mark 6:17–27). His influence as the keyholder of the Aaronic priesthood, however, carried on. He visited Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on the banks of the Susquehanna River on May 15, 1829, bestowing upon them the Aaronic priesthood (D&C 13). It is also possible that he was the Elias to visit Christ, Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Jesus took his three head apostles up onto a mountain to pray, and Jesus became “altered and his raiment was white and glistening” (Luke 9:29). He talked with two angels identified as Moses and Elias. This is one instance where the scribes and scriptionists automatically change Elias to Elijah, but there are a few clues in other texts to let us know that this Elias was John the Baptist. The most obvious one is Mark 9:3 JST: “And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Or in other words, John the Baptist and Moses.” To Jesus’s followers, Elias *was* John the Baptist. Jesus referred to him as Elias on multiple occasions (Matthew 11:13–15; 17:10–14 JST). Thus, to have Elias (John the Baptist) there as well as Moses seems to be what the JST is clarifying. However, the Bible Dictionary entry and footnote on the same verse makes it more complicated:

Interestingly, the LDS Bible Dictionary (prepared under the direction of Elder Bruce R. McConkie) says that “[t]he curious

wording of JST Mark 9:3 does not imply that the Elias at the Transfiguration was John the Baptist, but that in addition to Elijah, the prophet, John the Baptist was present.<sup>26</sup>

If this was a time of receiving priesthood keys for Peter, James, and John, they received not only the keys of the Aaronic priesthood (John-Elias), but they also received the sealing keys (Elijah) and the keys of gathering Israel (Moses) (Matthew 16:19, Acts 2:38; 6:5–6; 8:38; 10:47; 19:2–6). McConkie seems to be saying that there were three heavenly messengers on the Mount — Elijah, Moses, and John the Baptist. This corresponds to the keys that the Apostles had after Christ’s death.

Another clue is in the revelation received by Joseph F. Smith now canonized as D&C 138. He lists all the great and noble leaders of the Church throughout the dispensations. Included on his list are Noah, Elijah, and “Elias, who was with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration” (D&C 138:41, 45, 47). Missing from President Smith’s list is “John the Baptist.” It is very possible that John the Baptist was the “Elias, who was with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration.”

The last bit of insight to the event is in the Doctrine and Covenants:

Nevertheless, he that endureth in faith and doeth my will, the same shall overcome, and shall receive an inheritance upon the earth when the day of transfiguration shall come; When the earth shall be transfigured, even according to the pattern *which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount; of which account the fulness ye have not yet received.* (D&C 63:20–21)

There is more to the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration than we currently have recorded. The keys that Peter, James, and John carried in the apostolic Church following Christ’s death correspond to the keys held by Elijah, John the Baptist, and Moses — sealing, baptizing, and missionary work. We do not have the fulness of the account on the Mount of Transfiguration, but it is a reasonable assumption to say that Elias (John the Baptist), Elijah, and Moses were all there.

The mission of John-Elias the forerunner was initiated by Noah-Elias as the angel Gabriel, who visited the parents of the Lord and of John the Baptist. He ordained John-Elias to go before the Lord and prepare the

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26. See the question, “Did Joseph Smith Make an Error by Claiming that Elias and Elijah are two Different People?” FAIR, [https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Question:\\_Did\\_Joseph\\_Smith\\_make\\_an\\_error\\_by\\_claiming\\_that\\_Elias\\_and\\_Elijah\\_are\\_two\\_different\\_people\\_when\\_they\\_are\\_in\\_fact\\_one\\_and\\_the\\_same%3F](https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Question:_Did_Joseph_Smith_make_an_error_by_claiming_that_Elias_and_Elijah_are_two_different_people_when_they_are_in_fact_one_and_the_same%3F). See also Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Elias.”

way. John the Baptist executed his mission perfectly, carrying the keys of baptism beyond death and then bestowing them upon Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, and then upon Joseph and Oliver on the banks of the Susquehanna River. Those keys have been necessary in every dispensation of the gospel, and John-Elias has been the messenger bringing them to the last two dispensations. He, in turn, received his errand from the original Elias, Noah, who presides over the vast work of the restoration of all things pertaining to the last days. There could not be a Millennial Messiah if there was not first a mortal Messiah; both Eliases paved the way for that to come about.

### **Elias the Gatherer**

The next puzzle piece to investigate is how Elias is connected with Abraham. Within the covenant that the Lord made with Noah at the end of the flood was the important clause that “I will establish my covenant with you, which I made unto your father Enoch, concerning *your seed* after you. . . when *thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward*, then shall Zion look downward, and all the heavens shall shake with gladness, and the earth shall tremble with joy” (Genesis 9:15, 22 JST). Noah’s posterity would welcome Enoch’s Zion back to the earth. (Genesis 9:23 JST). The covenant promise of righteous posterity was then renewed with Abraham.

Behold, I will lead thee by my hand, and I will take thee, to put upon thee my name, even the Priesthood of thy father, and my power shall be over thee. *As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee*; but through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God. (Abraham 1:18–19)

These verses show the chain of priesthood authority from “the Fathers” to Abraham (Abraham 1:2). The covenant the Lord made with Enoch and then Noah was renewed with Abraham, and Abraham’s name would be attached to the covenant ever after. Hence, the Abrahamic Covenant is a continuation of an ancient promise between the Lord and his patriarchs.

For Elias to restore Zion on the earth in the last days, as has been prophesied by all the holy prophets, there needs to be a people, a posterity, who embrace the truth and look upward. This posterity is created and gathered because of the Abrahamic Covenant. Their scatterings and gatherings are all apparently presided over by Elias as well, as part of his restoration mission.

Q. What are we to understand by the angel ascending from the east, Revelation 7th chapter and 2nd verse?

A. We are to understand that the angel ascending from the east is he to whom is given the seal of the living God over the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, he crieth unto the four angels having the everlasting gospel, saying: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, *till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads*. And, if you will receive it, *this is Elias which was to come to gather together the tribes of Israel and restore all things*. (D&C 77:9)

The angel in Revelation 7:2 holds considerable authority, commanding the four angels who have the everlasting gospel, presiding over the reaping of the earth. Identified as Elias, it could be that Gabriel, the second in command in the Heavenly Host, is the one with authority and the keys to restore all things by gathering the tribes of Israel.

Just as John the Baptist was an *agent* of Elias serving as the messenger who prepared the way of the Lord, Elias has thousands of agents working on the gathering. The first and most notable is John the Revelator, given the title of Elias:

Q. What are we to understand by the little book which was eaten by John, as mentioned in the 10th chapter of Revelation?

A. We are to understand that it was a mission, *and an ordinance for him to gather the tribes of Israel*; behold, this is Elias, who, as it is written, must come and restore all things. (D&C 77:14)

John the Revelator is an agent of Elias given a mission to gather Israel, he was also given a translated body to enable him to do the work of gathering until Christ comes again (D&C 7). His singular responsibility to write the vision of the last days (The Revelation of St John the Divine) is also in line with the mission of Elias to restore all things pertaining to the last days (1 Nephi 14:20–26, Revelation 10:1–10).

Other agents who have received the commission to gather Israel combine all the roles of Elias: as a baptizer, restorer, and gatherer.

Yea, open your mouths and they shall be filled, saying: Repent, repent, and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; Yea repent and be baptized, every one of you, for a remission of

your sins; yea, be baptized even by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. (D&C 33:10–11)

These words were given to Ezra Thayre and Northrup Sweet as they were called to be among the first missionaries in this dispensation. The reference to John the Baptist’s mission is evident in their instructions and hearkens back to his role as an Elias, a preparer in the lives of people to make them ready for the Lord. They are also commissioned to baptize with water to make ready for the fire that follows. All of this is Elias language.

Orson Pratt, Sidney Rigdon, James Covell, and the elders of the Church were all given similar Elias-specific calls (D&C 34:5–7; 35:3–4; 39:11, 19–20; 42:6–8). The entire missionary force in the Church since 1830 has been working as agents of Elias, gathering, baptizing, and preparing hearts to accept Christ’s imminent coming.

Joseph Smith taught about being called in the spirit of Elias as well. James Burgess recorded the ideas Joseph presented on March 10, 1844:

I must go back to the time at Susquehanna river when I retired in the woods pouring out my soul in prayr to Almighty God, An Angel came down from heaven and laid his hands upon me and *ordained me to the power of Elias* and that authorised me to baptise with water unto repentance, It is a power or a preparatory work for something greater.<sup>27</sup>

There are many agents of Elias, doing the work of “an Elias” by gathering Israel, baptizing them, preparing them for the coming of the Lord and the reception of the Spirit in their lives. The Abrahamic Covenant creates a bond between God and His people; missionary work in our dispensation is responsible for finding lost Israel and renewing the covenant with them. This vast work is directed by *the* Elias, the archangel commanding the four angels of the everlasting gospel who received the original covenant from God that Zion would return when there were a people ready to receive them.

### **Elias the Endower of Priesthood Power**

Elias’s connection to the covenant of Abraham was explained in the last section; Elias’s connection to the person Abraham is the focus of this section. Much of the confusion surrounding the identity of Elias is

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27. “Discourse, 10 March 1844, as Reported by James Burgess,” 15, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-10-march-1844-as-reported-by-james-burgess/1>. Emphasis added.

rooted in D&C 110:12: “Elias appeared and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed.” The connection between this Elias and the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham has led to the conclusion that:

A man called Elias apparently lived in mortality in the days of Abraham, who committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland (Ohio) Temple on April 3, 1836 (D&C 110:12). We have no specific information as to the details of his mortal life or ministry.<sup>28</sup>

In actuality, we know of a person named Elias who was alive when Abraham was on the earth: Noah. Abraham was born 247 years after the flood. Noah died 350 years after the flood, so they overlapped for about a century (Genesis 9:29, Genesis 11).

Looking further at Abraham’s ordination to the priesthood is also instructive in linking the two together. When Abraham explains his desire for seeking the religion of his ancestors, he says:

Finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, *I sought for the blessings of the fathers*, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace and desiring to receive instructions and to keep the commandments of God, *I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the Fathers. It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time*, yea even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto me. I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood *according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed.* (Abraham 1:2–4)

Abraham, a direct descendant of Noah and Shem, sought his birthright blessing of priesthood ordination from “the Fathers.” He was a rightful heir. He belonged to their lineage. Considering that he was 62

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28. Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Elias.”

years old when he left Haran, which happened after this ordination, Noah and Shem would have been the leaders of the patriarchal presidency who could bestow this right on him (Abraham 2:14). Perhaps he didn't receive the priesthood directly from their hands, but they would likely have been the presiding "Fathers" in the assembly of the eleven generations of living Fathers from Noah to Abraham (Genesis 11).

John Widtsoe mentioned that this is not a new theory: "It should be said that some students believe that Elias who appeared in the Kirtland Temple was Noah, the patriarch."<sup>29</sup> It seems reasonable to believe that Elias, a named keyholder in revelations, is the very being who bestowed priesthood keys at the Kirtland Temple, especially when Noah-Elias and Abraham overlapped during their mortal ministries. The same Elias who held the keys and covenant when Abraham received them in mortality could have passed them on to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple. This allows for the covenant to be perpetuated so that the promise of Noah that "thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward" (Genesis 9: 22 JST) will be fulfilled. The covenant is identified in Abraham's name, but it is the same covenant given to Enoch and Noah, and now administered in our temple ordinances.

### Conclusion

The scriptures present a cohesive narrative that can arguably place Noah at the center of all of Elias's work. Each piece of the puzzle gives us a fuller picture of what the keys of the "restoration of all things pertaining to the latter-days" entails. In all four standard works, specific language of Elias signals his involvement in the calls to gather and prepare for the Lord's coming. Phrases such as "by the mouth of all the holy prophets," "preparing the way of the Lord," and baptism by water before the baptism of fire all indicate that the work involves Elias.

The overarching work of Elias as the restorer of all things encompasses the prophecies about Christ's first and second comings, the gathering of Israel, the latter-day restoration, and the establishment of Zion. Noah-Elias is the keyholder responsible for recruiting other agents of Elias to assist in this vast work. From John the Baptist to John the Revelator to Joseph Smith and the missionary force of the Church today, Eliases are gathering, baptizing, and preparing people to receive the Lord and His Spirit. The covenant driving this work involves the return of the city of

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29. Widtsoe, *Evidences*, 244.

Enoch and a people prepared to receive them and the Lord. There are a lot of moving parts to the fulfillment of this promise.

Ultimately, the “rest” and “comfort” of Noah was not only in continuing humanity after the flood, but in the promise given to Enoch of the earth’s final “rest” during the reign of the Millennial Messiah (Moses 8:2–3).<sup>30</sup> Elias is the archangel leading the work of restoration in the Church today. The puzzle pieced together in this article may give us new insights about his identity and work.

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30. Bowen, “This Son,” 263–98.



