

## ABSTRACT

### **The Moral World(s) of Malachi**

Studies of the Old Testament's ethical dimensions have taken one of three approaches: descriptive, systematic, or formative. Descriptive approaches are concerned with the historical world, social context, and streams of tradition out of which OT texts developed and their diverse moral perspectives. Systematic approaches investigate principles and paradigms that encapsulate the unity of the OT and facilitate contemporary appropriation. Formative approaches embrace the diversity of the OT ethical witnesses and view texts as a means of shaping the moral imagination, fostering virtues, and forming character

The *major phase* of this investigation pursues a descriptive analysis of the moral world of Malachi—an interesting case study because of its location near the end of the biblical history of Israel. A moral world analysis examines the moral materials within texts, symbols used to represent moral ideals, traditions that helped shape them, and the social world (political, economic, and physical) in which they are applied. This study contributes a development to this reading methodology through a categorical analysis of moral foundations, expectations, motives, and consequences. This moral world reading provides insight into questions such as what norms and traditions shaped the morals of Malachi's community? What specific priorities, imperatives, and injunctions were deemed important? How did particular material, economic, and political interests shape moral decision-making? How did religious symbols bring together their view of the world and their social values?

The moral world reading is facilitated by an exploration of Malachi's social and symbolic worlds. Social science data and perspectives are brought together from an array of sources to present six important features of Malachi's social world. These features highlight the social forces and circumstances that have motivated the community's attitudes and choices. Additionally, these features impact Malachi's rhetorical choices. For example, the imperial backdrop is significant for understanding Malachi's moral world since the imperial symbol system and moral world contributed to the disorder confronted by Malachi.

Core traditions preserved in Malachi's text are assessed to identify his resonance and dissonance with the traditions that have long shaped the community's symbolic world. This symbolic world provides the moral foundations for Malachi's moral arguments. His message addressed originally to a specific community also provides focal points representative of the OT tradition that make it a conducive end to the prophetic corpus since it emphasizes central matters relevant to future communities facing moral world crises of their own.

The *second phase* of the investigation considers how Malachi's ancient ethical approach shares commonality with modern systematic and formative approaches to OT ethics. The foundations for his moral outlook derive from a belief system that has congruency with contemporary paradigms abstracted from the OT. Even more, Malachi employs methods similar to the formative approach by appealing to a diversity of moral traditions, prompting dialogue, and provoking the imagination of his community.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABS	Archeology and Biblical Studies
<i>AcT</i>	<i>Acta Theologica</i>
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.
BHHB	Baylor Handbook of the Hebrew Bible
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibJudSt	Biblical and Judaic Studies
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>

<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible.</i> Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1995. 2 <sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999
<i>DOTP</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets.</i> Edited by Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012
<i>DSE</i>	<i>Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics.</i> Edited by Joel B. Green. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011
<i>EsIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde theologiese studies</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>IBHS</i>	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.</i> Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel

LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSTS	The Library of Second Temple Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary of the Old Testament
<i>NIDB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009.
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>Semeia</i>	<i>Semeia</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
<i>SBTS</i>	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
Siphrut	Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SymS	Symposium Series

<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.</i> G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO MORAL WORLDS AND MALACHI

This study explores the moral world(s) of Malachi in order to learn more about 1) the moral perspectives of the prophet and his community, 2) the circumstances surrounding and prompting his moral critique, and 3) the underlying unity of the moral ideals he stresses. It is intended to heighten the understanding of the prophet's message, illuminate the moral and social world of postexilic Israel, and provide insight for contemporary ethical reflection on Malachi within the discipline of OT ethics.

### **Approaches to OT Ethics**

Researchers of the ethical dimensions and significance of the Old Testament generally apply one of three methodological approaches: descriptive, systematic, and formative.<sup>1</sup> One approach is primarily concerned with the world behind and out of which OT texts developed. Generally, this includes studies that describe the social context of Israel's ethics or compare and contrast Israel's ethics and morals with the prevailing worldviews of the ancient Near East.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, it considers how the literary development of texts may illumine different, even competing, ethical views that are

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<sup>1</sup> M. Daniel Carroll R., "Old Testament Ethics," *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* 561-65; Douglas A. Knight, "Ethics, Ancient Israel, and the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia* 66 (1994): 1-10; Robert R. Wilson, "Approaches to Old Testament Ethics," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (eds. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen and Robert R. Wilson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 62-74; Eryl W. Davies, *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); Bruce Birch, "Ethics in the OT," *NIDB* 2:338-48.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas A. Knight, *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011); M. Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995); Walter J. Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament* (LHBOTS 428; London: T&T Clark, 2006); Carly L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* (BZAW 407; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

merged and overlaid within OT texts.<sup>3</sup> The historical breadth of ancient Israel and the complexity of textual development point toward a diversity of ethics in Israel and the OT rather than a single Israelite ethic.<sup>4</sup> This strategy is referred to by various terms including “behind the text” approaches, socio-historical constructs, or referential constructs. More generally we can refer to them as **descriptive approaches** concerned with the historical world, social context, and streams of tradition out of which OT texts developed and the diverse moral perspectives the texts represent and engage. The OT text may be the primary line of exploration or only one of many equally weighted pieces of evidence.<sup>5</sup> In most cases, the normative relevance for contemporary ethics is not considered.<sup>6</sup>

The second approach is more concerned with the bearing of the OT on contemporary ethics. Taking a more **systematic approach**, it attempts to identify a system of specifics, principles, or paradigms. Attention may be directed toward specific and selective OT concepts such as teaching on justice and righteousness or specific laws and commands like the ten commandments.<sup>7</sup> Beyond what may be specifically applicable from OT texts, this approach also investigates principles and paradigms that encapsulate

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<sup>3</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (OTL; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 1967), 316-79; J. David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); Henry McKeating, “Sanctions Against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society, with Some Reflections on Methodology in the Study of Old Testament Ethics,” *JSOT* 11 (1979): 57-72.

<sup>5</sup> Knight, “Ethics, Ancient Israel, and the Hebrew Bible,” 2-4.

<sup>6</sup> For an exception see J. W. Rogerson and M. Daniel Carroll R., *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics* (JSOTSup 405; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2004). For the view that the OT is too distant a culture to be relevant for contemporary ethics, see Cyril S. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics* (OTS; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Revised ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1984).

the OT and facilitate correlation with the NT.<sup>8</sup> This strategy works from the presupposition of an inherent authority within the OT as it points through the particulars of Israel's experience with God toward universals applicable to humanity. While concerned primarily with relevance for contemporary appropriation, some utilizing this approach acknowledge the importance of the descriptive task for understanding how the universal relevance of the ethical content of the OT can be responsibly extracted.<sup>9</sup>

The third approach centers attention on the final form of OT texts and gives weight to their canonical shaping. Using literary and theological methodologies, this manner of reading views the texts as a means of shaping the moral imagination, fostering virtues, and forming character, especially within a communal setting.<sup>10</sup> **Formative approaches**<sup>11</sup> recognize and weigh the diversity of ethical witnesses to the will of God,

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<sup>8</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); John Goldingay, "The Old Testament as a Way of Life," in *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Revised; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 38-65; John Goldingay, *Israel's Life* (Old Testament Theology 3; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> For example, this concern for the original context is evident in Wright's *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* seeing Israel as God's particular paradigm thus his emphasis on looking at Israel from three different angles (theological, social, and economic) in order to establish a paradigm rather than isolate principles. "A paradigm by its very nature is a particular, specific, concrete case that has wider relevance or application beyond its own particularity... The paradigm will then govern how we relate the principles to one another, how they are prioritized and their overall direction and thrust... the concept of paradigm includes the isolation and articulation of principles, but is not reducible to them," (65-71).

<sup>10</sup> Brevard S. Childs, "The Shape of the Obedient Life: Ethics," in *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 658-716; Bruce C. Birch, "Old Testament Narrative and Moral Address," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (eds. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen and Robert R. Wilson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 75-91; Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds. *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981); Bruce C. Birch, "Moral Agency, Community, and the Character of God in the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia* 66 (1994): 23-42.

<sup>11</sup> Some describe this approach as literary or canonical. "Literary" is a term used in some of the literature to describe this approach because of its use of literary theory and tools. Others use the term "Canonical," but

in and across both testaments, for the community of believers. Rather than seeing the diversity as needing reconciling they rather provide the boundaries within which ethical reflection on the OT should occur. It also situates the canonical ethical reflection within the history of Christian interpretation and the ongoing liturgy of the church—that is, how the church has been, is, and should be the church.<sup>12</sup> While some in this category, like Brevard Childs, would assert that the original context has been blurred through the canonizing process thus focusing attention on the canon as a “theological construct”, others, like Bruce Birch, would utilize the results of the descriptive task to the extent that the OT content is “illuminated by a better understanding of the ethics of the biblical communities.”<sup>13</sup>

These three approaches may be further related according to synchronic and diachronic interests. The systematic approach and the formative approach are both synchronic but may be distinguished along a unity-diversity spectrum. While the systematic approach seeks a unified ethical message across the testaments, the formative approach embraces the diversity of the biblical ethical witness and deliberates within it. In contrast, the descriptive approach highlights and evaluates the diachronic aspect of OT ethics, therefore, both accounting for the diversity of the OT’s moral witness and

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it does not seem to catch the full range of this category. I am using the description “Formative” since it better captures the purpose of the approach.

<sup>12</sup> These three approaches are generally related to Christian appropriation of the text. For additional considerations related to Jewish ethical readings see Peter J. Haas, “The Quest for Hebrew Bible Ethics: A Jewish Response,” *Semeia* 66 (1994): 151-59.

<sup>13</sup> Childs, “The Shape of the Obedient Life: Ethics,” 676-8; Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 19. Birch acknowledges the value of the descriptive task but not as an end in itself and is skeptical of its achievement: “More often than not, such attempts impose a system on the biblical material rather than discover one,” 19.

demonstrating the effect of historical and social context on that witness. This latter approach will be the initial focus of our pursuit.

## **A Moral World Approach**

### Related Past Studies

The socio-historical emphasis of the descriptive approach to OT ethics has its origins in John Barton. In his 1978 essay, Barton critiqued the long-held and traditional view underlying the few significant, extended treatments of OT ethics, most notably the works of Johannes Hempel and Walter Eichrodt.<sup>14</sup> Both Hempel and Eichrodt considered the ethics in the OT as an outworking of obedience from gratitude for God's saving work in Israel. Barton critiques them on their "tendency to systematize" and "lack of sociological depth." In his essay "Understanding Old Testament Ethics," Barton calls for more sociological sensitivity and consideration for the rationale underlying ethics. Barton raises the caution that underlying principles often lack sufficient reflection, and that in the case of the OT and its diverse witness, sociological factors may complicate discerning the underlying principle.<sup>15</sup> Consistent with his descriptive approach to OT ethics, Barton deems a better approach to examine specific perspectives, like those represented by the prophets, in order to be sensitive to the sociological differences behind and within texts.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Barton, *Understanding OT Ethics*, 15-31; Johannes Hempel, *Das Ethos des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 67; 2nd ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964); Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to the traditional view, Barton offers two other possibilities: "conformity to a pattern of natural order" (what might be called natural law, which is discernible by reason or general revelation) and "imitation of God." The "natural law" concept figures large in Barton's work.

<sup>16</sup> See examples of this approach in his essays exploring the ethics of Amos, Isaiah, and Daniel in Barton, *Understanding OT Ethics*, "Part Two: Explorations in the Prophets," 77-161.

The descriptive projects that have been undertaken vary in focus as indicative of the examples noted in the section above. One particular line of inquiry has built off the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz related to symbolic worlds. Geertz argued that a strong correspondence exists between what a given people or culture values and their perceived understanding of reality. He refers to these two aspects of culture as “ethos” and “world-view”, respectively:

A people’s ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. Their world-view is their picture of the way things, in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, and society.<sup>17</sup>

Geertz asserts that religion reflects this relationship between ethos and world-view. The primary means of reflecting how reality is viewed and values are expressed is through religious symbols, which store this combined meaning. “Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, an important aspect for discerning how a group of people viewed the world and behaved in it is an examination of key religious symbols— that is, how do these symbols bring together and reveal a people’s ethos and worldview?

Building off the work of Geertz, Wayne Meeks attempts “to understand some particular dimensions of the social process by which the character of the Christian

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<sup>17</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” *The Antioch Review* 17.4 (1957): 421-37. See also Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Geertz, “Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” 422.

communities of the first two centuries took form.”<sup>19</sup> Meeks highlights the polyvalence of the concept “world”. First, “world” may describe the circumstances, places, groups, institutions, and patterns of life in and among which we live — *the social world*. Meeks asserts that “in order to understand the moral formation of the early Christian communities, therefore, we must understand their world” because Christian communities, although undergoing conversion part and parcel with Christian faith, still reflect the social world of their day because it is never completely escapable.<sup>20</sup> Attempts to understand the formation of communities is compounded by a second concept of “world”. Although worlds are seemingly objective, a comparison of descriptions in how the world works between peoples of different social worlds or cultures indicates that one’s understanding of the “world” is in fact highly symbolized — *the symbolized world*.<sup>21</sup> Both of these worlds inevitably affect human behavior, which introduces a third concept of “world” — *the moral world*. The moral world is shaped by the symbolic world and the social world. Meeks argues that a moral world shift results from a change in either one’s symbolized world or social world. Toward this end of understanding the moral world of early Christians, Meeks examines their social settings, the great traditions of Greece and Israel that helped shaped their symbolized and moral world, the institutions and forms of Christian community, and their texts.

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<sup>19</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (LEC; ed. Wayne A. Meeks; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 12.

<sup>20</sup> Meeks, *Moral World*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Meeks, *Moral World*, 14: The world of our existence “is a world in which the sensations that pour in constantly upon us through our senses are organized and thus have meaning through a system of signs so much a part of us that we are rarely aware of them as such,” 14. Cf. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

Robert Wilson favorably views the moral analysis approach of Meeks and avers it could be a helpful approach to OT ethics, providing insight into the ethical decision making of ancient Israel. However, some difficulties are manifest: a) information is limited outside the Hebrew Bible; b) given the broad historical dimension of Israel's history and the significant shifts and segmentation in societal structure, a number of moral worlds existed to be described; c) compared to first century Christianity, influences are less fixed given the developmental process of the law codes and canon. Yet, a moral world analysis of even a complex world such as ancient Israel can be "a helpful tool to use as an aid to understanding the dynamics of moral decision making, and it may be safely employed so long as its heuristic character is recognized."<sup>22</sup> Wilson considers how the varying types of Israelite literature may contribute to an understanding of Old Testament "customary behavioral norms" allowing for some potential variation by societal segments and developmental periods.<sup>23</sup> Although not systematically documented or frequently discussed, traces of these norms remain in the literature of Israel, "particularly in the narratives, poems, and proverbs," are likely complemented and reflected by the law, and determined by prophecy, dependent upon the social location of the prophet — whether he is maintaining stability (central) or challenging authority (peripheral).<sup>24</sup> Overall, Wilson highlights the role that various traditions (narrative, law,

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<sup>22</sup> Robert R. Wilson, "Ethics in Conflict: Sociological Aspects of Ancient Israelite Ethics," in *Text and Tradition* (ed. Susan Niditch; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 193-205.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson acknowledges that the interrelation between customary norms, law, and prophecy vary over time given changes in societal structures, such as the transitions from tribal society to the rise of the monarchy to centralization of Jerusalem and prophetic conflict with kings to later periods of imperialization.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, "Ethics in Conflict: Sociological Aspects of Ancient Israelite Ethics," 197. Cf. Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

prophetic, poetic, and wisdom) found in Israelite literature played in intellectually shaping and transmitting Israelite moral worlds.

Following in the steps of his *Doktorvater* John Barton, Andrew Mein's *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* is an exercise in the descriptive approach, maintaining that the OT bears a diverse ethical witness and lacks a unified view since sociological factors such as class, status, and party serve as formative factors for groups in Israel over its history. Given the effect sociological factors have on ethics, it is important to begin narrowing the focus of OT ethic study to identify the ethics of certain groups of people in particular contexts. Mein seeks to apply this approach by looking at the ethics of Ezekiel within the context of the exile.<sup>25</sup> Important to Mein's argument are the concept of moral world and the social status and concerns of the exile group addressed by Ezekiel. First, a 'moral world' signifies "different ways of understanding the world and how to behave in it."<sup>26</sup> Attempting to identify and establish the sociological factors that affect specific people groups and texts, he asserts, "Moral agents do not act independently of the world in which they live, and the ways in which they choose to act will be largely determined by the way they understand that world to work. We cannot overestimate the importance of communities in shaping the world-views of their individual members."<sup>27</sup> Therefore, for Mein the moral world is inseparable from the social world. By this he means, people of

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). After describing his emphasis on moral and social worlds in the opening chapter, the second explores the context of exile in Babylon; chapters three and four outline the moral world in which the exiled elite had functioned in Jerusalem, with its focus on court concerns for politics and the state cult. Chapters five through seven demonstrate how Ezekiel utilizes perspectives and symbols from this Jerusalem-oriented moral world to speak into and shape the new moral world developing within the context of Babylonian exile. In these chapters, he addresses the cause of exile, the emphasis on ritual and purity for those deported, and the shift from judgment toward passivity in hope of restoration.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

different social status and/or people in distinct places have different moral concerns and varying circumstances in which to exercise moral decision-making.<sup>28</sup> Ideally their moral world can be studied, as Mein summarizes, by examining the **moral materials** within texts, **symbols** used to represent moral ideals, **traditions** that helped shape them, and the **social world** (political, economic, and physical) in which they are applied.<sup>29</sup> This study will utilize a similar approach for analyzing the moral world of Malachi and his community.<sup>30</sup>

## Terms and Methodologies

### *Qualifying the Word “World”*

As noted above, the term “world” may be used in a variety of senses. Therefore it may prove helpful at the outset to describe further how I will be using the term in conjunction with qualifiers such as “social,” “symbolic,” and “moral.” My usage of the

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<sup>28</sup> For Mein, the specific sociological group open for examination in Ezekiel is the urban elite of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 24:14-16). He asserts that the content of Ezekiel is best explained by positing a moral worlds shift. As members of Israel's elite exiled to Babylon, these former court officials, military leaders, priests, craftsman, and the like bring to Babylon from Jerusalem a moral world dominated by concerns for matters that preoccupied the court: foreign policy and the state cult. Now confronted by the reversal of fortunes in Babylon, the moral world of the exiled elite must undergo a transformation to adapt to its new circumstances and preserve their identity.

<sup>29</sup> Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Mein and many other descriptive OT studies do not distinguish morals or morality from ethics. I will attempt to honor the distinction drawn by Meeks and some Christian moralists that ‘morality’ “names a dimension of life, a pervasive and, often, only partly conscious set of value laden dispositions, inclinations, attitudes and habits.” Morality involves the practice and discourse of good and bad behavior. On the other hand, ‘ethics’ is a “reflective, second order activity” concerning morality. [Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 4. Cf. James I. H. McDonald, *The Crucible of Christian Morality* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1]. For our purposes, as we describe the worlds of Malachi, we will be discussing the *morals* of his community and the *moral* discourse which is the subject matter of his book.

term “world” is aligned with the sociology of knowledge.<sup>31</sup> From a sociology of knowledge perspective, culture and society are dialectic in nature—humans are both the producer of society and the product of it. Humans are born with the ability, desire, and need to produce a “world” external to themselves. The produced world takes on an objective reality, which is then reabsorbed by humans so that it determines and shapes human consciousness. The produced world entails both material (e.g., tools) and non-material (e.g., language) aspects of culture.

Socialization is “the process by which a new generation is taught to live in accordance with the institutional programs of a society.”<sup>32</sup> Participation in and appropriation of this social world facilitate the socialization process. In other words, as people learn how the world “works” by living and functioning within it, their world shapes their identity, understanding, actions, and behaviors. World-building is an ordering activity which provides a meaningful order to the world to protect members of society from the dangers and threats of anomy. When the ordered world (*nomos*) is taken for granted, “there occurs a merging of its meanings with what are considered to be the fundamental meanings inherent in the universe. *Nomos* and *cosmos* appear to be co-extensive.”<sup>33</sup> Frequently in societies, especially ancient ones, the association of *nomos* and *cosmos* takes on a sacred character. Religion is the human enterprise that seeks to maintain the sacred order helping to preserve the association between *nomos* and

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<sup>31</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1990 ed.; New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

cosmos.<sup>34</sup> The ordered, constructed world is given its meaning and validation through association with the sacred order. As Geertz asserts, religion as a set of signs and symbols gives human conceptions of reality and order an “aura of factuality.”<sup>35</sup> Religion pervades one’s perception of the world, fusing one’s experience of the world in which one moves and has being with conceptions of reality, fueling one’s ideas, perceptions, moods, and motives. Religious ritual and instruction serve to legitimate (that is, explain, reinforce, and justify) the social order.<sup>36</sup>

For analytic and heuristic purposes, I will designate the physical, social, economic, and political aspects of the ordered world encountered by the ordinary person in daily life as the “social world.”<sup>37</sup> Separately, I will consider the religious component that both undergirds and pervades the social world. Toward this end, I will leverage the anthropological insight of Geertz that religious symbols provide a unique insight into a community’s “approved style of life and assumed structure of reality.”<sup>38</sup> By symbol, Geertz means “any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a

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<sup>34</sup> See also Geertz’s “Religion as a Cultural System” for an anthropological perspective on religion in Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 87-125. Geertz defines religion as “a system of symbols which act to establish powerful pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivation in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic,” 90.

<sup>35</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 90.

<sup>36</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> In some cases the term “social world” is used more broadly to refer to the whole of the constructed, ordered world. As examples, Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (4th ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 194-5, state that social world “denotes how the people of a given time and place perceive and construct the social reality in which they live.... Humans are constantly engaged in the construction and maintenance of social worlds that provide the institutions, structures, and patterns for everyday life.” Cf. also, James W. Flanagan, *David’s Social Drama: A Hologram of Israel’s Early Iron Age* (JSOTSup 73; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 79.

<sup>38</sup> Geertz, “Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” 422. Again, this phrase is what Geertz terms “ethos” and “worldview.”

conception.”<sup>39</sup> In addition to religious objects and events which are typically viewed as symbols, certain human or communal experiences as “vehicles for a conception” best affirm, encapsulate, and express the broadly shared understanding and perception of the world. These experiences or traditions, selected and summarized, serve as means of transmitting and remembering communal understanding to successive generations.<sup>40</sup> Both traditions and religious symbols embody and reaffirm the communal understanding and perception of the world. They will be designated here as the “symbolic world.”<sup>41</sup>

Religion not only functions to bridge the real with one’s perceptions and understandings but also informs one’s understanding of how to live. Because religion fuses the ordered, constructed social world with fundamental reality, religion bears an inherent “moral vitality.” As Geertz states, “The powerful coercive ‘ought’ is felt to grow out of a comprehensive factual ‘is,’ and in such a way religion grounds the most specific requirements of human action in the most general contexts of human existence.”<sup>42</sup> The “moral world” constitutes a view of the world and how to behave in it, as Mein has aptly expressed. The moral world (informed and influenced both by the social world and symbolic world) encompasses moral foundations, expectations, consequences, and motives.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 91.

<sup>40</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 69.

<sup>41</sup> The bifurcation into “social world” and symbolic world” seems to help account for the similarities and differences between Israel and its ancient Near Eastern neighbors. That is, many societies or nations shared what I am designating as the “social world” but differences in the “symbolic world” largely account for different perceptions and understanding of how the world worked.

<sup>42</sup> Geertz, “Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” 421.

<sup>43</sup> These four categories provide a lens for our reading of Malachi’s moral world in chapter four.

## ***Methodologies***

Scholars have noted that the social and historical worlds behind the text have been blurred in the interest of a theological presentation.<sup>44</sup> This constitutes the critique of the socio-historical approach to OT ethics by those preferring the formative approach. For example, Childs avers that this approach is largely dependent upon historical reconstructions that have the risk of becoming the basis for ethical reflection rather than the OT text itself.<sup>45</sup> However, a moral world analysis embraces this facet of the texts and seeks to detect the moral world formation factors behind the text. In this way it approaches the biblical texts as they are composed yet pursues socio-historical matters along side religious symbols and traditions as shapers of the texts and their ethical content.

Texts, especially biblical texts having ethical interests, are artifacts of a moral world theologically conditioned, literarily shaped, and historically situated. These texts are foremost a witness to the moral world out of which they are conceived and composed. Moreover, in the case of prophetic texts, they represent themselves not simply as a moral world perspective but as informed and shaped by a divine perspective.<sup>46</sup> These texts confront other perspectives albeit those judged to be wrong. As a critique and confrontation, they highlight for us at least a portion of the “moral world” they oppose,

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<sup>44</sup> Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 241; Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, “The Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 509-30.

<sup>45</sup> Childs, “The Shape of the Obedient Life: Ethics,” 675-6.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick D. Miller, “The World and Message of the Prophets: Biblical Prophecy in Its Context,” in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future. Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker* (eds. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 97-112.

which we may use to substantiate and describe the moral world of its readers and opponents. In order to unearth the moral and social world of Malachi, careful attention will be given to the text of Malachi as an artifact of his world. The methodologies embraced will be largely social-scientific criticism, rhetorical criticism and analysis, and other traditional exegetical tools as appropriate.

Social-scientific criticism is a branch of sociological studies concerned with “that phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences.”<sup>47</sup> Sociological interpretations from the 20<sup>th</sup> century were primarily concerned with assembling social data, collating this data with political history for a social history, accounting for social organization, and reconstructing social worlds.<sup>48</sup> Social-scientific criticism brings these concerns to bear in relation to texts as a “way of envisioning, investigating, and understanding the interrelation of texts and social contexts.”<sup>49</sup> The objective of social-scientific criticism is “the analysis, synthesis, and interpretation of the social as well as the literary and ideological (theological) dimensions of a text, the correlation of these features, and the manner in which it was designed as a persuasive vehicle of communication and social interaction, and thus an instrument of social as well as literary and theological

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<sup>47</sup> John H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (GBS: New Testament Series; ed. Jr. Dan O. Via; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 7.

<sup>48</sup> Soulen and Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 198; related works to reconstruction of social worlds include Berger, *Sacred Canopy*; Walter Brueggemann, “Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 98 (1979): 161-85.

<sup>49</sup> Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 13.

consequence.”<sup>50</sup> Relevant social science data includes geographic location, temporal location, and social location, with the latter involving economic activity, population structure, social systems, political organization, cultural systems, and belief systems or ideologies.<sup>51</sup>

The diversity of methods employed as well as the limitations, criticisms, and benefits are well rehearsed.<sup>52</sup> Social science practitioners acknowledge the assortment of methodologies, varying in degree of sophistication, involved in the application of social science criticism to biblical studies and concede the limited availability of data for the task. However, the reward of better understanding the context and content of OT is deemed worth the effort. Charles Carter recommends due consideration be given to the methodology advanced by Norman Gottwald, a leading practitioner in the application of social science models in OT studies.<sup>53</sup> Gottwald has proposed “a grid of societal

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 70. See also Norman K. Gottwald, “The Interplay of Text, Concept, and Setting in the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 595-609.

<sup>51</sup> Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 61-69; Paula M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 30-2.

<sup>52</sup> M. Daniel Carroll R., “Social-Scientific Approaches,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* 734-47; McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 1-32; Charles E. Carter, “A Discipline in Transition: The Contributions of the Social Sciences to the Study of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (SBTS 6; eds. Charles E. Carter and Carol L. Meyers; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 3-36; Charles E. Carter, “Opening Windows onto Biblical Worlds: Applying the Social Sciences to Hebrew Scripture,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (eds. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 421-51; Gary A. Herion, “The Impact of Modern and Social Science Assumptions on the Reconstruction of Israelite History,” in *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (SBTS 6; eds. Charles E. Carter and Carol L. Meyers; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 230-57.

<sup>53</sup> Carter, “Opening Windows onto Biblical Worlds,” 449-50.

categories” for assembling the social science data: the physical grid, the cultural grid, the social organizational/political grid, and the religious grid.<sup>54</sup>

My intent in utilizing social-scientific criticism is not to *reconstruct* the social world of postexilic Yehud—most likely an impossible task. My stated aim is to assemble, analyze, and present data that will reasonably illuminate and substantiate the social world of Malachi and its potential for influence on his moral world. Additionally, using Gottwald’s schema, I will investigate traces of the four social dimensions residual in the text of Malachi as well as in other textual and artifactual data of postexilic Yehud. Attention will also be given to three historical streams of influence on postexilic Yehud: preexilic Israel, the Neo-Babylonian exilic experience, and the Persian Empire. Investigating and synthesizing the social science data through the four societal grids and the social science models of others will supply a blend of material and ideological influences on the moral world of Malachi.

Complementary to social-scientific criticism’s concern for the “situation” of the text is the author’s “strategy” for achieving action or change in the targeted recipient of the text.<sup>55</sup> To better comprehend the “strategy” of the text, I will employ tools of rhetorical criticism and analysis. Rhetorical criticism is primarily concerned with the art

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<sup>54</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, “Method and Hypothesis in Reconstructing the Social History of Early Israel,” *ErIsr* 24 (1993): 77\*-82\*. The physical grid “concerns the natural environment lived in and worked by the people in order to produce the necessities of life;” the cultural grid “concerns the conventional behavioral response acquired primarily by social and symbolic learning;” the social organizational/political grid “concerns the formations in which all the interactions of society are ordered and related from the smallest to largest units, with reference to how the needs and interests of all parties in society are addressed;” the religious grid “concerns institution, practices and ideas current in the society, including expressed or implied values and norms, as well as the symbolic understanding that religion provides,” 80\*-81\*. Gottwald is primarily concerned with the material or mode of production influences on societal formation rather than the shaping effect of ideas. Both are at work in society but the biblical texts provide a better glimpse into the world of ideas over the material world. Cf. Burke O. Long, “The Social World of Ancient Israel,” *Int* 36 (1982): 243-55.

<sup>55</sup> Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 54.

of persuasion (focus on audience and desired response) and rhetorical analysis with the art of composition (focus on author's intent).<sup>56</sup> Both have been applied amply to prophetic texts in a diversity of approaches.<sup>57</sup> A common approach for rhetorical criticism is based on the NT rhetorical model of George Kennedy.<sup>58</sup> The five phases of the model are: 1) establish the rhetorical unit; 2) expound the rhetorical situation; 3) explore the rhetorical disposition and genre; 4) examine the rhetorical techniques of arrangement and style; and 5) evaluate the rhetorical effectiveness.<sup>59</sup> My intention is not to produce a comprehensive rhetorical evaluation of Malachi but to use these phases and tools to help assess his message and audience toward the goal of examining his moral world. Expounding the rhetorical situation will be accomplished primarily through the social-scientific study described above. Rhetorical analysis will be used to delimit the textual units and comprehend their relationship as parts of the whole (phase one) as well as to identify points of emphasis, through repetition and isolation, as an aid in interpretation (phase four).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (GBS: Old Testament Series; ed. Gene Tucker; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 32-48; Soulen and Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 184.

<sup>57</sup> Duane Frederick Watson and Alan J. Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method* (BibInt 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 9-20, 80-97.

<sup>58</sup> George Alexander Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33-8.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 11-14; Charles S. Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah: A Rhetorical-Historical Analysis* (JSOTSup 145; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 22-28; J.D. Barker, "Rhetorical Criticism," *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* 676-84. Scholars varyingly enumerate the phases described by Kennedy. I have generally followed the description of Renz and Barker.

<sup>60</sup> Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (JSOTSup 256; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); Roland Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric* (International Studies in the History of Rhetoric 3; trans. Leo Arnold, Rubianto Solichin and Llane B. Briese; Leiden: Brill, 2012). While Malachi does not routinely utilize strict parallelism, common in some prophetic works, he still utilizes rhetorical tools common to all biblical Hebrew. His text displays characteristics of both poetry and

## Confessions and Limitations

The moral world analysis undertaken here will encounter certain challenges and limitations in both the available means for such an analysis and in the researcher doing the analysis. First, in his essay on “Thick Description,” Geertz argues, “Behavior must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behavior (social action) that cultural forms find articulation.”<sup>61</sup> Unlike the social scientist, we are not able to observe human behavior within its culture to help discern how that behavior reflects and shapes its cultural web—its social, symbolic, and moral worlds. But insight into behavior is preserved in written texts—what I described above as moral world artifacts. Texts have descriptions of behavior but are not the “thick descriptions” of an ethnographer.<sup>62</sup> Because of the limitation imposed by time and space, this analysis will necessarily involve a measure of critical realism or what Geertz calls “guesses.”<sup>63</sup>

Second, the sociology of knowledge considers the role of religion as the mediator between the sacred order and social order. Religious symbols give the sacred order

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prose, which Hill aptly describes as “oracular prose.” Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25D; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 24-6.

<sup>61</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 17.

<sup>62</sup> Geertz’s comparison between ethnography and reading old manuscripts offers some consolation to this undertaking; both enterprises are challenging yet not without promise. “Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of ‘construct a reading of’) a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventional graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior,” [Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 10].

<sup>63</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 20. “Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.”

legitimacy and help maintain the social order. One can point to concerns within the book of Malachi such as proper priestly instruction or calls for undefiled offerings as illustrative of legitimization. However, Malachi's stress goes beyond mere maintenance and certainly beyond manipulation. Malachi's God deserves honor because he loves and has elected Israel. Israel claims special revelation that both founded and formed their society and understanding of what is indeed real. (The same could be said of Israel's neighbors as well. Divine involvement in the world was a core belief. In the case of the Persians, Cyrus claimed the favor of Marduk. Darius saw his success as the blessing of Ahuramazda.) While a sociology of knowledge approach views religion as a social construction and often results in a skeptical reading of ancient texts, seeking to identify ideologies advanced and in conflict, it is incumbent on the interpreter providing a description of their moral world to acknowledge and allow for the pervasive religious world view. We impose too much when we discount their religious assertions as mere political propaganda as if they had experienced an ancient Enlightenment and were only manipulators of the religious world view that pervaded the ancient Near East. To deny or accept their religious claim has as much to do with the perspective and understanding of the interpreter as the evidence for the claim itself. Yet to ignore the claim and preclude it from an assessment of Israel's moral world strips the moral world of its vitality.

Likewise, social scientific studies that consider the social location of the prophet have provided numerous insights into understanding the prophetic role and message.<sup>64</sup> In the social settings considered below, the social location of Malachi in the fifth century

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<sup>64</sup> See Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, and essays in Part Four of Robert P. Gordon, ed., *The Place Is Too Small For Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 5; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 275-414.

B.C.E is disputed, each providing different readings of the text. Yet one cannot too quickly dismiss the prophet's claim to a divine social location.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, I do not profess to be an expert in sociological or anthropological studies. I join the foray of eclectic uses of the social sciences for biblical studies. It is my hope that the intentional use of the categories, methods, and social scientific views described above will provide a different location and perspective from which to view the words of a prophet uttered millennia ago to facilitate contemporary understanding and appropriation of his moral world critique.

A mingling of theological and sociological perspectives may be a difficult balance.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, we will carefully negotiate between reading the text of Malachi with questions prompted by the sociology of knowledge while respecting the claims of Malachi as a witness to the revelation of the God of Israel. Paying attention to both the sociology of knowledge as well as the prophet's claims and rhetoric using the methodologies described above will provide us an insight into the moral world of Malachi.

### **Malachi's History of Interpretation**

Before social science inquiries into the book of Malachi, a number of historical and literary critical studies were undertaken. Not unexpectedly, the emphases of these studies follow the general trajectory of modern biblical studies from questions concerning

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<sup>65</sup> Miller, "The World and Message of the Prophets: Biblical Prophecy in Its Context," 103-4. See also Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 179-85, on the possibility that certain projected meanings may indeed be a reflection of ultimate meaning as he illustrates with his analogy of mathematics.

<sup>66</sup> See the cautions expressed by Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 179-85.

sources and traditions behind the text to form critical questions, followed by literary approaches exploring the unity and development of the final text, and then more recent sociological approaches primarily concerning social setting and social groups. While some of these studies do not directly relate to a moral world analysis, preliminary consideration of them will provide background and helpful insight into this study, and identify open interpretive issues to which a moral world analysis may contribute. I will provide a brief overview and summary of the research history related to Malachi, drawing more attention to certain studies that move in the direction of my research interest, and take a preliminary position on the key critical issues.

#### Malachi: Name or Title?

The unlikelihood of the Hebrew name Malachi and the appearance of the same “name” in Mal 3:1 have prompted many scholars to consider “Malachi” as an appellation for an anonymous prophet or writer added later to 1:1 based on a “misinterpretation” or “misunderstanding” of 3:1.<sup>67</sup> The possibility is supported by the LXX translators’ interpretation as “his messenger” and the Targum’s designation of the “messenger” as Ezra.

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<sup>67</sup> C. C. Torrey, “The Prophecy of ‘Malachi’,” *JBL* 17 (1898): 1-15, esp. 9; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 441; Richard J. Coggins, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 73-4; Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 151. Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum - Malachi* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), contends that the title is “a reference to the function of the priest in 2:7,” but this adds further confusion rather than clarity. She envisions the book as a “court case, tried before the priest in the temple, with the prophet playing the role of the priest in his imagination.” 172. David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) also sees Malachi as a name attributed to an unnamed person over time, 166. While contending the oracle is a third in a series of anonymous *massōt*, he acknowledges that this one is given some distinction (from the previous two associated with Zechariah) with the superscription attributing it to one with prophetic authority signaled by *bēyad*.

While not explicitly arguing for Malachi as a proper name, Childs highlights several problems with the appellative argument that are persuasive.<sup>68</sup> The LXX translation does not use the same person as 3:1 which “obscures” the connection between 1:1 and 3:1.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, viewing 1:1 as an appellative “wreaks havoc with the entire message of the book” because the prophet then is the eschatological figure anticipated to come in 3:22-24.<sup>70</sup> He argues that it is preferable to view the book as the work of “a genuine prophetic figure” even if his name has been lost in transmission.

The form of the name and its lack of attestation elsewhere are problematic to some. Baldwin refutes the supposed unlikelihood of the name citing other instances of unattested names like Habbakuk and Obadiah.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, similar forms are attested such as Ethni ‘my gift’ (1 Chron 6:26 [Eng. 6:41]) and Beerī ‘my well’ (Gen 26:34; Hos 1:1). Bulmerincq has proposed that *mal’āki* is a shortened form of *mal’ākiyyāh*.<sup>72</sup> Similar contractions are present with Abi ‘my father’ (2 Kgs 18:2) and Abijah ‘Yahweh is my father’ (2 Chron 29:1).<sup>73</sup> However, critics still find the name ‘Yahweh is my messenger’ as non-sensical. Rudolph has suggested the extended form may be a constructive

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<sup>68</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 492-4. In Childs’s canonical reading, Mal 3:1 is a word-play on the “name” of the prophet in 1:1 rather than a borrowing in the reverse.

<sup>69</sup> Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) downplays the borrowing from 3:1 because the context would be better suited by a third person pronoun as the LXX translates, which then makes the MT the more difficult reading, 154-6.

<sup>70</sup> Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 493.

<sup>71</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 28; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 212. See also Walter C. Kaiser, *Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984).

<sup>72</sup> Cited in Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 441.

<sup>73</sup> See other examples in Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger* (SBLDS 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 28.

genitive—'messenger of Yahweh'—rather than a subject-predicate relationship.<sup>74</sup>

Glazier-McDonald considers a personal name as possible but also advances the suggestion proposed by Von Orelli that the name was taken at “his call to be a prophet”.<sup>75</sup>

Nogalski lays out the options without taking a position other than to defer to the editors of the 12 who placed Malachi “on par with the other writings of the Book of the Twelve associated with a prophetic personage.”<sup>76</sup>

A name based on 3:1 introduces unnecessary complications to the larger message of the book, and conclusive evidence that Malachi is not the actual name of a genuine prophet is lacking. The imperial background and allusions present throughout the text provide another alternative for understanding the name. Royal messengers were predominant in the Persian age and served a critical function in the service of the kings. “Malachi” may then be an appellative derived from the social background rather than an internal textual reference. Whether Malachi is an actual name or designation leveraging this royal background is not certain, but in either case, the association with Malachi, my messenger, attaches additional authority to the message. We will explore aspects of the messenger motif more in the upcoming chapters.

## Date

The date of the book is not made explicit in the text and although the internal evidence has been variously interpreted, a widespread consensus, albeit a broad span of

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<sup>74</sup> Cited in Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 29; Hill, *Malachi*, 17. Hill prefers the form *mal'ākyāh* like *zēkārāh* to avoid the “problem” of the connecting vowel.

<sup>75</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 28-29. See also C. Von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (trans. John S. Banks; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897).

<sup>76</sup> James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah--Malachi* (SHBC 18b; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 1010.

time, has been reached—early to mid-fifth century B.C. The internal evidence includes the impending destruction of Edom, the official title *pehâ*, sacrificial and tithing practices associated with the temple, and most prominently, similarities to the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>77</sup> Smith broadly locates Malachi between 510 and 312 B.C. because the book alludes to the completed temple and waning enthusiasm on one end and Edom having become known as Idumea in 312 B.C. More narrowly he contends it fits nicely with the reforms of Nehemiah 6-8.<sup>78</sup> Dumbrell too locates Malachi on the “eve of the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms” c. 460 B.C.<sup>79</sup> He views the book as depicting the prophetic movement’s attempt to strengthen lay leadership against those asserting priestly control to restore the institutions of old Israel. Glazier-McDonald too associates Malachi with the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms, placing Malachi after 460 B.C. because “poor economic circumstances” addressed by both Nehemiah and Malachi were “prevalent during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-425 B.C.).”<sup>80</sup>

Some prefer a date toward the latter half of the fifth century.<sup>81</sup> Building off Smith, Verhoef sees significant correlation between the reforms of Malachi and Nehemiah but

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<sup>77</sup> Coggins, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, does not deem that this evidence provides any more precision than during the Persian period, asserting that the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah by no means can serve as a *terminus ad quem* since there may have remained some malpractice, 75.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, “Malachi,” 5-9. As Smith summarizes in his frequently quoted line, “The book of Malachi fits the situation amid which Nehemiah worked as snugly as a bone fits its socket,” 7. See also Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 442-3; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 212-3; Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, dates the prophet between the second temple and Ezra, but redaction of the book occurred later, 150.

<sup>79</sup> William J. Dumbrell, “Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms,” *RTR* 35.2 (1976): 42-52. See specifically his footnote no. 2; Achtemeier, *Nahum - Malachi*, 171.

<sup>80</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 15-17. See specifically her footnote 13. Dating Ezra to 398 B.C., she deems it unlikely that Malachi came later since Ezra implemented a prohibition against mixed marriage which seemingly resolved the issue.

<sup>81</sup> Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve*, places between 450-400 BCE allowing for the apathy after the temple's rebuilding and the loose connections with the Nehemiah reforms, 991-3.

favors “the period between Nehemiah’s two visits, that is, shortly after 433 B.C.”<sup>82</sup> He highlights the general cooperation between priest and Levite demonstrated by Nehemiah during his first visit to Jerusalem as compared to the defilement of the priesthood alleged by Nehemiah upon his return (13:29). Somewhat contradictory, however, may be the favors accepted by the governor (Mal 1:8) and the opposite practice attributed to Nehemiah (Neh 5). Verhoef compensates by associating 1:8 with an interim governor. Kaiser associates Malachi with the same approximate period characterizing Malachi as a “forerunner who prepared for the extensive reforms introduced by Nehemiah when he returned sometime after 433 B.C.”<sup>83</sup>

Based on a linguistic analysis of the book of Malachi using the typological approach of Robert Polzin, Hill asserts that Malachi bears both features of classical Biblical Hebrew and late Biblical Hebrew placing it within a continuum of “postexilic” texts that corresponds chronologically with the general consensus between the completion of the temple and Ezra’s arrival c. 458.<sup>84</sup> In his more recent commentary, he argues for a more precise date near the turn of the fifth century.<sup>85</sup>

Examining closely the most common evidence supporting an early fifth century date, O’Brien breaks from the consensus thinking.<sup>86</sup> She asserts, “The book’s historical

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<sup>82</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 159-60.

<sup>83</sup> Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*, 17. He insists that Malachi must have followed Ezra in 458 since he based much of his arguments on the law of Moses, presumably lost until the teachings of Ezra.

<sup>84</sup> Andrew E. Hill, “Dating the Book of Malachi: A Linguistic Reexamination,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman* (eds. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 77-89.

<sup>85</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 83. See his commentary pages 77-84 for the most extensive discussion on the dating of Malachi.

<sup>86</sup> Julia M. O’Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* (SBLDS 121; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 113-33.

referents, its linguistic characteristics, its usage of other literature, its genre and its reference to a Temple—as well as its diatribes against idolatry and insincere worship—are as consonant with the years immediately preceding the Exile as they are with the Persian period.”<sup>87</sup> She argues that the fall of Edom and use of *pehâ* could be as easily dated in the mid- sixth century. Additionally, she concludes that “the books (Malachi and Ezra-Nehemiah), indeed, bear no necessary connection.”<sup>88</sup> Moreover, she critiques Hill’s linguistic analysis arguing that “Hill’s analysis relies heavily on the relation of literature to events rather than only to other literature,” noting that events are frequently dated subjectively.<sup>89</sup> O’Brien contends that using Hill’s linguistic criteria alone would point to a date as early as the mid- sixth century. However, her alternative date has not gained any traction. Hill has sharply critiqued her assessment of his typological analysis and demonstrated limitations in her approach.<sup>90</sup> Our own analysis that follows suggests more connections between Malachi and Nehemiah than she allows.

This study accepts the general consensus of first half of the fifth century B.C.E. as the most likely chronological setting for the book. Studies that explore the social setting of Malachi based on information from a spectrum of “postexilic” texts and the application of sociological models generally accept and affirm the location of Malachi

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>90</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 82 n. 3.

during the consensus period of early to mid- fifth century B.C.<sup>91</sup> These studies and models will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

### Literary Unity

The composition history of the book of Malachi is unknown. We do not know the precise correspondence between the messenger's written word and spoken word. We do not know the words the prophet himself used to address his world versus those perhaps supplied in later editing. We do have a written text with a fairly certain textual history.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, prophetic words have been written down for centuries (in some cases as dictated by the prophet himself, e.g., Jeremiah 36:4; 51:60) and seem to closely represent the highly respected spoken word.<sup>93</sup>

The book of Malachi has traditionally been viewed as an essential unity, with some disagreement over a few select passages.<sup>94</sup> More recent studies propose an editorial

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<sup>91</sup> Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Revised ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Jon L. Berquist, "The Social Setting of Malachi," *BTB* 19 (1989): 121-26; Jon L. Berquist, *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (SemeiaSt 50; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); John Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists: Power Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 91-122; Paul L. Redditt, "The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 240-55; John W. Rogerson, "The Social Background of the Book of Malachi," in *New Heaven and New Earth Prophecy and the Millennium: Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston* (eds. P.J. Harland and C.T.R. Hayward; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 171-79.

<sup>92</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 3-12; Verhoef, *Malachi*, 168-70. Text critical issues will be addressed in the following chapters as warranted.

<sup>93</sup> John W. Hilber, "The Culture of Prophecy and Writing in the Ancient Near East," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (eds. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 219-42; Hans M. Barstad, "No Prophets? Recent Developments in Biblical Prophetic Research and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," *JSOT* 57 (1993): 39-60.

<sup>94</sup> Smith, "Malachi," 3; Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 442. The most frequently noted passages include: 1:1; 1:11-14; 2:7 ("messenger"); 2:11-12; 3:1b; 3:1-4; 3:13-15; 3:16-21; 3:22-24.

history, ranging from the simple to complex. In his recent commentary on the Book of the Twelve, James Nogalski outlines the approaches of Bosshard and Kratz in comparison with Wöhrle, illustrating the complexity of some of the proposed compositional histories.<sup>95</sup> Bosshard and Kratz identify three layers of development from two original parallel confrontations addressed to the priests and the people. Wöhrle's model has seven layers of development moving from an original address to the people, expanded to confront the cult, and further modified in the development of the Book of the Twelve. Studies like these two and more emphasize various editorial purposes related to context and development, as follows: the book itself, a postexilic corpus of Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi, or the Book of the Twelve (and perhaps even the Book of the Prophets). I will briefly review these three possibilities followed by a summary of studies that point toward literary unity.

### ***The Book Itself***

These studies give attention to the book itself as a writing redacted in order to bring forward the prophet's word to a later audience. McKenzie and Wallace examine the covenantal emphases in the book and the prophet's call to the community for a covenantal return.<sup>96</sup> They conclude that 3:13-21 is a secondary layer of the book because it narrows the application of the covenant from the whole of the postexilic community "Israel" to the "righteous." Paul Redditt envisions a heavily redacted book using

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<sup>95</sup> Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve*, 996-8. Cf. Erich Bosshard and Reinhard Gregor Kratz, "Maleachi im Zwölfprophetenbuch," *BN* 52 (1990): 27-46; Jakob Wöhrle, *Der Abschluss des Zwölfprophetenbuches: Buchübergreifende Redaktionsprozesse in den späten Sammlungen* (BZAW 389; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, "Covenant Themes in Malachi," *CBQ* 45.4 (1983): 549-63.

messages addressed separately to the priests and the laity that a redactor organized as a message to his community with his own supplemental material (1:1; 3:1b-4 and 3:16-21) for his audience. A later redactor added 3:22-24.<sup>97</sup> Blenkinsopp asserts that the phrase “thus says the Lord” was inserted into postexilic writings like Haggai and Malachi to give the “impression of a prophet in the classical tradition.”<sup>98</sup>

### ***Corpus of Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi***

Other studies literarily link Malachi with a larger postexilic corpus inclusive of Haggai and Zechariah. The prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah (especially chapters 1-8) have been yoked because both prophets receive mention together in the book of Ezra as integral to the temple reconstruction, and the precise dating included in their historical superscriptions place their oracles near the time of the second temple’s rebuilding. Two primary features have tethered the book of Malachi with Haggai and Zechariah: 1) Malachi’s cultic and historical referents are best situated in the Second Temple period,<sup>99</sup> and 2) the similarity of the superscription in Mal 1:1 with superscriptions in Zech 9:1 and 12:1. These connections have led some to propose an original literary corpus consisting of Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi (HZM). Regarding the superscriptions, the combination *יהוה מִשָּׂא דְבַר יְהוָה* only appears in these three passages, prompting the long-held association of the three oracles.<sup>100</sup> However, differences between the fuller context of each

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<sup>97</sup> Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 155.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 231, 240.

<sup>99</sup> These include *pehâ* as reference to a Persian authority (1:8), altar sacrifices suggesting a completed temple, and similarities to the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms. See Coggins, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 74-5.

<sup>100</sup> Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 440-1; Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 239.

superscription have been leveraged to argue both for and against editorial intentionality behind the three superscriptions. Peterson notes that the varying prepositions suggest a sequence present in other prophetic texts like Amos, that is, an oracle against (ב) the nations, an oracle against (על) Israel, and finally an oracle to (אל) Israel.<sup>101</sup> Childs and Glazier-McDonald both illustrate, however, that the differences suggest the three superscriptions are original rather than by the hand of a later editor. For example מִשָּׁנָה alone is the “superscription” in Zechariah 9:1 with יהוה רַבֵּר יהוה functioning as part of the oracle. Additionally the usage of the phrase and preposition in Malachi 1:1 has more affinity with Haggai 1:1 and Jeremiah 50:1, highlighting the addressee and the prophetic agent, designated by בִּידֵי<sup>102</sup> Childs concludes that the integrity of the superscription in Malachi points to the book’s independent status.<sup>103</sup>

Beyond potential similarities in these three superscriptions, Pierce identifies four additional literary connections within the final form of the four primary components of the HZM corpus (Hag, Zec 1-8, Zech 9-14, & Mal).<sup>104</sup> Of the five connectors he notes, three link together only two of the constituent four parts [e.g., chronological framing links Hag and Zech 1-8; literary and thematic unity bind Zech 1-8 and Zech 9-14; oracle titles (the מִשָּׁנָה superscriptions) connect Zech 9-14 to Mal]. The rhetorical device of interrogation, present in three parts of the corpus (absent in Zech 9-14), and the units of

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<sup>101</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 165. Petersen notes the pattern also occurs in LXX Jeremiah.

<sup>102</sup> Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 491-2; Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, the Divine Messenger*, 24-9.

<sup>103</sup> Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 492.

<sup>104</sup> Ronald W. Pierce, “Literary Connectors and a Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi Corpus,” *JETS* 27 (1984): 277-89. For a well articulated critique, see Mark J. Boda, “Messengers of Hope in Haggai-Malachi,” *JSOT* 32.1 (2007): 113-31.

narrative genre, present in all four components, serve as his other two literary connectors. However, Pierce's five observed literary connectors function only as chain links holding the four "books" together rather than shared elements extending across all four.

Mark Boda argues the references to "messenger" (Hag 1:13; Zech 12:8; Mal 2:7) are part of redaction strategy tying the otherwise essentially whole texts of Haggai, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi to Zechariah 1-8 (whose messenger emphasis is central). The varying association of the "messenger" with the prophetic, royal, and priestly groups is the redactor's effort to point toward an emerging hope of a heavenly messenger that encapsulates these community leadership roles.<sup>105</sup>

Thematic sharing and development may also point to an original HZM corpus. Redditt identifies several shared themes in the corpus that argue for redactional unity.<sup>106</sup> He asserts that redactors utilized superscriptions/incipits, phrasing, and allusions to accomplish redactional unity. Pierce too detects a thematic development across the HZM corpus.<sup>107</sup> The assurances of God and the call to build the temple in Haggai are followed by challenges to fidelity (Zech 1-8) and declining leadership (Zech 9-14) that culminate in pessimism and conditional promises in Malachi.

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<sup>105</sup> Boda, *op. cit.*

<sup>106</sup> Paul L. Redditt, "Themes in Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi," *Int* 61 (2007): 184-97. Of particular interest are: community restoration, God as refiner, God as King and One, and Sin and Punishment. He also points out lack of wages, the temple, divorce and God's love, and the law and prophets.

<sup>107</sup> Ronald W. Pierce, "A Thematic Development of the Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi Corpus," *JETS* 27 (1984): 401-11.

### ***The Book of the Twelve and Beyond***

Other studies view Malachi as a fitting end to a larger prophetic corpus, whether the Book of the Twelve or the whole of the Prophets (and its relation to the Torah and the Writings). The linguistic analysis of Radday and Pollatscheck identified different vocabulary usage between Malachi 1-2 and Malachi 3 leading to their conclusion that the oracles originated independently and were later redacted together (as part of Book of 12).<sup>108</sup> Perhaps the most disputed verses in Malachi are the so-called appendices in 3:22-24. Two recent articles by Assis and Snyman summarize the past research.<sup>109</sup> The questions center around whether the closing verses are original to Malachi or later redactional activity related to the Book of the Twelve, the Prophets, and even the Torah. The texts themselves are not incompatible with the thought of Malachi but their direct naming of Moses and Elijah and their position at the close of the Book of the Twelve are attractive and suggestive to the redaction critic looking for connections to the larger corpora of the Prophets and Torah. Some suspicion is warranted given the reversal of the Moses-Elijah pairing in LXX (that is, MT vs. 22 follows vs. 23-24 in the LXX).

Nogalski acknowledges that the book's "readability factor" gives it a sense of perceived unity. Rather than attributing the disjunction to a multi layered development as posited by most redaction critics, Nogalski proposes that the book be viewed as a "compilation...wherein disparate elements have been integrated into the writing by (an)

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<sup>108</sup> Yehuda T. IchRadday and Moshe A. Pollatscheck, "Vocabulary Richness in Post-Exilic Prophetic Books," *ZAW* 92.3 (1980): 333-46. Their unit divisions by chapter do not account for related materials crossing chapter demarcations. The fourth oracle of Malachi is widely considered to extend from 2:17 - 3:5 or 3:6. How would this adaptation affect their linguistic analysis?

<sup>109</sup> Elie Assis, "Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope. A New Reading of Malachi 3,22-24," *ZAW* 123.2 (2011): 207-20; S. D. Snyman, "Malachi 4:4-6 (Heb 3:22-24) as a Point of Convergence in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of the Intra and Intertextual Relationships," *HvTst* 68.1 (2012): 1-6.

editor(s) in fewer stages than these redactional models have heretofore suggested. In other words, Malachi's unity and diversity is better explained as editorial compilation, arrangement, and adaptation of source material than through models of gradual accretion."<sup>110</sup> Thus Malachi reflects "the interplay of redactional and source material and the literary horizons in which the editorial work takes place."<sup>111</sup> The literary horizon to which Nogalski refers is the development of the Book of the Twelve.

### *A Literary Unity*

In contrast, other scholars argue for the essential unity of the book.<sup>112</sup> Substantial literary studies have argued through a variety of analytics that proposed additions or late insertions are not incongruent with the larger whole and even necessary for the work's unity. Glazier-McDonald, performing a descriptive literary analysis of the internal structure of Malachi via diagramming of prosodic units (analysis of rhythm patterns and sound in poetry), argues that Malachi is a poetic piece and a compositional unity.<sup>113</sup> O'Brien contends that viewing the disputations of Malachi through the lens of the *rib* form helps explain what some identify as later insertions.<sup>114</sup> In the most convincing of these studies, Ray Clendenen, building off the textlinguistic model of Longacre, proposes

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<sup>110</sup> Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve*, 999.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> For example, Verhoef, *Malachi*, 163-4; Hill, *Malachi*, 18-23.

<sup>113</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 4.

<sup>114</sup> O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, 49-84.

that Malachi is hortatory speech structured in three chiasmic movements by means of the hortatory structures of problem, command, and motivation.<sup>115</sup>

Although literary unity does not necessarily equate to prophetic origin, the book will be treated as reflecting the work of the postexilic prophet and pertinent as a whole for insight into his moral world. Passages noted above whose originality are disputed will be examined in more detail in chapter four and subjected to my own exegesis and rhetorical analysis.

### Tradition History

The influence of Deuteronomy on the book of Malachi has been widely recognized. Eissfeldt notes that “the influence of the Priestly code is not yet discerned, for it is clearly Deuteronomy which ranks as the finally authoritative law, and its language has also in fact influenced Malachi.”<sup>116</sup> Others have observed priestly influence as well in the book.<sup>117</sup> Fishbane argues that Mal 1:6 -2:9 is “aggadic exegesis” on the priestly blessing of Num 6:23-7 in which the prophet playfully inverts the language of blessing into a curse on the priests who have despised the name of Yahweh.<sup>118</sup>

O’Brien concludes from her close examination of the evidence that Malachi adapts “the language and ideas” of both D and P: “The author borrows freely from

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<sup>115</sup> E. Ray Clendenen, “The Structure of Malachi: A Textlinguistic Study,” *CTR* 2 (1987): 3-17. For minor adaptations, see also Hill, *Malachi*, 28-9.

<sup>116</sup> Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 442; McKenzie and Wallace, *op. cit.*

<sup>117</sup> See Verhoef, *Malachi*, 159.

<sup>118</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 332-4.

various sources, adapting the language of each for his or her own purposes and thereby creating a new idiom that is deeply rooted in tradition.”<sup>119</sup>

Berry argues that Malachi was designed to serve as a close to the canon and also as a look toward God’s future and final act on the day of the Lord.<sup>120</sup> He identified over thirty allusions to other biblical traditions, and possible sources, within Malachi arguing that “Malachi’s message developed within the milieu of a relatively full canon.”<sup>121</sup>

Several key themes in the book function as “organizing media.” Primary is the covenant which “draws from various segments of the canon of law and prophets.”<sup>122</sup> Other key themes include the Aaronic blessing, Deuteronomy and obedience to the Torah, messenger/angel, and the day of the YHWH. He says Malachi is not apocalyptic which has the potential of drawing attention away from the present in favor of past or future.

Instead, the “concern for moral and political order drives much of the message Malachi.”

The closing references to Moses and Elijah direct the community’s focus toward the Torah and Prophets to mitigate against moral laxness and serve as guides in anticipation of the coming day of Yahweh. Berry’s emphasis on the moral quality of Malachi’s message holds great potential in this investigation of the book’s moral world analysis.

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<sup>119</sup> O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, 106-7.

<sup>120</sup> Donald K. Berry, “Malachi’s Dual Design: the Close of the Canon and What Comes Afterward,” in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the 12 in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (JSOTSup 235; eds. Paul R. House and James W. Watts; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 269-302.

<sup>121</sup> Berry, “Malachi’s Dual Design,” 287. Earlier he explains: “For our purposes, all reflections of canonical theology in Malachi indicate to a greater or lesser degree (1) the book’s dependence on Scripture or (2) the book’s awareness of Scripture or (3) the awareness by the producer(s) of the book of the general situation reflected in writings the same age as Malachi,” 272.

<sup>122</sup> Berry, “Malachi’s Dual Design,” 287.

Looking at formulas marking divine speech, Weyde proposes that Malachi uses these formularies to mark his use of prophetic tradition.<sup>123</sup> Both tradition and the objections of his audience are rendered under the prophet's influence. "These peculiarities (formulas marking divine speech and the question-and-answer style) and the fact that there is no reference to a vocation, to auditory or visionary experiences, suggest that Malachi contains a special kind of prophecy: its authority and message are founded on traditions, in which previously spoken divine words are recorded."<sup>124</sup>

More generally, Mason examines the postexilic writings discerning a similarity in style and message which he contends reflects the "preaching" during the postexilic period of received traditions. This preaching underlies the written texts and reveals a concern shared by the rhetors of this diverse material to bring forward the heritage of Israel, establish assurance of God's promises as evidenced in the fulfillment of preexilic prophecy, and call the community to faithfulness.<sup>125</sup>

Nogalski views the reference to the Book of Remembrance in 3:16-18 as a reference to the developing corpus of the Book of Twelve written for "those fearing YHWH as a guide to help them distinguish the righteous from the wicked, thereby instructing them on their path and preparing them to survive the refining judgment of the

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<sup>123</sup> Karl W. Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Problems, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi* (BZAW 288; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000).

<sup>124</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 12. Cf. Helmut Utzschneider, *Künder oder Schreiber?: eine These zum Problem der "Schriftprophetie" auf Grund von Maleachi 1,6-2,9* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1989). Utzschneider considers Malachi as an example of *schriftpropheten*—scribal interpretation of texts and tradition. This important thesis will be assessed further as part of my evaluation of Malachi's use of tradition in chapter three.

<sup>125</sup> Rex Mason, *Preaching the Tradition: Homily and Hermeneutics After the Exile: Based on the "Addresses" in Chronicles, the "Speeches" in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the Post-exilic Prophetic Books* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 235-56; Rex Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 135-62.

coming day of YHWH.”<sup>126</sup> He identifies four themes running through the twelve: 1) Day of YHWH—Malachi speaks of the coming day of YHWH when the righteous and wicked will receive their due; 2) Fertility of the land—This theme is used to discuss invasions, pestilence and the prosperity of the people [cf. Mal 3:10-11]. 3) Fate of God’s people—Malachi discusses abuses by the priests and people warning of coming retribution in the absence of repentance; 4) Theodicy—Malachi confronts the people for questioning God’s justice and promises that God will deal with the wicked in his time on his day. In the mean time, the righteous are called to faithfulness and given a book of remembrance for learning and instruction. Nogalski contends that “a case can be made that many of these links were intentionally created in the process of compiling and editing the writings within the Twelve.”<sup>127</sup>

As these studies suggest, tradition plays an important role in Malachi’s message. Moreover, unraveling his use of traditions will be a significant component of this moral world analysis. While some of Nogalski’s links are suggestive, the work of O’Brien, Berry, Weyde, and Mason all emphasize the use of traditions in the prophetic work of Malachi. Allusions to past traditions made by the prophet for rhetorical effect seem equally probable to allusions made by an editor as advanced by redaction critics such as Nogalski, Redditt, and Pierce. How one classifies these allusions is largely tied to one’s theory of composition. While not mutually exclusive, given my working assumption that the book is a literary unity primarily attributed to the prophet, privilege will be given to the former position.

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<sup>126</sup> Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve*, 1002-3.

<sup>127</sup> Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve*, 504.

## Form & Structure

Discussions related to the form and structure of Malachi have revolved around its elaborate question-answer format, pervasive covenantal themes, and didactic tone. For example, Andrew Hill describes the book as a “catechism on covenant relationship with Yahweh” with “the literary form of ... ‘disputation speech’.”<sup>128</sup> In the wake of Gunkel and form criticism, studies in Malachi’s form have been largely shaped by Pfeiffer, who characterized the oracles as *Disputationsworte*. He identified six oracles in Malachi bearing a three-fold structure of “*Die Behauptung*” (assertion or allegation), “*Die Einrede des Partners*” (objection of the addressee), and “*Die Begründung* or *Die Schlußfolgerung*” (explanation leading to conclusion).<sup>129</sup>

Boecker affirmed the divisions and form identified by Pfeiffer but observed that the tone of the work was not dispute but discussion (*Diskussionsworte* or *Streitgespräche*) between the prophet and his targeted audience.<sup>130</sup> Reasserting Pfeiffer’s position, Glazier-McDonald has stressed the tone of disagreement is more than simple discussion.<sup>131</sup>

Since Pfeiffer and Boecker’s discussion of form, other scholars have drawn attention to other features of the question-answer form of the oracles. Fischer asserts that

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<sup>128</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 37.

<sup>129</sup> Egon Pfeiffer, “Die Disputationsworte im Buche Maleachi,” *EvT* 19 (1959): 546-68. Pfeiffer’s divisions have been widely affirmed by subsequent scholarship: 1:1 [superscription] 1:2-5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10-16; 2:17–3:5; 3:6-12; 3:13-21(4:3 Eng.); 3:22-24 (4:4-6 Eng.) [appendices].

<sup>130</sup> Hans Jochen Boecker, “Bemerkungen zur formgeschichtlichen Terminologie des Buches Maleachi,” *ZAW* 78 (1966): 78-81.

<sup>131</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, the Divine Messenger*, 21.

Malachi's usage of the question-answer format shifts the locus of the message from the threat or blessing to the introductory statement and initial response of the Lord in each oracle.<sup>132</sup> In this way Malachi emphasizes God's love for Jacob and his desire for honest worship, real faithfulness, belief in God's justice, real worship, and honesty.

Petersen has argued that the form reflects the more immediate context of Persian-period internationalism.<sup>133</sup> He highlights the similarities to Greek diatribe, building off Verhoef's comparison in style to later Jewish and Greek writings.<sup>134</sup> He insists that a diatribe-like form may be shared without necessitating borrowing. While the precise form may be illusive, Petersen's description of the overall cast of the book is on point: "It was discourse with an identifiable set of purposes, namely, to stimulate reflection, to instruct, to critique, and to provide correction."<sup>135</sup>

Wallis maintains that the author of the book reworked the prophetic discussions with his audience for literary purposes. His assertion raises questions concerning the literalness and accuracy of statements attributed to the prophet's opponents as well as questions concerning the oral or written nature of Malachi's oracles.<sup>136</sup> Concerning the accuracy of the statements, some suggest that the question-answer reflects Malachi simply anticipating his audience's reaction to his assertion. For example, Hendrix

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<sup>132</sup> James A. Fischer, "Notes on the Literary Form and Message of Malachi," *CBQ* 34.3 (1972): 315-20.

<sup>133</sup> David L. Petersen, "Malachi: The Form-Critical Task," in *Lasset uns Brücken bauen: Collected Communications to the XVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament* (eds. Klaus-Dietrich Schunck and Matthias Augustin; Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1998), 269-74.

<sup>134</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 166.

<sup>135</sup> Petersen, "Malachi: The Form-Critical Task," 273. Interestingly, Petersen's depiction of Malachi has resonance with Paul's characterization of all Scripture in 2 Tim 3:16. This may be a critique of Petersen's position because in the Pauline sense all of the OT writings are diatribe like in function.

<sup>136</sup> Gerhard Wallis, "Wesen und Struktur der Botschaft Maleachis," in *Das Ferne und Nahe Wort* (BZAW 105; Berlin: Alfred Töplemann, 1967), 229-37.

contends, “Malachi perceives what is happening in Israel differently from anyone else. The meanings come from within.”<sup>137</sup> Others assert the reportage of the opponents’ position is accurate, if not literal. For example, Tiemeyer empathetically reads the questions “as expressions of sincere doubt and as an honest bewilderment about God’s justice.”<sup>138</sup>

Murray’s explanation of the form and characterization of the opponent’s objections mitigates questions concerning their authenticity or literalness. Positing a broader definition of the genre “disputation” in form critical studies, Murray insists that the constitutive elements of disputation are thesis, counter-thesis and dispute.<sup>139</sup> The disputes in Malachi represent the “attenuated form of disputation” in which “a person seeks to counter objections, actual or potential, to a position he maintains, or to counter views which are explicitly or implicitly contrary to that position, without engaging in actual debate with an opponent.”<sup>140</sup> In this category, all the elements of thesis, counter thesis, and dispute are present in the deep structure but neither an explicit response from the disputed party or “dialectical development” of the contrary positions is present. In Malachi, the disputations begin with a statement or accusation stemming from the

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<sup>137</sup> John D. Hendrix, “‘You Say’: Confrontational Dialogue in Malachi,” *RevExp* 84.3 (1987): 465-77, esp. 467, 470.

<sup>138</sup> Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Giving a Voice to Malachi’s Interlocutors,” *SJOT* 19.2 (2005): 173-92, esp. 191.

<sup>139</sup> D. F. Murray, “The Rhetoric of Disputation: Re-Examination of a Prophetic Genre,” *JSOT* 38 (1987): 95-121. He points out that dispute is often inherent in human communications so he attempts to identify a logical deep structure in prophetic texts that signal disputation. He argues, “But it is the presence, be it noted, of these three in the logical deep structure which is essential to disputation, and not necessarily their direct representation in the rhetorical surface structure, though the latter will, understandably, frequently be the case,” 99.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 98. He identifies two additional types of disputations. The first he likens to the Platonic dialogues in which a thesis is followed by inquiry leading to the conclusion. His second classification includes the disputations in Job in which disagreement exists between parties with both sides arguing their position but reaching no conclusion.

prophet's position "to which he makes his opponents object with the briefest of questions, even though it is clear that in the existential situation it must have been he who was seeking to counter a proposition he believed them to maintain."<sup>141</sup> Murray's observation about the "existential situation" of the dispute emphasizes the need to assess the moral and social world of the conflict to better understand the dispute.

In contrast, Graffy does not think the oracles in Malachi fit the technical definition of a disputation, thus siding with Boecker over Pfeiffer.<sup>142</sup> He argues for a more narrow definition of disputation in which the prophet quotes the people followed by a rejection of their position (as he argues is the case in the disputations in Deutero-Isaiah). He contends that quotations of the people in Malachi are used by the writer to help convince the audience of the prophet's or God's opening assertion rather than to register dispute. Murray's and Graffy's characterizations of the objections in Malachi are similar, although, they disagree on whether they should be considered "disputation." I am presuming the words to be a fair reflection of the opponent's position, whether literal or the prophet's own characterization. Anything less would seem to undermine the prophet's own concern for the people to be persuaded by his message.

### ***From Oracle Form to Book Structure***

The heavy emphasis upon the form of the individual oracles and their proper description – disputation or discussion – has placed less attention on other prominent features of the book. As O'Brien noted, "Perhaps most problematically, treating Malachi

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>142</sup> Adrian Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People* (AnBib 104; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), 15-7.

as a collection of six disputation speeches fails to account for other significant elements of the book. Not only does such an explanation fail to discuss continuity in theme among the oracles but also ignores Malachi's legal and covenantal characteristics."<sup>143</sup> More recent discussions of the six oracles and their form have taken up these questions of their shared themes and unity—a beneficial move in Malachi scholarship.

O'Brien herself has proposed that a solution to this dilemma lies in understanding the oracles of Malachi as an innovative adaptation of a *rib* lawsuit. She builds off the heavy covenant themes noted by McKenzie and Wallace; the legal-court setting as observed by Achtemeier and Coggins; and the covenant lawsuit features (preliminaries, interrogation, indictment, declaration of guilt, threats, and ultimatum) noted by Verhoef and Harvey.<sup>144</sup> She argues that the covenant lawsuit features “resound throughout the book, both in the individual units and in the organization of these units into a larger scheme.”<sup>145</sup> In her schema, the opening “disputation” in 1:2-5 functions as the prologue and the remaining five “disputations” are accusations within the lawsuit. However, only two of the accusations include all the features, likely contributing to a limited following of her proposal.

Addressing the variation latent in the oracle form and the lack of attention given to how the oracles work together to provide the book's overall structure, Nogalski highlights the shift from the present in the opening oracles to the future in the latter

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<sup>143</sup> O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, 60.

<sup>144</sup> O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, 60-84; Cf. McKenzie and Wallace, *op. cit.*; Achtemeier, *Nahum - Malachi*, 172; Coggins, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 77; Verhoef, *Malachi*, 180-4; Julien Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967).

<sup>145</sup> O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, 63.

oracles.<sup>146</sup> The first major section 1:2-2:16 addresses problems and the last section 2:17-4:6 offers solutions in the context of the future day of YHWH.

Some of the freshest work on Malachi in recent years has been done by Elie Assis. He points out distinctions between two groupings of the oracles which have been obscured by attempts to identify a similar form in the six oracles of Malachi.<sup>147</sup> Oracles 2, 3, and 5 begin with an assertion of YHWH or his prophet who takes issue with the people. In response the people seek to *justify themselves*. In contrast, oracles 1, 4, and 6 begin with an assertion and *self-justification* by YHWH that is a response to accusations made by the people. The contrasting oracles highlight the covenantal dispute between God and the people, which is the impetus behind the prophetic message. The first group of oracles are rebukes, common in prophetic literature. The second group “are God’s response to complaints directed by the people against him, and the uniqueness of this type of oracle is conspicuous in prophetic literature.”<sup>148</sup> Rather than precisely classifying the forms, Assis gives stress to the variation of the content within the question-answer format to draw attention to the purpose of the oracles—assuring the people of God’s ongoing commitment to the covenant because they are elected and loved. This illustrates a good move beyond strict form discussions toward assessing the overall relationship between the oracles and how they might inform the context of issues being addressed.

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<sup>146</sup> Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve*, 995.

<sup>147</sup> Elie Assis, “Mutual Recriminations: God and Israel in the Book of Malachi,” *SJOT* 26.2 (2012): 212-19.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* 217-8.

In an earlier article, Assis seeks to hear the book as a whole and looks to message, structure, and context to ascertain the prophet's meaning.<sup>149</sup> Accepting the traditional breakdown of units, he attempts to demonstrate how the arrangement of the main units highlights three important insights into the context of the oracles— an identity shift toward universalism, questioning God's justice toward Israel, and the lack of necessity in keeping the law.

He divides the oracles into two main parts, each with three oracles. Oracles 1-3 confront an identity-shift in which the Judeans are moving toward universalism. The first oracle reflects doubt of their election—God has moved toward Edom over Israel. The third oracle addresses the consequence of universalism—intermarriage. This is a response to the failings associated with the return and depict a new stage in the postexilic community's outlook. The link between these oracles is the recurrence of the theme Yahweh among the nations. His position hinges tenuously on a reinterpretation of 2:10ab as being spoken by the people rather than the prophet.<sup>150</sup>

The second oracle, confronting the priests and ritual sacrifices, also reflects the “relationship between Israel and the nations” (as in oracles one and three) by comparing 1) Israel's honor for God and the Persian governor (1:8-9) and 2) honor (1:10-11) and exaltation (1:14) given to God by Israel versus the nations. Additionally, all three oracles share features of the father-son motif and address some matter of covenant.

In a similar pattern, oracles 4-6 address a common theme with the middle oracle relating the issue to a ritual matter. These three oracles confront claims of God's injustice

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<sup>149</sup> Elie Assis, “Structure and Meaning in the Book of Malachi,” in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 354-69.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

and favor toward evildoers. The fifth oracle concerns the ritual matter of tithing, and its emphasis on testing God by tithing connects this oracle with the larger context of questions concerning God's justice.

The centrality of oracles 2 and 5 in the two main units assert the need to keep the law because God has elected Israel and will act to assure their justice. Malachi's emphasis on keeping the covenant law combats two principles at work which lead to the people's abandonment of the covenant. First, growing sentiment toward universalism would prompt the removal of law systems that "establish barriers between people." Second, the lack of any apparent justice from God "led to the natural conclusion that there is no advantage in a strict observance of law."<sup>151</sup> Assis' work to ascertain the beliefs and attitudes of the people moves toward our effort to understand their moral world.

As the above review of the critical scholarship indicates, questions abound concerning the historical personage and period of the prophet associated with the book attributed to Malachi as well as the nature and development of the book. Cogent arguments accompany a number of disparate positions yet none preclude with certainty the oldest tradition that the book of Malachi accurately reflects the message of a prophet named Malachi to his community that he simply terms Israel. This moral world analysis will proceed from this starting point, openly engaging opposite points of view.

Our analysis will follow the organization of the traditional units with one exception: 1:2-5; 1:6-2:9; 2:10-16; 2:17-3:6; 3:7-12; 3:13-21; 3:22-24.<sup>152</sup> The six individual units or oracles are unified as a message from YHWH's messenger to Israel,

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>152</sup> The break on the fourth oracle is disputed although the majority of commentators terminate the unit after 3:5. I will argue in chapter four that 3:6 is a hinge verse that provides the moral foundation for both the fourth and fifth oracle.

and as Assis argues, function to assure the people of God's ongoing commitment to the covenant. In the opening oracle, YHWH affirms the covenant relationship with Israel. Oracles two and three assert YHWH's greatness and authority as King, Creator and Father. These two oracles also confront covenant breaches by the priests and men of the community, respectively. Oracles four and five address questions about God's justice and provision, linked by the assertion that YHWH does not change. The final oracle anticipates ultimate consequences for unfaithfulness on the day of YHWH. Additionally, similar to Nogalski's observation of structural movement from present to future, we will observe, in moral world terms, a movement from moral foundation to moral consequence. This will be expounded from the results of the moral world analysis.

### **Prospect and Aim of This Study**

The *first and major phase* of this investigation is concordant with the descriptive approach of OT ethics—the pursuit of the ethics of Israel, identifying the moral commands and critiques residual in the OT witness as well as locating them within a larger social and moral framework for the purpose of better understanding the influences on and the process of moral decision-making. Toward this end, questions that should be asked include: For the community of Malachi, what norms and traditions shaped their ethics? What specific priorities, imperatives, and injunctions were deemed important? How did particular material, economic, and political interests shape moral decision-making? How did religious symbols bring together their view of the world and their social values? A moral world analysis is well suited for this task. A moral world can be analyzed and synthesized by scrutinizing the moral content, priorities, and demands that

reside in texts generated from that world's moral discourse and by considering how the social environment, received traditions, and sacred symbols have shaped and represent its moral ideals.

Specific to the descriptive approach, I will examine the moral world of a particular time, place, and people. I have chosen to examine the moral world of the prophet Malachi as a glimpse into the moral worlds and ethics of the postexilic period and particularly the period of community restoration, between Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. No such moral world analysis of the postexilic, restoration period has been undertaken. As we will see below, researchers have placed significant focus upon the Persian period, especially the identity of various social groups within postexilic Yehud. While these explorations have filled in our understanding of the period, the specific question of moral worlds has not been asked. Identity studies, to the extent that identity entails moral identity, will prove helpful in describing moral world perspectives.

While the pursuit of moral worlds related to specific groups within Israel is theoretically preferred, it may not always be pragmatically achieved. Some texts (like Malachi) address both a specific group (priests) but also the community at large. How the moral world of one group among others may be fully distinguished and discerned is likely beyond our ability. As shared members of a community, it is not unreasonable that moral worlds of groups overlap to some degree if not significantly.<sup>153</sup> One particular focus of this investigation will be the group that constitutes the leaders of postexilic Yehud. At the same time, the moral world of the community at large may be commensurate at points with its leaders, so the content of the address to and description

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<sup>153</sup> This is the critique made by Jacqueline E. Lapsley, review of *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, by Andrew Mein, *ThTo* 61.2 (2004): 258-60.

of the community at large will be carefully weighed. After all, just as the moral world of a group is a conglomeration of its members, with varying yet similar perspectives, so the moral world of the community is but a general reflection of the moral worlds of the various communal groups.

Additionally, the work and world of Malachi serve as an interesting case study because of their location near the end of the biblical history of Israel and their connection with, perhaps, the last of the OT prophets. The world of Malachi is awash with the great streams of OT tradition. From the accretion of tradition available to Malachi, why does he emphasize those he did? How do they specifically inform his moral world? How do they speak to the circumstances of his community? Even more than traditions (and symbols) which address the social world of his community, could the prophet be highlighting for subsequent generations essential moral matters that should inform their own moral world? This leads to the second phase of our study.

The *minor and second phase* of this investigation is to consider how the moral world of Malachi may inform contemporary ethical reflection upon Malachi and the OT. Within the theoretical framework of the general approaches to the significance of the OT's ethical dimensions, I am taking the position that a descriptive approach is logically a critical beginning point. As Eckart Otto contends, "If we want to understand a given text we must also understand its history."<sup>154</sup> Unlike many descriptive approaches, this work will also consider how this descriptive effort may help illuminate the formative moral world of Malachi and the glimpse he provides to the systematic or universal moral

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<sup>154</sup> Eckart Otto, "Of Aims and Methods in Hebrew Bible Ethics," *Semeia* 66 (1994): 161-72.

world.<sup>155</sup> This will also permit us to assess and weigh the efficacy of each approach, and particularly the value of the descriptive approach since it is the most elusive and demanding of the tasks.

This phase of inquiry will explore further the multivalency of the term “moral world” (and the choice of it in the title for this research). While the terminology of “moral world” mostly applies to descriptive approaches, as a general concept it can be detected in formative and systematic approaches as well. Some formative approaches emphasize the power of OT narratives, which may create a world or work within an assumed one, to disclose the reality of God and transform the faithful community, by addressing and overturning *the reader’s moral world*.<sup>156</sup> Likewise, systematic approaches are committed to identifying moral universals and patterns through the particulars of Israel. For example, Wright explains, “Israel’s particularity serves their universal significance. Their concrete existence in history functions not in spite of its particularity but precisely through and because of it to disclose the kind of ethical behavior, attitudes and motivation God requires universally in human communities.”<sup>157</sup> In this way systematic approaches demonstrate an interest in *the moral world*.

This moral world analysis and assessment will unfold over the following four chapters. In the next chapter, we will explore the social world of Malachi. The third

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<sup>155</sup> Rogerson, Birch, and Wright were noted above as representative of the three general approach to OT ethics that acknowledge, albeit to different degrees, the necessary overlap of the descriptive task with the normative appropriation of the OT for contemporary ethics.

<sup>156</sup> Birch, “Old Testament Narrative and Moral Address,” 80-83.

<sup>157</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 469. Interestingly, Wright also brings together the literary and systematic approaches: “To regard Israel and the Old Testament as an ethical paradigm forces us constantly to go back to the hard given reality of the text of the Bible itself and imaginatively to live with Israel in their world (‘inhabiting the text’), before returning to the equally hard given reality of our own world, to discover imaginatively how that paradigm challenges our ethical response there,” 71.

chapter will consider the symbolic world of Malachi with a focus on religious symbols and traditions preserved in the text. Using the tools of rhetorical analysis, the fourth chapter will examine closely the text of Malachi and the six units that comprise his address to his community. This culminating analysis of his moral world will leverage what we learn from the social and symbolic worlds of Malachi. The final chapter will extend the moral world analysis to the three general approaches to OT ethics and consider the forms of ethical reflection in Malachi for insight related to contemporary practice of OT ethics.

## CHAPTER 2: THE SOCIAL WORLD OF MALACHI

Even physical, economic, organizational, and political aspects of the social world can influence morals. The primary aim of this chapter is to illuminate certain features of the social world prevalent in the fifth century B.C. Persian province of Yehud that influenced Malachi's moral world and resonate through his text.

Most attention to the social setting of Malachi has focused on perceived conflict among different groups. Torrey senses the beginnings of Judaism and proto-Pharisee-Sadducee conflict between the pious and a liberal priestly group.<sup>158</sup> Hanson identifies preserved in the text a critique against the Zadokite priesthood originating from a coalition of Levitical priests and prophetic visionaries, possibly even including marginalized Zadokite priests.<sup>159</sup> Kessler advances the charter group model that pits faithful Yahwistic returnees, willing to work amidst Persian imperial structures, against Yehud remainees.<sup>160</sup> Berquist identifies the situation as inner conflict between developing Jewish social groups each advancing favored traditions.<sup>161</sup> In-group disputes are set alongside opposition with outsiders, foreigners, and evildoers. He links the in-group conflict to changes in imperial policy. The social world feature of groups-in-

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<sup>158</sup> Torrey, 1-15.

<sup>159</sup> Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 281-2. See also Redditt, "The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting," for a similar scenario involving dissident Levites.

<sup>160</sup> Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists: Power Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud," 91-122. This describes the operating conditions of the late sixth and early fifth centuries although it is not clear how he specifically views Malachi fitting into the situation.

<sup>161</sup> Berquist, "The Social Setting of Malachi," ; Jon L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

conflict will be taken up in more detail later in the chapter, but understanding Malachi's moral world warrants a wider view of the social world.

As noted in the previous chapter, Gottwald has proposed that social science data needs to be assembled through a grid of societal categories (physical, cultural, social organizational/political, and religious). Much good work has been done toward this end. Extremely valuable are the works of Lester Grabbe and Paula McNutt—the latter focused on the social world of ancient Israel and the former with expanded and detailed attention on the postexilic Persian period.<sup>162</sup> More broadly the social world of the Persian Empire has been illuminated most notably through the splendid historical volume of Briant,<sup>163</sup> the cultural and institutional digest of ancient Iran by Dandamaev and Lukonin,<sup>164</sup> and the collection of primary source material by Kuhrt.<sup>165</sup> A variety of conference volumes, monographs, and articles noted throughout offer more focused attention to specific aspects of the social world.

Rather than cataloguing again or differently the social science data relevant to understanding Malachi's social and moral world, I am emphasizing six main features of the social world experienced in the province of Yehud that seem particularly relevant to assessing Malachi's moral world. For heuristic purposes, while socio-religious matters are intertwined greatly with politics and economics, I will suspend attention to religious

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<sup>162</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period. Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (LSTS 47; vol. 1; London: T&T Clark, 2004); McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*.

<sup>163</sup> Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002).

<sup>164</sup> Muhammad A. Dandamaev and Vladimir G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (trans. Philip L. Kohl; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>165</sup> Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

structures and materials that are relevant to Malachi's moral world until the consideration of Malachi's symbolic world in the following chapter. Each feature will be situated in the historical streams influencing its development (preexilic Israel, the Neo-Babylonian empire experience, and the Persian empire) with increased attention given to Persian imperial influence. Each element will be examined and supported with evidence from the archeological record and testimony preserved in the primary sources. Given the limitations associated with dating much of the Persian period remains and texts, including Malachi, it is difficult to present a purely diachronic analysis of Malachi's social world. While trying to be diachronically sensitive, some aspects of the following six features are informed unavoidably by our synchronic knowledge of the Persian period. Lastly, each of these six components will be connected with the biblical texts of the period and especially Malachi. Observations on particularly relevant takeaways and implications for our moral world analysis (in chapter four) will conclude each section. The six main features to be considered are: 1) an imperially dominated Yehud; 2) an economically constrained Yehud; 3) a small, sparsely populated Yehud; 4) a dismayed Yehud; 5) a family-centered Yehud; 6) a divergent Yehud.

## **An Imperially Dominated Yehud**

### Historical Background

Israel had a long history of struggle with empires. Since the glory days of David and Solomon, Israel as divided kingdoms experienced conflicting interactions with larger and more dominant nations. Over 120 years of conflict with and subservience to the Assyrian empire resulted in the end of the northern kingdom in 721 B.C. and the

decimation of much of the southern kingdom during Sennacherib's southern campaign in 701 B.C. Jerusalem endured the long Assyrian conflict but could not survive Zedekiah's revolt against the Babylonians. Thousands, including the young elite of Jerusalem, were exiled. The king was killed and replaced by a provincial governor. The city was vacated and overturned. The temple was raided and destroyed. The effect on the identity of the people of Judah prompted new mechanisms for survival and those who survived had to reassess their own moral world.<sup>166</sup>

During the closing decade of exile in Babylon for the Jews, a new power surged to the forefront.<sup>167</sup> In a little more than a decade Cyrus the Great defeated the Medes (c. 550 B.C.), overcame by surprise Croesus, the king of Sardis (c. 546 B.C.), and supplanted the Babylonian king Nabonidus with seemingly little opposition. He cast himself as a liberator of the people offering assurances of continuity and opportunities for collaboration with new rulers.<sup>168</sup> The commissioned return of the Jews by Cyrus as preserved in Ezra 1, understood as God's providential care and prophetic fulfillment by the writer of Ezra, approximates what we know of Cyrus's policies and agenda. With little doubt, Cyrus's support of Judah blended religious overtures with political and military objectives, including the establishment of a loyal, repatriated people in a strategic area for economic control of the Syria-Palestine region and a military staging

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<sup>166</sup> Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: A Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989); Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*.

<sup>167</sup> For an overview of important historical issues and additional bibliography, see Peter van der Veen, "Sixth Century Issues: The Fall of Jerusalem, the Exile, and the Return," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources* (eds. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 383-405; André Lemaire, "Fifth- and Fourth-Century Issues: Governorship and Priesthood in Jerusalem," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources* (eds. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 406-25.

<sup>168</sup> Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East: c. 3000-330 BC* (2vols.; New York: Routledge, 1994), 659.

ground for advancing toward Egypt.<sup>169</sup> As such, Cyrus established Yehud as a province with a governor.

Darius secured the throne after the murder of Cambyses, son of Cyrus, and inaugurated the height of Persian imperial dominance. Darius's role as usurper or royal protector is unclear, but his administrative skill, political maneuvering, military prowess, and keen advancement of royal ideology are without question.<sup>170</sup> He emphasized the rightful rule of the Achaemenids as representatives of Ahura-Mazda and propagated this with royal imagery throughout the empire. His efforts to strengthen administration, expand building projects, and subdue Greece provided stability and stimulated the economy. In Yehud, with the approval and support of Darius, Zerubbabel and Joshua oversaw the completion of the temple.

Xerxes became the heir apparent to Darius near the age of twenty (c. 498) becoming the satrap of Babylon. As the son of Cyrus's daughter (Atossa), he further established Darius's claim of Achaemenid privilege to the throne in contrast to Darius's firstborn son by the daughter of Gobryas. He inherited a vast kingdom and sought to establish himself in continuity with the rule of his father: "I am Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of all kinds of people, king of this earth far and wide, son of Darius the Achaemenid."<sup>171</sup> At the beginning of his reign, the war with Greece held the attention of Xerxes—a risk with high reward. Control of the Mediterranean and a weak Greece would have economically fueled a massive Persian empire and facilitated its ongoing

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<sup>169</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 44-9.

<sup>170</sup> Josef Wiesehöfer, "The Achaemenid Empire," in *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (eds. Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66-98, 72.

<sup>171</sup> From inscriptions XV and XE in Kuhrt, *Ancient Near East*, 301.

dominance. Yet tactical decisions such as the burning of Athens emboldened the Greeks and empowered their resistance against the Persians. Losses at the borders were compounded by problems closer to home such as the Babylonian revolts (c. 484-482). Additionally, as tradition professes, Xerxes's sexual trysts and growing harem set off palace squabbles that disrupted his court. The spiraling effects led to Xerxes's assassination in 465 B.C.

Historians offer competing views of Xerxes. The Greek historians construe Xerxes as a mad despot and the epitome of decadence.<sup>172</sup> Based on these portrayals of decadence and accounts of temple destruction, some modern historians conjecture that Xerxes reversed many of the policies of Darius that began the decline of the Persian Empire. Richard Frye begins his discussion of Xerxes writing, "The reign of Xerxes was a period of consolidation of the foundations built by his father, but it was also a change in direction in both religious and ruling policies of his predecessors, and the beginning of a stagnation and decline in various features of the Achaemenid Empire."<sup>173</sup>

Xerxes did increase the central power of Persia by placing more Persians in positions of authority and reducing the autonomy of other regions in the province.<sup>174</sup> This fact, combined with destruction at temples in Babylon and Egypt, have led some to conclude that Xerxes implemented a change in Darius's policy. Berquist argues that Xerxes's reversal of Darius's policy of supporting temple functionaries across the empire

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<sup>172</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 515-7; .

<sup>173</sup> Richard N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1984), 126.

<sup>174</sup> By using more Persian elites at the highest levels of authority, Xerxes, on the pattern of his father, mitigated the ability of the local elite to rebel while granting them sufficient authority, responsibility, and tribute to placate them. Wiesehöfer, "The Achaemenid Empire," 75-6.

resulted in a “depletion of local economies” and financial strain on temple activities.<sup>175</sup>

In order to sustain the temple, the priests had to choose between increasing revenue locally or reducing temple costs. Because the temple lacked power, other groups began to flourish yielding a pluralistic environment. Berquist concludes that a decrease in imperial support for temples and the redirection of Xerxes’s attention westward and inward could have spawned effects on Yehud similar to the context faced by Malachi.

However, there is no direct evidence to support that a policy shift had any real effect in Yehud and is not necessary to explain the circumstances of Malachi. Modulating economic conditions associated with an agrarian economy and the ongoing tribute demands of the empire could just as likely have driven the adverse circumstances.

In fact, it is doubtful an empire-wide policy shift occurred at all. Briant has pushed back against the characterization of the despot and decadent Xerxes.<sup>176</sup> Briant points out that little is actually known about Xerxes after the defeat by the Greeks in 479 B.C. He also has dismantled the assessment of Xerxes as a destroyer of temples.<sup>177</sup> The evidence for such is jumbled together from disparate sources read without regard for bias. Likewise, given the ancient linkage between politics and religion, it was not uncommon for disciplinary or destructive measures to occur at temples of rebellious nations (as was the case in Babylon and Egypt). Ultimately, Xerxes’s religious practices and policies seem to vary little from his father’s.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, under Xerxes the empire reaches “the

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<sup>175</sup> Berquist, *Judaism in Persia’s Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach*, 87-94 who is generally followed by McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 189-90.

<sup>176</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 543-9.

<sup>177</sup> See also Wiesehöfer, “The Achaemenid Empire,” 74.

<sup>178</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 549. Josephus provides a similar assessment of Xerxes writing, “For he followed his father in all the things which he had done for His service, and he held the Jews in the highest

apex of Persian artistic creativity” and continues to excel at advancing a royal ideology of rightful dominion and order.<sup>179</sup> Within this broad historical backdrop, we can assess Yehud’s imperial experience by examining more closely imperial political structures through three basic categories: institutions, processes, and culture.<sup>180</sup>

### Imperial Political Institutions

Institutions refer to the adaptive measures undertaken by the empire to administer and organize people groups to provide security and advance the allocation of resources.<sup>181</sup> Under the aegis of the emperor, satraps oversaw the administration of the empire being assigned a large division of the empire’s lands.<sup>182</sup> The satrap, a “protector of the kingdom” selected from the emperor’s family or close Persian supporters, served as a designate of the king to preserve order and extend power, having the military of Persian nobles and the garrisons of the king at his disposal or available for support.<sup>183</sup> Decentralized governing rested significant powers in the satraps who at times leveraged

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esteem.” (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.120-1 [Thackeray, LCL].) However, Josephus relates the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah as occurring during the reign of Xerxes rather than Artaxerxes, raising some question to the reliability of his assessment.

<sup>179</sup> Wiesehöfer, “The Achaemenid Empire,” 81.

<sup>180</sup> These categories and the their descriptions are borrowed from “A Model for Synchronic Analysis of the Roman Empire” that follows a model of Thomas F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1975) summarized in Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 64-5.

<sup>181</sup> Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 64.

<sup>182</sup> Herodotus recounts twenty administrative units (*Hist.* 3.89-97) but the number more likely varied. The satrap Beyond the River (Ebir-nari) is not included in any available listing but its existence is certain. Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 133-4; Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 487.

<sup>183</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, assert that Darius separated the administrative role of the satrap from military command, but after Darius the distinction began to dissolve, 101.

their position into revolt. The king checked this power through periodic inspectors or visits by other officials frequently termed the “King’s Eye” by Greek historians.

Satrapies were further divided into provinces—each being an “independent socio-economic region with its own social institutions and internal structure; with its old local laws, customs, traditions, systems of weights and measures, and monetary systems.”<sup>184</sup> Provinces were governed by an assignee of the king or satrap. The position’s terminology varies; at times the provincial ruler is described as a “satrap” or, as depicted in Malachi, a “governor” (פֶּהָרָה). Yet the identification of governors between Zerubbabel (c. 520 B.C.) and Nehemiah (c. 445-432 B.C) is unknown.<sup>185</sup>

The Persians maintained imperial unity through a diversity of means that frequently allowed local leadership and traditions to remain in place under the satrap, as was the case for Yehud, in exchange for abiding loyalty and meeting financial or military obligations.<sup>186</sup> The biblical account of Darius’s support for the temple reconstruction and the priesthood are congruent with this practice of institutional autonomy and similar to policies implemented by Darius in Egypt.<sup>187</sup>

Additionally, the empire sustained control by implementing mutually beneficial mechanisms that extended beyond simple social organization to provide coherence to the empire while simultaneously reminding the populace of the imperial presence.<sup>188</sup> For

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>185</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 148-9; Lemaire, “Fifth- and Fourth-Century Issues: Governorship and Priesthood in Jerusalem,” 408-10.

<sup>186</sup> Wiesehöfer, “The Achaemenid Empire,” 85-6; Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 64.

<sup>187</sup> Wiesehöfer, “The Achaemenid Empire,” 73.

<sup>188</sup> Kenneth G. Hoglund, “The Achaemenid Context,” in *Second Temple Studies* (JSOTSup 117; ed. Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 54-72, esp. 56; Josef Wiesehöfer, “Achaemenid Rule and

example, well-maintained and sophisticated highway structures enabled the communication of news and orders across the empire and facilitated the easy flow of goods and persons, creating economic interdependence.<sup>189</sup> The empire ensured these transportation and communication systems via the implementation of garrison systems to secure road networks and maintain a peacekeeping presence.<sup>190</sup> Additionally, the promotion of Aramaic as the *lingua franca* fueled the development of language and scripts that helped facilitate broad communication.<sup>191</sup>

Satraps and governors, the faces of imperial political institutions, provided strong, and, as needed, severe supervision. Integrating mechanisms such as an international language and a highway system protected by military garrisons served the economic and military needs of the empire. Even more, the mere existence of these institutions and mechanisms served as an ever-present reminder of imperial dominion.

### Imperial Political Processes

Political processes entail the maintenance of control primarily through harnessing the surplus goods in the economic system through taxation, tribute, or more coercive means of extraction; controlling the economic cycle from production to consumption; and regulating mechanisms of all kinds via legal implementation, enforcement, and

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Its Impact on Yehud,” in *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts* (FAT 53; ed. Louis Jonker; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 171-85, esp. 181.

<sup>189</sup> Wiesehöfer, “Achaemenid Rule,” 173; Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, 109.

<sup>190</sup> Hoglund, “The Achaemenid Context,” 62-4.

<sup>191</sup> Wiesehöfer, “Achaemenid Rule,” 173.

adjudication.<sup>192</sup> Matters involving the economic system will be addressed separately below; here the focus will be legal processes.<sup>193</sup>

The Great King maintained imperial control through an emphasis on right (*rāsta*).<sup>194</sup> From a Xerxes inscription at Persepolis:

Xerxes the king proclaims: By the favor of Ahura-Mazda I am of such a kind that I am a friend to what is right, I am no friend to what is wrong. (It is) not my wish that to the weak is done wrong because of the mighty, it is not my wish that the mighty is hurt because of the weak.

What is right, that is my wish. I am no friend of the man who is a follower of the Lie. I am not hot-tempered. When I feel anger rising, I keep that under control by my thinking power. I control firmly my impulses.

The man who cooperates, him do I reward according to his cooperation. He who does harm, him I punish according to the damage. It is not my wish that a man does harm, it is certainly not my wish that a man if he causes harm not be punished.<sup>195</sup>

As a representative of the god Ahura-Mazda, the king viewed himself as the source and master of justice.<sup>196</sup> The emperor's claim extended over all kingdoms of the empire, which Ahura-Mazda had granted him with the support of other gods (cf. Cyrus Cylinder, Ezra 1). He ensured right and justice through the faithful administration of the law of Ahura-Mazda and the law of the king.<sup>197</sup> As Wiesehöfer points out, the law (*data-*)

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<sup>192</sup> Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 64.

<sup>193</sup> The Persian interest in legal processes has prompted some to postulate Persian influence in the formation of the Pentateuch. See James W. Watts, *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson, *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007). This will be explored further in the following chapter under the section "A Symbolic World within the Social World".

<sup>194</sup> According to Wiesehöfer, "Achaemenid Rule," "the language of the king uses as a word for 'right' and 'just' or 'law' and 'justice' the adjective or noun *rāsta* with the literal meaning 'adjusted', 'arranged', related to the Latin *rectus* ('right', 'correct', 'proper', upright)," 175.

<sup>195</sup> Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, XPI, §2a-c, 503-4.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, DB §8, 143; Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 130, 212.

<sup>197</sup> Wiesehöfer, "Achaemenid Rule," 180. Cf. Ezra 7:12-26 for parallel language. See XPh §4d in Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, 304-5 for assurances of blessing associated with obeying the law.

represents “that which was laid down/settled.”<sup>198</sup> A single codification of laws is unknown and does not seem to be in view but rather faithful administration and good judgment in the implementation and exercise of existing local law.<sup>199</sup>

In the Persepolis inscription, Xerxes viewed himself as having the ability to maintain self-control and to subjugate his impulses to wise thinking in order to ensure justice and right were accomplished through fair judgments.<sup>200</sup> As Wiesehöfer notes, the king provided a sense of “vertical solidarity” between the gods and the people.<sup>201</sup> He served the gods as the people served the king and he ruled over the people with good leadership, favor, and justice as Ahura-Mazda ruled over the king. In his role of ruler, the king provided law and justice, peace and prosperity, and protection from enemies in order to seek the welfare of his subjects thereby both inducing loyalty and substantiating his right to punish.

*Rāsta* also entailed cooperation with the king and, therefore, was as closely tied with loyalty as it was social order. Social order was best maintained through loyalty to the king. Even some crimes may not receive full punishment if they were outweighed by

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<sup>198</sup> Wiesehöfer, “Achaemenid Rule,” 180. Wiesehöfer, “The Achaemenid Empire,” observes that “the spread of the Persian word *data-* (‘law’, ‘order’) into almost all languages of the Ancient Near East is a good example of the effectiveness of an elementary ‘ideological’ vocabulary, propagated by the center to underline the authority of the Great King,” 87.

<sup>199</sup> As Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, state, “Extremely diverse legal systems and institutions which ranged from the very primitive to the highly developed, existed in the Achaemenid state,” 116. The Laws of Hammurapi continued to be copied and certain sections used for adjudicating cases in Babylon during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Hence the importance of having good judges is seen in the mission of Ezra to implement law and appoint judges (Ezra 7). The Persian appointment of judges is reported in both Greek and Babylonian texts. See Dandamaev, 122-23.

<sup>200</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 213.

<sup>201</sup> Wiesehöfer, “Achaemenid Rule,” 179.

right acts and loyalty.<sup>202</sup> Those who were disloyal and rebellious were deemed supporters of the Lie, which the king had the responsibility to confront.<sup>203</sup> He sought to rid the empire of those who aimed to disrupt the divinely sanctioned order of the empire.<sup>204</sup> Addressed primarily to the powerful elite, that is, those with the ability to rebel, the king's promise of blessing for "cooperation" was mutually beneficial—what Briant terms a "dynastic pact"—the king exchanged blessing for loyalty in order to preserve his reign and imperial order.<sup>205</sup>

### Imperial Political Culture

Political culture is shaped through the dispersion of information and prevalence of imagery that help to reinforce directly the imperial ideology and integrate indirectly the mindsets, traditions, and cultural attitudes of the populace concerning ideas, beliefs, values, and norms.<sup>206</sup> Symbols of imperial dominion over the provinces provided an external cultural influence on institutions and ways of life.<sup>207</sup> Particularly royal imagery and demands of the Great King reinforced the imperial ideology and shaped the culture. Royal messengers, the royal table with its offerings, and royal paradises illustrate the predominance of royal ideology and its effect on the culture.

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<sup>202</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 213; Herodotus, *The History* (trans. David Grene; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 1.137 and 7.194.

<sup>203</sup> Wiesehöfer, "Achaemenid Rule," 176.

<sup>204</sup> The primary example is Darius's Behistun inscription that recounts Darius recapture of the throne and refutation of numerous rebellions across the empire. See Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, DB (esp. §8, 54-55), 141-57.

<sup>205</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 354; Cf. Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.5.22-26.

<sup>206</sup> Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 64.

<sup>207</sup> Høglund, "The Achaemenid Context," 54.

### ***Royal Messengers***

Even certain functionaries played a key role in advancing royal imagery. While the terms vary, the function of messengers was prevalent both in the king's court and throughout the empire.<sup>208</sup> Messengers had responsibilities for guarding access to the king, introducing those seeking the presence of the king, preparing the way for a royal visit, inspecting and reporting on conditions throughout the empire, carrying messages, and even dispensing discipline and punishment. At a general level, responsibilities for guarding the king and delivering messages were assigned to eunuchs in the court of the king or macebearers in the royal entourage (Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.77; Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.3.19). More specifically, a high ranking official like the chiliarch, who directed the royal chancellery and captained the Immortals—the 1000 elite guards of the emperor—and constantly ensured the safety of the king, held the duty of presenting petitioners and delivering messages.<sup>209</sup> Those seeking an audience with the king but were unwilling to kneel before him dealt directly with the “introducer.”<sup>210</sup>

Messengers also played a significant role outside the court throughout the empire. The Persians maintained a network of roads used for military maneuvers and trade networks.<sup>211</sup> The road system also facilitated an express mail service of couriers riding by

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<sup>208</sup> Messengers had long filled a critical role in ancient Near Eastern empires. See Gary H. Oller, “Messengers and Ambassadors in Ancient Western Asia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. Jack M. Sasson; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 1465-73.

<sup>209</sup> Aelian, *Var. hist.* 1.21; Xenophon, *Cyr.* 1.3.8; Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.34; Nepos, *Con.* 3.3. On the function and prestige of the chiliarch, see Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 262 and Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, 107-8; Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 111-12.

<sup>210</sup> Nepos, *Con.* 3.3; Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 261.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 364-71.

horseback delivering letters, reports, and orders between high officials and the king, some of which have been preserved in the Persepolis Fortification texts.<sup>212</sup> Spaced apart a “distance a horse could cover in a day when ridden hard” (Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.17-8), postal relay stations with inns and store rooms were staged along the road allowing messages to be passed from rider to rider or providing a fresh horse to the rider so that the message could be delivered rapidly.<sup>213</sup> At full speed, the courier system could traverse the empire from Sardis to Susa in about 7-9 days as compared to foot travel that took approximately 90 days. Herodotus marveled, “Than this system of messengers there is nothing of mortal origin that is quicker” (*Hist.* 8.98).

Messengers also had responsibility for inspecting and monitoring activities throughout the kingdom and reporting back to the king. Because of the king’s kindness and his propensity for rewarding loyalty, the king had “eyes” and “ears” throughout the empire to ensure stability and minimize unrest (Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.2.10ff). The one who reported back to the king may have been simply a loyal servant or someone assigned this special task. Xenophon describes “circuit commissioners” (*Cyr.* 8.6.16) traveling with a small army of the king to inspect the satraps, monitor tax collections, and assess the cultivation of land to identify areas needing help, correction, or the direct attention of the king.

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<sup>212</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 108. Someone trusted by the sender handled private correspondence independently of these couriers, 110-1.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 107. Herodotus (*Hist.* 5.53) describes the staging of the royal road from Sardis to Susa which covered 450 parasangs with 111 royal stations— an average distance between stations of 4 parasangs. The length of a parasang is disputed. Based on Dandamaev’s calculations, one parasang = 5.5 kilometers or 3.3 miles. However, based on examples from Fortification texts, he estimates the royal stations were approximately 30 km apart which exceeds the average distance of 22.5 km based on Herodotus’ description.

In a variety of ways, as Briant points out, “To Greek eyes, the presence and activity of the Achaemenid couriers represented and symbolized the territorial dominion exercised by the Great King.”<sup>214</sup>

### ***The Royal Paradises***

The emperors maintained royal paradises or gardens throughout the empire as both agricultural estates and parks for leisure and rest.<sup>215</sup> They included samples of the best trees and plants of the empire and may also have included something like game preserves for hunting. Irrigations systems were used to bring water for development, production, and sustenance. With flora and fauna, even the exotic, the paradise represented the splendor and beauty of the empire. A variety of texts suggest that each satrapy included a garden-paradise, corresponding to Xenophon’s account of Cyrus having each satrap develop a paradise (*Cyr.* 8.6.12).<sup>216</sup> They “had a widespread reputation”<sup>217</sup> and contributed to the image of the great king as a gardener-king who was committed to the development of the land and its care.

### ***The Royal Table***

Whether at the royal paradise, palace, or traveling from place to place, the royal table accompanied the emperor. Accompanying the nomadic king and table was the expectation that the location visited would provide hospitality and that the very best of

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<sup>214</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 376.

<sup>215</sup> Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, 510-12; Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 200-3; See Xenophon, *Oec.* 4.8.13.

<sup>216</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 233.

<sup>217</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 143.

the choice foods would be shared at the king's table.<sup>218</sup> The movement of the king from capital to capital or to intervening paradises emphasized that "power was where the king was"—that is, power resided in the person not the place.<sup>219</sup> On a nomadic procession through the empire, Xerxes sent messengers or heralds ahead of him to announce the king's visit, demanding "earth and water" as well as preparation of food (Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.32).<sup>220</sup> The expense encountered for the dinner was substantial, "(f)or the dinner was something ordered long before and was treated as a very serious matter" (Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.119, [Grene]). Provision of food was just one type of gift offering that demonstrated subordination and political allegiance (cf. 1 Kgs 4:27). As Briant notes: "By coming in person to take possession of the symbolic gifts, the Great King reminded the cities and peoples that their most marvelous products were reserved for him alone. Every available text indicates that in this way the Great Kings periodically reaffirmed their dominion over the peoples they controlled."<sup>221</sup>

The practice extended as well to satraps and governors so that all peoples throughout the empire shared the experience of the royal table and its expectations (cf. Neh 5:17). According to Xenophon, Cyrus set the expectation that the satraps would imitate him (and their delegates in turn would imitate the satrap) in appointing armies, receiving loyal servants, educating their sons, hunting and exercise, showing honor and

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<sup>218</sup> Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, 509; Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 200-2; Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.118-20.

<sup>219</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 189. In part, the movement was seasonal with the royal court present in Babylon during the fall and winter, Ecbatana in the summer, and Susa in the spring while holidays were spent in Pasargadae or Persepolis, Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 111.

<sup>220</sup> The meaning of the phrase "earth and water" is not clear but seems to relate generally to accepting Persian control. For bibliography, see Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, 199, n.6.

<sup>221</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 193.

distinction to the most worthy at the table (*Cyr.* 8.6.6-13). Also like the king, satraps relocated throughout their provinces between cities and paradises funded by provincial taxes and table goods.<sup>222</sup>

### Observations and Implications

Previous studies on imperial influence in Malachi have focused on changes in imperial temple policy. However, reevaluations of Xerxes suggest that religious policy changes may not lie in the background as a cause for the temple practices critiqued by Malachi.

Yet in other ways contextual allusions in Malachi to governmental structures, concerns over the concept of justice, and the royal symbol system reflect the reality of imperial dominance. Ezra 1-6, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all describe a political structure in line with imperial common practice. Although unnamed, the governor (פִּתְחָה) of Yehud during Malachi's day is present, and meeting his expectations, reflective of the Great King of Persia, is apparently viewed as more important than those of Israel's Great King – YHWH Sebaoth. Despite some level of autonomy, the actuality of living within an empire with all its demands lies underneath the postexilic texts. This state is made explicit in the prayers of Ezra 9:8-9 and Neh 9:36-37 where the community laments its existence as enslaved to the king— a stirring metaphor for imperial dominance.<sup>223</sup>

The Great King viewed himself as master of justice, and with that came the responsibility of provision and protection.<sup>224</sup> From the prayer of Darius (DPd), "King

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 388.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 213, 241.

Darius proclaims: May Auramazda bring me aid, together with all the gods; and may Auramazda protect this country from the army (of the enemy), from famine, from the lie!”<sup>225</sup> Briant summarizes, “Here in a nutshell are the royal virtues: the good fighter (who gives chase to an enemy army), a king of justice (who fights the Lie), a protector of the land and its peasants (who is the source of prosperity for the fields).”<sup>226</sup> In this inscription we have a remarkable parallel of concerns present in Malachi against which YHWH, the Great King, defends himself, promising that the enemy Edom will not rebuild, the God of justice is coming to make things right, and the God of provision is willing to be tested to see if he will not rebuke the devourer and fill the storehouses.

As images of the Great King, royal messengers, royal paradises, and the royal table served as reminders of imperial presence and its ongoing expectations. Malachi partakes in this symbol system with emphasis on messengers, table offerings, and land as a means of experiencing and showing honor to the Great King YHWH. In particular, the prevalence of royal messengers as royal functionaries and symbols of the royal ideology provide an important imperial backdrop for the announcement of Malachi —”my messenger”— and numerous functional parallels for the role of the messenger in the text of Malachi.

### **An Economically Constrained Yehud**

Perhaps no feature of the social world illustrates the relevance of the social world to the moral world like economics. Physical world realities shape how people sustain life, help determine what is possible for people to do, and more significantly often sets one’s

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<sup>225</sup> Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, DPd §3, 487.

<sup>226</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 241. See also Wiesehöfer, “Achaemenid Rule,” 177.

priorities. Economics at its essence concerns the management of one's estate or household. Pseudo-Aristotle, in the century following Malachi, sets out to explore the relationship between managing the state and managing the household in his *Oeconomica*. He describes four types of "household" management: "the administration of a king; the governors under him; of a free state; and of a private citizen" (Xenophon, *Oec.* 2.1.1-6 [Marchant, LCL]). So the size of one's "household" varied depending upon one's role. As part of an agrarian society, most individual householders utilized their goods and other household resources to facilitate production balanced with the management of expenditures as income from production allowed. On a much larger scale, the king oversaw the same functions for the empire as a whole. While the king's attention was the going concern of the empire and necessitated primarily a center-focus, the empire was fueled via peripheral resources managed provincially by governors who collected tribute and taxes from individual householders in order to fund the centralized strategy of the Great King. To further appreciate the reality of an individual landholder in a small province like Yehud, we must consider the conditions associated with an agrarian society, the strategies and expectation set by the king and executed by his local personification—the governor.

### The Agrarian Level of Society and Its Context

The social structure of individuals in society can be classified into four groupings.<sup>227</sup> Urban citizens who owned land possessed full rights and participated in the assembly. Second, freemen (most likely foreigners serving in an official capacity) lacked

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<sup>227</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 152-54.

property ownership and did not have full civil rights. A third group consisted of the semi-free population of farmers and small land holders. Settlement data from Ezra 2 and Neh 7 and the description of early Yehud in Neh 5 point to land ownership in line with preexilic Israel.<sup>228</sup> Slaves, who still may have maintained rights to marry, own property, and incur debts, composed the final grouping. Dandamaev asserts that the privilege and function of the two latter groups were not that different in society.

Economic realities of Malachi's social world remained closely tied to the pastoral and agricultural utilization of the land.<sup>229</sup> Agriculturally the primary products continued to be wheat, barley, olives, and grapes (cf. Neh 13:12, 15) congruent with the vision of the land given the Israelite slaves (Deut 8:8-9) and the agricultural calendar preserved on a limestone tablet at Gezer. Rainfall was essential for agricultural success. Rain occurred primarily in the winter and spring months with lesser rain experienced in the southern and eastern portions of Palestine (the Yehud province) than in the north and west.

Agricultural yields could be diminished not only by the lack or timing of rain but also by disease and pests. The dozen different Hebrew words describing these pests, frequently translated as 'locust', signal their prevalence.<sup>230</sup> The pasturing of small cattle, such as sheep and goats, complemented the agricultural use of the land.<sup>231</sup> These provided the economic and subsistence staples of wool, hides, meat, and milk.

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<sup>228</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 206.

<sup>229</sup> Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (LAI; ed. Douglas A. Knight; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 85-8; Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 198.

<sup>230</sup> See examples and citations in King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 87.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-4.

Ancient empires had long valued the land of ancient Israel for its agricultural resources.<sup>232</sup> The Assyrian conquest of Palestine squashed urban centers leaving mostly rural settlements. Babylon essentially continued this policy maintaining but not developing the rural settlements to ensure receipt of agricultural products as taxes. In the early Persian period, the Achaemenids focused attention first on the development of the coastal plain to enhance maritime trade and control the Via Maris. Persian development activity in Palestine or the hill country remained limited, with the exception being “roads in southern Palestine, as part of the military, administrative, and economic effort to control the route to Egypt.”<sup>233</sup> The rural hill country continued to function primarily as agricultural producers, precluding the need for urban development.<sup>234</sup>

### Balancing Center and Periphery

Agrarian societies during the Persian era are generally considered to function within the economic theory of “Asiatic mode of production” or a tributary mode of production in which production flows from the peripheral groups to a center group. This places the burden of production on peripheral groups in the society responsible for providing their own subsistence and for meeting the demands of the center. Establishing a

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<sup>232</sup> Oded Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 19-52, esp. 24; Oded Lipschits, “Jerusalem Between Two Periods of Greatness: The Size and Status of the City in the Babylonian, Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods,” in *Judah Between East and West: The Transition from Persian to Greek Rule (ca. 400-200 BCE)* (eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Oded Lipschits; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 163-75, esp. 168-9.

<sup>233</sup> Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 26.

<sup>234</sup> During Malachi’s time, the Persian provinces of Palestine were beginning to experience Greek economic and cultural influences. See Einat Ambar-Armon and Amos Kloner, “Archaeological Evidence of Links Between the Aegean World and the Land of Israel in the Persian Period,” in *A Time of Change: Judah and Its Neighbours in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods* (LSTS 65; ed. Yigal Levin; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 1-22; Hoglund, “The Achaemenid Context,” 60-2.

working economic theory such as Asiatic mode of production for the Persian Empire is not simple or straightforward. The essence of Persian economic strategy was the collection of money and resources in support of the military and related infrastructure.<sup>235</sup> Undoubtedly a center-periphery model affected empire economics, but a simple uni-directional model may oversimplify the economic relations that would not have been sustainable over time.

Olmstead's explanation of the Persian tribute system falls into this trap.<sup>236</sup> Based largely on evidence from Babylon, Olmstead argued that over taxation peaked during the reign of Xerxes and Artaxerxes. Olmstead sketches the empires as draining the periphery of gold and silver while returning little. The lack of precious metals and coinage elevated the need for credit and the centralization of loaning. "As coined money became a rarity, hoarded by the loan sharks, credit increased the inflation, and rapidly rising prices made the situation still more intolerable."<sup>237</sup> Olmstead works from the premise that taxes had to be paid in silver. Lack of silver led to borrowing and pledging collateral or use of land or slaves that were ultimately claimed in loan default. He does not take into account the payment of taxes in-kind. The developing pattern is that a citizen gave land as collateral to a business firm (like the Murashu of Nippur) for short term loans.<sup>238</sup> The firm claimed

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<sup>235</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 190-1; as Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, notes, it is better to talk about tribute policy rather than economic policy because economics was in service to "political-military concerns," 809.

<sup>236</sup> Albert Ten Eyck Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 297-9.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 298. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, points to similar conditions in Babylon and Egypt but is reserved in attributing the same situation elsewhere, 129.

<sup>238</sup> Matthew W. Stolper, "Murashu, Archive of" *ABD* 4:927-28. The commercial firms made profit by acquiring land outright or obtaining land rights through defaulted pledges then subleasing the land or managing indebted tenants. They also received payments in-kind and converted them to silver for payment of taxes.

the land on defaulted payments and took effective control of it. The landholder served as an indebted tenant to the firm. However, payments to the firm, who paid the royal taxes, were made in-kind. The firm converted the in-kind payment to silver.

The real question is whether the conditions in Babylon were characteristic of the whole. Wiesehöfer reasonably argues that the economic system of the empire was generally consistent with its predecessors “with special developments in land tenure, business practices, and legal instruments” primarily occurring in Babylonia.<sup>239</sup> However, the economic cycle of Babylon is reminiscent of Neh 5 wherein land and children are mortgaged or sold to meet debt and tax obligations. It would seem that at a minimum the early fifth century conditions of Babylon were present to some degree in mid-fifth century Yehud. Little more can be said about the forty years in Yehud between these descriptions from Babylon and Jerusalem. While the conditions may be similar, this does not imply that similar systems existed in both the highly developed urban Babylon and the rebuilding cultic center of an agrarian society like Jerusalem.

As Olmstead argued, treasuries do illustrate the centrality of imperial economics, but one cannot conclude that this was sign of over taxation and hoarding.<sup>240</sup> Treasuries resulted not only from tribute but also from war victories throughout the life of the empire. Booty often was used for dispensing or making royal gifts to those loyal to the king. Indeed, maintaining the provincial village communities of the periphery helped to secure the empire politically and economically and to ensure its ongoing prosperity and

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<sup>239</sup> Wiesehöfer, “The Achaemenid Empire,” 79.

<sup>240</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 803.

dominion.<sup>241</sup> Xenophon relates an illustration of this Persian perspective in Cyrus's campaign against the Assyrians (Xenophon, *Cyr.* 4.4.1-13). The alternatives made available to the Assyrians were to surrender or be killed. Cyrus preferred the former because it helped accomplish his two aims of mastering the population, especially property owners, and keeping them on the land replete with the resources of the day—"full of sheep and goats, cattle and horses, grain and all sorts of produce" (Xenophon, *Cyr.* 4.4.4 [Miller, LCL]). He explained his strategy to his allies, "an inhabited country is a very valuable possession, but a land destitute of people becomes likewise destitute of produce" (Xenophon, *Cyr.* 4.4.5 [Miller, LCL]). Those willing to lay down arms and continue to live freely on their own property required less supervision and provision for the Persians and functioned as a demonstration to other inhabitants and groups of a mutually beneficial relationship with the Persians—new ruler, same life.

The Great King's priority was the empire at large, which entailed centralized collection of tribute and storehouses of the best the kingdom offered. Yet this was dependent upon a developing and producing periphery as the source of empire-sustaining resources in the form of tribute and taxes.

### Tribute and Taxes

The satraps, governors, and their local designees charged and collected tribute, forwarding a portion to the empire's treasury and using a portion to maintain peace and secure the frontiers.<sup>242</sup> Gifts, offerings, and tributes collected for the king were expected

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 806.

<sup>242</sup> Wiesehöfer, "Achaemenid Rule," 172; Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 411; Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.6.

to be of the best available (Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.6, 23). In provinces like Yehud taxes were most likely paid in-kind.<sup>243</sup> Ezra 4:13, 20 and 7:24 list three different kinds of taxes (מַדָּה, בְּלוֹ, and הַלֵּךְ), but the distinction is not available to us.<sup>244</sup> The Persepolis Fortification texts provide evidence of tax payments in the form of animals and also levies on grain and wine.<sup>245</sup> Payment of taxes in-kind required a surplus beyond levels needed for subsistence. The exact amount for both of these is unknown.

It is generally assumed that the tax burden was great but without good measures of income, productivity, etc. it is difficult to know what portion of one's income was dedicated to taxes.<sup>246</sup> Subsistence living probably existed at a low standard of living, especially by today's standards. While it is difficult to quantify the impact of taxation, the multiplicity of demands upon income and resources is undeniable. Assuming Nehemiah 5 is reflective of the earlier period of Malachi, the people of the community had to pay the king's tax (Neh 5:4), the local satrap/governor tax (5:14-15), and the multiple local religious levies (Neh 10:33; 12:44-47; 13:10-13).<sup>247</sup> Even if the taxes themselves were not overly burdensome during normal years, challenges encountered in an agrarian society, such as diminished rainfall, drought, pestilence, or pest, would have exacerbated

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<sup>243</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 207-8.

<sup>244</sup> Each term seems to be borrowed from Akkadian and related primarily to in-kind payment of taxes. HALOT, מַדָּה, (or מַנְדָּה), 1911; HALOT, בְּלוֹ, 1834; HALOT, הַלֵּךְ, 1860; Hugh G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 55-6.

<sup>245</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 439-43.

<sup>246</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 193.

<sup>247</sup> The apparent failure to meet temple demands, in both Malachi and Nehemiah, is suggestive of economic difficulties. Malachi positions the tithing as a test, and Nehemiah calls for pledges of support (10:36-40; 13:10). As Grabbe (*ibid.*) points out, "you do not pledge what is already being faithfully carried out," 208.

the royal and religious demands of tax and tithes.<sup>248</sup> Fragile circumstances like these are common for the period. This characterization corresponds with the circumstances described and lamented by Joel.<sup>249</sup> Haggai (1:6) and Nehemiah (5:3) depict aspects of these circumstances as bookends to the era in which Malachi is situated. Malachi itself points to the challenge of the locusts and barren vines (3:11) while having to satisfy the honor due the governor.

### Observations and Implications

The Great King certainly was interested in local production and the going concern of the provinces. Xenophon presents the Persian King as concerned as much with farming as warfare (*Oec.* 4.4.4-11).

To those governors who are able to show him that their country is densely populated and that the land is in cultivation and well stocked with the trees of the district and with the crops, he assigns more territory and gives presents, and rewards them with seats of honor. Those whose territory he finds uncultivated and thinly populated either through harsh administration or arrogance or carelessness, he punishes and appoints others to take their office (Xenophon, *Oec.* 4.4.8-9, Merchant LCL).

This may offer the simplest explanation for the Persian investment in Jerusalem in the mid-fifth century B.C. Others in the region perceived Nehemiah's imperial mission as for the welfare of the city (Neh 2:10). This tells us two things. First, it supports the view

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<sup>248</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 585, 809-10.

<sup>249</sup> The dating of Joel is disputed with positions ranging from the ninth to second century BC. See Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Second ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 411-14. The extended focus on agrarian social conditions fit with the undeveloped Jerusalem during the exilic and early Persian periods. While the text mentions the temple, it is not definitive whether it refers to a fully functioning complex or just the site where grain and drink offerings continued (1:9,13; 2:14). The address to elders and priests with no mention of a king further suggests a time after the destruction of Jerusalem. These features place Joel in the vicinity of Malachi in the early postexilic period and perhaps even in the exilic era. Joel 4:19 (3:19) anticipates the desolation of Edom cited as having occurred in Mal 1:3. If both texts refer to the same event, Joel's text may precede or approximate the invasion of Edom by Nabonidus (c. 552). See Elie Assis, "The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel," *VT* 61.2 (2011): 163-83 on Joel as an exilic text.

proposed by Briant that while demanding, the empire acknowledged that a developed, improved periphery was a greater asset to the center.<sup>250</sup> Second, since the work of Nehemiah post-dates the circumstances of Malachi, it help confirm that Jerusalem and its environs are in need of welfare.

Signs of these economic realities and constraints are present in the book of Malachi. The economic constraints present in the small province of Yehud can be attributed to the imperial economic policies and practices as well as the recurring challenges of a pastoral and agricultural society. In 1:6-14, the community is confronted for bringing unsatisfactory sacrifices. In Malachi 3:10-11, the community is challenged for not meeting its tithing obligations. Is the community struggling to get by? Is it a question of means or a priority setting issue? God's rebuke of the "eater" is the primary focus for addressing "the need" that has preempted tithing. Malachi singles out "the eater" as having a detrimental effect on production (Mal 3:11). It is not certain whether this is a period of intensified effect or simply a recurring and frequent problem faced by agrarian societies. It seems likely that hampered production as a result of "the eater" has placed an economic constrain on the community, only compounded by the demands of the empire.

### **A Small, Sparsely Populated Yehud**

#### The Archeological Record

Archeological evidence and glimpses provided by the biblical texts point toward a small, sparsely populated Yehud and Jerusalem during the early Persian period and the days of Malachi. Even after the sponsored return from exile by Cyrus, both Yehud and

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<sup>250</sup> Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 809.

Jerusalem pale in comparison to their former existence in terms of settlement patterns and population.

Malachi addresses his message to Israel, which likely has more of a theological significance (to be explored later), but nonetheless, the address points us naturally toward the primary location of Israel which is the former kingdom of Judah and its capital Jerusalem—a one-time kingdom, now a mere province in the massive Persian empire. Jerusalem includes a rebuilt temple, but the city itself has not yet been restored. Available Persian period imperial records and inscriptions that describe the lands included in the extensive empire do not mention the province of Yehud. This may be moot since Briant argues that the purpose of the available listings was to represent the expanse of the kingdom, a “politico-ideological message” rather than a simple cataloging of imperial provinces.<sup>251</sup>

The available archeological record suggests that Jerusalem and Yehud were shadowy figures of the glory held before the desolation and deportation sponsored by the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar. In the aftermath of the Babylonian destruction, some remained in the land (Ezek 33:24; 2 Kgs 25:12) providing evidence for the appearance of a continuous culture in particular regions.<sup>252</sup> Yet in the main, what would become the

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 173, 177, 180.

<sup>252</sup> Hans M. Barstad, “After the “Myth of the Empty Land”: Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 3-20. Faust fairly points out that continuity appears to be less the case at single sites, based on planned and salvage excavations, as compared to the general continuity apparent based on survey data. Avraham Faust, “Settlement Dynamics and Demographic Fluctuations in Judah from the Late Iron Age to the Hellenistic Period and the Archaeology of Persian-Period Yehud,” in *A Time of Change: Judah and Its Neighbours in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods* (LSTS 65; ed. Yigal Levin; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 23-51, especially 48.

Persian province of Yehud experienced a dark age preserving little insight into life in the Neo-Babylonian period.<sup>253</sup>

The Persian period offers a few more portals into life in Yehud yet limitations still persist. Lipschits, an adept reader of the archeological record, has recently pointed out that “in most sites in Judah there is no distinct stratum with a well-defined pottery assemblage from the Persian period.”<sup>254</sup> Based on his survey of data from Engedi, Jericho, Jerusalem, Tell en-Nasbeh, and Beth-Zur, he concludes, “actual Persian period finds are meager and that most are out of any archeological context.”<sup>255</sup> Generally small and medium settlements, many in prior Iron II sites, increased while larger sites declined marking a move from urban to rural in the Persian period.<sup>256</sup> In fact, findings suggest that any development or change during the period was small and gradual providing almost “no clear archeological, chronological, or historical anchors between the events of 586

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<sup>253</sup> Bustenay Oded, “Where Is the ‘Myth of the Empty Land’ To Be Found: History versus Myth,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 55-74.

<sup>254</sup> Oded Lipschits, “Persian-Period Judah: A New Perspective,” in *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts* (FAT 53; ed. Louis Jonker; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 187-211.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 193. Also, Lipschits, “Jerusalem Between Two Periods of Greatness,” cautiously but fairly points out that the negative presence of archeological remains may not be conclusive of no or limited activity in the Persian period. The lack of finds during the Persian period may point to the intensity of later building efforts that simply destroyed and removed previous eras in order to “build new buildings and leave their own impression on the city,” 165.

<sup>256</sup> Lipschits, “Persian-Period Judah: A New Perspective,” 194. See also Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 202-4 and Hoglund, “The Achaemenid Context,” 57.

B.C. and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.<sup>257</sup> Periodization within the Persian period can only be based on historical records and not the archeological one.<sup>258</sup>

Despite the limitation of findings, a number of recent surveys have been utilized to discern a general picture of the period. Survey work is affected by numerous factors (i.e., worldview of the surveyor, surveying resources, techniques, site visibility, etc.) yet the work provides data from which to draw general, provisional conclusions on types of sites, peaks of habitation, and estimates of populations.<sup>259</sup> Within the boundaries of these constraints, the general hypothesis that Yehud of the early fifth century was a small province with a sparse population can be reasonably supported. Additionally, Faust's analysis and trending of the survey data combined with planned and salvage excavation data demonstrates a much smaller Judah during the fifth century B.C. compared to Judah's height in the seventh century and its eventual recovery in the third century B.C.<sup>260</sup> Faust also rightfully contends that even if the population estimates from the settlement data are open to challenge, the general character of the trend—deeply downward during the Babylonian period with only gradual change through the Persian period—is well substantiated and widely accepted. A brief examination of the boundaries and population estimates for Yehud and Jerusalem substantiate the claim.

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<sup>257</sup> Lipschits, "Persian-Period Judah: A New Perspective," 196.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 196-97. This is the substance of Lipschits's critique of Carter's division of the material record into two historical periods [*The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*], which he deems an arbitrary imposition onto the record.

<sup>259</sup> Oded Lipschits, "Demographic Changes in Judah," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323-76, see especially p. 325, n.4.

<sup>260</sup> Faust, "Settlement Dynamics and Demographic Fluctuations," 33.

## Provincial Boundaries and Population

While general agreement on the core of Yehud exists, the extent and ‘firmness’ of its boundaries are questionable. Differences of opinion primarily concern the inclusion of the Shephaleh, the area of Lod, as well as Engedi and the location of a southern border.<sup>261</sup> Based upon the line of border fortresses<sup>262</sup> and the distribution of ‘*yhd*’ seal impressions, Ephraim Stern locates the northern boundary of Yehud at Tell en Nasbeh and the southern boundary near Beth-zur. In the east, his reconstruction of Yehud includes both Jericho and Engedi with the western portion inclusive of Gezer in the Lod area and Tel Ḥarasim in the Keilah district.<sup>263</sup> While he includes the Shephaleh in the Yehud province, he concedes that few Persian period finds have been produced.<sup>264</sup>

Stern limits Persian-period Jerusalem to the southeastern hill, which includes the city of David, the Ophel, and the Temple mount.<sup>265</sup> A settlement gap occurred on the western hill between the destruction period and Hellenistic era. Based on the varied collection of seal impressions including governor and official names, Stern contends that Ramat Raḥel with its citadel was the “provincial headquarters for the governor consistent

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<sup>261</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 138. He excludes the Shephaleh and Lod but includes Engedi.

<sup>262</sup> Carter offers a valid critique of Stern’s characterization of “border fortresses.” He follows Hoglund who maintains that the fortresses are concerned with protecting trade and messenger routes rather than provincial borders. Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 89; Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration*, 202-3.

<sup>263</sup> Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods* (ABRL; vol. 2; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 430.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 434.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

with the latter days of the Judean monarchy.”<sup>266</sup> Stern does not propose any population estimates for the province.

Carter proposes a smaller Yehud than Stern.<sup>267</sup> In the west, he does not include the Shephaleh on the basis of geographic features and the tendency of empires to utilize natural boundaries, even though the Shephaleh was part of Judah between the United Monarchy and the Babylonian Empire.<sup>268</sup> With the western boundary at the Shephaleh, the eastern boundary is the Rift Valley. The southern border lies near Beth-Zur in the early Persian period then extended south of Hebron between the central hill country and the Negev during the later Persian period.<sup>269</sup> The northern border lies just north of Bethel so that Yehud includes much of the land of Benjamin. He estimates the population of Yehud to be approximately 13,350 in the Persian I period (538-450) with at most 800 inhabiting Jerusalem.<sup>270</sup> This would make Yehud to be about 20-25% of its preexilic population and Jerusalem an even smaller 10%.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 437. Contra Lipschits [Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 34-35] who contends that the capital was still likely at Mizpah since the Babylonians established Gedeliah there (2 Kgs 25:10), but only until the arrival of Nehemiah. At that point Nehemiah returns the provincial capital to Jerusalem, which was already the cultic center after the rebuilding of the temple. Whichever is the case, Jerusalem during Malachi’s day was still not the capital city of the province.

<sup>267</sup> Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 91-99.

<sup>268</sup> Moreover, Carter also points out that the Eshmunazer inscription places Dor and Joppa under Sidonian control (*Emergence of Yehud*, 97-8). Cf. Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 490.

<sup>269</sup> Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, breaks from the consensus and includes Hebron in Yehud, which others have deemed to be under Edomite control. Carter argues the references in Maccabees are late and no archeology or textual evidence puts Edomites in Hebron in the Persian period, 99.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 201. This computation is based on excavated areas plus survey areas in Judah and Benjamin (including a 10-20% correction for yet unidentified areas) multiplied by a generally accepted population coefficient of 25 persons per dunam. [Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah* defines a dunam as “1000m<sup>2</sup> or one-tenth of a hectare; since approximately 2.5 acres make a hectare, a dunam is one fourth of an acre,” 200.] Also, Carter attempts to distinguish two settlement periods during the Persian Period based on changing historical circumstances in the mid-fifth century. Methodologically Carter’s interest in bifurcating between periods necessitates some extrapolations and assumptions that are

Lipschits's more recent readings, interpretation, and synthesis of the archeological excavations and demographic surveys of the Judean area yield a larger settlement area.<sup>272</sup> Contra Carter's boundaries, Lipschits includes a portion of the Shephaleh (an additional 195 dunams). Differences between Carter and Lipschits illustrate that the real question about population estimates is the number of known settlements—a limitation that both attempt to correct, but nonetheless leaves some question about the results.

Lipschits's 2003 analysis concludes that from the end of the Iron Age to the Persian period, the settlement area of Judah declined 72%.<sup>273</sup> The most significant decline occurred in and around Jerusalem (89%) with continuity only in the Northern Judean Hills (2% change). The Benjamin region was the only other region to decline less than the overall average (56%). The settled area would correlate to population estimates of 110,000 near the end of the kingdom of Judah and approximately 30,000 during the Persian period.<sup>274</sup>

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subjective. He estimates 534 settled dunams during Persian Period I and 826 settled dunams in Persian Period II.

<sup>271</sup> Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 247.

<sup>272</sup> Lipschits, "Demographic Changes in Judah," *op.cit.* See 357-60 for a comparison and reconciliation of his work, which shows more settled area, to previous work done by Finkelstein for the Iron Age and by Carter for the Persian period. Lipschits's work is difficult to compare with Carter's because Carter divides the province into ecological zones while Lipschits uses more general geographic zones. Lipschits's 1,205 settled dunams less the Shephaleh (195 dunams) results in a total of 1,010 which is still 22% more than Carter's totaled settled dunams of 826 (Persian Period II).

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 355-6. See his Table 1. The settled area of Judah that later comprised the province of Yehud (according to Lipschits) experienced a decline of 64% with population estimates decreasing from approximately 80,000 to 30,000 (62.5%).

<sup>274</sup> His population estimate includes a coefficient of 30% applied to the regions north and south of the Judean hills and the Shephaleh region for gaps in knowledge associated with some unsurveyed areas. He estimated settled dunams declined (Iron Age to Persian Period) from 4,320 to 1,345. The portion of settlements that constituted the province of Yehud declined from 3,225 to 1,205. See his Table 2 and 3.

Lipschits estimates the population of Jerusalem and its environs declined from approximately 25,000 to 2,750, with the final number being Jerusalem at its height of the Persian period beginning at the sponsored settlement of Jerusalem by Nehemiah.<sup>275</sup> The sharp decline in the settlement of Jerusalem supports the “historical premise that most of the exiles to Babylon had been residents of Jerusalem.”<sup>276</sup> Lipschits goes further suggesting that “the absence of architectural remains may mean that Jerusalem was wretchedly poor, not just in the period after the Babylonian destruction but also at the height of the Persian period.”<sup>277</sup>

All of the population estimates based on archeological studies yield a lower population than genealogical and census lists preserved in Ezra-Nehemiah. Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 report lists of returnees totaling approximately 50,000.

<i>Source</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Settled Dunams</i>
Carter (PP I)	13,350	534
Carter (PP II)	20,650	826
Lipschits	30,125	1205
Ezra 2/Nehemiah 7	c. 50,000	

<sup>275</sup> Lipschits, “Demographic Changes in Judah,” 329-34. Lipschits’s ratio of population in Yehud to Jerusalem corresponds to Nehemiah’s estimate of one-tenth settled in Jerusalem. Lipschits has subsequently reduced his estimate for the city of Jerusalem from 60 dunams to 50 dunams. See Lipschits, “Jerusalem Between Two Periods of Greatness,” 170-73. The western hill was not occupied during the Persian period. He concurs that the main settlement area existed along the central ridge in the city of David—an area of about 20-30 dunams. Additionally, he asserts that the Ophel hill between the city and the temple mound would have been “the preferable option for settlement” given its location, topography, and fortification possibilities. The majority of finds are in earth fills likely from the Ophel region. When combined, Lipschits envisions a settled Jerusalem of about 50 dunams with a population between 1000-1250 people. Resettlement was a gradual process with the city not becoming a true urban center until the Hellenistic period.

<sup>276</sup> Lipschits, “Demographic Changes in Judah,” 364.

<sup>277</sup> Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 31.

Carter and Lipschits consider the list secondary, reworked, and constructed for literary or historiographic purposes and thus unreliable.<sup>278</sup> The particular character and features of the lists may help account for differences in records and later population estimates. The function of the list is open to question since the listing is repeated with few variations and related to two different settings.<sup>279</sup> While the opening of the lists describe them as a register of returnees, other features included have raised questions. First, the list counts people both by family and by location and in the second half alternates the references of “sons of” and “men of” with no clear distinction between people and place. This may point to some kind of composite listing that may include some remainees despite the heading on the list.<sup>280</sup> This would have the benefit of reducing the discrepancy between archeological population estimates and the list. The groups in the list associated with locations are concentrated in areas just south of Jerusalem, in the region of Benjamin, and in Lod. These generally correspond to regions that had less decline in settled area or signs of continuity between exile and return, especially the Northern Judean Hills.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 81; Lipschits, “Demographic Changes in Judah,” 358. See Israel Finkelstein, “Geographical Lists in Ezra and Nehemiah in the Light of Archeology: Persian or Hellenistic?,” in *Judah Between East and West: The Transition from Persian to Greek Rule (ca. 400-200 BCE)* (eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Oded Lipschits; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 49-69 for his argument that the lists reflect a second century provenance.

<sup>279</sup> Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* notes that the list seemed to have functioned as an introduction to a narrative since Ezra 3:1 and Neh 8:1 connect to the list with the same opening phrase yet introduce different stories. He concludes that Ezra 2 probably depends on Neh 7 because the list’s dating scheme fits later material better whereas Ezra 1-6 dates are based on references to Persian kings, 29. F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) notes that Neh 7:5 attributes the list to the “Book of Genealogy,” perhaps a common source for Ezra 2 and Neh 7.

<sup>280</sup> Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, thinks the inclusion of “natives” unlikely, 58.

<sup>281</sup> Lipschits, “Demographic Changes in Judah,” 357.

Second, the listing of leaders in Ezra 2:2 may suggest that this was not a single group of returnees but represents multiple generations of those returning at various times although the duration of that period is not clear. For example, Blenkinsopp points out the recurrence of some of these names elsewhere in Ezra-Nehemiah (e.g., Rehum in Ezra 4 and five of the names included in the signers of the covenant in Neh 10).<sup>282</sup> He concludes these are leaders over a period of time representative of the book from Zerubbabel to Nehemiah and beyond.<sup>283</sup> In contrast, Williamson concludes the list is reflective of groups returning in the early period before temple reconstruction, but given the composite nature of the list, does not rule out it representing returnees over a longer time period.<sup>284</sup> So the register may not necessarily provide a snapshot-census.

Third, the list provides a total of 42,360 for the assembly, but the sum total of those enumerated is just shy of 30,000. The difference is unknown but may refer to women and children included among the assembly.<sup>285</sup>

Finally, nothing in the list restricts those included to the boundaries of the Persian province of Yehud.<sup>286</sup> The list's heading does not designate the name of the province or its boundaries. In the settlement of Jerusalem in Neh 11, Judeans that are included in the resettlement of Jerusalem come from villages in the Negev and the Shephelah and

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<sup>282</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 85.

<sup>283</sup> He argues Ezra is represented in the name variation Azariah (Neh 7) and by his father Seriah (Ezra 2), 85.

<sup>284</sup> Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 32.

<sup>285</sup> Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 56-7; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 37-8. Fensham asserts that that number of women or children would be too low given the number of men. However, as Williamson notes, perhaps more of the returnees were younger yet unmarried given the risk and uncertainty of the return.

<sup>286</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 137. The list does not designate the province and potentially predates the designation of the province. See Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 48.

Benjaminites from the Lod/Ono area. All of these areas fall outside the boundaries of the province reconstructed by archeologists and may be largely villages with only partial Jewish populations, yet Nehemiah considers them part of the Jewish community.<sup>287</sup> The list very likely describes Jewish settlers without regard to Persian borders and thus does not provide a one-one comparison.

### Observations and Implications

The determination of Yehud's borders is most likely unavailable to us now. The Persians clearly defined borders in certain Greek territories to help prevent border disputes and establish tribute expectations.<sup>288</sup> Whether or not this occurred in Yehud and the surrounding provinces is not clear. The evidence that leads Stern, Carter, and Lipschits to differing conclusions may signal a shifting border redrawn at different occasions—a practice not uncommon elsewhere in the empire.<sup>289</sup>

The province that was formerly the kingdom of Judah is smaller and less populated during the Persian period. The estimates of Carter and Lipschits are both estimated based on settlement data at the height of the Persian period, which did not begin until the mid-fifth century. This suggests that the Yehud and Jerusalem of Malachi's day were even smaller.<sup>290</sup> Other postexilic texts (Neh 7:4 and Zech 7:7; 10:8) also intimate this general conclusion of smaller, less populated Yehud.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Cf. Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 249.

<sup>288</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 73.

<sup>289</sup> Wiesehöfer, "The Achaemenid Empire," 85.

<sup>290</sup> For agreement, see Faust, "Settlement Dynamics and Demographic Fluctuations," 36-43. He asserts that the decline may have been closer to 90%. Regardless of where the decline falls in the range of 72% (Lipschits) or 90% (Faust), the major takeaway is that the decline is substantial and sharp leaving the

Moreover, the population of Yehud is relatively insignificant when compared with the population of the empire as a whole, with estimates ranging from 17 to 35 million.<sup>292</sup> Even at the low end of empire population estimates, Yehud was a very small province in the grand sweep of the empire, and its population represented slightly less than two-tenths of a percent of the empire's population.<sup>293</sup> While the small province of Yehud may have escaped the direct attention of the emperor, it would not have been immune to the earlier described imperial ideological influence that swept the empire.

### **A Dismayed Yehud**

Besides Israel, Edom is the only other geopolitical reference specifically named in Malachi. In the larger prophetic corpus, the condemnation of Edom stems in part to Edom's reversal from ally to antagonist in the early sixth century that manifested itself in the looting of Jerusalem after its demise (Obad 13) and the handing over of survivors to the Babylonians (Obad 14, Ezek 35:5).<sup>294</sup> Retribution against Edom came to be expected among the remnant of Judah (Joel 3:19; Jer 49:13; Ezek 25:13).<sup>295</sup> We can surmise from

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Persian province of Yehud much less populated and still in recovery during the Persian period—still only beginning during the days of Malachi.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>292</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 77.

<sup>293</sup> On analogy, the city of Wilmore to the state of Kentucky approximates the population relationship of Yehud to the Persian Empire.

<sup>294</sup> Beth Glazier-McDonald, "Edom in the Prophetic Corpus," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite For He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition* (ABS 3; ed. Diane Vikander Edelman; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 23-32, esp. 28.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 29; André Lemaire, "Nabonidus in Arabia and Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 285-98, esp. 290.

the mention of Edom in Malachi that the old nemesis had become a source of dismay to Yehud. Signs of Edomite recovery were perhaps casting doubt on hopes of retribution and adding to the distress of an imperial existence.<sup>296</sup>

Our insight into the geopolitical realities between Yehud and Edom are limited in the early fifth century. Edom was most likely destroyed or subjugated by the Babylonians under Nabonidus during his campaign to Tema c. 552 B.C. as indicated in *The Nabonidus Chronicle*, “he/they encamped [against E]dom.”<sup>297</sup> Archeological studies indicate burning and destruction during the mid-sixth century at Teman and Bozrah but not entire devastation.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Glazier-McDonald, “Edom in the Prophetic Corpus,” raises the possibility that Edom came to symbolize “the enemy” (Ezek 35; Obad 16-17; Is 34; 63). “Most likely, Edom came to symbolize the hostile, encroaching world when the hope of actual restoration of Israel was being vitiated by the recognition of human powerlessness in the face of cold political reality—as Babylonia hegemony gave way to Persian,” 31. However, Edom as symbolic is not clear from the passages she cites. Rather than symbolic of all enemies, more likely, Edom represented the alternative choice that YHWH made between Jacob and Esau in Israel’s tradition. (See Elie Assis, “Why Edom? On the Hostility Towards Jacob’s Brother in Prophetic Sources,” *VT* 56.1 (2006): 1-20.) As Mal 1:2-5 suggests, the people seem concerned that YHWH has altered his choice. This would indicate that social world dynamics are being interpreted through Israel’s symbolic world, which will be considered further below.

<sup>297</sup> Bill T. Arnold, “The Neo-Babylonian Chronicle Series,” in *The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation* (ed. M.W. Chavalas; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 407-26, esp. 418-20, 425 n. 60; John R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSup 77; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 157-74; Diana Edelman, *The Origins of the ‘Second’ Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (ed. Philip R. Davies; London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2005), 250ff. The reference could be to the capital city Bozrah or the outlying city of Dumah. Edelman seems correct in her assertion that it is Bozrah since it is on route from Lebanon to Tema, which is the most likely route for Nabonidus. Also, a relief was found at Sela near Bozrah most likely attributable to Nabonidus. See Lemaire, “Nabonidus in Arabia and Judah,” 287; Veen, “Sixth Century Issues: The Fall of Jerusalem, the Exile, and the Return,” 396-8.

<sup>298</sup> Piotr Bienkowski, *Busayra Excavations by Crystal M. Bennett 1971-1980* (vol. 13; Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Council of British Research in the Levant, 2002), 482. Cf. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 159. Bienkowski offers a possible explanation for the limited burning, “Thus, the fire was concentrated in what can be described as key symbolic ‘public’ areas: the ‘cella’ of the temple, the ‘reception room’ of the palace, and a major gateway through the defences (sic). This might suggest that the destruction was not random outbreaks of fire, but deliberate and focused messages left by a conqueror intent not on annihilation but on subjugation.”

Archeological findings suggest some continued activity at certain sites. At Tawilan, a cuneiform legal document mentioning the ascension of Darius (probably Darius I or II) indicates some interaction between Haran and Tawilan as well as the presence of those who could read cuneiform.<sup>299</sup> Jewelry from the sixth to fifth century further signals the town's international connections.

Rebuilding found at Bozrah soon after the destruction by fire suggests the possibility of a change from a palace to the governor's administrative center, perhaps as the establishment of a provincial center for the Persians.<sup>300</sup> Some renewed functions at Bozrah would be sensible since the city was an important site for controlling trade in the region.<sup>301</sup> Additionally, activity at the copper mines in Feinan (Punon) renewed during the fifth century after being dormant during the Neo-Babylonian period.<sup>302</sup> However, the overall lack of "stratified Persian period material" at any of these sites does not allow for much certainty and makes doubtful a recovering, thriving Edom during the fifth century B.C.<sup>303</sup>

Edomite influence is present in the Negev and southeastern Yehud "from Lachish and Marisa almost up to Beth-Zur" during the early Persian period.<sup>304</sup> Ostraca found at Arad and Tel Sheva with numerous personal names having a theophoric component of

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<sup>299</sup> Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 157-74; Piotr Bienkowski, "The Edomites: The Archeological Evidence from Transjordan," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite For He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition* (ABS 3; ed. Diane Vikander Edelman; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 41-92, esp. 47-9; Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 457.

<sup>300</sup> Bienkowski, *Busayra Excavations*, 478.

<sup>301</sup> Edelman, *Origins of the 'Second' Temple*, 250ff.

<sup>302</sup> Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 331, 458.

<sup>303</sup> Bienkowski, "The Edomites: The Archeological Evidence from Transjordan," 47-9.

<sup>304</sup> Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 443.

*Qos* have helped establish a certain Edomite presence in the area by the fourth century.<sup>305</sup> Edom had already made inroads into this area during the Assyrian period, gaining control of copper resources and trade routes across the Negev toward Gaza from the King's Highway.<sup>306</sup> After the fall of Edom to the Babylonians, some remnant of survivors may have fled westward into the Negev or were forced there by the Arabs as Stern suggests.<sup>307</sup> Edomite presence in the region is assured but exact causes are inconclusive due to incomplete data.

### Observations and Implications

There is no sense of a renewed kingdom in Edom under the Persians. As Edelman concludes, during the late Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, three possibilities are viable: Edom functioned with a vassal king, Edom became a province within the Beyond the River satrapy, or Edom was placed under Arab control.<sup>308</sup> The latter may be supported by the fact that in Ezra-Nehemiah, Edom is not mentioned;<sup>309</sup> that Geshem the Arab represents the southern area may also be suggestive of the latter of the three possibilities.

Despite the unlikely possibility that the Edomite nation east of the Jordan was recovering, the growing presence of Edomites in the Negev and southern Judah may have

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<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>308</sup> Edelman, *Origins of the 'Second' Temple*, 250ff; Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 444.

<sup>309</sup> J.M. Myers, "Edom and Judah in Sixth-Fifth Centuries B.C.," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (ed. H. Goedicke; Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 377-92 (esp. 385) notes a possible textual variant in Ezra 9:1. The parallel passage in 1 Esd 8:66 (8:69 Eng) substitutes Edomites for Amorites.

been sufficient cause to raise alarm and create dismay among inhabitants of Yehud who had come to expect a ruined and punished Edom. For Malachi, the destruction of Edom and the promise of its perpetual demise by YHWH underscore the assurance of God's favor toward Israel over Edom.

### **A Family-Centered Yehud**

The basic social unit before the Babylonian exile was the **בֵּית אָב** which was led by the paterfamilias and consisted of his wife, unmarried children and the families of his married sons as well as other extended family relatives such as older parents, aunts, uncles, and servants.<sup>310</sup> A **בֵּית אָב** was adjoined to others to form clans primarily on the basis of blood relations but also fictively in some cases.

During the exile, it is generally asserted that the **בֵּית אֲבוֹת** replaced the clan as an organizational structure. For example, Smith asserts that this was a survival mechanism during exile that evolved from the settlement policies of the Babylonians and the need for large labor groups.<sup>311</sup> The **בֵּית אֲבוֹת** may have been more fictively associated than the preexilic clans as a result of the exilic organization experience.<sup>312</sup> During the exile, Jeremiah and Ezekiel addressed the elders (**זִקְנֵי**) as the leaders of the people (Jer 29:1; Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1). Among those who return to the land, the primary term of reference (Ezra 1:5; 2:28; 3:12; 4:2; 8:1; Neh 7:69-70) is the heads of the fathers (**רִאשֵׁי הָאֲבוֹת**). The

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<sup>310</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 39-40.

<sup>311</sup> Daniel L. Smith, "The Politics of Ezra: Sociological Indicators of PostExilic Judean Society," in *Second Temple Studies* (JSOTSup 117; ed. Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 73-97.

<sup>312</sup> McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 199.

actual term *בֵּית אֲבוֹת* occurs in Ezra 2:39; 10:16 and Neh 7:61, but presumably the varied terminology all refer to the *בֵּית אֲבוֹת* leaders.

Williamson suggests that the change may have been organically related to changing circumstances which began during the preexilic period and further modified by the exilic experience.<sup>313</sup> He notes that in the late monarchy with the increase in urbanization (and the move from strictly agricultural vocations towards artisans and craftsman), the traditional *בֵּית אֲב* was already evolving. As inheritances were divided, new settlements formed, and relocations to urban centers increased, relations that formed between households in new places of residence likely shifted the constitution and understanding of the *בֵּית אֲב*.

The postexilic texts clearly indicate that the returnees from Babylon brought with them new social structures. Yet those who remained in the land seem to have maintained kinship on the basis of place of residence. As we noted earlier, the lists of returnees in Ezra 2 and Neh 7 include names of those identified by place of residence rather than father's name. These may include those who remained in the land and joined the efforts of returnees to rebuild. Additionally, Williamson points out that in the social outcry faced by Nehemiah, the terminology (wives, sons, and daughters) points primarily to nuclear families while the heads of the *בֵּית אֲבוֹת* are not mentioned, an unusual circumstance if the *בֵּית אֲבוֹת* is the primary social unit.<sup>314</sup> Evidence of both social unit changes and the remnant of preexilic arrangements suggest, as Williamson proposes, that the social

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<sup>313</sup> Hugh G. M. Williamson, "The Family in Persian Period Judah: Some Textual Reflections," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palestine* (eds. W. G. Dever and S. Gitin; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 469-85.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 476-7.

structures may have been more diverse than a simple development from אבות to בת אב בת.

While our understanding of who constituted “family” during the period is not absolutely clear, in either case, the family structure still primarily oriented around the father or father-figure. Bossman substantiates this point looking at the recurring family and kinship terms embedded within the text of Malachi.<sup>315</sup> Bossman avers that Malachi employs the operative social kinship model to explicate problems in the religious life of his community. Within the anthropological matrix of family structures, Bossman classifies the household depicted in Malachi as the “authoritarian, inegalitarian model.” In support, he highlights the replete family references and examples that Malachi draws on to critique his community: God favors Jacob over Esau; Jacob’s family is God’s family; the priesthood’s duties are likened to a son’s responsibilities to his father; exogamy threatens the household and godly offspring; loyalty to the house results in provision; and fatherly compassion and filial obligation interplay with each other. “The religious system, then, is equated with the family system of social organization. In it, the father of the extended (authoritarian) inegalitarian family serves as the operative model for God. Household norms accordingly extend to temple cultic practice.”<sup>316</sup>

The integration of household norms and cultic practice manifests itself also in expectations of faithfulness between husband and wife that are extended to the relationship between YHWH and Israel as in Malachi 2:10-16. The particulars of that text

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<sup>315</sup> D.M. Bossman, “Kinship and Religious Systems in the Prophet Malachi,” in *Religious Writings and Religious Systems: Systematic Analysis of Holy Books in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Greco-Roman Religions, Ancient Israel, and Judaism* (eds. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs and Amy-Jill Levine; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 127-41.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

will be explored further below, but it highlights the importance of marriage in Malachi's social world. Endogamous marriage is evident as common in Israel from Abraham to Tobit.<sup>317</sup> Direct evidence of marriage practices in Malachi's world is limited. However, signs later in the Second Temple period suggest that young married couples lived in close proximity with the groom's family. This would suggest the patrilocal characteristic of ancient Israel persisted.<sup>318</sup> Adams argues that marriage arrangements held the financial interests of families as close as possible to keep resources and inheritances within the kinship group.<sup>319</sup> Elephantine marriage contracts illustrate that agreements included both legal and economic concerns.<sup>320</sup> The marriage contracts indicate the process included the groom's request for permission to marry, a promise between the husband and wife, payment of the bride price and specification of the dowry, and the criteria for dissolution. The contracts conclude with a list of witnesses. The contractual marriage practice is reflected in Tobit 7 yet it is not clear if it entailed the same provisions as in Elephantine and if either is applicable to marriage practices in Malachi. Both of these outside examples highlight the legal and economic aspects of marriage. The Elephantine contracts indicate that divorce provisions were part of the marriage process suggesting that it was not uncommon and may have been motivated economically.

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<sup>317</sup> Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 24.

<sup>318</sup> John J. Collins, "Marriage, Divorce, and Family in Second Temple Judaism," in *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 104-62, esp. 105-6.

<sup>319</sup> Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*, 23.

<sup>320</sup> Collins, "Marriage, Divorce, and Family in Second Temple Judaism," 107-10.

## Observations and Implications

The language of Malachi suggests that the household remained the core social unit. As discussed earlier, the individual householder had responsibility for managing his resources and setting priorities of their use. The foundational social relationship of father to son remains important and functions in Malachi as the analogical equivalent to the community's relationship with YHWH. Malachi also stresses the importance of the husband-wife relationship expressing concerns about certain questionable marriages and divorces occurring in the community.

### A Divergent Yehud

The social setting of Persian period Yehud and Malachi have been assessed frequently in terms of social conflict. Malachi's disputational style certainly indicates some contention among groups, but it is difficult to ascertain from Malachi what specific social groups are in conflict. Additionally, recent studies on "Judean" identity during the Achaemenid period include very little reference to Malachi.<sup>321</sup>

Hanson models two opposing groups that provide the societal framework for the early postexilic period.<sup>322</sup> The Zadokite priests, endorsed and funded by the Empire, returned from exile seeking to restore the lost cultic institutions of Israel. Their restoration program is best formulated in Ezek 40-48. They were realists and

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<sup>321</sup> Oded Lipschits, Gary K. Knoppers and Manfred Oeming, eds. *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

<sup>322</sup> Paul D. Hanson, "Israelite Religion in Early Postexilic Period," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (eds. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 485-50; Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*; Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 277-90.

accommodating to the larger reality of the Persian Empire. In response to the Zadokite program, a group of dissidents consisting of Levitical priests and visionaries who shared a view of the world shaped by the prophetic tradition (most comprehensively in the work of Second Isaiah). Their restoration program, outlined in Is 60-62, anticipated the decisive action of YHWH to restore Jerusalem. Hanson sees the conflict between these two parties as the backdrop for much of the content preserved in Isaiah 56-66. Within two generations of return and rebuilding the temple, the Zadokite party had assumed power and the community was experiencing “social stagnation and religious decline.”<sup>323</sup> According to Hanson, the book of Malachi preserves the critiques levied against the Zadokite priesthood and general indictments against the community at large.<sup>324</sup>

Within the four streams of tradition identified by Hanson as operable in the postexilic period, Malachi does not fit neatly into one stream but bears elements of both the priestly and prophetic streams. Additionally, Hanson’s reconstruction is almost too specific given the lack of particulars in Is 56-66. As Middlemas asserts, conflict is present, but the identification of the disharmony is general to the extent that a respect for Isaiah’s “intrinsic reticence to the specific” should guide our usage for understanding the restoration context.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*, 278.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 281-3, envisions two possibilities for the group that Malachi represents. The first is a coalition of Levitical priests and visionaries whose roots reach back to the days of Trito-Isaiah. Alternatively, given the extensive critique of the priesthood, it is possible the above coalition now includes marginalized members of the Zadokite priesthood pushing against the declining standards and practices of their fellow Zadokites. This group appeals to the covenant of Levi from an earlier period in Israelite history when no distinction was drawn between the priests and the Levites on the basis of Deut 18:1-8. Hanson highlights that this group referred to themselves as those who fear YHWH. He sees striking similarities in the description of Mal 3 and certain late psalms like 115, 118, 135, 147.

<sup>325</sup> Jill Middlemas, “Trito-Isaiah's Intra- and Internationalization: Identity Markers in the Second Temple Period,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International*

Kessler advances the sociological model of John Porter as a way of conceiving the nature and function of the Golah returnees. These returnees were a charter group in the sense that they were “an ethnic elite that moves into a geographical region, establishes its power base, and creates a sociological and cultural structure distinct from the one already existing in that region.”<sup>326</sup> The charter group understood themselves as those who preserved the Yahwistic faith returning to the land to “re-found” the faith while working amidst power structures maintained by the Persian imperial forces and the Yehud remainees. They held many advantages over other Yahwistic groups with their genealogical connections to past political and religious leadership, their connection with imperial powers and policies, their literacy and bilingualism, as well as their shared experience of the exile designating them as the purified remnant. The identity of the group was shaped by both inclusion and exclusion as they sought to maintain their power and position while also seeking the economic and social development of the province as an outworking of their socio-religious and political mission. Kessler depicts this model as operative during the late sixth and early fifth century, drawing heavily from texts such as Haggai and Ezra-Nehemiah. He makes no direct reference to Malachi, and moreover, the social dynamics that Kessler describes are not at the forefront of Malachi. If his model is applicable to this period and Malachi originates then, the text would have to be read as internal to the group and not directly addressing these sociopolitical realities (with the possible exception of endogamy).

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*Context* (eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary K. Knoppers and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 105-26.

<sup>326</sup> Kessler, “Persia’s Loyal Yahwists: Power Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud,” 99.

Berquist contends that due to factors on the international scene<sup>327</sup> the province of Yehud had “little social cohesion.”<sup>328</sup> In this environment, different social groups began to thrive bringing forward their championed traditions. In Berquist’s view, this social scenario and clues from the text suggest a three group theory as the best explanation for understanding the parties involved in the book of Malachi: an out-group, in-group, and inner-group.<sup>329</sup> Malachi is from the perspective of the inner-group who is critiquing the in-group and calling for them to change and live congruent with their traditions. The out-group consists of foreigners and evildoers who are rejected. This is best seen in Mal 3:13–21. Berquist helpfully moves toward more general designations for the groups rather than attempting to associate with specific groups as do Hanson and Kessler. Even in his scenario of three groups, there still seems to be a choice between two worlds—faithfulness or unfaithfulness, acceptance or rejection. Like Isaiah 56-66, the particularity is provided by “obedience to Yahwistic principles.”<sup>330</sup>

### Observations and Implications

Conflict with outsiders is prevalent in the early period of return and restoration with conflict featured in many of the biblical narratives. In Ezra 1-6, the

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<sup>327</sup> As noted above, Berquist, *Judaism in Persia’s Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach*, 87-104, associates Malachi with the reign of Xerxes. He argues Xerxes’s reversal of Darius’s policy of supporting temple functionaries across the empire resulted in a “depletion of local economies” and financial strain on temple activities. Because temple power weakened, other groups began to flourish. However, the notion of Xerxes’s policy reversal is not likely as noted above.

<sup>328</sup> Berquist, “The Social Setting of Malachi,” 121.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 123. Berquist builds from Talmon’s descriptions of later postexilic groups. “Talmon identifies an ‘out-group’ that is defined along creedal, ethnic and foreign lines; an ‘in-group’ defined along national lines; and an ‘inner-group’ defined along creedal and national lines,” 123.

<sup>330</sup> Middlemas, “Trito-Isaiah’s Intra- and Internationalization,” 122.

community faces objections to rebuilding the temple from the people of the land with the support of local Persian officials. Haggai and Zechariah present an inner conflict between those who want to rebuild the temple and those more interested in settling into the land. In the era following Malachi, similar conflicts exist. Nehemiah faces challenges from outsiders like Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem while also dealing with inner conflict over economic status and condition. After covenant renewal, Nehemiah's confrontations concern matters of covenant keeping such as Sabbath, tithing, and marriage. In Berquist's terms, we see both out-group and in-group conflict.

Some signs of outside conflict are present in Malachi surrounding dismay over Edom and some influences from foreigners through idolatry or foreign wives.<sup>331</sup> However, starker in Malachi's world is the divergence along traditional Yahwistic theological lines which Malachi characterizes as the "difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him" (Mal 3:18). As Childs emphasizes, the prophet addresses the whole of Israel, and the groups such as priests and god fearers are not politicized.<sup>332</sup> The in-group dispute is along concepts of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. Malachi features three basic contrasts that signal the presence of conflict along these lines: Jacob vs. Esau; priests vs. the idealized priest Levi; the righteous vs. the wicked.

Our social world analysis has pointed to features of the social world such as changing dynamics regarding Edom in the south or economic demands and agrarian pressures that may help to explain in-part some of the apparent conflict. Yet Malachi largely addresses these issues in terms of faithfulness. Malachi primarily describes the

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<sup>331</sup> Rogerson, "The Social Background of the Book of Malachi," *op.cit.*

<sup>332</sup> Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 494.

divergence in Yehud in moral terms such as the loved children of Jacob and the wicked country of Edom; the priest who has been unfaithful to covenant and needs refining; the condemnation of evildoers alongside promises of blessing to the God-fearers.

Undoubtedly, social world influences have affected the moral world of the community and its leaders as demonstrated in the practices and priorities that Malachi critiques. Yet interestingly, Malachi grounds and constructs his critiques on a symbolic world that emphasizes traditions and ethical practices that should inform his community's moral world more so than the circumstance of their social world. To understand the moral world that Malachi presents to his community, we need to understand the symbolic world operative in Malachi's Yehud.

### CHAPTER 3: THE SYMBOLIC WORLD OF MALACHI

According to the sociology of knowledge, a society develops and builds an understanding of their world in order to establish and maintain order. This construal of the world is strengthened when fused with the sacred order and nurtured with religion. Religion provides a set of signs and symbols that reinforce and transmit these human conceptions of reality. Objects, events, experiences, and traditions become the vehicle for remembering and transmitting a society's symbolic worldview or belief system. Texts such as Malachi convey a certain view of the world. As Becking summarizes, "texts, rituals and iconic representations of the divine are expressions of the belief of a society or of the most powerful group in a society."<sup>333</sup> By examining the text, we can detect and sketch, even if but broadly, how the world was understood by its members, or as Becking points out, at least some portion of its members. We can fill out this understanding by tracing the major elements of the symbolic world through the traditions that shaped it, and by doing so, identify whether the tone is a lasting resonance or an evolving dissonance with past tradition.

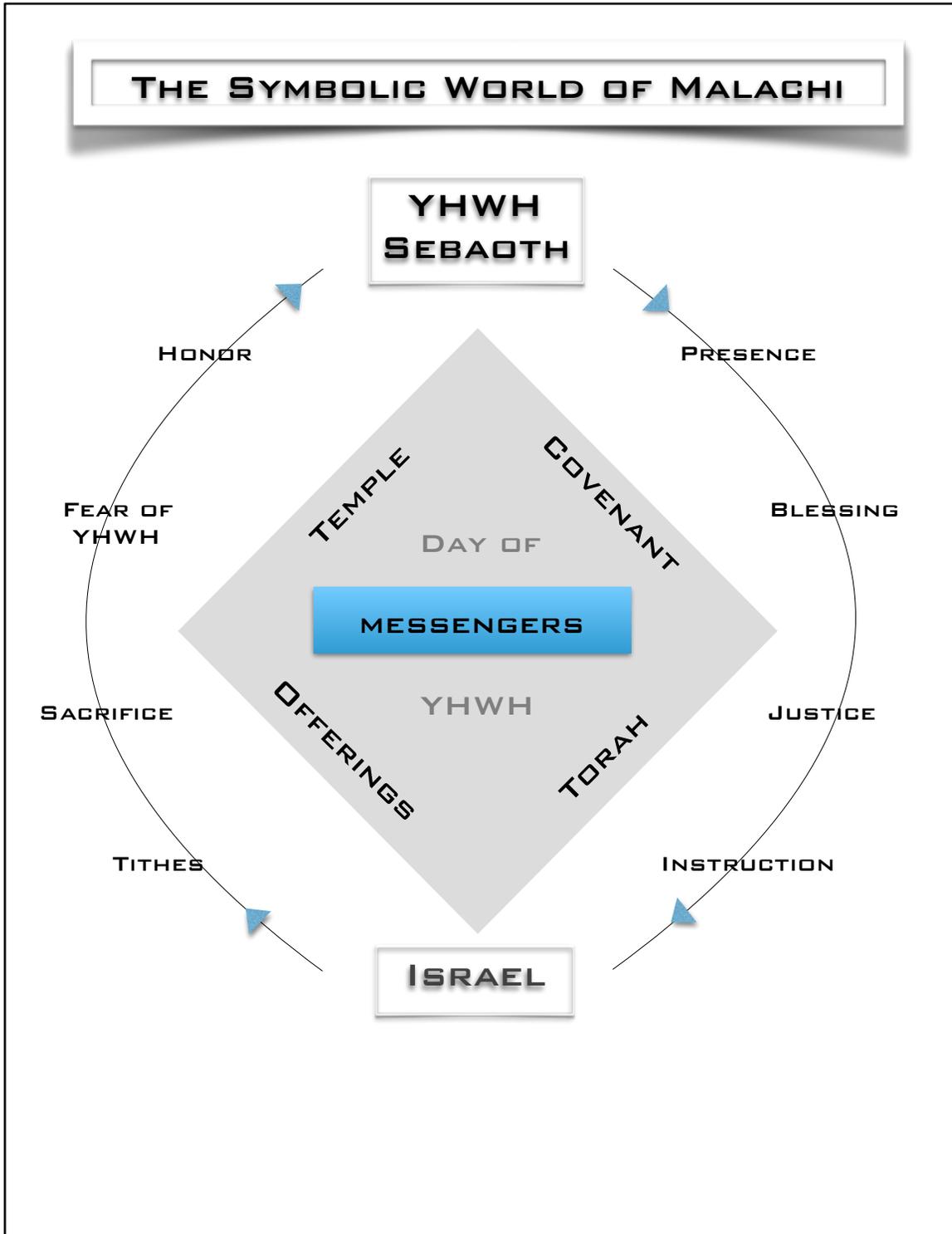
In this chapter, we take up the description of Malachi's symbolic world. In reality, it is inseparable from the social world, especially to those living in ancient times. The examination of the social world illustrated this when we highlighted the power of royal imagery as symbolic of imperial rule and domination. It is separable from the social and moral world artificially, as we are choosing to do here for heuristic purposes. The

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<sup>333</sup> Bob Becking, "The Belief System in the Book of Ezra," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 256-75, esp. 258.

distinguishing factor for this purpose is that the symbolic world is primarily animated and empowered by the belief in a divine reality as an attempt to understand this world in relation to a reality beyond the physical. As such, the symbolic world is conveyed through objects, traditions, and practices that have come to encapsulate certain beliefs about the symbolic world and the deity (See Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1



## A Symbolic World within the Social World

Before delving into Malachi's symbolic world, we should briefly locate it within the social world of Yehud and the Persian Empire. Generally, Persian policy allowed the local practice of religion as long as it did not conflict with the aims of the Empire. To what degree the Persians supported or sponsored cultic efforts in Yehud is unclear. Considerations of Persian influence have concentrated primarily on matters of temple and torah, so we will briefly consider these two areas which will serve as a bridge from social world to symbolic world concerns.

### Temple Authorization

Grabbe asserts that the Persians likely allowed the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, but apart from Jewish evidence it seems, "the Persians would not have provided financial support or other imperial resources or granted tax concessions."<sup>334</sup> He contends the evidence typically cited in support is better interpreted as support for state sponsored cults.<sup>335</sup> Persian treatment of the Jews as depicted in the biblical text would have had to fall into a category of special favor (of which Grabbe seems skeptical).

However, other readings of Persian religious practices provide a plausible scenario for Achaemenid support even in Jerusalem.<sup>336</sup> While the Persians believed Ahuramazda was the supreme god, they continued to acknowledge the presence of local deities, even worshipping and sacrificing to them, especially when the Persian kings

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<sup>334</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 216.

<sup>335</sup> For example, Hugh G. M. Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography* (FAT 38; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 212-31.

<sup>336</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 356ff.

sought their favor and support. Cyrus, politically savvy and religiously conscious of ancient Near Eastern deities, supported local religious practice and modeled tolerance for the sake of the empire. Cambyses too sought the support of local deities yet did not hesitate to diminish the funding of local priesthoods, such as in Egypt, in order to weaken the power of priests while demonstrating reverence for the local religions. Persian acceptance of the locality of gods may also explain the seeming contradiction between Xerxes destruction of temples and other instances of supporting local deities. For example, Xerxes destroyed certain Greek temples yet sacrificed to the same gods, sought prayers from local priests, and supported native sacrifices to the gods made in the name of the king (Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.54; cf. 6.97; 9.37-8). Dandamaev and Lukonin assert that this fits the general tolerance of the age for other gods. We will point out manifestations of this specific to Yehud and its temple below. While the Persians may have displayed a widespread acceptance for diverse religious practices, Malachi stresses a distinct worldview for his community. Malachi's god is no mere local god but YHWH Sebaoth.

### Torah Authorization

In the context of Ezra's mission, the Achaemenid emperor is portrayed as authorizing the task to teach and implement the Torah. This has raised questions about the Persians' involvement in the approval and even formation of the Torah or Pentateuch.<sup>337</sup> Frei suggests the authorization of the Torah as law of the king fits a pattern of legal pronouncements originating in the provinces that were given normative status

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<sup>337</sup> Watts, *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch*; Knoppers and Levinson, *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*; Kyong-Jin Lee, *The Authority and Authorization of Torah in the Persian Period* (CBET 64; Leuven: Peeters, 2011).

through “imperial authorization.”<sup>338</sup> He argues that these provide evidence of an authorization process in Persia that helps explain similar events related to Judaism, including the mission of Ezra (7:12-26) and Nehemiah’s regulations for the priests and Levites according to the rule of the king (11:21-24 & 13:30-31).

Frei’s incidences occur during the reigns of Darius to Artaxerxes III (late sixth century to mid-fourth century). While he sufficiently demonstrates the feasibility of the practice, its precise meaning and implication to Yehud is still not clear. Besides Egypt, all the other examples are very focused on specific situations such as festival celebration or securing cult recognition and support. Ezra 7 is unique as an authorization of a self-governing body. Additionally, of all the examples, the Pentateuch would be the longest and most complex.

Blum has gone the next step arguing that the authorization process prompted the formation of the Pentateuch that was produced as a reconciling document between Deuteronomic and priestly compositions.<sup>339</sup> Blum’s idea of an imperially sanctioned reconciling document on the surface seems to go beyond the evidence. Frei’s examples

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<sup>338</sup> Peter Frei, “Persian Imperial Authorization: A Summary,” in *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (SymS 17; ed. James W. Watts; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 5-40. He cites as evidence from outside Judaism the codification of Egyptian laws by Darius, the authorized regulation (that specified provision for the cult from local taxation) of two new cults by a Persian satrap in Asia Minor memorialized in the Trilingual Inscription from Letoon, and the resolution of a border dispute between Miletus and Myus. Likewise, he also cites the Passover Letter from Elephantine. The instructions concerning the timing of keeping the Passover are preceded by the mention of a decree from Darius (c. 419) to the Egyptian satrap. However, an intervening line is missing; Frei postulates it as instruction from Darius for the satrap to pass to the colony (transmission order). Additionally, he notes that the Purim Regulations in Esther, endorsed by the Queen (even if a fictional account) may yet be reflective of Persian practice.

<sup>339</sup> Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1990). Noted and discussed in Konrad Schmid, “The Persian Imperial Authorization as a Historical Problem and as a Biblical Construct: A Plea for Distinctions in the Current Debate,” in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 23-38.

suggest authorization applies to new norms proposed by subordinates.<sup>340</sup> Most cases that have been cited in support of Persian authorization seem to be reactive or responsive to local situations rather than Persian initiative.<sup>341</sup>

Ska and others have raised a number of “question marks” about the Persian authorization theory.<sup>342</sup> First, the sanctions in Ezra 7 do not match the Torah, so Ezra is either applying the Torah to a new context or working independent of it. Second, one must also question whether the Pentateuch—with its heavy mixture of narrative and law—would have been conducive to juridical matters from the Persian perspective. Additionally, the demand for exclusive allegiance to YHWH would have countered Persian beliefs in the supremacy of Ahuramazda. Finally, as is the case with the Letoon inscription, the Pentateuch does not describe itself as a reconciling document, and there is no known Aramaic version of the OT congruent with the sample of Persian authorization protocol.

In light of these objections and the limited evidence, in my view, we should be wary of considering this a definitive Persian policy, especially one that sanctioned the formation of the Pentateuch. As we will see in his symbolic and moral world, Malachi has available and knows a robust tradition that serves as his basis for the message to Israel.

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<sup>340</sup> Frej, “Persian Imperial Authorization: A Summary,” 33.

<sup>341</sup> Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 331-43.

<sup>342</sup> Jean Louis Ska, “‘Persian Imperial Authorization’: Some Question Marks,” in *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (SymS 17; ed. James W. Watts; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 161-82; Jean Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 217-26. See also Lee, *The Authority and Authorization of Torah in the Persian Period*. The theory has been critiqued strongly by Iranologists. For a summary, key points of clarification, and bibliography, see Schmid, “The Persian Imperial Authorization as a Historical Problem and as a Biblical Construct: A Plea for Distinctions in the Current Debate,” 23-38.

## YHWH Sebaoth – Israel’s King

The Sovereign in Malachi’s world is יהוה צבאות (hereafter YHWH Sebaoth).<sup>343</sup>

Malachi assumes the name without explicating its meaning.<sup>344</sup> Traditions associated with YHWH Sebaoth emphasize him as regnant God and divine warrior. Additionally, YHWH Sebaoth as king employs agents to accomplish his mission. We will review the traditions associated with YHWH Sebaoth, examine the social world resonance of Malachi’s claim about YHWH Sebaoth, and assess Malachi’s allusions to the YHWH Sebaoth traditions.

YHWH Sebaoth is primarily a royal metaphor (Pss 84:3; 89:8; 24:10; Jer 46:18, 25; 48:1, 15). The name has a long tradition in Israelite thought with origins in the Shiloh-era as “the god enthroned upon the cherubim” (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2) bringing it into close association with the ark of the covenant. The southern prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah as well as certain psalms employ the name frequently pointing toward, as Mettinger notes, the name’s association with a temple milieu.<sup>345</sup> Among Israel and its ancient Near Eastern counterparts, the temple represented the connecting point between heaven and earth—an

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<sup>343</sup> Malachi accounts for just less than 10% of the OT usage (24 of 284). 21 of the 24 uses in Malachi are used to signal a prophetic utterance. Others references include messenger of YHWH Sebaoth (2:7), offering to YHWH Sebaoth (2:12), being in the presence of YHWH Sebaoth (3:14).

<sup>344</sup> The meaning of the name is somewhat enigmatic given its construction. Syntactical difficulties associated with the Hebrew construction compound the challenge of deciphering its meaning. Syntactically, Sebaoth has been understood as either in construct relationship with YHWH (although it is unusual for a proper name to be in construct) or in appositional relationship (which would essentially equate YHWH and Sebaoth). See Choon-Leong Seow, “Hosts, Lord of,” *ABD* 3:304-7; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, “Yahweh Zebaoth,” *DDD* 920-4; Otto Eissfeldt, “Jahwe Zebaoth,” *Kleine Schriften* 3 (1963-68): 103-23 on discussion of semantic forms. The elusive meaning of the name is evidenced by the difference in the two most common translations “Lord of Hosts” and “Lord Almighty”. “Lord of Hosts” follows a literal construct understanding of the name. Eissfeldt’s argument that “Sebaoth” is an intensive abstract plural signifying power, perhaps emphasized in the LXX “Lord of the powers,” lies behind the choice of “Lord Almighty.” I am maintaining the ambiguity by using the transliterated title but emphasizing the royal focus, which encompasses the aspect of power—royal power.

<sup>345</sup> Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 124-5; Mettinger, *DDD* 920-4.

earthly manifestation of a heavenly reality.<sup>346</sup> The title is also connected specifically with Mt. Zion, the temple mound, as YHWH Sebaoth's dwelling place (Is 8:18; Zech 8:3) and the place of his name (Is 18:17; Pss 48:8; 84:1). Psalms 84 and 89 intertwine YHWH Sebaoth and Zion with enthronement and kingship. The enthronement recalls the Shiloh-era tradition of dwelling upon the cherubim (a continuing image with the temple, e.g., Is 37:16 ;1 Kgs 6:23-28; Ps 80).

Yet YHWH Sebaoth as the enthroned king in Zion continued to be associated with Divine Warrior imagery.<sup>347</sup> YHWH Sebaoth as Warrior dominates the focus of both Isaiah and Jeremiah. YHWH Sebaoth warns of impending judgment against his own people (Is 1:24; 10:16, 33; 13:4, 13; Jer 6:6, 9; 11:17, 20, 22; 19:3, 11, 15) and summons the sword (Jer 25:28, 32). He purposes nations and employs them as agents of his wrath (Is 14:24, 27; 19:12, 16-17, 25). For example, YHWH Sebaoth orchestrates the punishment of many nations (Jer 28:2, 14), including Israel (Jer 29:12), Egypt (Jer 46:25), Moab (Jer 48:1), Edom (Jer 49:7), Assyria (Jer 50:18) and even the "weapon of his wrath" Babylon (50:18, 25, 45).

The plural construct or appositional noun **צבאות** further suggests the divine warrior aspect of the name. It can be linked to both the heavenly hosts and Israelite armies. Earliest references are associated with battle narratives and the Israelite army (1 Sam 17:45), some involving the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 4:3-4; 15:2; 2 Sam 5:10). In other battles, the heavenly host participate in the divine warfare (Josh 5:14; Judg 5:20;

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<sup>346</sup> Mettinger, 131-2. Cf. Ps 11:4.

<sup>347</sup> Mettinger seems to understate this in his emphasis upon a temple milieu.

10:12).<sup>348</sup> Host of heaven is further intimated by the battle precursor account of Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:19-23). Moreover, YHWH Sebaoth's cosmic battles are perceived to have earthly implications (Ps 89:6-12; Is 24:21, 23; Zech 14:16-17). The warrior and king focal points of the tradition do not stand far apart.<sup>349</sup> Certain texts envision YHWH enthroned among his hosts, adjoining the battling imagery of the divine warrior with cosmic kingship (cf. Pss 89; 103:19-21).

Warriors and especially kings have special agents, and Malachi may envision himself in a long line of such agents belonging to YHWH Sebaoth. Isaiah bore witness to the enthroned, holy God YHWH Sebaoth and served as a royal agent sent to his people Israel (Is 6:5-6; cf. Jer 10:16; 51:19). The name is used sparingly in Samuel and Kings yet the few references notably connect YHWH Sebaoth with David, Elijah, and Elisha. YHWH Sebaoth makes a covenant with David and his sons as his royal emissaries in Israel (2 Sam 7). Elijah and Elisha "stand" before YHWH Sebaoth (1 Kgs 18:15; 2 Kgs 13:14).

The name's dormancy during the exilic period (not used by Ezekiel) makes its renaissance in the postexilic prophets even more notable.<sup>350</sup> The promise of YHWH Sebaoth's restoration of Israel (Jer 31:23; 32:14; 33:12) and return to Jerusalem surely lingered in the memory of Israel. Isaiah too envisions a return of YHWH Sebaoth, the Holy One and Redeemer of Israel, who makes a way through the deserts and back to Zion (Is

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<sup>348</sup> The likely reference according to Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 69-70.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, argues the name means "he creates the (heavenly) hosts" and connects it with the Divine Warrior imagery from the conquest era that was later integrated with kingdom cultic ideals of a Divine King who chose David and Zion, 65, 105-6. This follows with the movement of the title in the narrative.

<sup>350</sup> Ninety-one of the 284 uses of YHWH Sebaoth occur in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. See tabulations in Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 152.

44:6; 47:4). The depiction renews conquest imagery and the defeat of cosmic enemies in a bold, new way (Is 35 and 51).<sup>351</sup>

The name's resurgence in the postexilic prophets draws upon these hopes. In Haggai, YHWH Sebaoth calls for the rebuilding of his house, guaranteeing his presence once again in Jerusalem and a future shaking of the earth that will induce a flow of treasures from the nations to Jerusalem. In Zechariah, YHWH Sebaoth calls for repentance and warns Israel against repeating the sins of the ancestors (1:3, 6). YHWH Sebaoth is returning to Zion to dwell in Jerusalem (1:14, 16; 2:11; 8:1-4) where nations will come to seek him (8:20-32; 14:16-17)—a scene in which Zechariah explicitly describes YHWH Sebaoth as King. The HZM corpus uses YHWH Sebaoth as the primary reference for God and the source of the words proclaimed by the prophets.<sup>352</sup> The name's meaning and impact then must be assumed knowledge by Israel, drawing upon past traditions. In this way, the message of these prophets is not new; it partakes of and emphasizes the preexilic traditions that encircled YHWH Sebaoth in order to spark imaginations of YHWH Sebaoth dwelling in Zion as King and at work among the nations.

For Malachi specifically, the same sense resounds. YHWH Sebaoth claims, "I am a Great King." YHWH's declaration that he was a great king, a somewhat generic description to modern readers, would have reverberated against a social world dominated by the imperial claim that Xerxes was the great king. "I am Xerxes, the great king, king

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<sup>351</sup> Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 106-9.

<sup>352</sup> The text of Ezra 1-6 occasionally uses the title "God of heaven" or "God of heaven and earth". Williamson points out that this convention, an accepted title for Persian gods, was likely employed by Jews to obtain acceptance of their God by the Persians, especially since the usage, "is largely confined to points of official contact between Jews and Persians." Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 12. See also Bill T. Arnold, "The Use of Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible: Another Look at Biligualism in Ezra and Daniel," *JNSL* 22.2 (1996): 1-16 and Joshua Berman, "The Narratorial Voice of the Scribes of Samaria: Ezra iv 8-vi 18 Reconsidered," *VT* 56.3 (2006): 313-26.

of kings, king of all kinds of people, king of this earth far and wide, son of Darius the Achaemenid.”<sup>353</sup> The psalmists claim the “great king” title for YHWH (Pss 47:2; 48:2; 95:3). Alive in Israel’s memory is another king who threatened Judah. King Sennacharib, the “great king” of Assyria (Is 36:4), asserted his dominance over the kings and gods of the earth and laid siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah placed the threatening announcement of Sennacherib before the throne of YHWH, prayed to YHWH Sebaoth, the king enthroned upon the cherubim, and called for deliverance (Is 37:16). Judah experienced in a mighty way YHWH Sebaoth’s presence and protection.

With this title for YHWH, Malachi triggers the ideas of God reigning and purposing the nations. YHWH Sebaoth demands Israel return (3:7), heed the words and instruction formerly given (2:7; cf. Zech 7:12; Is 5:24), recognize YHWH as king among the nations (Mal 1:11,14), and give him honor (Mal 1:6; 2:2 cf. Is 8:13; 23:9). The power of the name implies that the nations, including the Achaemenids, are doing only what is allowed. Israel’s proper response is honor and trust.

### **YHWH’s People: Israel**

Malachi addresses his message to “Israel,” moving beyond the boundaries of Yehud and simultaneously connecting to his community’s past. Throughout her history, Israel denoted both a broad and narrow sense in the biblical writings.<sup>354</sup> In pre-monarchial and monarchial periods, Israel designated both a people (the descendants of Jacob) and the northern kingdom as distinct from Judah. Even in the accounts of David,

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<sup>353</sup> From inscriptions XV and XE in Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, 301.

<sup>354</sup> Zobel, “ישׂראל,” *TDOT* 6:397-420.

Israel at times pointed beyond the northern tribes (2 Sam 5:12,17; 6:5,15,21; 13:12; 17:11). Later the southern prophet Isaiah occasionally called the Northern Kingdom Israel, but more frequently he envisioned the whole people of God (e.g., Is 8:14). When the southern kingdom was exiled to Babylon, Isaiah addressed the exiles as Israel—YHWH’s chosen servant for whom salvation was coming.<sup>355</sup>

The broader sense became the more common in postexilic parlance. Joel (2:27; 3:2, 16) refers to Israel three times in the broader sense as explicated by the parallel lines describing Israel as God’s people and heritage. Zechariah’s closing oracle (12:1) addresses broad Israel even though his other usages tend toward the narrower political sense (Zech 2:2 (1:9); 8:13; 9:1; 11:14). In Ezra-Nehemiah, Israel (along with “descendants of Israel” and “people of Israel”) entails the reconstituted community of returned Judahites.<sup>356</sup> No extra-biblical literature of the Persian period mentions Israel, which further corroborates the movement toward Israel as a theological designation in the postexilic period.<sup>357</sup> This broader vision of Israel as all God’s people is not unlike the view of Israel developed later in the work of the Chronicler. Williamson has shown that the Chronicler uses the term “Israel” for those among both the northern and southern kingdoms during the divided monarchy.<sup>358</sup> After the northern exile, the Chronicler depicts a united Israel during the reign of Hezekiah as a result of Hezekiah’s reforms and

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 405-6.

<sup>356</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, “Israel’s Historical Reality after the Exile,” in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 9-32, esp. 13; Zobel, *TDOT* 6:418.

<sup>357</sup> See Grabbe, “Israel’s Historical Reality after the Exile,” for discussion of the one possible but unlikely exception, 18.

<sup>358</sup> Hugh G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 110-18.

reinstitution of the Passover celebration.<sup>359</sup> During both eras, calls for repentance signal a hope that the rebellious will embrace their true identity of Israel. Louis Jonker argues the Chronicler is working out an identity of “All-Israel” influenced by at least four socio-historical and socio-religious forces: “the Persian Empire, provincial existence amidst surrounding provinces, the tribal relations between Judah and Benjamin, and the inner-cultic dynamics in the Jerusalem temple.”<sup>360</sup> Jonker concludes that the Chronicler’s designation “All-Israel”:

already embodies something of the utopian vision that the Chronicler had of the post-exilic community. This expression signifies the envisioned unity that the writer wanted to facilitate in the late Persian period, after the return of different groups of exiles to their homeland, where many of their compatriots had remained behind, and amidst those who chose to remain in diaspora. “All-Israel” embodies the social memory of a united Davidic kingdom, a kingdom which included not only the southern tribes, but also the northern and Transjordanian areas.<sup>361</sup>

Malachi’s vision of Israel reaches further back than David, reflects provincial concerns that are theologically substantiated, and moves in the direction of associating Israel with the faithful people of God. Taking the occurrences in reverse, Israel in 3:22(4:4) designates the congregation receiving the sermons of Moses at Horeb thus connecting Israel with its long ancestral heritage. Second, in 2:16, the appellative “God of Israel,” further draws on this tradition asserting Israel’s relationship with YHWH, still relevant to Malachi’s community.<sup>362</sup> Third, in 2:11, Israel is used synonymously with

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 119-25.

<sup>360</sup> Louis C. Jonker, *Defining All-Israel in Chronicles: Multi-levelled Identity Negotiation in Late Persian-Period Yehud* (FAT 106; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 281.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>362</sup> The usage in close proximity to YHWH Sebaoth offers an interesting application of the tradition addressed below in chapter four.

Judah and Jerusalem (cf. Zech 12:1), laying hold of an Israel identity for his own community that expands beyond northern kingdom associations. Fourth, the messenger in 1:5 anticipates YHWH's glorification beyond the borders of Israel. While partaking in political or provincial territorial distinctions, Malachi's appeal to the Jacob tradition in the immediate context further substantiates his broader understanding of Israel.<sup>363</sup>

Used sparingly in other postexilic literature, Malachi headlines his message by recalling the Jacob and Esau tradition. As noted in the previous chapter, Edom posed a real concern for the people of Yehud. Edom's participation in the destruction of Jerusalem and their incursion into southern Yehud were perceived by some as a reversal of God's choice of Jacob.<sup>364</sup> The prophetic critiques against Edom sought to counter this perception. Despite aspects of the Genesis account that portray Jacob as trickster and Esau, the one conned, Jacob became the favored son and took his older brother's place, in part because Esau proved unworthy of the birthright he despised. Our reading of the tradition is no doubt influenced by the prophetic interpretations of these traditions.<sup>365</sup> Both Obadiah and Malachi reflect two different emphases from the tradition supported by aspects of the ancestral stories. Obadiah emphasizes Esau/Edom's misconduct, even doing violence to Jacob (Obad 10), and anticipates Edom will experience retribution. Malachi stresses Jacob's divine election as the basis for God's continuing favor to Israel despite its repeated transgressions and despicable actions, an unfortunate family

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<sup>363</sup> The Chronicler takes a similar approach "to emphasize the continuity and totality of Israel" by substituting Israel for references to Jacob (cf. 1 Chron 1:13; 29:10, 18), Zobel, *TDOT* 6:418. See also Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, 130.

<sup>364</sup> Assis, "Why Edom? On the Hostility Towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources," 1-20.

<sup>365</sup> Joachim J. Krause, "Tradition, History, and Our Story: Some Observations on Jacob and Esau in the Books of Obadiah and Malachi," *JSOT* 32.4 (2008): 475-86.

resemblance to Esau (cf. Obad 2; Mal 1:6).<sup>366</sup> Malachi echoes the oracle that announced the twins' birth and future (Gen 25:22–23). It is easily imaginable that as the theological perception of God's favor for Israel came into question, animosity bred toward Edom, and the theological despair of an uncertain future took hold, shaking a pillar of Israel's symbolic world. That Malachi confronts this perception directly in his message may point to its role in the apathy toward YHWH Sebaoth that had grown among both priest and people.<sup>367</sup>

How the community precisely understood the constitution of "Israel" is as unknown as the boundaries of the Yehud province.<sup>368</sup> Yet Malachi clearly viewed Israel as distinct from other nations such as Edom and associated Israel with the worship of YHWH rather than foreign gods. Additionally, in the culmination of his message, the messenger differentiates within the community on the basis of faithfulness and righteousness, further narrowing the understanding of Israel as the faithful, righteous people of God. However, this differentiation is situated within a warning to the wicked and a wider call for Israel to return to YHWH. His favor will be directed toward the faithful and his attention set against those who persist in rebellion. Malachi's message is intended to induce change. While Israel may in fact be narrowing, this is by no means the desired reality. As Williamson notes in relation to the Chronicler, "a faithful nucleus does not exclude others, but is a representative centre to which all the children of Israel may be

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 483 n. 31.

<sup>367</sup> The exclusion of this concern from Haggai, Zechariah, and Ezra 1-6 may just be coincidental or a combination of the hope inspired by Haggai and the yet unrealized expansion of the Edomites into the southern region of Yehud.

<sup>368</sup> See Jon L. Berquist, "Construction Identity in Postcolonial Yehud," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 91-121.

welcomed if they will return.”<sup>369</sup> The apparent narrowing of Israel near the end of Malachi’s message does not preclude an expanded Israel as Malachi calls on the wayward of his community to return.

These four instances of “Israel” in the body of Malachi’s message fill out the meaning of Israel specified in the message’s address: an Israel who shares continuity with Israel of old, whom YHWH chose and with whom he is not finished. YHWH calls for Israel to return on way to establishing his greatness among the nations.

### **YHWH’s House: Temple**

For the divine king, the temple served as the primary institution representing his presence and claim on the earth. Temples also functioned as administrative and economic centers, illustrating the overlap between social and symbolic worlds. As a result, we will need to consider the temple’s varying functions in Malachi’s world.

#### The Temple in Jerusalem and the Achaemenid Period

The larger temple systems of the Achaemenid period functioned as small economic centers collecting taxes, holding land, breeding animals, managing flocks, and collecting grain and other food supplies.<sup>370</sup> While priests held responsibility for cultic functions, often a separate administrative bureau (including a commissioner, deputies, and scribes) managed, regulated, and kept records of economic activity. Cyrus and his successors generally followed temple policies in place in Egypt and Babylon that

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<sup>369</sup> Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, 140.

<sup>370</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 360-6.

required certain payment of taxes or portions of tithes to the state. Thus the exemption of taxes for certain temples, such as in Ezra 7:24, were unusual and a gesture of favor. While some are skeptical of the biblical witness to Persian favor in support for the Jerusalem temple, none of the instances are without precedent elsewhere in the empire.<sup>371</sup> Yehud was a very small province in the empire and would not have been the forefront of international concern for emperors. However, the Jewish economic involvement in Babylon as witnessed by the al-Yahuda Neo-Babylonian tablets and the Murashu archive,<sup>372</sup> the important role of Nehemiah in the court of Susa, and the existence of local royal representatives such as Ezra provide plausible scenarios. As observed in the previous chapter, the emperor fostered imperial development and production, in which the temple played an important function. As Blenkinsopp has noted, the Achaemenids seem to have engaged in supporting diverse, local, autonomous systems under the direction of local elites, who were loyal to the empire, in order to provide social cohesion and means of economic exchange.<sup>373</sup> The extent to which the Jerusalem temple functioned like other temple complexes across the empire is limited. Nonetheless, the

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<sup>371</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communities During the Persian Empire," in *Tough-Minded Christianity: Legacy of John Warwick Montgomery* (eds. W. Dembski and T. Scirrmacher; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 350-74.

<sup>372</sup> Lemaire, "Fifth- and Fourth-Century Issues: Governorship and Priesthood in Jerusalem," 413-6.

<sup>373</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," in *Second Temple Studies* (JSOTSup 117; ed. Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 22-53, especially 26. See Joel P. Weinberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community* (JSOTSup 151; eds. David J.A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; trans. Daniel Smith-Christopher; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992). Weinberg leveraged this environment of imperial support to argue that the Jerusalem temple functioned as a civic-temple community that controlled land around a complex and restricted membership to the community. However, Weinberg's thesis has succumbed to its critique. Population estimates assumed by Weinberg are not supported and no evidence exists that the temple controlled land. For critiques of Weinberg, see Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography*; Blenkinsopp, "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," 26, 40-44.

existence of the rebuilt temple was deemed vital because of the temple's important functions.

The Ezra and Haggai accounts of reconstruction depict a gradual process, encumbered by economic difficulties and encountering conflict from those present in the land.<sup>374</sup> From the perspective of Ezra 1-6, the “temple was built at the behest of Yahweh, in the service of the Persian imperial policy, and with the subvention of imperial tax revenue.”<sup>375</sup> However, the actual funding of the temple is unclear. Cyrus commissioned the temple reconstruction and authorized the return of YHWH's vessels according to Ezra 1, yet funding for the effort was dependent upon donations obtained by returnees from neighbors and kinsman.<sup>376</sup> The Darius decree authorized “whatever is needed” as provision for the temple; however, the account only describes resources relevant for the offerings and daily prayers for the king—the aim behind Darius' support (Ezra 6:8). Funding issues likely contributed to the underwhelming beginning and twenty year process to reconstruct the altar, foundation, and temple building.

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<sup>374</sup> The timeline as preserved in Ezra is difficult. Either names are confused (Sheshbazzar (5:16) and Zerubbabel (3:8) are both credited with rebuilding the foundation), the rebuilding of the foundations occurred in stages, or the chronological genre of the text is not clear. For the various reading strategies, see Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 43-5. For a renewed effort to explain the arrangement of sources in Ezra 1-6, see Lisbeth S. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire* (BibJudSt 10; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004); cf. Veen, “Sixth Century Issues: The Fall of Jerusalem, the Exile, and the Return,” 402-5.

<sup>375</sup> David L. Petersen, “The Temple in Persian Period Prophetic Texts,” in *Second Temple Studies* (JSOTSup 117; ed. Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 125-45, esp. 131.

<sup>376</sup> Ezra 6:3 may suggest some costs were to be paid by the royal treasury, but Marty E. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic Life of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006) makes a good case that the better interpretation is “let the outflow be given” referring to Cyrus's return of the temple vessels rather than money to cover the costs of construction, 45-7.

## Temple Functions

The restoration period writers describe three essential functions of the temple. First, as the Cyrus decree suggests, the temple functioned as the religious storehouse for the vessels of God. Cyrus returned the Jerusalem temple vessels with Sheshbazzar and authorized a house be built for them. Visions of future glory for the temple expected more treasuries to flow to the city on the Day of YHWH (Zech 11:13; 14:20-21). Additionally, Ezra is reported to have brought an economic infusion of goods for the temple storehouse (Ezra 8:30). Later, Nehemiah demanded contributions and tithes for the chamber storehouses (Neh 10) and struggled with proper stewardship over the temple resources (Neh 13:4). Malachi alludes to this temple function as he calls his community to answer God's challenge to fill the storehouses with tithes and contributions.

Second, the temple primarily served as a place of prayer, praise, and sacrifice as in days of old (Is 37:1,4; 38:20-22). At the beginning of the postexilic period, the temple lying in ruins, served as a bitter reminder of a golden age when prayer and praise were centralized in the beautiful city of Zion (Is 64:10-11). In support of this function, Darius authorized the rebuilding efforts so that prayers could be raised to YHWH on behalf of the king and his sons. Upon return under Sheshbazzar, the altar was rebuilt first in support of this function. This ongoing aspect is present in later texts (cf. Ezra 10:1,9; Neh 8:16; 10:33). Malachi's critique of defiled offerings at the altar or table of YHWH as well as YHWH's plea for the doors of the temple to be shut until honorable offerings are presented indicate the presence of the temple in Malachi's world and its centrality to his symbolic world.

Last, the temple served as a symbol of God's presence and the site of his reign, where heaven touched earth. While the temple was unable to contain all of YHWH's glory (Is 6:1), the temple as footstool (Is 66:1) signified God's presence and reign upon the earth. As the place of God's presence, the temple is most often referred to as the "house of God." The postexilic era texts first call for rebuilding the temple and plans toward this end (Hag, Zech, Ezra 1-6). Yet upon its completion, something about the Second Temple was not as impressive as its predecessor (Hag 2:3).<sup>377</sup> Timber and stone are the only materials noted in its construction (Ezra 6:3-4), a far cry from the cedar and gold of Solomon's architectural marvel (1 Kgs 6). But the disappointment probably extended beyond the structure's physicality.

Assis concludes that "the people's disappointment was theological rather than material."<sup>378</sup> The cause for the disappointment may have varied across the community, but Assis's focus on theological reasons is helpful. The people had delayed in rebuilding the temple assuming that God had abandoned them. Even as the temple was being built, they lamented because the glory of God and the assurance of his presence were missing. That is why Haggai encouraged the people to build on the promise that God was with them, had not abandoned his covenant, and would bring glory and peace (Hag 2:6). In Ezra 6 at the completion of the temple, the house is dedicated, offerings are made, duties of priests and Levites are assigned, the Passover is celebrated, and the providence of God is praised. However, the return or reality of God's presence at the Second Temple is not

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<sup>377</sup> Cyrus authorizes a 60x60 cubit structure (no height specified), which has three times the surface area of Solomon's temple. Since the full dimensions of the temple are omitted, it is frequently assumed the dimensions provided are incorrect, a result of parablepsis. The restoration of the temple foundations would suggest a structure equal in size to the first temple. See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 71.

<sup>378</sup> Elie Assis, "A Disputed Temple (Haggai 2,1-9)," *ZAW* 120.4 (2008): 582-96, esp. 588.

specifically described.<sup>379</sup> Even after the temple was built, reality did not match expectations.

The postexilic texts intimate that God was present in a new way, providentially working at large. Zech 1:16 indicates that he had returned to Jerusalem even though there is no house yet. Is 64 asserts that the temple could not contain the presence of God insisting rather on his transcendence. There seems to be an acknowledged difference from the first temple experience as prophets like Zechariah and especially Malachi anticipate something more.<sup>380</sup> Zechariah envisioned the temple as the destination for the returning king to oversee the protection of his world and his people (9:8). Malachi announces the Lord returning to his temple to make things right and refine its leaders. A promised *future* return implies that YHWH is not currently there, at least not in a full sense.<sup>381</sup>

Malachi serves as our only biblical witness to the era between the temple's completion in Ezra 6 and another wave of returnees in Ezra 7, who bring with them an economic infusion for the temple as a gift from Artaxerxes. According to the dating of Ezra's text, this is a period of nearly 60 years (515 to 458 B.C.). If they had expected a

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<sup>379</sup> R. E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 126. Clements summarizes a Rabbinic perspective that developed during the Second Temple period of discontinuity with the first temple including the missing Shekinah and Holy Spirit. As Clements notes, the exception to this is Joel (2:27; 4:16-17) that describe God reigning in Zion. Nothing is explicitly mentioned either by Ezra or Nehemiah. The possible exception is Neh 6:10 where Nehemiah considered himself unworthy to be present in the temple sanctuary, perhaps implying his unworthiness to be in the presence of God.

<sup>380</sup> Other postexilic texts insist that the glorious temple days lie in the future. The temple, metaphorically depicted as a fountain of water (Joel 3:18), would be the center of God's future glory to which the nations would stream for instruction and blessing, bringing treasures and sacrifices. Even more, the temple would welcome and integrate exilic survivors, foreigners, and eunuchs committed to YHWH (Is 2:2-3; 66:20; 56:5-7).

<sup>381</sup> The argument requires significant nuance since the postexilic texts indicate a tension between God's presence and absence. The anticipation of a return among the prophets lends some credence to the perception that YHWH is absent or not fully present.

full return of YHWH's presence and it had not happened, this would have reasonably contributed to the hardship and weariness expressed by the priests in Malachi. Israel sought a new understanding to match their new reality.

### **YHWH's Messengers: Priests & Levites**

YHWH Sebaoth enlisted priests, Levites, and other personnel to administer the temple structure and represent him among the people.<sup>382</sup> As the governor represented the Achaemenid king, the high priest represented King YHWH. The priests' primary duty was to God rather than the community as they functioned as attendants in his house.<sup>383</sup> This is significant for Malachi because the priests have rejected their role perhaps in empathy for the community or from self-interest.

Malachi refers to three basic functions of the priest and Levites: 1) administering the sacrificial system, 2) providing judicial and pedagogical instruction, and 3) maintaining the temple stores. The latter of these will be discussed below in the context of the symbolic economic world. The first two functions have a long history in the traditions of Israel. We will summarize the traditions, roles, and related functions of the priests and Levites then consider who particularly is in view for Malachi.<sup>384</sup> The

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<sup>382</sup> Other personnel are not specifically addressed in Malachi. (Cf. Ezra 3:10-12; Neh 12:27-47). For more, see Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 225-30 and Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 390-4.

<sup>383</sup> Haran, 18.

<sup>384</sup> See additionally Mark Leuchter and Jeremy Michael Hutton, *Levites and Priests in Biblical History and Tradition* (AIL 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011); Risto Nurmela, *The Levites: Their Emergence as a Second-Class Priesthood* (SFSHJ 193; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); Deborah W. Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs: The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Harald Samuel, "Levi, the Levites, and the Law," in *Rewriting and Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: The Biblical Patriarchs in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (BZAW 439; eds. Devorah Dimant and Reinhard G. Kratz; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 215-30; Joachim Schaper, *Priester und Leviten*

traditions can be grouped in four primary categories: origin stories, Deuteronomic traditions, exilic sources, and postexilic perspectives.

In the origin stories preserved in the Pentateuch, the priesthood is assigned to Aaron and his sons.<sup>385</sup> The Levites gain prominence at Sinai as supporters of YHWH and Moses as agents of justice against Israel's rebellion (Exod 32:25-29). In the wilderness, they are assigned the role of tabernacle ministers in support of Aaron (Num 1:50; 3:6) — a role that comes to include carrying the ark, standing before YHWH as his ministers, and blessing his name. Neither priests nor Levites receive an allotment of land but instead are placed in special relationship to YHWH and Israel; the Levites, in particular, represent the firstborn of Israel who inherit YHWH rather than land (Num 3:12; 8:16; cf. Deut 10:6-9). With no land allotment, they receive a tithe from the other tribes to sustain life in exchange for serving as ministers to YHWH.

Deuteronomy generally discusses the priests and Levites in tandem using the nomenclature “levitical priests,” “the whole tribe of Levi,” and “sons of Levi” (Deut 17:9, 18; 18:1; 21:5).<sup>386</sup> Functions assigned to the levitical priests include ministering before YHWH, pronouncing blessings, settling disputes, and carrying the ark (Deut 10:6-9;

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*im achämenidischen Juda: Studien zur Kult- und Sozialgeschichte Israels in Persischer Zeit* (FAT 31; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

<sup>385</sup> The choice of Levi's descendants as priests and ministers is surprising given the negative depiction of Levi in Genesis 34 and 49:5-7. Either their role as ministers is a redemptive act of YHWH that ironically coheres with their “scattering” in accord with the blessing of their father Jacob or the origins of the priestly group have been conflated with the ancient tribe. See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 369-71.

<sup>386</sup> See Raymond Abba, “Priests and Levites in Deuteronomy,” *VT* 27.3 (1977): 257-67 for varying positions on how to understand these descriptions, especially when used in tandem as in 18:1. Abba contends 18:1-8 depicts two groups, levitical priests and the rest of the tribe, then describes their different roles. Priests primarily functioned at the central sanctuary. When a Levite left his rural setting and came to the central sanctuary, he had full participation rights only along side his fellow priests. This follows from the tradition in 10:6-9.

21:5). Deuteronomy appears to include the Levites among the “priests” in certain texts such as 31:9— the “priests” who carry the ark are given the written torah.<sup>387</sup> Those particularly called “Levites” are depicted as residing in towns outside the sanctuary city (“the place that the Lord will choose”) who bring offerings, tithes, and gifts in the company of families to God’s city or come to reside at the sanctuary site with full status to “stand to minister” before YHWH (Deut 18:6-7). So while a shared nomenclature is used, “Deuteronomy preserves a tradition” that distinguishes the Aaronic priesthood from the rest of the Levitical tribe and its assigned duties.<sup>388</sup>

Ezekiel’s description is consistent with the origin stories: the priests (the descendants of Aaron and Zadok) have charge of the altar while the Levites have a supporting role in the cult. Additionally, Ezekiel assigns the two groups distinct residences at the new temple (Ezek 40:45-46). Because Ezekiel’s perspective on the priests and Levites comes during a turning point in Israel’s history, some view it as the pivotal text explaining the distinction drawn between priests and Levites in Israel’s tradition.<sup>389</sup> Wellhausen argues that the origin stories must be a retrojection of the events described in Ezekiel because Ezekiel (44:13) depicts the duties assigned to the Levites as “degradation” and “no mere relegation back” to previously assigned roles. In response, Kaufmann finds it unlikely that a late Priestly document would have retrojected the

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 261. Both groups had responsibility for carrying the ark dependent upon the circumstances. When ceremonial, it was the priest; in ordinary time, it was the Levites.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>389</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 121-7. This is largely dependent upon one’s perspective on the dating of the priestly writings (P). Does Ezekiel outline the program advanced and described by P or is Ezekiel working out of a preexilic Priestly perspective? In my view, the priestly material originates pre-exile and is reflective of wilderness and settlement traditions alive during the monarchial period of Israel’s history.

degradation of the Levites on the basis of Ezekiel and simultaneously invented an origin for the Levites worthy of praise and designated the tithe provision for them.<sup>390</sup> Linguistic studies have also challenged Wellhausen's conclusion of a late Priestly source requiring a different interpretation of the facts as Wellhausen saw them.<sup>391</sup> Additionally, Ezekiel's terminology (Levites and levitical priests, descendants of Zadok) appears to be employing a distinction that already existed along some lines. Different actions are associated with the two groups, but the actions did not produce the two groups.

In Ezekiel's description, the restriction of the Levites from serving the altar is attributed to their participation with foreigners "who went astray" after foreign idols. They are to bear the punishment of these idolaters (44:12). Priests "who kept the sanctuary" attend to God's table, enter the sanctuary, and wear priestly vestments. Such a clear bifurcation seems to be an over simplified reading. Does Ezekiel really intend to characterize all Levites as unfaithful priests? Is this punishment and restriction placed upon all Levites or just the apostate?<sup>392</sup> Likewise, the descendants of Zadok are portrayed as protectors of the sanctuary, but are elsewhere held accountable for abominations during the latter days of the temple (Ezek 5:11; 8:6-17; 22:26). So the Zadokite faithfulness is only relative to that of the rural Levites and not absolute.<sup>393</sup>

In Ezra 1-6, priests and Levites are often mentioned together and share similar functions. Both groups live in the environs of Jerusalem, oversee the work of

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<sup>390</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (trans. Moshe Greenberg; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 194-5.

<sup>391</sup> Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to an Old Problem* (CahRB 20; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1982).

<sup>392</sup> See Raymond Abba, "Priests and Levites in Ezekiel," *VT* 28.1 (1978): 1-9.

<sup>393</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 636.

reconstruction, and lead the praise of YHWH. Both are witnesses to the former temple and celebrants in the Passover. Both are included among the returnees though the number of priests far out number the Levites. Again, the priests are distinguished by their attachment to the altar, which they are tasked with rebuilding (Ezra 3:2), and consultation with the Urim and Thummim (Ezra 2:63).

In the postexilic prophets, the priests, described as “ministers of the Lord” weep for the lack of offerings and repentance (Joel), make torah rulings about cleanliness (Hag 2:11-13), and receive questions about proper fasting (Zech 7:3-5). However, the Levites are not specifically mentioned in these texts, perhaps reflecting their diminished numbers, with the possible exception of their inclusion in the “house of Levi” (Zech 12:13) mentioned alongside the houses of the royals and the prophets.

All of these traditions lie behind the thought world of Malachi.<sup>394</sup> Malachi mentions both priests and “descendants of Levi”. To whom the latter phrase applies is much debated.<sup>395</sup> Does the phrase refer to the priests only<sup>396</sup>, the Levites only<sup>397</sup>, or to the

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<sup>394</sup> This study does not pursue in detail the perspective of the Chronicler on the priests and Levites since it is widely thought to reflect both preexilic responsibilities of the two groups and postexilic developments, most likely occurring after Malachi. Interpreters of Chronicles offer varying opinions on the agenda of the Chronicler that are frequently intertwined with explorations of the books compositional history. For examples, see Gary N. Knoppers, “Hierodules, Priests, or Janitors? The Levites in Chronicles and the History of the Israelite Priesthood,” *JBL* 118.1 (1999): 49-72 and Yeong Seon Kim, *The Temple Administration and the Levites in Chronicles* (CBQMS 51; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2013), esp 162-71.

<sup>395</sup> Karl W. Weyde, “The Priests and the Descendants of Levi in the Book of Malachi,” *AcT* 35.1 (2015): 238-53; O’Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*.

<sup>396</sup> Joachim Schaper, “The Priests in the Book of Malachi and their Opponents,” in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets* (JSOTSup 408; eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 177-88. Schaper takes up O’Brien’s categories arguing that Malachi depicts a critique levied by dissident priests (not Levites or visionaries, contra Hanson) against corrupt sacrificial practices who invert the priestly blessing against their fellow priests. In part, Schaper concludes it is the priests only because the Levites are not specifically mentioned and are “universally elsewhere attested.” But this is not the case as indicated by Haggai, Zechariah, and Joel.

combination of both groups?<sup>398</sup> O’Brien and Weyde argue convincingly in my view that the phrase is Malachi’s way of referring to the combined group, consolidated under the covenant with Levi. As suggested earlier, Deuteronomy 33 has the entirety of Levi’s descendants in mind—the altar priests and the Levites. The close relation of these groups is illustrated in Jer 33 where God affirms his covenant with the Levitical priests who offer sacrifice (33:18) and the Levites who minister (33:22).<sup>399</sup> The whole of the tribe seems to be in view as Jeremiah sets each “sub-group” in parallel to David. Deut 33 stresses the Levites’ zealous commitment to YHWH even at the cost of family, which certainly recounts the ordaining of the Levites in Exod 32 and the attitude exhibited by Phinehas.<sup>400</sup>

Like Deuteronomy, Malachi addresses both, yet with a single designation inclusive of two groups with diverse roles who are both acting neglectfully. The conflation of the two into a single grouping of ministers does not deny the unique roles

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<sup>397</sup> Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*, 277-90. This is Hanson’s view based on the parallels he sees between the levitical priests in Malachi and with Deut 18. However, Deut 33 points to a collective group as Urim and Thummim are designated elsewhere for the priests only (Num 27:21; Ezra 2:63). If Malachi 3:3 is referring to Levites only, it implies a new role for them as sacerdotal priests, previously reserved for the sons of Aaron. Cf. Mark J. Boda, “Perspectives on Priests in Haggai-Malachi,” in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature. Essays in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the Occasion of Her 65th Birthday* (STDJ 98; eds. J. Penner, K.M. Penner and C. Wassen; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 13-33, esp. n. 13. This seems unlikely given Malachi’s overall orthodox approach (See Becking, “Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile,” 4.) Likewise, the group tension Hanson perceives is not evident from Malachi’s text.

<sup>398</sup> O’Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* outlines the four traditional approaches to this question in the context of Malachi’s relationship with the priestly source, 24-6. She concludes that Malachi presents the priests and the descendants of Levi as functional equivalents but does not describe the context enough to “explain the equation”, 47. Both are deemed guilty by the prophet and in need of refinement and not “a wronged party being vindicated”, 83. See also Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 76-77. However, the interchangeability of the term does not hold up in literature subsequent to Malachi such as Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles (e.g. 1 Chron 6).

<sup>399</sup> The last reference in 33:22 omits כהנים.

<sup>400</sup> Chronicles depicts Phinehas as in charge of the Levites.

held by each group.<sup>401</sup> Malachi critiques the priests for impure offerings and failure to instruct—recalling the blessing of Levi (Deut 33:8-11). Malachi’s significant focus on sacrificial practices points definitively to the priests, yet his nearly equal emphasis on proper instruction plausibly encapsulates the whole of the Levitical tribe.<sup>402</sup> Nehemiah also combines his address to the two groups constituting the priesthood while also “establishing the duties of the priest and Levites, each in his own work” (Neh 13:28-31). Malachi envisions one group with different responsibilities, all of which have been shirked, leaving the whole of the group in need of purification.<sup>403</sup>

### **YHWH’s Covenants: A Covenant-Formed Israel**

Covenant language pervades the book of Malachi, which employs בְּרִית six times combined with covenantal stock language such as love–hate, father–son, master–servant, and blessing–curse. The number of references exceeds that of any other postexilic book.<sup>404</sup> The covenant *topos* saturates Israelite tradition as preserved in the OT texts.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Jonker, *Defining All-Israel in Chronicles*, argues that the Chronicler throughout the narrative elevates the profile of the Levites without displacing the priests or minimizing their role in the cult, which includes at times presenting the Levites as subordinate to the priests. “The Chronicler did not take an exclusive stance for or against certain priestly groupings, but rather merged different factions into a reconciliatory disposition, 254.” [For example, both groups participate in bringing the ark to Jerusalem (2 Chron 5:4-11) and participate in teaching torah (2 Chron 17:7-9).] While the Chronicler presents differences between both groups, he shows an aligning of responsibilities especially in matters of “holiness and dedication to Yahweh,” 274. Malachi shrouds the distinctions perhaps because he is more interested in the restoration of all responsibilities in matters of honoring YHWH and torah rulings.

<sup>402</sup> Cf. 2 Chron 17:7-9. The scope of torah instruction is discussed further in chapter four.

<sup>403</sup> Weyde, “The Priests and the Descendants of Levi in the Book of Malachi,” 247; O’Brien, 83.

<sup>404</sup> References include the covenant with Levi (2:4, 5, 8), the messenger of the covenant (3:1), the covenant of our fathers (2:10), and the marriage covenant (2:14). Nehemiah (1:5; 9:8, 32; 13:29) comes closest to using covenant language on par with Malachi. Both address God’s commitment to covenant, a priestly covenant, and ancestral covenants, especially Abraham in Neh 9. Ezra uses “covenant” to refer to the agreement to put away foreign wives (Ezra 10:3) whereas Malachi advocates the covenant with one’s wife as incentive for avoiding foreign women. Third Isaiah references are mostly forward looking (56:4, 6; 59:21; 61:8).

Most assuredly covenant is an ancient practice and concept, well-developed prior to the Second Temple period and understood across the ancient Near East, born from efforts by both kings and clans to foster extended kinship.<sup>406</sup> Given the grave, challenging circumstances of his community, Malachi employs the covenant tradition in a variety of ways to assert YHWH's ongoing concern and commitment to Israel. Drawing on this rich tradition, Malachi reformulates the covenant *topos* for his own context, shaped by imperial practices and language, as he emphasizes certain particulars.

Various explorations of the covenant theme have been undertaken. McKenzie and Wallace reviewed each element of the theme concluding that the variation suggests a redactional development within the book.<sup>407</sup> More recently, Assis has argued in two separate examinations that covenant provides a key to the book's structure and overall message.<sup>408</sup> By emphasizing covenant commitments Malachi is asserting that Israel is still the people of God even though they doubt it.<sup>409</sup> Malachi stresses a theme of reciprocity —“mutual commitments between the people and God.”<sup>410</sup> However, it is

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<sup>405</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*.

<sup>406</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3-21; Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 246.

<sup>407</sup> McKenzie and Wallace, 563.

<sup>408</sup> Assis, “Mutual Recriminations: God and Israel in the Book of Malachi,” ; Elie Assis, “The Reproach of the Priests (Malachi 1:6 - 2:9) within Malachi's Conception of the Covenant,” in *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles* (ed. Richard J. Bautch and Gary K. Knoppers; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 271-90.

<sup>409</sup> Assis, “The Reproach of the Priests,” asserts that 1:6-2:9 is illustrative of this main point. The two main parts of the oracle address the two primary functions of a priest—sacrifice and teaching. The priestly culpability derives from and contributes to Israel's disregard of God and the covenant with him. Their neglect of ritual, jealousy of Edom, and their perplexed questioning of God reveal a doubt among the people that their covenant with God is still in force, 278.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

challenging to ascertain to which covenant Malachi primarily refers. His covenantal references are both general, such as “the covenant of our fathers,” and specific, such as “the covenant with Levi.” We will examine each to determine if there is a unified way that Malachi views covenants.

The “Covenant with Levi” seems to encapsulate multiple traditions that establish the relationship between YHWH and the descendants of Levi as his special ministers. McKenzie and Wallace observed that it is difficult to link directly with any other biblical text. The parallel language “covenant of peace” likely draws on the covenant made with Phineas in Numbers 25 for a perpetual priesthood.<sup>411</sup> That text primarily emphasizes the benefit accrued to Phineas and his descendants given his zeal for God. Expectations for that covenant are not spelled out, and it bears more similarity with a covenant grant or reward. Yet in Malachi 2, the covenant with Levi entails the specific expectation that the descendants of Levi would instruct Israel.

The covenant *topos* and context are used to emphasize blessing and curses that await the priest.<sup>412</sup> Because of Malachi’s emphasis on the covenant and the role of the priests in maintaining the commitments between God and the people, Assis considers the reference simply “an associative term used for rhetorical purposes.”<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Texts frequently examined for background include Deut 33:8-11 and Num 25:12-13. Only Num 25 uses “covenant” terminology. See Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 77-80 and O’Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, 104-7 for analysis of the comparative language. O’Brien insightfully points out that the shared language may stem from stock language used in grant treaties rather than Malachi simply borrowing from Num 25.

<sup>412</sup> McKenzie and Wallace, 550-51.

<sup>413</sup> Assis, “The Reproach of the Priests,” 282.

Weyde points out that the explicit use of the term ברית within the tradition is not required to designate the special agreement and relationship formed.<sup>414</sup> For example, the account of YHWH's promise to David of a perpetual house (2 Sam 7) does not employ the term ברית, yet subsequent references to the promise use ברית to describe it (2 Sam 23:5). Malachi, or the oral tradition before him, may have adjoined the covenant terminology (perhaps from Jer 33:21) to older traditions concerning the levitical priesthood.

Less clear is what Malachi means by the covenant with “our fathers” (Mal 2:10). McKenzie and Wallace lean toward patriarchal associations rather than Sinai, holding open the “possibility that the passage is deliberately ambiguous.”<sup>415</sup> Patriarchal references throughout the book such as Jacob, Esau, and Levi are suggestive of their position. The immediate context of 2:10 begs the question of the one father's identity: God, Abraham, or Jacob. The parallelism of 2:10a might point to God, but the broader context of the book might lead to settling on Jacob (1:2 and 3:6) while the larger biblical narrative would suggest Abraham (cf. Neh 9). If Abraham and Jacob are in view, we should be thinking about the covenant that promised descendants and land —perhaps a renewed concern among returnees. However, it is not clear how the patriarchal covenant relates to concerns for faithlessness to one another and profaning the sanctuary (2:10-11). Similar language is used in 3:7 “days of our fathers” that mentions turning from statutes, suggesting the Mosaic covenant. The Mosaic covenant more directly encompasses all the particulars Malachi addresses such as sacrifice, tithes, and marriage. The evidence would

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<sup>414</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 184-5.

<sup>415</sup> McKenzie and Wallace, 552.

certainly swing toward the Mosaic covenant if the reference in the appendix does indeed belong to Malachi's message.

Bautch argues that covenant in the postexilic period is claimed by partisan returnee groups who utilize specific aspects of the covenant to help establish identity and advance social cohesion among kinship groups.<sup>416</sup> Interestingly Bautch does not discuss or even cite Malachi. But, Malachi too may be using "covenant" generally, or ambiguously as McKenzie and Wallace conceded, with a unique purpose. Malachi's focus on the fathers, Levi, and messengers seems less concerned with communal kinship relations and more concerned with commitments before the Divine Kinsman. For example, in the marriage covenant, the emphasis is that YHWH is witness. Again, Malachi raises his level of focus beyond social world realities. Bautch has observed that covenant texts in the postexilic period tend to focus on specific points of covenant and torah. This holds true in Malachi as he uses sacrificial practices as illustrative of priestly failures (1:6-8) and withholding the tithe as an example of how Israel has turned from YHWH (3:7-8).

The flexibility with which Malachi uses the *topos* while never abandoning its essence is also reflective of Persian influence on covenants. Mitchell argues that typical covenant language and relationships take on a new meaning in the Achaemenid period.<sup>417</sup> The Persians do not employ typical vassal treaty language but supplant it with *bandaka*—an emphasis on personal relationship and loyalty. *Bandaka* is essential in maintaining the

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<sup>416</sup> Richard J. Bautch, *Glory and Power, Ritual and Relationship: The Sinai Covenant in the Postexilic Period* (LHBOTS 471; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 87-122.

<sup>417</sup> Christine Mitchell, "Achaemenid Persian Concepts Pertaining to Covenant and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi," in *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles* (ed. Richard J. Bautch and Gary N. Knoppers; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 291-306.

cosmic order as designed by Ahuramazda and accomplished through his agent, the Persian King. This has possible implications for the role envisioned for the priests in Malachi's symbolic world. Mitchell sees Malachi's emphasis on the priest as upending the Persian notion of king as primary representative (as evident in Is 42 and 49). Malachi's symbolic world differed from the Persian conception of the emperor as earthly representative of the god since YHWH is both God and King. It is the responsibility of YHWH's messengers to represent the God-King with concern for knowledge and instruction (further paralleling Persian concerns for law and order).

The general and novel references in Malachi point to the covenant conceived ideally as a symbol of the relationship between YHWH and Israel. Mutual commitment should pervade all relationships and may manifest itself in unique ways dependent upon one's role. For a husband, he lives by a covenant with his wife while a priest's life springs from his commitment as YHWH's messenger—a covenant as old as Levi.

### **YHWH's Torah: A Divinely Instructed Israel**

It is difficult to know in what form Malachi knows of torah. As O'Brien and Berry have shown, Malachi includes a number of references from across the Pentateuch.<sup>418</sup> A surface survey reveals some interesting features in postexilic and prophetic literature that may yield insight into torah traditions available to Malachi and how he wields the term.

On the surface, Malachi's mentions of torah differ from the majority of other postexilic references. A concentration appears in Nehemiah 8-10 (19 of the 32). Each of

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<sup>418</sup> O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, 85-112; Berry, "Malachi's Dual Design," *op. cit.*

the main scenes (reading torah and celebrating the festival of booths, the prayer of Ezra, and the covenant ceremony) refers to torah as being by the hand of Moses (Neh 8:14; 9:14; 10:30)<sup>419</sup> and described as a book or being written (Neh 8:3, 8, 18; 9:3; 10:34, 36). Like Mal 3:22 (4:4 Eng.), synonymous terms such as *מצות*, *חקים*, and *משפטים* occur in both Neh 9 and 10 (cf. Ezra 7:6).

A survey of the term “torah” in the book of the Twelve reveals limited usage. Malachi’s five instances account for a third of the occurrences in the corpus. More occurrences exist in the works of Isaiah (12x), Jeremiah (12x), and Ezekiel (9x) but still not with the relative frequency of Malachi. In most occurrences, torah is paralleled with “covenant” (Is 24:5; Jer 31:33; Hos 8:1), “words of YHWH” (Is 1:10; 2:3; 5:24; Jer 6:19; Mic 4:2), “judgments” or *משפטים* (Hab 1:4), “what is holy” (Zeph 3:4), and “statutes” or *חקים* (Is 24:5; Jer 44:10, 23; Amos 2:4). The term *חקים* is frequently used in tandem with *משפטים* alongside “torah” as referring to the Sinatic covenant code/Deuteronomic law [cf. Mal 3:22 (4:4 Eng.)]. Malachi refers to YHWH’s *חקים* (3:7) as being abandoned and not kept when he calls the community to repentance. While not in parallel with torah, this resembles the prophetic technique. Apart from Mal 3:22 (4:4 Eng.), this is Malachi’s primary allusion to the Sinatic covenant.

When Malachi uses torah, to what does he refer? Aside from 3:22, the four other usages are all within Mal 2:6-9 which locates torah as the jurisdiction of priests (cf. Jer 18:18; Ezek 7:26). The immediate context is priestly instruction that is true, turns people from iniquity, and consistent with God’s ways. The sense is broad. Alternatively, torah

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<sup>419</sup> The historical narratives pre and post exile associate torah with Moses, but the prophets do not with the exception of Mal 3:22 (4:4).

may refer to specific instructions given by the priest best characterized as priestly rulings in the determination of status – holy and common, clean and unclean (cf. Ezek 22:26; Hag 2:11; cf. Lev 10:10). The latter better fits the last two uses of torah in this section and is congruent with the primary issue in the larger unit of offering unclean sacrifices. The instructions were integral to fulfilling the obligations of the covenant, namely honoring and revering YHWH. The rulings have caused people to stumble.

Like covenant, Malachi uses torah both broadly, in reference to YHWH's instruction for living in relationship with him and his community, and specifically, as status rulings made by the priests.

### **YHWH's Tribute: A Gift-Bringing Israel**

The economic system of the temple functioned on the same currency as the social world: animals, grain, wine, and oil. Sacrifices, tithes, and freewill offerings may be paralleled to imperial tribute, tax, and gifts. The lack of economic commitment by Israel to YHWH Sebaoth lay at the root of Israel's failures critiqued by Malachi, inextricably linking resource stewardship to covenant faithfulness.

### **Offerings**

In his critiques against sacrificial practices, Malachi most frequently uses the term מנחה. Commonly, מנחה refers to the grain offerings brought to the priest mixed with oil, a portion offered on the altar and the remainder as a gift to the priest (Lev 2). It is frequently paralleled with drink offering נסך (cf. Exod 29:41; 30:9), especially in postexilic literature (Is 66:3; Neh 13:9), as a complement to meat sacrifices (Ezra 7:17)

and the regular daily offering (Exod 9:4-5; Neh 10:33). Being handled in vessels (Is 66:20) and stored in the temple chambers (Neh 13:5) further substantiates its association with the grain offering (1 Chron 21:23; 23:29). Yet Malachi does not limit the term to a grain offering as he uses it more generally for gift or offering. For example, in Mal 1:10-11 מנחה denotes the defiled animal offerings brought to the altar-table. The term is used this way in the origin stories referring to both grain and animal offerings (Gen 4:3-5) as well as presents given in good will such as those conferred by Jacob to Esau and Joseph (Gen 32:13,18,20-21; 43:11,15,25,26).

In light of the recurring depiction of YHWH's table (Ezek 41:22; 44:16), we should also hear the term "offering" in its social world context as a gift brought to the king's table to welcome and honor the Great King. This coheres with instances of the term used in scenes of showing homage in the origin stories and as a tribute in royal settings (1 Chron 18:2,6; 2 Chron 17:5, 11; 26:8; 31:12; 32:23). Viewing מנחה as a royal gift further accentuates the royal metaphor of YHWH Sebaoth ever present in the book.

### Tithing

Additionally, Malachi challenges Israel to bring the full tithe into the storehouse and test God's willingness to bless Israel. Tithing functions as an illustration of how Israel can respond to YHWH Sebaoth's appeal for Israel to renew their commitment and loyalty to him.

Variant traditions lie behind the practice of tithing. To which Malachi may be referring is difficult to determine. Num 18 describes the tithe as remuneration for the service of the Levites in the tent of meeting and sets a general expectation for tithing

although the frequency of the tithe is not specified. Correspondingly, the Levites owe a tithe of the tithe to the priests —the latter’s portion deemed holy to the Lord (Num 18:28-29). The substance of the tithe (fruit of the soil and vine in the field in Mal 3:11) is the same as Num 18:27, 30.

The brief reference to tithes in Lev 27 further substantiates the tithe as “holy to the Lord,” providing more weight to the notion that withholding the tithe robs God of his due.<sup>420</sup> Yet Leviticus describes an expanded universe of resources subject to the tithe — fruit of the trees and a tenth of the herd and flock.

Malachi appears to draw primarily from Deuteronomic traditions. Tithes are listed among the many forms of gifts brought to YHWH, but like Malachi, are paired with תְּרוּמָה (Deut 12:6, 11).<sup>421</sup> Deut 14 shares the same expansion of resources with Leviticus 27 yet the tithe functions not just as gift to YHWH but as a means of learning to fear YHWH as well as caring for the displaced in the community—Levite to immigrant. While Malachi does not expand upon frequency, he mimics the call of Deuteronomy to bring the tithe into the storehouse. He does not speak in terms of the tithe as a communal meal, but his usage resonates with concepts associated with the third-year tithe (14:18). Malachi also imitates a number of features from Deut 26. Again, the focus is on the produce of the fruit of the land. The tithe is considered the ‘sacred portion’ taken from each household and given to YHWH’s house for the Levites, widows, orphans, and sojourners (see

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<sup>420</sup> The link between covenant faithfulness and offerings and tithes in Mal 3:7-10 is comparable to Lev 26-27. Lev 26 contrasts the results of Israel’s unfaithfulness and faithfulness in typical covenantal terms of blessings and curses. Lev 27, which seems to be something of an appendix to Lev 26, situated between two summary statements “These are the statutes/commandments...,” clarifies for Israel the procedure and practice of votive offerings. The text is heavily economic with exchange equivalents, surcharges, and valuation practices. Tithes are excluded from the resources available for the freewill offerings as they are holy to the Lord.

<sup>421</sup> Another general term for a gift or offering. See L. Wächter, “תְּרוּמָה, תְּרוּמֵיהָ,” *TDOT* 15:770-7.

concern for similar groups in Mal 3:5). Deut 26 also fills out ways that the withheld tithe robs God. The tithe-bringer affirms that his gift to YHWH fulfills the commandment and is no less than whole: “I have not eaten of it while in mourning; I have not removed any of it while I was unclean; and I have not offered any of it to the dead” (Deut 26:14). The giver hopes to secure YHWH’s blessing, which Malachi promises to be a sure result if Israel will but test YHWH to end their need. He will open the windows of heaven and rebuke the devourer so that again the land will be perceived as “a land of delight,” evoking images of a land “flowing with milk and honey.”

Petersen understands the combination of the terms תרומה and מעשר as the tithe and tithe tax referring to “general tithes, which were collected in regional storehouses, and the tithe tax, which was sent to the temple in Jerusalem.”<sup>422</sup> Thus the contribution is the portion sent by the Levites to the priests in Jerusalem consistent with Num 18. This is largely on the basis of Neh 10:40 (39) where the Levites collect the tithe in the rural towns and bring the tithe of the tithe or תרומה to the chambers in Jerusalem. The concern of both Neh 10:40 and 13:11 is ultimately the house of God.<sup>423</sup> In the latter case, it is clear that the portion of the tithe for the house of God was not being provided. This may give some insight into Malachi’s call for the “full tithe.”<sup>424</sup> Both the Levites and priests need provision.

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<sup>422</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 216.

<sup>423</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 333.

<sup>424</sup> Cf. Lev 27:30; Deut 14:28; 26:12.

## The Day of YHWH

In his four references to the day of YHWH, Malachi leverages three important features associated with the tradition.<sup>425</sup> Only the last reference in Mal 3:24 (4:6 Eng.), considered by some as an appendix to the book, includes the exact language of day of YHWH (יום יהוה). However, Nogalski and others have demonstrated that the ideas associated with the day of YHWH that reside in the fifteen OT passages using the precise terminology are also encompassed around variations in the vocabulary such as “the day,” “on that day,” “the day belonging to YHWH,” and “the day of YHWH’s wrath or anger.”<sup>426</sup> Malachi’s three other references in 3:2; 3:17 and 3:19 (4:1) fall under this larger umbrella of day of YHWH language.

First, the day of YHWH is associated with theophany. The day of YHWH tradition extends far back to the earliest prophets although its precise origin lacks consensus. One of the more significant theories links the day of YHWH with the holy war tradition.<sup>427</sup> The notion is compelling since the holy war tradition resonates with the YHWH Sebaoth traditions that Malachi certainly emphasizes. Additionally, Malachi warns his community to heed the appearance of Elijah preceding the day of YHWH lest YHWH comes with decree of הִרָם, dispossessing and clearing Israel from the land [Mal 3:24 (4:6 Eng.)]. Von

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<sup>425</sup> On the “day of YHWH” generally and its relation to OT eschatology, see Bill T. Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (ed. J. L. Walls; Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23-39, esp. 27-9; Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is A Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 61-71.

<sup>426</sup> James D. Nogalski, “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 325; eds. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 192-213, esp. 192-6.

<sup>427</sup> Gerhard von Rad, “The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh,” *JSS* 4.2 (1959): 97-108.

Rad's proposal has been criticized as being too limited and ignoring the oldest prophetic traditions associated with the day of YHWH, namely Amos 5 and Isaiah 2.<sup>428</sup> Hoffmann argues that the association of theophany strictly with war limits the possibilities of understanding the day of YHWH. Theophany is broader than war.

Second, the day connotes the action of YHWH to rectify wrongs and punish enemies. YHWH's appearance at his temple for judgment against the wicked accentuates this feature and lends credence to a broader conception of theophany (Mal 3:1, 5). Additionally, Malachi assumes knowledge of Obadiah's usage of the day of YHWH that anticipates a punishment of Edom following the destruction of Judah/Jerusalem that will ultimately culminate in God's intervention against the nations. Within this threefold movement of divine intervention, Malachi is situated between the punishment of Edom (1:2-5) and God's impending intervention against the nations.<sup>429</sup> Yet the timeline may oversimplify the day of YHWH tradition. For example, Weiss seems right to emphasize that the time element present in the day of YHWH concept is better understood as the certainty of occurrence rather than a specific time.<sup>430</sup> Additionally, Malachi does not deem the punishment of Judah and Jerusalem as over. Given Israel's unfaithfulness, the

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<sup>428</sup> While Yair Hoffman, "The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 37-50 and Meir Weiss, "The Origin of the 'Day of the Lord' – Reconsidered," *HUCA* 37 (1966): 29-71 both emphasize a broader, more general focus on theophany, they disagree as to the origins of the Day of YHWH. Weiss argues that the Day of YHWH originates with Amos and his allusion to theophany traditions. Some prophets, particularly Isaiah and Zephaniah, build on and specify the Day of YHWH from Amos. Hoffmann contends that Amos (the oldest usage) plays with a familiar concept among the community even though the phrase lacked precise definition. Later, Zephaniah used the term more definitively to point toward eschatological activity of God largely associated with a theophany of judgment. Variations of the phrase occur primarily after Zephaniah as prophets modify the phrase within their context to stress certain aspects of the Day of YHWH.

<sup>429</sup> Nogalski, "The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve," 212.

<sup>430</sup> Weiss, 46-7.

wicked among Israel will be grouped with the nations on the day of God's intervention.<sup>431</sup>

Third, the imagery used to convey the day of YHWH is summarized in Malachi's characterization "great and terrible". Malachi is a late witness to the day of YHWH in the OT. Potentially the whole tradition is available to Malachi and his audience. His concluding single reference to the day of YHWH echoes the anticipatory language of Joel. However, the emotion linked with the day to some extent is a matter of perspective—those who revere YHWH will be spared.<sup>432</sup> Likewise, some even among the nations will be spared when YHWH acts (cf. Mal 1:11-14). The eschatological traditions that formed in the postexilic era anticipated YHWH's return and restoration of his reign among his people accompanied by the flow of the nations and their treasures to recognize and honor YHWH. While Malachi shares aspects of this vision, he does not faint from stressing the judgment associated with YHWH's arrival with ominous warnings, reminiscent of Amos, for those who show disregard for the present and assume too much concerning the results of that day.

### **Synthesis and Implications**

In conclusion, we will summarize the core elements of Malachi's symbolic world, reflect briefly on why he emphasizes these particular symbols and traditions, and consider the implications of these matters on the nature of Malachi's prophetic message.

In Malachi's symbolic world, YHWH Sebaoth is the sovereign king. The name assimilates the traditions associated with God as reigning king and divine warrior.

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<sup>431</sup> Nogalski, "The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve," 212.

<sup>432</sup> Hoffman, 43.

Narrative, prophetic, and cultic traditions underlie the belief in YHWH Sebaoth who reigns over the host of heaven, dwells among Israel at the temple, and sets in motion the rise and fall of nations. On the basis of these traditions, Malachi understands YHWH Sebaoth as the king who commissioned the message he delivers to Israel. Like other postexilic prophets, Malachi embraces the name to revive confidence that YHWH Sebaoth will return to Zion and continues to oversee the nations, including the Persian Empire.

Malachi directs his message to the community of Israel. The name embodies a people in longstanding relationship with YHWH but who have struggled to prevail in faithfulness to their sovereign king. Malachi reminds his generation of Israel that assurance and hope reside in a renewal of the relationship with YHWH. In his message, Malachi attributes questions to those among his community that signal a shaken and unraveling belief system. Their questions challenge God's love and justice; they reflect an unawareness of how to honor God and why God no longer shows favor to Israel. Within his message, we can detect the main elements of the belief system that revolve around symbols such as temple, offerings, covenant, and torah.

As the house of God, the temple was the emblem and location of God's presence among Israel, serving as the primary locus for praise, prayer, and sacrifice. While the temple is central to the symbolic world, the community questioned YHWH's abiding presence in Jerusalem and the temple. YHWH's messenger announced an impending return, substantiating to some degree, the inference that YHWH's presence did not measure up to past understandings and prophetic expectations. Disregard for the house of God has prompted the Great King to prefer the doors be closed rather than his table be defiled with deficient gifts.

Messengers occupy a central role in Israel's symbolic world, corresponding to the social pattern of royal communications and administration. Malachi counts himself among these special envoys and additionally announces the impending arrival of other messengers before YHWH's return. However, charge for everyday oversight and leadership had been entrusted to the priests and Levites, whom Malachi casts as messengers in their own right. Malachi envisions their relations and responsibilities in covenantal terms. They were to mediate the relationship between YHWH and Israel, both at the temple and among the community through their administration of sacrifices and teaching torah. As such, the priests served a critical role in the socialization of the symbol system. Their failure as described by Malachi no doubt contributed to the crumbling belief system confronted by Malachi.

Malachi adheres to covenant constructs that pervade Israel's belief system. Malachi highlights the shifting function toward general usage of ברית in the postexilic period, likewise reflective of Persian influence, which emphasized personal relationship and loyalty over traditional vassal treaty thinking. Covenant connotes mutual and reciprocal commitments that pervade the foundations and expectations associated with Malachi's moral world. YHWH bestows his presence, blessing, justice, and instruction upon Israel. In turn, Israel honors and fears YHWH by bringing its offerings and living faithfully with each other.

Integral to covenant, torah represents the instruction provided by YHWH to Israel for maintaining the covenant relationship, expounding on roles, responsibilities, and obligations that would foster a moral world that acknowledged YHWH's greatness and promoted faithful communal living. Malachi stresses its importance to remind Israel that

it had turned from YHWH's statutes (3:7) and in the closing appeal to remember the Mosaic torah [(3:22 (4:4 Eng.)). Additionally, torah specifically designates the vital priestly teaching and rulings associated with matters of holiness and sacrificial practices.

Based largely on the communal vision of Deuteronomy, offerings and tithes symbolize the tribute and gifts brought to the Great King YHWH. YHWH is honored through offerings that acknowledge his greatness among the nations and also provide for his messengers. YHWH meets Israel at the temple, at his table, where gifts are presented and YHWH's name is honored. These tokens from the economic system not only exhibit Israel's honor and loyalty, but also serve as economic provision for YHWH's house, its servants, and the marginalized bereft of another household.

In Malachi's symbolic world, the Day of YHWH stands in the distance as a warning against Israel's unfaithfulness that will be rectified on the great and terrible day when the Great King appears to claim the righteous and punish the wicked, ominously depicted with war-like imagery intrinsic to Malachi's concluding warning of **הָרָם**.

Why does Malachi emphasize these particular traditions? The broad outlines of this structure are not unique but strongly contiguous with the larger biblical narrative and tradition. This is not surprising since it is generally acknowledged that exilic returnees sought to instill past beliefs into the community.<sup>433</sup> Yet Malachi tailors and accentuates aspects of each of these features to fit his message and serve as foundations in his moral world. More importantly, the symbol system of Malachi's community has begun to disintegrate. In sociology of knowledge terms, socialization has failed and the community's symbolic world needs rebuilding. Malachi envisages himself as a

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<sup>433</sup> For example, Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists: Power Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud," 91-122; Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile," *op. cit.*

messenger sent from YHWH Sebaoth to Israel whose symbolic understanding of reality has been challenged by difficult social world experiences and unrealized symbolic world hopes. To address the symbolic and moral world crisis, Malachi focuses on the core rather peripheral matters of the belief system in order to stabilize and reorient the community. He stresses the primary relationship with the symbolic world and asserts the identity of God as YHWH Sebaoth and the community as Israel or beloved Jacob. Malachi's message concentrates on key elements of the symbolic world such as temple, offerings, covenant, and torah. Around these core matters, Malachi takes issue with both the community and its priests. Core beliefs are substantiated by fundamental values and practices. As a result, we observe Malachi setting expectations around values and practices such as honoring God, keeping commitments, and working out justice.

Malachi's selection of traditions around core matters may provide insight into the nature of his message. As noted in the earlier review of interpretation history, Utzschneider and Weyde have argued that Malachi is an example of the scribal prophetic tradition, in which the prophetic message is grounded in tradition and previous utterances of God's word. Our symbolic world analysis gives credence to the thesis. For example, Malachi participates in the resurgence of the YHWH Sebaoth's identity rooted in preexilic traditions. He announces YHWH's love for community first bestowed on their ancestor Jacob. Malachi refers to the ancestral covenant generally without specifying a Abrahamic or Mosaic emphasis. The differences between priests and Levites are blurred with emphasis on primary responsibilities, such as showing honor and teaching, and a common origin idealized in the covenant with Levi, perhaps his own formulation of traditions. He employs general terms for offerings and turns to tithing as an illustration of

returning to YHWH. While named among the prophets by later tradition, Malachi views himself primarily as a messenger whose message is grounded in these traditions such as the greatness of YHWH Sebaoth, the choice of Jacob, the covenant with Levi, and the torah of the priests. It is impossible to know which specific traditions have shaped the symbolic perspective of Malachi, but his message suggests a symbolic world understanding informed by a diverse universe of narrative, legal, prophetic, cultic, and wisdom traditions. This implies that Malachi is not promulgating new prophetic revelation but rather interpreting, advancing, and applying traditions available to his community that have shaped their long established, orthodox symbolic world. We will see in the following chapter that the community had once accepted this symbolic world but were now questioning the accuracy of its claims and its ongoing applicability.

## CHAPTER 4: THE MORAL WORLD OF MALACHI

This is a descriptive reading and analysis of Malachi's moral world. The reading reveals a moral world crisis for some portion of his community. The moral matters being addressed suggest that the symbolic world of Malachi is at risk of disintegrating. YHWH's messenger exposes and critiques Israel's commitment to YHWH while Israel questions the evidence of YHWH's commitment to Israel. YHWH's messenger is calling Israel back to fundamental commitments that have been abandoned. His message engages the thoughts, actions, and attitudes of his community that he deems in conflict with the traditional moral world of Israel. The book's opening title establishes a relationship between YHWH and Israel as one critical for viewing the moral world. YHWH's position gives authority to his messenger to confront, critique, and instruct. The use of a messenger signals YHWH as king and Israel as his subject commensurate with the symbolic world of Malachi.

The moral world entails how one views the world and chooses to act in it. At the heart of the moral world are ideas and beliefs that constitute the symbolic understanding of reality or belief system. Certain statements about reality or tenets congeal the essence of the belief system and establish an expectation for behavior. For example, Israel's *Shema* proclaims their core conviction that YHWH is God, and as a result, Israel should love YHWH with all of their being. We have outlined many of the key features of Israel's convictions in the previous chapter, especially those concerned with Malachi's symbolic world. Now, certain expectations arise out of the set of ideals and beliefs that constitute the moral world. These expectations are the means for both affirming and actualizing the

belief structure. They manifest themselves in practices, commands, prohibitions, obligations, and tasks that reflect, sustain, and perpetuate the moral world.

As we move into the text of Malachi, an artifact of his moral world, we will emphasize the statements of reality or *moral foundations* that summarize the main assertions Malachi employs to advocate for his moral world. Second we will identify the *moral expectations* that Malachi argues result from the core beliefs and ideas. In tandem, we will examine the practices, commands, obligations, and tasks that Malachi asserts move the community toward the good envisioned by the moral world. In certain portions of the message, Malachi exhorts the community to change by warning them of the impending *moral consequences* of their present trajectory. By examining the attitudes and actions of those he confronts, we can glimpse the moral world of his community. From his characterization and critique, we can begin to project the *moral motives* behind the actions of the community and the functioning counter belief system accommodating the social world circumstances and influences. This moral world description will not necessarily follow a strict sequence of the four categories but in a fashion that best suits the presentation of the moral world.

### **Proclaim the Greatness of YHWH – Protector of Israel (Malachi 1:2-5)**

Malachi's opening message goes to the heart of the moral problem in Israel. Their mediocre offerings, lack of tithing, relational treachery, and doubts of God's justice reflect a deep uncertainty about their ongoing relationship with YHWH. Malachi confronts this most basic understanding in his opening passage to Israel. The unit is arranged with alternating sayings attributed to YHWH and the nations of Israel and Edom.<sup>434</sup> The alternating voices establish YHWH as the one who defines and declares the relationship; Israel may only question. Edom may have a plan for its future, but YHWH is the ultimate authority. While Israel's questions are entertained, YHWH intends for them to see and marvel at him. The first word of the message both disarms and orients Israel. Unfaithful Israel is still the object of YHWH's love. Until Israel recognizes and acknowledges their special relationship with YHWH and the concomitant obligations, their behaviors will go unchanged. Israel's moral perspective needs recalibration.

#### Moral Foundations

The opening message illustrates the priority of ideas and beliefs in a moral world. Malachi deals with a fundamental belief before addressing any of Israel's practices. Israel must recognize that YHWH loves them. Malachi's assertion of God's love for Israel stems from the core tradition that YHWH made a covenant with Israel. The polar word pairing of

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<sup>434</sup> The prophet's use of other's speech could be rhetorical, reported speech, or anticipated speech. It is difficult to know with any certainty. As Hill observes, "his oracles would have a more piercing impact on the Hebrew community if he were turning their words against them." Hill, *Malachi*, 148.

love-hate points toward this covenantal context. YHWH summarizes and reasserts his commitment to this fundamental belief in his opening assertion “I have loved you.” This two-word declaration opens the speech and introduces the statement-question-answer formula recurring in Malachi. The opening exchange is structured with two verbs concentrically arranged: love and say. YHWH’s answer to Israel’s question is followed by a syntactically concentric response that contrasts YHWH’s love for Jacob and hate for Esau.

1:2a		I-have- <i>loved</i>	you
1:2b		YHWH <b>says</b>	
1:2c		Yet you <b>say</b>	
1:2d	how	have you <i>loved</i>	us

In covenantal contexts, “love” terminology has been understood in terms of covenant loyalty.<sup>435</sup> Although loyalty, which focuses on allegiance and behavior, is a key connotation for understanding YHWH’s claim, the emotive aspects of “love” still adhere in the biblical covenant contexts.<sup>436</sup> Malachi’s employment of love’s opposite “hate” (אָנְטִיפֶזִי) illustrates this. The fuller understanding of both terms enhances the rhetorical power of YHWH’s assertion and the covenant context.<sup>437</sup>

“Love” can connote covenantal choice or favor (Deut 7:6-8). Moreover, the prophetic picture of God’s love for Israel reveals the empathetic, passionate God in love with Israel as his child (Hos 11) and as the people he reluctantly must punish for their

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<sup>435</sup> William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77-87.

<sup>436</sup> Bill T. Arnold, “The Love-Fear Antinomy in Deuteronomy 5-11,” *VT* 61.4 (2011): 551-69.

<sup>437</sup> R. Michael Fox, *A Message from the Great King: Reading Malachi in Light of Ancient Persian Royal Messenger Texts from the Time of Xerxes* (Siphut 17; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 50. Fox develops and confirms the imperial allusions and links in Malachi that I observed independently in light of the work of Briant.

unfaithfulness to the covenant (Jer 5:7,9; 9:7). YHWH's opening appeal asserts his own faithfulness and passion for his people.

YHWH proves his electing love not only by divine declaration but also recent historical demonstration.<sup>438</sup> As the prophets had anticipated, Edom experienced the judgment of God for their complicity in Judah's destruction by Babylon. In some measure Edom later experienced the Babylonian machine with similar results. Malachi points to Edom's experience as punishment that corroborates the prophetic word against Edom. Edom became a *desolation* as a result of their punishment. The catchword *שממה*, depicting a ruined and uninhabited land, links the current state description to the prophetically pronounced destruction (Ezek 35: 3-9; described semantically similarly by Jer 49 and Obadiah). The prize of Esau is now the haunt of desert jackals. YHWH appeals to those memories and their actualization to explain his love for Israel.

The speech alternates back to the perspective of Edom which plans to rebuild. Edom plans to reverse its fate, yet this counters YHWH's plan. YHWH's response, a declaration attributed to YHWH Sebaoth, succinctly indicates YHWH's ongoing hate toward Edom. Expressed with two pair of lexemes constructed in opposition at the morphological and lexical levels.<sup>439</sup>

1:4e		<b>They</b>	<b><u>may build,</u></b>
1:4f	but	<i>I</i>	<b><i>will tear down</i></b>

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<sup>438</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 165.

<sup>439</sup> Third person plural pronoun is paralleled with first common singular pronoun. The verbal lexemes are opposed semantically: "build" and "tear down."

In relational and covenant contexts, “hate” is traditionally understood as something less than love or not preferred.<sup>440</sup> If love is related to choosing as suggested in Deuteronomy 7:6-8, hate may be understood as not loved or not chosen.<sup>441</sup> Yet the emotive and rhetorical power of “hate” is present in the messenger’s explanation of God’s love. YHWH’s depiction of his past treatment of Edom and how he will counter any resurgence attempted by Edom is not congruent with connotations such “love less” or “not chosen.” YHWH has and will undertake efforts to oppose and punish Edom, pointing toward the active expression of hate; they have been rejected.<sup>442</sup> YHWH’s hate for Edom will result in loss of property and curse so that the land is desolate and Edom will be known as a Wicked Country.<sup>443</sup> YHWH’s hate for Edom is illustrative of his love for Israel and likewise, because he loves Israel, he hates Edom.

### Moral Consequences

Notably and ironically, the majority of the opening message discusses Edom and not Israel. It is disputed whether Edom should be understood as a literal reference to the country of Edom or whether Edom had become the symbolic reference of Israel’s enemies.<sup>444</sup> In my view, the social world circumstances point toward the former view.

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<sup>440</sup> See the extended discussion in Verhoef, *Malachi*, 200-2.

<sup>441</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 166-7.

<sup>442</sup> John Oswalt, *Where Are You God? Malachi’s Perspective on Injustice and Suffering* (Nappance, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1982), 37-40.

<sup>443</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 170.

<sup>444</sup> See Verhoef, *Malachi*, 25 and chapter 2, note 137 for Edom as symbolic in later texts.

Yet interestingly, Malachi appears to be using Edom as symbolic for Israel.<sup>445</sup> Edom's future may be a sign for Israel of what they will experience if they do not live out the implications of being loved by YHWH. Over a century earlier, Jeremiah forecasted Judah's future with similar language. "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of *jackals*, and I will make the cities of Judah a *desolation*, without inhabitant." (Jer 9:11 ESV) Now Judah is at the crossroad deciding how it will be known. Israel, the object of God's love, formerly had come to be hated by YHWH because of its wickedness (Hos 9:15) and Judah had experienced the punishment of exile. YHWH's faithful love resulted in their return. If Israel was seeking to rebuild apart from YHWH, as their practices suggest, YHWH provides Edom as a sign of what lies ahead for those opposed to him.

Edom will be known by the moniker גבול רשעה "Wicked Territory." Such a characterization places them among כל עשה רשעה and designated them for judgment on the Day of YHWH [Mal 3:19 (4:1 Eng)]. God's disfavor will frustrate and make futile all of Edom's efforts to rebuild, earning them the second epithet "People Forever Cursed." The ongoing effect of YHWH's curse is rhetorically emphasized. The lengthened line rhetorically compliments the ongoing curse, described as lasting ער עולם.

1:4g They will be called a **territory** of wickedness

1:4h and a **people** whom YHWH has cursed perpetually.

The possibility that Israel will share in YHWH's cursing is present throughout the succeeding passages of Malachi's message (1:14; 2:2, 12; 3:9). It is made abundantly clear in the concluding appendix to the message that if Israel will not return to Yhwh and enact reconciliation within the community, the land will experience הרם—the ultimate

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<sup>445</sup> I am building an observation made by Hill that Edom may be Malachi's foil for Israel's future. Hill, *Malachi*, 168.

curse and desolation. But YHWH has different plans for Israel—plans to reverse her desolation and make her a land of delight (cf. Is 62:4).

### Moral Motives

Hill describes the opening tone as “combative.”<sup>446</sup> Given the context of ancient Near Eastern messengers, combative might be expected from a messenger, yet the first word is not “Why have you not loved me?” but the reassuring word of God’s constant love, perhaps a disarming word. The opening thesis likely provoked a variety of responses dependent upon one’s view of YHWH, being either unconvinced, doubtful, or faithful.<sup>447</sup> However, those of Jacob responding seem to represent primarily the doubtful or skeptical. YHWH’s chosen son and his beloved doubted the ongoing significance of these traditions captured in YHWH’s opening proclamation. Their brief retort “how have you loved us” reflects their doubt of this core tenet. To what can this doubt be attributed?

From the symbolic worldview, the viability of the covenant is unclear in the postexilic period. The prophets leverage the tradition, but something new has been envisioned already by Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Ezekiel (36:22-30). Jeremiah depicts the covenant as broken (31:32). Haggai and Zechariah envision a renewal of God’s presence through king and temple. As noted in the symbolic world description, the status of the covenant and the actualized presence of God is unclear; at a minimum, it is not described as it was in the preexilic era. It is not until Ezra and Nehemiah that an actual covenantal renewal ceremony occurs, yet even then there was no word from YHWH. So it is plausible that some in Israel doubted the covenant’s persistence.

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 162-3.

From a social world perspective, YHWH's "comparative contrast" between Jacob and Esau suggests that part of Israel's doubts stem from circumstances involving Edom. It is difficult to draw clear lines between Malachi's account of Edom and the historical happenings on the ground. Edom had experienced the punishment promised by the prophets. Now, Israel may have seen Edom reviving and its inhabitants pushing toward their southern border. For the skeptical, if Edom had survived YHWH's punishment and the promise of YHWH's blessing had gone unrealized for Israel, perhaps Edom was now displacing Israel place with YHWH. This angst would have produced a dismayed Yehud and threatened its moral world.

#### Moral Expectations

YHWH's messenger expects Israel to trust in YHWH's word. The surety of that word should give credence to the renewed words of YHWH that Edom will not succeed. Moreover the prophetic formulas marking this speech recall these traditions and perhaps reiterate the central message applying them again to the future YHWH intends for Edom.<sup>448</sup>

Additionally, YHWH's messenger expects Israel to trust in YHWH's love. Israel's history with YHWH was replete with manifestations of YHWH's love. Malachi focuses his message on the choice of Israel over Edom, but that choice began with the call of Abraham and continued through the rescue of this beloved son from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai, the gift of land, and generations of patient mercy with an unfaithful Israel among the nations. In Israel's restoration from exile, again Yhwh demonstrated his choice of

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<sup>448</sup> The prophetic formulas in 1:2-4 are certainly not unusual in prophetic speech but these particular phrases are unique in Malachi's text, so they may be Malachi's means for pointing to the tradition. See the discussion of Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 101.

Israel. With a recalibrated understanding that YHWH loves Israel, YHWH expects Israel's questioning will become proclamation. Edom serves as a past and future sign of YHWH's faithfulness to Israel. On the basis of YHWH's commitment to them, Israel's moral world needs to be addressed as Malachi proceeds to refine it in the remainder of his message. Second, and most immediate in this passage, Israel will recognize and proclaim YHWH's greatness **מעל לגבול ישראל**. Whether **מעל** signals "over" or "beyond" is unclear. Actually both meanings inhere in the morpheme and resonate with the context. The evidence of God's greatness is present in Israel and beyond, in Edom and among the nations, as the next passage suggests.

Worldviews are largely a matter of perspective arrived at as one attempts to make sense of what is observed. The more narrow the worldview, the less understanding and valid are the perspectives held. Preoccupation with one's own difficulties can skew the view of reality while glimpsing the experiences of others broadens perspectives and influences behavior. YHWH is calling Israel to look to its past and then beyond itself, beyond its borders, for perspective on how he is loved by YHWH.

### **Honor YHWH Sebaoth – The Great King (Malachi 1:6-2:9)**

The book's opening message closed with the anticipation that Israel would see and proclaim YHWH's greatness among the nations. Malachi expands on this idea in his second message, confronting practices in Israel that betray a doubt or rejection of YHWH's greatness as being worthy of honor. Malachi stakes his position on two basic claims about YHWH's sovereignty and his covenant with the priests. For each of these

foundational claims, certain expectations emanate. Let us consider each claim and its related expectations in turn.

### First Moral Foundation

Of first importance is YHWH's sovereignty—YHWH Sebaoth is a Great King. Malachi builds to this assertion in 1:14. The claim is loaded with meaning from both the social and symbolic world as discussed previously. In his symbolic world, Malachi portrays YHWH Sebaoth as his God. The title embraces a rich tradition of God reigning, often portrayed with divine warrior imagery. YHWH's own claim of being a great king would have reverberated in Malachi's Persian imperial setting. As we reviewed in chapter two, the imperial context pervades the community, reinforced through institutions, processes, and symbols. The title of Great King used widely by the Persian emperor asserted continuity with the past and far-reaching rule. One example well illustrates the claim: "I am Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of all kinds of people, king of this earth far and wide, son of Darius the Achaemenid."<sup>449</sup> YHWH's bold claim undermines the claim of Xerxes and insists upon a different context out of which YHWH should be honored. As Fox concludes, "in short, the text presents YHWH as the true emperor."<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> From inscriptions XV and XE in Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, 301. For other examples, see Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 86.

<sup>450</sup> Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 86.

The central tenet of this reality is encapsulated in 1:11.

1:11a *Indeed*

**from the rising of the sun to its setting**

1:11b GREAT (IS) MY NAME AMONG THE NATIONS

1:11c and **in-every-place**

incense is presented to my **name**  
and a pure gift .

1:11d *Indeed*, GREAT (IS) MY NAME AMONG THE NATIONS

1:11e YHWH Sebaoth says.

Introduced by an asseverate **וַיֵּשֶׁבֶט**, the prophet proclaims a central truth that challenges the reality proposed by his opponents. The verse achieves two rhetorical aims. First, its juxtaposition with v.12 and its opening disjunctive **וְאַתֶּם** establish two important contrasts between the priests, the nations, and their offerings: the nations are contrasted with “you” (the priests) whose *defiled offerings* are at odds with *pure offerings*.

Second, the arrangement of the verse uses repetition to emphasize the central claim of the statement “Great is my name among the nations” and asserts that this belief extends across time and space. Likely an allusion to Psalm 113:3, the phrase from the rising to setting of the sun may be a merism for all space, as Verhoef argues, to emphasize the expanse of God’s reign.<sup>451</sup> The Persians employed a similar rhetorical device to describe the extent of the emperor’s reign.<sup>452</sup> Psalm 113:4 further substantiates the notion of spatial expanse through the phrasing “above all nations” and “above the

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<sup>451</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 223.

<sup>452</sup> Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 85-6.

heavens.” Yet 113:2 also incorporates the element of time, “this time on and evermore.” The rising and setting sun metaphor accentuates aspects of time and space.

Malachi’s assertion that YHWH is praised among the nations is a *crux interpretum*, with questions concerning *how* is YHWH honored and *by whom* among the nations is he honored.<sup>453</sup> A relationship between YHWH and the nations was not a new idea.<sup>454</sup> Haggai anticipated God’s mighty acts that would “shake” the earth and overthrow thrones (Hag 2:2-7). Zechariah envisioned God’s angels/messengers patrolling the earth (Zech 2:11) and people of the nations coming to seek God’s favor in Jerusalem (Zech 8:22-23). Joel portrayed YHWH as the judge over the neighboring nations (Joel 3:12-14). Oracles against the nations were common stock among the biblical prophets. During the exile, Ezekiel counseled Israel that YHWH would act to restore his own reputation, profaned among the nations by Israel (Ezek 36). As an additional alternative, the phrase may simply imply a localized phenomenon centered on Yehud. In Neh 6:6, Sanballat of Samaria uses the phrase to describe local groups that are distinct from Judah.

Attempting to specifically associate certain groups with the claim or argue for a burgeoning religious development may miss the point of the assertion given the context. Rhetorically and contextually it asserts a claim about YHWH’s greatness that places him

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<sup>453</sup> Verhoef offers a thorough discussion of the options, 225-32. The diverse perspectives fall into four general categories: 1) Malachi is asserting a form of universalism congruent with Persian religious development; 2) Malachi is referring to the faithful Jews dispersed among the empire; 3) or similarly, proselytes among the nations; 4) Malachi is describing a coming eschatological reality. Is Malachi proposing that any worship is the worship of YHWH? This would be an evolution or unique perspective in biblical teaching and seems unlikely simply from the fuller context of his message—Edom is the focus of judgment (1:2-5) and wives or idols of foreign gods are the focus on Malachi’s pejorative in 2:10-11. The verbless clause would easily allow “will be” vs. “is” so that Malachi is casting a vision for the future international glorification of YHWH. However, a fully future cast on the statement seems to weaken its rhetorical punch.

<sup>454</sup> Cf. Hill, *Malachi*, 219 for the references that develop this chain of thought.

on par with the emperor whose demands in the form of the governor (1:8) have received greater attention than honor due the Great King YHWH who loves Israel.

### Moral Expectations

Out of the reality of YHWH’s great reign, certain expectations flow about how YHWH is to be recognized and honored. YHWH’s greatness entitles him to honor, yet YHWH is being despised, that is, treated as if he is of little value and not even as well as a father or master. Malachi appeals to the conventional wisdom that masters and fathers are due honor.<sup>455</sup> Verse 6 is an example of the parallel arrangements that Malachi uses throughout this section.

1:6a	A son	<b>honors</b>	a <b>father</b> , and	
	a servant	[ ]	his <i>master</i> .	(Syntactically parallel)
1:6b	So if		a <b>father</b>	<u>I am</u> , where is my <b>honor</b> ?
1:6c	If		a <i>master</i>	<u>I am</u> , where is my <i>fear</i> ?

Lines 6b and 6c are a bi-member segment of 5 terms each. They are syntactically and synonymously parallel with the personal pronoun “I” at the center.

Honor is rooted in the idea of recognizing someone’s weight or significance.<sup>456</sup> The analogies that Malachi chooses of father–son and master–servant may partake of covenantal ideas as McKenzie and Wallace suggest.<sup>457</sup> This possibility is strengthened given the previous message, which conveys the covenant context. As God’s chosen

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<sup>455</sup> See Oswalt, *Where Are You God?* for the relationship between father–master and love–fear, 43-50.

<sup>456</sup> C. John Collins, “כבוד,” *NIDOTTE* 2:577-87.

<sup>457</sup> McKenzie and Wallace, 557.

nation whom he has rescued, it would follow that Israel should honor YHWH as a response to his salvation (cf. Ps 50:15, 23). But more likely, Malachi simply leverages a legal maxim or conventional wisdom that would not have been denied by the priests.<sup>458</sup> Certain proverbs (Prov 10:1 and 15:20) emphasize this aspect of the father–son relationship, as do other texts that prescribe honor for father, like the fifth commandment of the Decalogue and its semantic equivalent in Lev 19:2.<sup>459</sup> Malachi adds the parallel line of master-servant, which would not defy societal values and in fact may be moving closer to the ultimate claim that YHWH is king and thus worthy of honor. The analogical move comports with Israel’s own liturgical pronouncements that call on Israel to ascribe honor to YHWH (Pss 29:1; 96:7; 1 Chron 16:28).

Concomitant with showing honor to YHWH, there is an expectation that favor results from honoring YHWH. The sentiment is captured in the echoed petition “Entreat the face of God so he will show us favor” (Mal 1:9).<sup>460</sup> The discourse shifts in emphasis but remains in continuity with the ideas already presented as marked by *וַעֲתָהּ*.<sup>461</sup> It seems best to view the transition as the messenger speaking for YHWH alluding to a customary saying from petitioner to priest as an additional way of illustrating the problem. The

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<sup>458</sup> On the basis of similarities with Prov 10:1 and 15:20, Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 114-5, argues verse 6 is a proverb.

<sup>459</sup> Lev 19:2 uses the verb “fear” rather than “honor.” In Mal 1:6 the related nominal forms are set in parallel as observed by *ibid.*, 115.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 140 following Utzschneider, *Künder oder Schreiber?: eine These zum Problem der “Schriftprophetie” auf Grund von Maleachi 1, 6-2, 9* observes that the phrase “face of god” may be a wordplay on Peniel in Genesis 33 where Jacob received a blessing from God. This occurs in the Jacob narrative as he prepares to meet his brother Esau. The previous unit certainly places the Jacob-Esau narrative in the immediate background. Yet here, the priestly entreaty does not enjoy the same favor as their ancestor’s. The possibility is intriguing but not certain.

<sup>461</sup> *IBHS* §39.3.4f.

priest is disqualified from entreating God, one of their tasks, because they have handled their duty improperly.

Other interpretive alternatives have been suggested because it is difficult to know who is speaking. The use of “us” in the phrase seems counter to the verse’s conclusion that attributes the whole saying to YHWH Sebaoth. The prophet may be inserting and including himself with the community and exhorting the priests to intercede for them appropriately.<sup>462</sup> However, the rest of the verse clearly situates the phrase in an ironic context.<sup>463</sup> The wordplay between the *piel* (to entreat) and *qal* (to be sick) forms of חלה in v. 8 further illustrates the irony.<sup>464</sup> The priests *entreat* favor with *sick* animals. Also, the customary expectation sets up a strong contrast with priestly practice. In my view, the message utilizes a customary saying without attributing it directly. Retorts or refutations of Malachi’s message are marked throughout by “you say.” Here Malachi is echoing a common expression and not refuting the statement of his opponents but illustrating the futility of the request given the morals of the priest.

The phrase conveys a typical cultural understanding as evidenced by its presence in liturgical, social, and royal contexts. Petersen describes the phrase as “fossilized liturgical usage.”<sup>465</sup> In several instances, its liturgical function is clear, such as in prayers (Ps 119:58), petitions to priests accompanying fasts and laments (Zech 7:2), prayers for healing (1 Kgs 13:6), and repentance (Dan 9:13). Additionally, Weyde argues the

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<sup>462</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching* 137; Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 165.

<sup>463</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 226; Verhoef, *Malachi*, 220; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 138.

<sup>464</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 182.

<sup>465</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 182.

sentiment likely has royal origins<sup>466</sup> further making it suitable for the context of Malachi's message in which the deity, the great king, has been entreated poorly.

The liturgical formula shares vocabulary and logic with social customs (Proverbs 19:6). The means of entreaty, a gift מְנַחָה, “usually represents the bestowal of something to enhance an individual's public status, preserve stability within a kinship group, or provide economic benefit for all parties...Such exchange points to reciprocity as a means of attaining necessary items.”<sup>467</sup> The need to improve social standing found a place among the counsel of the wise (Prov 18:16). It seems the same mindset was active in the giving of gifts to YHWH. On one hand, the understanding helps make sense of the promise of blessing or YHWH's challenge to test him by bringing the full tithe so that blessings will flow. Some level of reciprocity seems to be at work. On the other hand, it highlights the potential for trying to manipulate God with offerings or allowing them to become token. This was part of the cultural mindset; as Adams notes, “gift giving does not reflect altruistic motives (i.e., these are not ‘pure gifts’): the initial bearer expects something in return.”<sup>468</sup>

However, the maxim realizes that what YHWH gives is not just a reciprocal act but a gracious one. This provides an alternate insight into YHWH's desire for a pure gift, that is one absent of other motives.<sup>469</sup> Just as a blessing from God is graciousness and not mere reciprocation, neither should Israel's gifts fall prey to the attitude of tokenism, a mere

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<sup>466</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 135.

<sup>467</sup> Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*, 123.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 123; cf. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic Life of Ancient Israel*, 51.

<sup>469</sup> The word “טָהוֹרִי,” *HALOT* 1:369 can refer to physical, ceremonial, or ethical purity.

exchange for something necessary. Gifts and offerings are not ultimate in God's world (Ps 40:6-8 and Hos 6:6). The prophetic and hymn traditions offer a caution against a simple one-to-one exchange absent proper reverence and ethical practice.

Perhaps too this offers another understanding of "incense." The genuine offering of the simplest gift is preferred to the defiled offerings presented by Israel. Aelian recounts one man's humble efforts to present an honorable gift to the emperor Artaxerxes.<sup>470</sup> It consisted of nothing more than a cup of water from the Cyrus River. The king was so impressed with the heart to honor the king that he rewarded the man with a great reward including a golden cup from which he could always drink from the river Cyrus. Kuhrt describes the exchange as "a simple gift lavishly rewarded."<sup>471</sup> Abundant graciousness from the king exceeds simple, pure demonstrations of honor.

### Second Moral Foundation

The second important aspect of Malachi's moral world understanding is the covenant YHWH made with Levi. As discussed in the previous chapter, Malachi draws on various traditions to emphasize the special agency that the priesthood has in Malachi's symbolic world. Malachi's discussion builds toward the claim that the priest is a messenger of YHWH.<sup>472</sup> Like the messengers of the imperial king, the faithful priest had special access to YHWH and significant responsibility in the house or court of YHWH — a role made particularly clear to the high priest Joshua (Zech 3:7). The special relationship

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<sup>470</sup> Aelian, *Var. hist.*, 1.32.

<sup>471</sup> Kuhrt, *A Corpus of Sources*, 658.

<sup>472</sup> Contra Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 72, Malachi is not insinuating that the priest is replacing the prophet. Cf. Hill, *Malachi*, 213; Verhoef, *Malachi* 250-1).

was contingent upon loyalty and faithfulness, which is connected to the Persian concept of *bandaka*. The emphasis upon speech with the repeated parallel metaphors of mouth and lips in 2:6-7 accentuate the messenger imagery.<sup>473</sup>

2:6a	Reliable instruction	was	in his <u>mouth</u>
2:6b	Injustice	was not found	on his <b>lips</b>
2:6c	In-peace and in-fairness	he- walked	with me.
2:6d	Many	he- caused to turn	from iniquity.
2:7a	For the <b>lips</b> of a priest	guard	knowledge
2:7b	Torah	they- seek	from his <u>mouth</u> .
2:7c	For the messenger of YHWH	Sebaoth he is	

As spokesman for the king, the messenger provides a reliable word (2:6a) and his performance is consistent with the standards of the king (2:6c). He is entrusted to advance the will of the king (2:7a) and to correct moral disorder (2:6d). The picture painted by Malachi of an ideal messenger tells us something about his own credentials as one entrusted by YHWH to bring a message, ironically, to those designated as YHWH’s messengers. If the priests had fulfilled their responsibility, the messenger Malachi would have been unnecessary.

Malachi refocuses his message to the priest with special emphasis upon the command given to them. In fact, “this command” forms an *inclusio* for the opening four verses of chapter two. From the context, “this command” involves properly honoring YHWH, the emphasis of the first half of the message. In this section, YHWH addresses the direct relevance of the command to the priests. He asserts that the command to show him

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<sup>473</sup> For a potential intertextual allusion regarding the speech of fools using similar terminology (Prov 18:6), see Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 190-1.

honor advances the well being of the priests and continues the covenant that YHWH made with their ancestor Levi. The fronting of אֱלֹהֵיכֶם after the discourse shift marked by וַעֲתָה rhetorically emphasizes the priestly advantage of honoring YHWH. The priests receive reciprocation through the graciousness of YHWH. However, their continued lack of attention, תְּשִׁימוּ עַל-לֵב / תְּשִׁימוּ שְׁמִיָּהּ repeated twice in 2:2, will result in a curse against them. The curse on blessing may allude to the blessing pronounced by the priests or the blessing they received as YHWH’s agents—their portion of the sacrifices (e.g., Lev 7:28-36).<sup>474</sup> Since part of the offering system was to provide for the priesthood, they neglected the offering system to their own detriment.<sup>475</sup> Further they may have already begun to experience a loss of “seed”.<sup>476</sup> Malachi also insinuates a reversal of status—they will become like the offal of the sacrifices.<sup>477</sup> Ultimately they will be abased in the community. In their low state, the priests could eventually recognize that YHWH’s command was for their own well-being, aligned with the promises made to Levi of life and peace.

Much of the following language echoes Deuteronomic covenant terminology such as “life”, “fear”, “torah”, “walk”, and “guard”.<sup>478</sup> As Hill notes, “life” and “peace” offer an “unlimited combination of nuances that include wholesome and prosperous activity,

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<sup>474</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 232-3.

<sup>475</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 189.

<sup>476</sup> The participle following הִנֵּה can signal immediate or future circumstance. *IBHS* §37.6 (cf. Hill, *Malachi*, 200). This seems to denote a loss of offspring as a personal consequence for the priests. However, a double entendre may be at work given the similar language of rebuke in 3:11 so that the messenger may be alluding to YHWH’s further rebuke of the agricultural yield (see Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 67-8). 3:11 would signal a reversal of the curse on the seed.

<sup>477</sup> This is a difficult phrase given the unclear subject referent and the switch to a singular pronoun whose antecedent is unclear.

<sup>478</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992).

vivifying peace, robust health, length of days, and vibrant well-being.<sup>479</sup> The pairing, not present in Deuteronomy, occurs in Prov 3:2 in a promissory context. In Proverbs, the father promises his son will accrue “length of days, years of life, and well being” if he heeds the command of his father.<sup>480</sup> The simple return of blessing for obedience motivates the relationship.<sup>481</sup>

The function of “fear” in the next member of the segment is unclear.<sup>482</sup> The word מורא may be an additional object of the verb<sup>483</sup> or a parallel term to life and peace that depicts Levi’s responsibility in the covenant, which he fulfilled.<sup>484</sup> Whatever the case, Levi’s fear of YHWH is stressed and offered as a contrast with this priesthood (1:6). More specifically, Levi feared YHWH’s “name”, a particular point of emphasis in this passage [1:6 (2x); 1:11 (3x); 1:14; 2:2; 2:5].<sup>485</sup> What was to be a “focal point of priestly service” is not honored by the priesthood.<sup>486</sup> It is only among the nations and by an ancestor of the past that YHWH’s name has been rightly honored. The covenant with Levi and its

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<sup>479</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 206.

<sup>480</sup> See Mitchell, “Achaemenid Persian Concepts Pertaining to Covenant and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi,” for similar Persian language.

<sup>481</sup> For a fuller discussion of the similarities and differences of the terminology in Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Malachi see Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 186-7.

<sup>482</sup> The 3mp pronominal suffix on the verb most reasonably points back to “life and peace”.

<sup>483</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 188. Weyde offers as an example Is 11:2 in which the shoot of the stump of Jesse is given the fear of the Lord (v.2) and “his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord” (v.3). Fear is both given by YHWH and the response to the gift.

<sup>484</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 246.

<sup>485</sup> “Despising Yahweh’s name involves improper ritual practice at the place where Yahweh has caused his name to dwell.” Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 178 (cf. Deut 12:11 and 16:2,6).

<sup>486</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 207-8.

expectations for the idealized priest became the moral foundation for subsequent priestly expectations.

### Moral Expectations

As YHWH builds to his final indictment of the priests, he describes three primary tasks idealized by the ancestor Levi. Levi represents the fear of YHWH, presented in Deuteronomy as action-orienting awe. It entails a matrix of ideas including walking, loving, serving, obeying, holding fast, and swearing by his name. (e.g., Deut 10:12, 20). The same action-orientation is present in the description of Levi's tasks. The first task is to provide reliable instruction (2:6a). The first bi-member contrasts two characterizations of torah: אמת against עוֹלָה. The latter word is used in other instances of speech (Job 6:30; 13:7; 27:4; Is 59:3) characterized as false or deceitful.<sup>487</sup> Particularly as the words of a messenger of YHWH, false and deceitful instruction stood counter to the character of YHWH (Deut 32:4). The former language points toward the oral instruction of the priest in “juridical and pedagogical functions ... predicated upon the Mosaic legal tradition.”<sup>488</sup> Ezra uses the plural form of the phrase תּוֹרֹת אמת to describe Mosaic laws (cf. Neh 9:13).<sup>489</sup> The priests listened to disputes, provided guidance, made determinations in purity matters, and decided between clean and unclean sacrifices. In these type matters, the priests had proven unreliable and unjust. Their decision to accept certain sacrifices illustrates their dereliction of duty. The contrast between true and false instruction

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<sup>487</sup> See David W. Baker, “עוֹלָה,” *NIDOTTE* 3:342-4.

<sup>488</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 208. See also Verhoef, *Malachi*, 247. Cf. Duet 17:10-11; 33:10; Lev 10:10-11.

<sup>489</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 189.

likewise recalls the Achaemenid emphasis upon *the truth* and *the lie* as a matter of loyalty to the king.<sup>490</sup> By not adhering to their responsibility to teach torah, they demonstrate their disloyalty to the Great King.

Second, Levi fulfilled his responsibility to walk with YHWH in peace and uprightness (2:6c). On the latter term, מִישׁוּר and its cognates have a rich tradition in ancient Near Eastern literature, designating behavior and actions associated with order, equity, and justice. In the OT, the figurative use of the root denotes “correct human conduct in regard to ethical norms and religious values.”<sup>491</sup> The peace–uprightness bi-member further illustrates the action orientation of Levi’s proper fear depicted as a walk with YHWH characterized by high ethical standards. The priest’s upright walk combined with reliable instruction had the effect of turning the community from iniquity. Whether through their rulings or through their example, as YHWH’s agents, they were responsible for correcting and even preventing acts contrary to standards of order, justice, and equity. The implication again is that the priests have failed and have permitted iniquity (עוֹן).

Finally, Levi modeled preserving or guarding knowledge about God. The asseverate כִּי in 2:7 could be emphasizing a third elaboration on the priestly tasks, or simply reiterating the first two descriptions. Again the speech metaphors emphasize “instruction,” which here is paralleled with “knowledge”. The terminology and priestly context recall the critique Hosea levied against the priest of his day (Hos 4:1, 6). The language also leverages the wisdom tradition (Prov 15:7; 18:15) emphasizing the sages’

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<sup>490</sup> See Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 339 on the emphasis on truth and lie among the Magi, the functionary Persian priests.

<sup>491</sup> Hannes Oliver, “יִשָּׁר,” *NIDOTTE* 2:563-8.

desire for knowledge in contrast with the fool.<sup>492</sup> Malachi subtly connects the priests of his day with apostate priests of Hosea and the fools of the wisdom tradition.

In the concluding verse (2:9), YHWH renders his judgment against the priests and summarizes the charge. The first charge alludes to the previous failures of the priest to keep YHWH's ways. The second half of the indictment is less clear. The idiom נָשָׂא פָּנִים can refer to showing favor in both the positive sense (be merciful) and negative sense (be partial).<sup>493</sup> The context generally determines the meaning, but in Mal 2:9, the grammar and context actually complicate the issue. The unit context is clearly a negative accusation against the priesthood supporting the position that Malachi is accusing the priests of showing partiality with their torah rulings. The majority of commentators take this view.<sup>494</sup> However, the grammatical context of the prior line includes אֵינְכֶם that negates the previous line and appears to be gapped in the second line. In the translation preferred by most, the subject "you" is retained without the negation. Without the negative particle, the participle is left without a subject referent. The *vav* would have to be read as a disjunctive and the subject assumed from the prior line (Cf. NRSV). The indictment of partiality would open an additional set of charges against the priest since showing partiality often accompanies practices motivated by self-gain. For example,

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<sup>492</sup> Throughout his work on the traditions behind Malachi, Weyde makes strong arguments that Malachi is influenced by the wisdom tradition. These two passages link knowledge with the "lips" of the wise and seeking of knowledge as a habit of the wise. In Mal 2:6-7 "mouth" and "lips" are arranged chiastically at the beginning and end of the two verses. Prov 18:6-7 likewise arranges the terms in chiastic fashion but in reverse order. In proverbs the focus is on the fool. In Malachi, the positive depiction of priestly speech using similar terms but in reverse may be a subtle rhetorical device associating the ideal priest with the wise and the corrupt priests with the fools. See Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 190-1.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>494</sup> See Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 193; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 237; Verhoef, *Malachi*, 253; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 208-9.

Verhoef argues their action is “instigated by material gain and was based on bribery and corruption.”<sup>495</sup> But these charges are not explicit in the detailed indictment. The focus rather seems to be on their improper handling of the torah and sacrifice.

If the negative particle is gapped, an alternative rendering would be, “you did not show favor with torah.”<sup>496</sup> That is, in their pronouncements of clean and unclean when determining worthy sacrifices, the priests had pronounced as acceptable what was unclean and defiled (i.e., sick, lame, blind). Through their corrupt torah rulings they had failed to show YHWH proper favor—the primary moral matter of the unit.<sup>497</sup>

Their corrupt rulings have resulted in an utter failure to fulfill the expectations of the covenant with Levi. The actions of these priests are contrasted with the tasks idealized by Levi in Mal 2:8. The sharp disparity is emphasized by the introductory “But you” **אַתָּה**. These priests have turned aside from the way rather than walking in peace and uprightness with YHWH. Rather than turning people from iniquity, they have caused many to stumble through their torah instructions. As a result, Malachi asserts that they “have ruined the covenant with Levi.” The covenant made between YHWH and Levi for the purpose of providing true instruction has become corrupted through torah rulings that have not shown favor to YHWH.

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<sup>495</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 253.

<sup>496</sup> See Hill, *Malachi*, 171, cf. 217-8, who seems more correct including the **אַתָּה** in the second line which he renders as “[you are not] acting graciously in [matters of] *Torah*.”

<sup>497</sup> Goldingay, *Israel's Life*, 754, favors a similar reading. However, he concludes, “By not regarding Yhwh’s ways they fail to show their own or Yhwh’s favor to the people.” In my view, the failure to show favor to the people is secondary to their neglect to help the people show YHWH favor.

## Moral Consequences

The judgment against the priests is their reversal of status among the people — “despised and abased.” The first term is a keyword of the whole unit (1:6 (2x), 7, 12; 2:9). The word *בזה* signifies “undervaluing someone or something.”<sup>498</sup> It is an inner attitude that affects relationships. Malachi’s moral world reflects an understanding of the word made intelligible through its antonyms. 1 Sam 2:30 contrasts honor with *despising* as does Malachi and alludes to the same priestly traditions associated with the covenant of Levi that emphasize the priestly designated role in sacrifice. Eli’s house is condemned for not offering proper sacrifices because they kept the best portions for themselves. (This is not explicitly mentioned in Malachi but the possibility exists). Prov 14:2 juxtaposes the upright (*ישר*) who fear YHWH with the devious who *despise* him. Prov 19:16 differentiates between keeping the commands and *despising* his ways. These three selections and Malachi elucidate *despising* YHWH through opposite characterizations such as honoring, fearing, and keeping his ways. Because the priests have shown no honor to YHWH in proper sacrifices and *undervalued* their responsibility to be his messenger and keep his ways, they will reap the same consequence among the people.<sup>499</sup>

## Moral Motives

Had anyone in Israel held the belief system we have ascribed to Malachi, it would have been the priests. What has motivated the priests toward this conduct? What has shifted their moral perspective? Mal 1:13 may provide some insight into the mindset of the priests. Some commentators believe it reflects the weariness and boredom

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<sup>498</sup> Michael A. Grisanti, “*בזה*,” *NIDOTTE* 1:628-30.

<sup>499</sup> Cf. Goldingay, *Israel’s Life*, 753.

experienced by the priests with the sacrificial process.<sup>500</sup> The nominal form appears in limited cases in the OT, but in each, תלאה describes challenging, difficult experiences endured: the community's exilic experience (Neh 9:32), a poet's travail in the wake of Jerusalem's destruction (Lam 3:5), and the ancestors' Egyptian enslavement and wilderness wandering (Exod 18:8, Num 20:14). In this light, the priests are referring to the larger postexilic experience, and namely their imperial existence, which has become an excuse for not bringing proper offerings. "What hardship!" This aligns with the social world conditions of an economically constrained and sparsely populated Yehud.<sup>501</sup> Along these lines, the imperial demands for tribute and taxes combined with diminished agricultural productions amidst a small province provide multiple extenuating circumstances that could have made temple requirements challenging.

The following line allows for this alternative.<sup>502</sup> The verb נפח can mean "blow" or "breath" which has been interpreted as a sign of contempt, signaling an attitude problem in support of the majority interpretation "What a weariness!" However, the verb can also mean "set a flame," which reasonably fits the context of offering sacrifices.<sup>503</sup> This coincides with YHWH's call in 1:10 to close the temple doors so that the altar's fire will no longer be kindled. Under the latter scenario, the priests attribute the poor sacrifice to their hardship and go ahead with the offering even though the sacrifice is tainted. They

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<sup>500</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 233; S.D. (Fanie) Snyman, *Malachi* (ed. Cornelis Houtman et al; Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 77. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 184-5, translates the term as "nuisance", and Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 151 thinks it refers to their overall attitude toward the cultic instructions.

<sup>501</sup> Goldingay, *Israel's Life*, 139, suggests this possibility too.

<sup>502</sup> For a fuller discussion of the alternatives see Verhoef, *Malachi*, 233 and Snyman, *Malachi*, 77. The *hiphil* form is used only here, Hag 1:9, and Job 31:39.

<sup>503</sup> See Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 185. He takes with the former line as "What a nuisance! But you still ignite it..."

have used the difficult circumstances to justify offering blind, lame, and sick animals (1:8).<sup>504</sup> In the absence of proper sacrifices, some have presented stolen animals tainting the sacrifice in yet another way (1:13). They have justified their actions with no regard to YHWH's table.

Malachi reveals their changed perspective by attributing to them the saying "the Lord's table may be despised." It is difficult to imagine the priests actually saying such a thing. Perhaps it is better to understand this not as literal speech but Malachi putting priestly actions into words to illustrate their absurdity. As Petersen argues, "By bringing the activity of the priests to linguistic expression, the author has palpably displayed their disregard for YHWH and his due."<sup>505</sup> They no longer consider such offerings inappropriate.

Proper honor is being denied YHWH according to his messenger. However, the same cannot be said of the honor being shown to the king and his surrogate, the *פֶּהַח*, as implied by verse 8. To some extent, the reason the governor and king received their due was because of their ever-felt presence. The Achaemenid king's table was not neglected because the demand was real. When the emperor's messenger announced his impending visit, the community knew the emperor and his host must be honored. Malachi anticipates an appearance of Israel's Great King that will stress his presence. But first the messenger turns his attention to another aspect of his moral world in crisis because of the priests' failure to keep YHWH's torah. Perhaps their failure to secure the blessing of YHWH for the

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<sup>504</sup> For a description of the animals characterized and correlation to the sacrificial prohibitions in the torah, see Verhoef, *Malachi*, 217 and Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 118-24.

<sup>505</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 180.

community had already lead to their despised and unimportant state within the community. Therefore, men must seek their own well-being.

### **Guard Your Character and Be Loyal (Malachi 2:10-16)**

In the book's third unit, Malachi emphasizes Israel's treachery. Malachi charges that Israel's moral world has been corrupted by its unfaithfulness and betrayal. The unit is held together by the keyword בַּגַּד used five times in the seven verses. Erlandsson's depiction of this term aptly describes Malachi's usage: "It is used when the OT writer wants to say that a man does not honor an agreement, or commits adultery, or breaks a covenant or some other ordinance given by God."<sup>506</sup> The unit has two halves (2:10-12 and 2:13-16) held together by the phrase "this second thing you do." In 2:13, the statement-question-answer format featured in the two opening disputations is resumed, but it is noticeably absent in the opening half of the unit (2:10-12). In the first half, the questions are rhetorical and voiced by the prophet rather than by YHWH. Since the first half does not follow the anticipated structure set up by the opening disputations, some suggest it is secondary.<sup>507</sup> However, the "treachery" *topos* stretches across both subunits insisting the two be read as a whole.

Israel's treachery has affected all of its relationships. Malachi first insinuates that failure to guard their spirit has resulted in them being faithless to one another (2:10). The faithfulness described primarily relates to God and wives making the call to faithfulness to each other seem an odd first description. Baldwin suggests it describes the "general

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<sup>506</sup> Erlandsson, "בַּגַּד," *TDOT* 1:470-3.

<sup>507</sup> See BHS proposals and Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 155.

tendency to disregard promises and agreements of all kinds, in business, marriage or social affairs generally (Is 24:16).”<sup>508</sup> In that scenario, the issues Malachi raises may simply be illustrative of a bigger issue concerning promise keeping. Given the writer’s tendency when discussing covenant matters to isolate a particular issue, a similar tactic may be at work here.<sup>509</sup>

### Moral Foundations

Their treachery contradicts reason since one Creator, one Father, and a longstanding covenant bind them.<sup>510</sup> In the analysis of Malachi’s symbolic world, we concluded that Malachi seems to often use “covenant” in a general sense, as this section illustrates. The one Creator, one Father descriptions seem to point to YHWH, echoing the Deuteronomic tradition. In Deut 32:6, Moses sings of God’s faithfulness despite the faithless conduct of his children Israel, “Is not he your father, who created you?”. Also, in response to Israel’s faithlessness, Isaiah proclaims YHWH as father and one who made Israel with his hands (Is 64:8; cf. Jer 31:9). Their collected actions have defiled what held Israel together as a community, namely their relationship with YHWH. They have affronted the holiness of YHWH, their first love.

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<sup>508</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 237.

<sup>509</sup> See the discussion of Covenant in chapter 3. Also, Malachi employs a similar approach in the fifth message. When the community questions how they can return to God, YHWH describes deficiencies in the tithing practice.

<sup>510</sup> See Assis, “Structure and Meaning,” *op.cit.*, for his perspective on an identity shift toward universalism.

## Moral Expectations

The unit as a whole presents a number of interpretive difficulties and features phraseology unique to Malachi.<sup>511</sup> As will be discussed below, the exact focus of the prophet's dispute is debated. Is he addressing idolatry *or* mixed marriage and divorce? One matter is relatively clear—the prophet's admonition that will help safeguard Israel against the actions spurned by Malachi: “Let each of you guard your character and do not act treacherously” (Mal 2:16e).

To determine the main focus of Malachi's critique, it proves helpful to look at parallels to the admonition that encapsulates his moral expectation. Two other passages share the verbal inflection and construction of Malachi 2:16e. In Deut 4:15, Moses counsels Israel to be careful not to desire an image for worship since they did not see God appear in any form at Horeb. In Josh 23:11, Joshua warns the new occupants of the land not to intermarry since YHWH loves them and mixing with the nations will pull them away from YHWH. Both texts present remarkable similarities to the *topos* of Mal 2:10-16, especially Josh 23.

The verb שָׁמַר conveys the sense of take care, be attentive to, watch over, or guard. The aim is the protection and preservation of something vital with deliberate diligence. In the reflexive construction of the *niphal* verb, the subject functions also as the object of the verb.<sup>512</sup> In the three cases above, the verb is conjoined with an “object” prefixed with a preposition, frequent with the verb שָׁמַר.<sup>513</sup> The presence of the “object” still maintains

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<sup>511</sup> See Hill, *Malachi*, “Notes,” 224-54 for examples.

<sup>512</sup> *IBHS* §23.4.

<sup>513</sup> Deut 4:15 and Josh 23:11 employ a *lamed* rather than a *bet* preposition.

the sense of the reflexive since both נפש and רוּחַ are closely aligned with the person.

Malachi calls for the protection of something essential to the person.

In Deut 4 and Josh 23, the “object” of the verb is נפש, which is sometimes used in parallel with רוּחַ.<sup>514</sup> Also, the plurality of the verb is matched by the plurality of the object noun, although this is not the case in Malachi. The term רוּחַ is somewhat difficult to define in Malachi. It is used three times in the latter half of the unit. The term has a variety of meanings ranging across both natural and spiritual domains such as “wind,” “breath,” “human spirit,” and “the Spirit” of God. The meaning of רוּחַ as “breath” naturally extends to the conception of that which animates life, that is, a life-essence or life force.<sup>515</sup> The word רוּחַ may also refer to the mind, implying rationality and sound judgment<sup>516</sup> with the extended meaning of disposition, attitude, or character.<sup>517</sup> The latter seems to fit the context of 2:15-16 better—one’s character represents their mental and moral qualities.

The singular רוּחַ could be read as suggesting some collective sense or character, even an ethos, that should be guarded. The collective idea would parallel the opening concern of Malachi that Judah has not been faithful to one another. Likewise, the difficult phrase in 2:15 שֹׂאֵר רוּחַ might then suggest an attitude or disposition not reflective of the

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<sup>514</sup> The word רוּחַ may tend more toward rationality while נפש entails emotions and desires. “*rûah* is life-power, having the ground of its vitality in itself; *nepesh* has a more subjective and conditioned life.” J. Barton Payne, “רוּחַ,” *TWOT* 2:836-7.

<sup>515</sup> This is the sense adopted by Hill, *Malachi*, 245.

<sup>516</sup> See Verhoef, *Malachi*, 227.

<sup>517</sup> “רוּחַ,” *HALOT* 2:1197-1201 and Philip Jenson and J. P. J. Olivier, “רוּחַ,” *NIDOTTE* 3:1070-3. In Hag 1:14 and Ezra 1:1,5, the writer describes YHWH stirring (עִיר) the spirit (of Cyrus, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant community/returnees) to take action, thus better understood as mind/disposition/attitude than life-force. See also Is 19:3 and Eccl 7:9.

ethos or character that benefits the whole of the community. The singularity of the corresponding simple prohibition in Malachi's repeated admonition would suggest the distributive sense of the *niphal* plural.<sup>518</sup> This implies that it is the disposition of each individual's mind and character that is to be guarded. If this is the sense of  $\text{רָחַץ}$ , given the context and caution against acting treacherously, Malachi may be advising to guard *against* a negative attitude or disposition that has led them into unfaithfulness. That is, guard against negative tendencies that would lead one to act unfaithfully or against unreasonable behavior that lacks good sense.

Malachi logically connects his admonition to 2:15a, but the difficulties present in the text of Mal 2:15a obscure the full force of Malachi's exhortation. The language is ambiguous thus rendering a variety of interpretations.<sup>519</sup> My translation seeks to cohere with the bottom-line exhortation of Malachi.<sup>520</sup> Given their linkage and proximity, I am taking  $\text{רָחַץ}$  to possess the same meaning in 2:15a as it does in Malachi's admonition: Guard your *spirit*, that is, act reasonably and preserve your character. Some propose that the pointing on  $\text{בְּשָׂר}$  should be emended to read "flesh" rather than "portion" so that Malachi is making an allusion to the creation narrative. For example, Weyde proposes the translation, "Not one [not only man] did he [YHWH] make, but flesh with spirit [woman] for him [man]" (underline is mine).<sup>521</sup> The idea is appealing and the reference to the "One Creator" in 2:10 could serve to locate the tradition behind the text. Yet, as Baldwin points

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<sup>518</sup> *IBHS* §23.4b.

<sup>519</sup> See Oswalt, *Where Are You God?*, 91-2 for the variety of interpretive choices.

<sup>520</sup> Cf. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 240. "One guide to interpretation is that it must agree with the clear intention of Malachi, expressed at the end of the verse, to encourage husbands to remain true to their first wife."

<sup>521</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 262.

out and Weyde notes, the creation narrative uses **בְּשֵׁר** rather than **שָׂאֵר**.<sup>522</sup> Additionally, if **רוּחַ** is used consistently throughout, this would suggest “spirit” represents wife, in that each man should guard his wife. This would be an obscure usage of spirit. Instead the use of **שָׂאֵר** with a meaning of *portion* or *something kept* seems preferable and rhetorically enhances the admonition of **שָׁמֹר** through paronomasia.<sup>523</sup>

The referent for **אָחֵר** is an additional interpretive conundrum. The word **אָחֵר** may function as a second key word, but it is not convincing that **אָחֵר** is used as single reference throughout as Hill proposes.<sup>524</sup> The first two (in 2:10) function as attributive adjectives; the third is negated in the opening line of 2:15; the fourth is prefixed with the article. Although rare, **וְלֹא** likely functions as item negation rather than clausal negation and signals an emphatic construction.<sup>525</sup> Assuming **עֲשֵׂה** refers back to the unfaithfulness to one’s wife in 2:14, this renders the understanding that no one is faithless to his wife and concurrently displays any sense or character (**רוּחַ**) reflective of either the community’s shared identity or the previous commitment made to his wife, witnessed by YHWH.

Even more difficult is the second usage of **אָחֵר** in 2:15, which in this case has the article prefixed, signaling a particular referent, unfortunately unclear from the context. Is

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<sup>522</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 240.

<sup>523</sup> See the same possible paronomasia in 1 Sam 9:24.

<sup>524</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 244.

<sup>525</sup> See *IBHS* §39.3.2 and *IBHS* §152.e See the discussion in Terry W. Eddinger, *Malachi: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (BHHB; ed. W. Dennis Tucker Jr.; Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2012), 66-7.

this still referring to the faithless man or at least man in general?<sup>526</sup> Or does it resume the references in 2:10 to One Father and One Creator pointing toward God as the one?<sup>527</sup> Often when אִיחַד is used twice in close proximity it is used to draw a contrast such as one and the other or one of two (Exod 18:3-4; Lev 14:30-31; 1 Kgs 18:23).<sup>528</sup> Applying this technique, the faithless man does not act out of reason or character when he seeks another wife. In contrast, what does the faithful man do? He seeks after godly offspring. This could be a reference to children, but given the earlier referent to the daughter of a foreign god, it may connote seeking a daughter of God for a wife.<sup>529</sup>

Malachi alters his bottom-line admonition from a simple to emphatic prohibition in the wake of his brief description of divorce (2:16). Unfortunately, the interpretive difficulties of this text continue. Varying options have been proposed and are well documented.<sup>530</sup> The interpretive difficulties arise from 1) the grammatical function of the opening כִּי; 2) the subject of the initial verb and its pointing; and 3) the grammatical form of שָׁלַח. Rather than rehearse all the options I want to approach the issue from a moral world perspective that observes the importance of tradition and symbol in the interpretive task as well as from the perspective of the rhetorical movement.

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<sup>526</sup> *IBHS* §13.2b. Reference to a class in general (man) rather than a particular referent typically would be indefinite.

<sup>527</sup> Cf. Deut 6:4 and Zech 14:9 although in both cases the article is not present.

<sup>528</sup> In these cases usually both lexemes have the article prefixed.

<sup>529</sup> G.P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* (VTSup 52; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 104f; cf. Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 265.

<sup>530</sup> See Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, op cit.; Verhoef, *Malachi*, 278-81; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 267-71.

The phrase כִּי־שָׂנֵא שְׁלַח is located between the repeated admonitions “guard your character and do not act treacherously.” The admonition shifts from a simple prohibition to an emphatic one in light of 2:16a. Something about this phrase moves the messenger toward greater emphasis of his bottom-line message. Second, the phrase is attributed to “YHWH, God of Israel” which only occurs here in Malachi’s whole message. Third, the phrase is expanded or paralleled by the following member attributed to YHWH Sebaoth, the most frequent referent for YHWH in the book.

Most interpreters emend or modify the phrase, making God the subject to reflect the phrase as a saying of YHWH, God of Israel.<sup>531</sup> I suggest the emendation is not necessary. I think Malachi succinctly echoes the tradition and frequent explanation permitting divorce in the community without attributing it directly to his audience with the “you say” designation. A similar tactic was used with the allusion to the priestly blessing in 1:9. The phrase succinctly summarizes the preexilic legal tradition associated with YHWH, the God of Israel, “If he hates, divorce.”<sup>532</sup> This alternative has some support in early versions. Fuller notes that 4QXIIa, the Targum Jonathan, and early Greek manuscripts took the כִּי as introducing a conditional clause, understood שְׁלַח as an imperative, and supplied a

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<sup>531</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 241 and Verhoef, *Malachi*, 278 render שָׂנֵא as a participle “I hate divorce”. Hill, *Malachi*, 251 takes the subject to be God, resumed from the previous verse “The One hates divorce”. Snyman, *Malachi*, 117 interprets the phrase as a participle and infinitive absolute missing the conjunctive *vav* “One (who) hates and divorces....” Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 204 takes שְׁלַח as the subject “divorce is hateful.”

<sup>532</sup> Verhoef discounts the suggestion representative of German scholarship “if one hates, (let him) send away.” See Verhoef, *Malachi*, 278 n. 35 for bibliography. Verhoef and Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 241 reject this interpretation because it seems to endorse divorce. But the phrase may be recast if it is an echo of the tradition.

second person sufformative to אַתָּה.<sup>533</sup> For example, 4QXIIa reads “but if you hate (her), send (her) away.”<sup>534</sup>

The saying is attributed to YHWH, the God of Israel, which most take as a simple parallel to YHWH Sebaoth or a late interpolation.<sup>535</sup> This appellation for YHWH is primarily associated with the traditions of preexilic Israel in the Deuteronomic history and Jeremiah. The case would be strengthened if the Deuteronomic reference “YHWH, your God” were employed. However, in the postexilic literature the appellation is used to refer to the temple (the temple of YHWH, God of Israel in Ezra 1:3; 4:1,3) past worship of God (Ezra 6:21), the law of Moses (Ezra 7:6), and prayer to YHWH, the God of Israel (Ezra 9:15). The name clearly draws upon the past to establish continuity. Could the community be using it much the same way? That is, the community sees their current practice as consistent with their tradition. Malachi acknowledges the assumed practice while also clarifying that its misuse results in violence.

If the phrase functions as refutation of a justified practice or an objection to the message, this helps explain the progression from simple to emphatic prohibition. The prophet has condemned the treachery of disregarding the covenant commitment and the absence of reason or character. Malachi makes clear that these actions are not justifiable through an appeal to Mosaic tradition. The seriousness of the act is illustrated in the

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<sup>533</sup> Russell Fuller, “Text-Critical Problems in Malachi 2:10-16,” *JBL* 110.1 (1991): 47-57.

<sup>534</sup> Reading an omitted second person pronoun implied in the participle “you hate” is a remote possibility. See *GKC* §116.s. Gesenius cites Hab 2:10 as an example of the second person pronoun omitted but clearly understood from the context. If applicable here, the subject would be assumed from the imperative in the apodosis. Interpretations taking God as subject on the basis of the attribution phrase essentially do the same by supplying a first person subject to the participle.

<sup>535</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 251.

parallel member. Divorce of this kind is on par with violence so graphic and public that it leaves him a blood-stained garment.

So the resumption of the YHWH Sebaoth appellative does not conflict or correct the legal tradition associated with the God of Israel but speaks to the situation addressed by Malachi when wives are divorced for the benefit of marrying outsiders. The utter disregard for the well being of one's wife merely because one can technically divorce constitutes an act of violence that severs a commitment to a companion. Some relationships cannot be cleanly ended. Moreover, the spirit of Deuteronomy 24 was to protect a wife not favored, but now the divorce stipulation is used as an excuse to cover the man's betrayal.

As noted above, interpretations of whether Malachi is addressing idolatry or intermarriage vary. Marital faithfulness seems to be at the forefront in my view.<sup>536</sup> As Josh 23:11 illustrates, the two concerns are not far apart.<sup>537</sup> However, the idea of idolatry seems less likely given the lack of evidence for the practice in the postexilic era. Stern has observed that in postexilic Palestine figurines are present in all areas except in Yehud. He suggests the exilic reflection on the problem of idolatry as impetus for Israel's fall was a lesson learned and not repeated.<sup>538</sup> In prophetic literature, marital

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<sup>536</sup> Cf. Goldingay, *Israel's Life*, 376-8.

<sup>537</sup> Rogerson, "The Social Background of the Book of Malachi," . Considering the debate concerning whether Mal 2:10-16 has a primary focus of idolatry/cultic impurity or mixed marriage and divorce, Rogerson sees evidence for the former outweighing the latter. However, he points out the two are not wholly unrelated. Mixed marriage may have resulted in improper worship practices by foreign wives, potentially even within the temple. The Chronicler's emphasis on cultic purity may substantiate this as an issue during the Second Temple period. However, the same argument could be made that the focus is mixed marriage and divorce given the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms.

<sup>538</sup> Ephraim Stern, "Religion in Palestine in the Assyrian and Persian Periods," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 245-55.

unfaithfulness often functions as a metaphor for covenantal unfaithfulness. In my view, Malachi rotates the metaphor.<sup>539</sup> Here Malachi leverages the language of covenantal unfaithfulness to God—abomination and the daughter of a foreign god—to describe the effect of a social problem—marrying foreign women.

### Moral Consequences

The failure to guard one's character and remain faithful entails two moral consequences. As previously noted, the unfaithfulness accompanied by divorce is likened to a violence-soaked garment. The one who divorces in the case of self-interested pursuits suffers and bears the guilt of severing what YHWH had witnessed being joined.

Additionally the messenger announces a curse against those who marry foreign women: “May YHWH cut off for the one who does this ער וענה from the tents of Jacob” (cf. Mal 2:12). The tents of Jacob represent the larger community (Num 24:5; cf. 2 Sam 20:1; 1Kgs 12:16). Jeremiah had promised a restoration of the tents of Jacob (30:18), and the context of the promise suggests he was referring to the people rather than the specific dwellings. The messenger's curse implies exclusion from the covenant community.

Unfortunately the full force of the curse evades us, as the supplementary phrase ער וענה is enigmatic. Taken literally it suggests waking and answering but may be an idiomatic expression referring to the whole of one offspring.<sup>540</sup> Separation from the community, and potentially involving the extent of one's family, is fitting punishment for

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<sup>539</sup> Contra Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 201-2.

<sup>540</sup> Jonathan M. Gibson, “Cutting Off ‘Kith and Kin,’ ‘Er and Onan’? Interpreting an Obscure Phrase in Malachi 2:12,” *JBL* 133.3 (2014): 519-37. For a possible allusion to Judah's sons, see Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 245-6; for a general review of the alternatives, see Hill, *Malachi*, 234-5.

the unfaithfulness demonstrated to the community (2:10c) by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.

### Moral Motives

The crisis of marriage with foreign women becomes fully evident sometime after Malachi during the era of Ezra and Nehemiah. Yet the seeds of this concern are germinating during Malachi's day. Adams has shown that in the postexilic period marriage practices were intertwined with economic concerns: "While the sources present the union of husband and wife as a sacred act, marriage also brings with it an array of concomitant financial obligations on the part of both households."<sup>541</sup> Marriage arrangements kept the financial interests of families as close as possible by retaining resources and inheritance within the kinship group. Endogamous marriage, evidenced as common from Abraham to Tobit, highlight that "economic motivations are a central factor."<sup>542</sup>

Adams downplays the notion of marrying outsiders for advantage, preferring the motive that the imperially supported party "sought to limit its ranks, maintain the inheritance claims of its families, and keep good relations with benefactors."<sup>543</sup> While this may have been the preference and consistent with the tradition, it is not mutually exclusive for some to have perceived marrying outsiders as advantageous even though

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<sup>541</sup> Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*, 29.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-4.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

leadership, invested with concern for the collective good and theological tradition, could have counseled against it.<sup>544</sup>

Perhaps some had sought economic advantage to the detriment of the community since marriage involved land and inheritance. This may explain why the punishment of those unwilling to part with foreign wives was the threat of land confiscation (Ezra 10:8).<sup>545</sup> Nehemiah decried the actions of nobles and officials who sold children of the community for the sake of gain and greed to the detriment of the community. Nehemiah testifies to a concern for the collective but also financial inequality that may have motivated drastic actions.

In addition to threats against social solidarity, Judah is experiencing the rejection of God's favor. Like Israel of the past, those practicing social injustice continued to seek the favor of YHWH through offerings and other rituals (Amos 5, Is 58). Yet Judah has not connected the dots between their self-interested marriages and the lack of YHWH's blessing. Although they cry at the altar, imploring YHWH for a blessing, he does not accept their offering.

Divorce compounded Judah's practice of mixed marriage. Some apparently sought economic gain at the cost of their own wives. Malachi ascribes a high status to the wife of one's youth being his companion or ally in a marriage sealed sacredly and legally by covenant. YHWH, who had witnessed the marriage of the man and woman, now stood as witness to the dissolution of these marriages. As noted in chapter two, in Malachi's

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<sup>544</sup> The allure of the bride's dowry provided a strong motivation for marriage and may serve as background for the tenth commandment. See Michael D. Matlock, "Obeying the First Part of the Tenth Commandment: Applications from the Levirate Marriage Law," *JSOT* 31.3 (2007): 295-310, esp 300-4.

<sup>545</sup> Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*, 27.

broader social world, available marriage contracts provided for the dissolution of marriage. This again suggests divorce was not an uncommon practice, especially if understood to be legally permissible in the Mosaic legal tradition. These same contracts indicated a commitment made between husband and wife before witnesses named in the contract. Malachi's admonition may be a reminder that the legal promise was made and sealed by the witness of YHWH himself. Malachi implores Judah to keep watch over their character and not act treacherously against their wives.

### **Expect YHWH – The God of Justice (Malachi 2:17 – 3:6)**

The fourth message both reiterates the moral world deficiencies previously addressed and also begins to look forward to YHWH's future intervention. The message intimates that God's perceived absence has contributed to the circumstances. In this section, Malachi stresses the constancy of YHWH as the fundamental moral understanding because Israel perceives that YHWH has changed in his dealings with Israel. Particularly, at question is God's justice. Grounding this message within the claim of YHWH's constancy argues that Mal 3:6 responds to the concerns of Mal 2:17 and closes this section rather than introducing the next.

### **Moral Foundations**

The opening exchange between YHWH and the children of Jacob draws into question the presence and constancy of YHWH. The boundaries of this unit are in

question.<sup>546</sup> The presence of *מִשְׁפָּט* in the opening question (2:17) and the announcement of coming judgment (3:5) form an *inclusio* that may serve as the boundaries.<sup>547</sup> However, if the *כִּי* is causal, 3:6 provides a logical explanation for YHWH being wearied by Israel's questions. While they not only doubt his presence and concern for justice, they wonder if he deals with the righteous and wicked the same way any longer. From their perspective, the evil prosper and even seem to enjoy YHWH's blessing or delight.

YHWH's declaration *כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה לֹא שֵׁנִיתִי* provides the underlying understanding that substantiates both of the messages before and after it. Hill places this verse with the succeeding unit but acknowledges "some coordination with the preceding disputation must be recognized."<sup>548</sup> Weyde concludes that "V.6, then functions, as a link between the two passages."<sup>549</sup> The linkage and coordination observed by Weyde and Hill are a move in the right direction.<sup>550</sup> Moreover, if we think of the whole message as a unified one from the Great King through his messenger, the strict isolation and identification of six disputations become less important.<sup>551</sup> The two passages concern different topics which both flow from the core belief that YHWH does not change.

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<sup>546</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 244-5; Verhoef, *Malachi*, 282-96; Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 206-12; Hill, *Malachi*, 292 conclude at 3:5. Verhoef thinks it is questionable that Malachi would wait to give a reason for verses 2-5 until the end. He takes the *כִּי* in 3:6 as asseverate "Truly."

<sup>547</sup> Per Snyman, *Malachi*, 125-6, the conclusion at 3:5 is generally based on the *inclusio* formed by *מִשְׁפָּט* in 2:17 and 3:5 as well as the concluding "YHWH Sebaoth says" in 3:5. She takes the *כִּי* as causal and extends the section through 7a on the recurrence of "day" in 3:4, 7. [Cf. S. D. Snyman, "Rethinking the Demarcation of Malachi 2:17-3:5," *AcT* 31.1 (2011): 156-68.] However, 3:7a and 3:7b are connected with the *topos* of turning away and returning. It seems more reasonable for the break to fall between verses six and seven.

<sup>548</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 292.

<sup>549</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 321.

<sup>550</sup> Additionally, the placement of the Hebrew setuma combines 2:17 – 3:12 as a single liturgical unit with 3:6 at the center.

<sup>551</sup> Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 72-3.

The identity **אני יהוה** appears nearly 200 times in the OT. It is a favored declaration for Ezekiel (85x), Leviticus (40x), and Isaiah (22x). Ezekiel primarily uses the identity statement in descriptions of God's coming judgment that will awaken Israel and the nations to God's might and presence. "As silver is melted in a smelter, so you shall be melted in it; and you shall know that I the LORD have poured out my wrath upon you" (Ezek 22:22, NRSV). Leviticus repeats the assertion in descriptions of God's deliverance and even more to substantiate YHWH's instructions for holy living (Lev 19). Commonly the identity statement is expounded as the God who sanctifies. "You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am the LORD; I sanctify you" (Lev 22:32). Isaiah often modifies the assertion as the God who calls, creates, saves, and loves justice (Is 61:8). These traditions inhabit Malachi's pronouncement. YHWH is a holy God who demands holy living and comes with might to rescue his people and redeem his own reputation among the nations. These are the themes close to Malachi. The children of Jacob have been redeemed from exile and freed from God's mighty judgment; however, they may still become subject to judgment again by not acknowledging YHWH and returning.

The identity embedded **אני יהוה** counters the accusations that YHWH delights in evil and the belief that the God of justice has become absent. Malachi asserts the identity I am YHWH, of which Israel has become skeptical, in order to caution, call to action, and assure them that YHWH has not changed. His constancy resides in who is: "I am YHWH" who loves and requires justice rather than delighting in its disregard.

## Moral Expectations

Malachi's address extends beyond the priests. The community is questioning or challenging the fundamental understanding of God and Israel's relationship. YHWH expects honor, offerings, and justice. YHWH promises blessing, presence, and justice. The people challenge God's fulfillment of the relationship. This section resumes a focus on expectations addressed earlier in the message (1:6–2:9) concerning the honoring of YHWH through offerings and the proper conduct of the priests, who have not embraced their calling and responsibilities. YHWH expects the priests and the community to modify their behavior in response to his messenger. Now in response to the escalating questions of the community, YHWH announces he is coming to his temple after his messenger.

## Moral Consequences

The impending appearance of the messenger both sets an expectation for change and anticipates consequences for moral decisions. The visitation by YHWH and his messengers has a clear purpose to refine the priests and eventually bring judgment against those who do not heed YHWH's messengers. The clear resumption of the messenger motif in Malachi 3:1 may draw on earlier biblical allusions that portray the messenger clearing or preparing the way for the king. Parallels are present, particularly in Isaiah where the YHWH Sebaoth imagery is predominant (Is 40:3; 57:14; 62:10).<sup>552</sup> Others see parallels between Malachi and Exod 23:20, recounting when YHWH sent his messenger before him to lead the people to the promise land.<sup>553</sup> Commentators are

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<sup>552</sup> See Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 242; Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 99

<sup>553</sup> See Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 209-10; Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 130-32.

divided on the identity and relationship between the three figures in the text: the messenger, the Lord, and the messenger of the covenant. The figure “the Lord” יהוה may refer to YHWH’s messenger (Zech 1:9; 4:4, 5, 13; 6:4),<sup>554</sup> but here יהוה is best understood as a reference to YHWH. The announcement is attributed to YHWH Sebaoth with an internal self-reference: the messenger will prepare the way “before me.” Additionally, יהוה claims the “temple” as “his”. Malachi has used יהוה as a referent or allusion to God (Mal 1:6, 12, 14) as does Zechariah (4:14; 6:5).<sup>555</sup>

More difficult is the identity of the messengers.<sup>556</sup> There is no clear OT parallel to the figure of the messenger of the covenant in Mal 3:2. On the basis of Exod 23:20, some understand this as the angel of the covenant. However, in Exodus the issue is preparing the way for the people of Israel and not God. Sometimes the distinction between YHWH and the messenger is blurred in the ancestral stories.<sup>557</sup> However, in other instances YHWH clearly distinguishes himself from the messenger (Exod 33:2-3).

We can deduce from the tasks associated with each that the passage is alluding to two figures. The first messenger is distinct from the Lord. He will come to refine the Levites so that the offerings may be renewed. Following his work, the Lord, who now

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<sup>554</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 268.

<sup>555</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 242; Snyman, *Malachi*, 132-3.

<sup>556</sup> While Petersen thinks the messenger of 3:1 and 3:4 are the same, Hill and Glazier-McDonald draw a distinction between the two. Hill points to parallels with the Elijah figure at the end of Malachi (4:5-6). His appearance is described as imminent (הנה + participle *IBHS* §40.2.1b) and will be followed by the “sudden” arrival of “the lord” at his temple. Such a return had been anticipated prior to Malachi (Ezek 43:1-5 and Zech 2:14; 8:3).

<sup>557</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 289; Cf. Gen 16:7-14; 21:17-21; 22:1-18; Exod 3:2-22.

resumes speaking in the first person (3:5), will return for judgment, as implied from a consequential *vav* (cf. NRSV).

In the case of the second messenger, multiple factors suggest that Malachi intends a strong linkage of identity between YHWH and the messenger of the covenant. First, the rhetorical parallelism of the description links the two.

3:1c	Then suddenly	he-	<b>WILL COME</b>	to his temple/palace—
3:1d			<b>the Lord</b>	<u>whom</u> <i>you are seeking</i>
3:1e		and	<b>the messenger of the covenant</b>	<u>whom</u> <i>you are desiring</i>
3:1f	behold	he-	<b>IS COMING</b>	

Additionally, the resumption of first person speech by YHWH follows the coming of the messenger of the covenant. The alternation between messenger speech and first person speech may be illustrative of the interconnectivity. Even if the passage describes two figures, they are of one and the same in authority and consequence. As Fox states, “It is important to keep in mind that Persian royal messengers spoke the very words of the king and not their own message. That is precisely why they were inviolable and why it was so dangerous to mistreat or harm them. When these figures spoke their royal messages, there was a blurring of the identities of herald and king, as demonstrated in the correspondence between Oriotes and Darius.”<sup>558</sup> The close relationship draws on the royal messenger motif of the ancient Near East operating among the Achaemenid kings. In light of this, the identity and number of figures moves to the background leaving the emphasis on the words of the message—the Lord is coming.

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<sup>558</sup> Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 100. Oriotes, governor of Sardis, had attempted to secretly kill the messenger of Darius. In response, Darius sent a second messenger with a message to those faithful to Darius to kill Oriotes, which they readily did.

The appearance of the first messenger is primarily intended to alter the performance of the Levites through the refinement of their character. Malachi employs a refining metaphor to convey the purpose of YHWH's coming. The art of metallurgy was common in Israel.<sup>559</sup> The refinement of precious metals like silver and gold was a multi-stage process. The silver or gold ore was mixed with a base metal such as lead and melted in a crucible under intense heat. The melting process allowed the impurities to separate from the precious metal and be removed as they bound to the baser metal. The refining process, again conducted with fire, continued with the mixing of lye so that the remaining impurities could be gathered as dross in the floating slag and skimmed off. The aim was pure metal that could be shaped into objects of beauty and honor. The sages fittingly analogize the refining process to the removal of wickedness by the king so that his throne could be established in righteousness (Prov 25:4-5). YHWH's purifying intervention aimed to renew righteous offerings that symbolized the honor due the Great King, reiterating the symbolic understanding of the world. Only after YHWH receives proper honor and recognition will he act to bring justice to the community.<sup>560</sup> The primacy of priestly agency is addressed perhaps with the hope that the effect will self-correct the community's ills before YHWH intercedes. If the moral world of Malachi's audience does not change, YHWH will refine and judge upon his arrival.

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<sup>559</sup> Eveline J. van der Steen, "Metallurgy," *NIDB* 4:68-70.

<sup>560</sup> See Snyman, *Malachi*, 128 for a number of links between this section and 1:6 - 2:9 in which the honor of YHWH is primary.

## Moral Motives

In Malachi's symbolic world, we explored the apparent change in God's presence described in the Second Temple period. The community's question about God's presence and concern "Where is the God of justice?" affirms the uncertainty associated with God's presence among the community. Some viably argue that the community was experiencing disillusionment because the anticipated return to Zion as announced by Zechariah remained unrealized in Malachi's day.<sup>561</sup> YHWH's announcement of messengers to proceed his *return* further substantiates that these hopes were still unfulfilled.

Questions concerning YHWH's presence and the claim that YHWH approves of evil prompted his exasperation and imminent intervention. After the refinement of the Levites, he will turn his attention those who do evil. His actions align with the tradition of God's judgment rather than the developing assumption of the community. The four particular evils named, likely representative of problems facing the community rather than the only ones, are sorcery, adultery, swearing falsely, and oppressing women, orphans, and workers.

Sorcery, listed among the abhorrent practices of the nations (Deut 18:10-12), intriguingly headlines the deeds named by Malachi. Sorcery is one aspect of magic practiced frequently in the ancient Near East. As Horsnell observes, "That God's people succumbed to the influence of magic so that it became widespread among them is shown by the strong legal, deuteronomistic, and prophetic prohibitions against its practice

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<sup>561</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 242.

because such practice was regarded as illegal, anti-social, and anti-Yahwistic.”<sup>562</sup> The biblical condemnation of magic signals a rejection of the worldview behind magic rather than just its practice.<sup>563</sup> Sorcery is associated with the royal courts (Exod 7-8, 2 Kgs 9, 22 and Daniel 2). Even in the court of Judean kings, Jeremiah denounced the predictions of magic practitioners, including sorcerers, who denied Israel’s future servitude to Babylon (Jer 27:9-10). According to Isa 47:9, 12, the Day of YHWH will expose the failures of magic. These limited insights indicate that broadly sorcery was associated with foreign practices and involved the prediction or influencing of future outcomes.<sup>564</sup> More specifically, sorcery is related to spell binding in order to gain control over others. Arnold concludes, “Whatever the similarities or differences between sorcery and spell-binding, both have moved from seeking discernment and guidance to exercising control over another.”<sup>565</sup>

In broad terms, the condemnation of sorcery is a rejection of attempts to manipulate and discern the future in light of uncertainty. The perceived absence of YHWH coupled with Persian imperial influences may have led the people to appeal to sorcery as a means of understanding or even resolving their negative circumstances. Malachi points toward YHWH and his unchangeability as the proper solution to uncertainty about the future. The tradition of YHWH’s faithfulness reiterated in the opening message should have provided all the surety Yehud needed in its difficult circumstances. Instead they turned to sorcery.

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<sup>562</sup> Malcolm J.A. Horsnell, “כִּשְׁפֵי,” *NIDOTTE* 2:735-8. See also J. A. Scurlock, “Magic (Ancient Near East),” *ABD* 4:464-8. In Mesopotamia, sorcery was associated with black magic that was punishable by death.

<sup>563</sup> Bill T. Arnold, “Divination and Magic,” *DSE* 238-42.

<sup>564</sup> Snyman, *Malachi*, 139; Joanne K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, “Magic (Old Testament),” *ABD* 4:468-71.

<sup>565</sup> Arnold, *DSE*, 240.

In narrowed terms, the condemnation reflects a rejection of those who seek to control and manipulate others for their own well-being. In this way, it bears similarity with the other evils addressed: adultery, swearing falsely, and oppression of others.

Malachi addressed adultery in the prior message and it echoes one of the prohibitions of the Decalogue. Its gravity in ancient societies is illustrated by the significant consequence associated with it (Deut 22:22) and prominence among the warnings of the sages (Prov 5:3-5; 7:5-27).<sup>566</sup> As examined above, this likely refers to those who have abandoned marital obligations in order to get ahead or moderate the challenging circumstances of the time.

Those who swear falsely recall again the Decalogue but expressed in different terminology.<sup>567</sup> Torah, prophet, and sage disparage the practice (Lev 19:12; Jer 5:2; 7:9; Zech 5:4; Prov 19:5; 24:28) because it profanes the name of God, threatens trusting relationships, and promotes a context lacking truth. In the verses cited, swearing falsely often accompanies stealing. The condemnation may recall the *cheat* who has a worthy sacrifice to fulfill his vow but brings a blemished one instead (Mal 1:14).

The charge of oppression against women, orphans, and workers serves as an additional sign of economic difficulties faced by some in Malachi's world. The prophet draws attention to those who oppress the marginal and laborers of society echoing the traditions of Deuteronomy 24:14-17. Notably, even given the concerns of foreign

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<sup>566</sup> Snyman, *Malachi*, 139.

<sup>567</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 210.

marriages, YHWH expects the resident aliens to be cared for.<sup>568</sup> The proper treatment of those on the community's margins is yet another way to honor YHWH (Prov 14:31).

That some of the community have moved so far from their symbolic understanding of the world, leading them to conclude that YHWH does not consider these practices evil and then to conclude that he must now approve of them, signals the challenging pressures faced by the community and the culmination of failures by the priesthood to properly instruct and model honoring YHWH.

### **Test YHWH – God of Provision (Malachi 3:7-12)**

Three imperatives drive the fifth portion of Malachi's message: return, bring, and test. YHWH calls on Israel to *return* to him by renewing their efforts to *bring* the full tithe to the storehouse. YHWH challenges Israel to *test* him and see if he will not more than abundantly respond with blessing.<sup>569</sup> Additionally, this unit features a number of parallel lines and antitheses that accentuate the moral world conflict addressed by Malachi, such as blessing and curse, God and human, robbing and bringing.<sup>570</sup>

### Moral Foundations

The linkage of this message with YHWH's previous declaration *כי אני יהוה לא שניתתי* has been noted. Malachi grounds the discussion of blessings and curses, centered on tithing, in the assertion that YHWH does not change. YHWH has always been the source of

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<sup>568</sup> Snyman, *Malachi*, 141.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-45.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-7; Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 213.

blessing for Israel. YHWH's constancy stands in contrast to Israel who has turned away and must return in order to renew and realign the relationship. Again, the exchange innate to the symbolic world underlies the expectations that follow. YHWH blesses, protects, and ensures justice in exchange for Israel's honor and acts of loyalty, demonstrated through the bringing of gifts, specifically tithes and contributions here. Additionally, YHWH Sebaoth the king demonstrates interest in the land and its fruit. The concern for agriculture by YHWH Sebaoth is consistent with the confluence of the warrior-king and gardner-king witnessed in the Persian kings.<sup>571</sup> While the Persian kings prided themselves on the work they contributed to making their paradises flourish, YHWH claims the unique power to affect all of the land even overcoming the natural causes such as drought and pest that hindered the land from producing.<sup>572</sup> YHWH demonstrates concern for ordinary life along with the ability to make it extraordinary.<sup>573</sup>

### Moral Expectations

The call to return is indicative of the distance that has developed between YHWH and Israel.<sup>574</sup> The people's failures link them with their ancestors who were perpetually unfaithful and disloyal to their mutual covenant agreement with YHWH. YHWH calls attention to the "the total history of their waywardness."<sup>575</sup> The later narrative prayers of Israel (Ezra 9:7; Neh 9:2-3) indicate an acknowledgment that these failures were the

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<sup>571</sup> Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 103-4; Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 232-40.

<sup>572</sup> Snyman, *Malachi*, 155.

<sup>573</sup> Goldingay, *Israel's Life*, 655.

<sup>574</sup> Snyman, *Malachi*, 149.

<sup>575</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 300.

impetus for Israel's dire circumstances.<sup>576</sup> However, in Malachi's world, knowledge of failures is not enough because it has not shaped the life of this community. Failures require action and reorientation. They require Israel to return. Malachi echoes, if not borrows, the language from the opening oracle of Zechariah (1:3; cf. 2 Chron 30:6, 9).<sup>577</sup>

Malachi's call to return is the prerequisite expectation for the restoration of justice and blessing. As we have seen in covenantal matters, Malachi seems to focus on a particular issue that illustrates and represents a microcosm of the moral world breakdown. Malachi highlights the moral expectation of bringing gifts to YHWH Sebaoth as illustrative of Israel's failure to keep the statutes. When confronted with turning from YHWH's statutes, Israel requests an example. The community's confusion or dismissal of the call to return is answered with a question. "Will man rob God?"<sup>578</sup> The question may be taken as rhetorical, which would normally elicit a negative response. How is it possible for a human to rob God? The inequality between God and man signal the absurdity of such a question. Although the question implies a negative answer, an affirmative one is given.<sup>579</sup> Israel's response illustrates their incredulity at such a possibility and even more their "shocking unawareness of the transgressions."<sup>580</sup> Yet the

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<sup>576</sup> cf. Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 328. For an analysis of these prayers and their ideology, see Michael D. Matlock, *Discovering the Traditions of Prose Prayers in Early Jewish Literature* (LSTS 81; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 23-30, 37-48.

<sup>577</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 329.

<sup>578</sup> Some translators follow the LXX and use "deceive" עִבֵּר as a play on the name Jacob. However, deception with the tithe seems less likely than "rob". Perhaps they were representing a partial tithe as whole. The result is the same. Additionally, the bold assertion of robbing God has more rhetorical power. (Cf. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 246; Snyman, *Malachi*, 147)

<sup>579</sup> Weyde captures the contrast by translating the כִּי as adversative. "A negative answer is not given, but is implied in the rhetorical question" (Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 330); Verhoef, *Malachi*, 302.

<sup>580</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 303.

whole nation is guilty, labeled as גִּי, used elsewhere in the book to refer to other nations (cf. 1:11, 14; 3:12).<sup>581</sup>

Based upon an amalgam of tradition, tithes and contribution in Malachi's symbolic world were one form of offerings and gifts presented to YHWH as provision for the temple personnel and the poor of the community. The prophet is concerned both with cultic maintenance and meeting societal needs as the tithe benefited both the priests and the poor.<sup>582</sup> The tithe is described as food for the house of YHWH. The word זֶרֶק most commonly refers to food of prey but in some instances in wisdom literature may refer to human food (Prov 31:15; Ps 111:5; Job 24:5). The word choice spawns the vivid imagery of fresh food, perhaps in contrast to the type of tithe being given.<sup>583</sup> While Fox parallels this with royal demands for tribute, more to the point may be the food brought to the king's table as gift and honor.<sup>584</sup> The bringing of food to the king's table signaled a response to the call from the king's messenger in preparation of the king's approaching visit. The food brought to the king was for his sake as well as his company and entourage. The royal imagery linkage is strengthened as this call for food follows the previous announcement of YHWH's impending arrival. Bringing the tithe functions as another means of preparing for the Great King's appearance.

YHWH challenges, even invites, the community to test him in this. Typically God is the one who tests, trying hearts and minds, the righteous and the wicked, to validate and reveal true identity (Jer 11:20; 17:10; Pss 17:3; 26:2; 66:10). At times God allowed a

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<sup>581</sup> Snyman, *Malachi*, 152.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>583</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 217.

<sup>584</sup> Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 105. See the discussion on the "Royal Table" in chapter two.

form of testing to prove the validity of his own word (Exod 4:1-9; Judg 6:36-40; 1 Kgs 18:22-46; Is 7:10). In the latter instance, even Ahaz was reluctant to test God, leaving it to God to willingly prove himself. So the challenge presented by YHWH Sebaoth to test him is somewhat unusual. The idea that evildoers test God and get away with it is condemned in Mal 3:15. The wilderness community who tested God at Meribah is likewise portrayed negatively (Ps 95:9). The testing by evildoers is condemned because it misunderstands YHWH while the challenge to test him in Mal 3:10 aligns with the character of the unchanging God who blesses! The blessing offered to Judah mirrors the message to the priests. As the offering system was to the advantage of the priests, so too faithful tithing will benefit the community. Testing YHWH will yield blessings to their advantage, which is emphasized through the repetition of “to you,” reiterated five times in 3:10-11.<sup>585</sup> The first act of God to profit Israel will be the outpouring of rain metaphorically depicted as opening the windows of heaven (Cf. Deut 28:8 Lev 26:3-4).<sup>586</sup> The rain will be a blessing expounded in three ways.

First, the “devourer” will be rebuked. Most commentators take this as a reference to locust.<sup>587</sup> Verhoef interestingly observes that locusts usually accompany drought because they thrive in dry conditions, which enable their eggs to survive and accumulate rather than being washed away.<sup>588</sup> But Petersen helpfully notes that it could be other “devourers” such as flies (Ps 78:45) or worms (Deut 28:39). Malachi “has offered a more

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<sup>585</sup> Trace similar circumstances and promised reversal in Hag 2:3, 7, 9.

<sup>586</sup> Snyman, *Malachi*, 154.

<sup>587</sup> For example, Verhoef, *Malachi*, 308.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

encompassing mantle of protection than if he had just cited one insect.”<sup>589</sup> Moreover, he does not use the specific vocabulary of Joel (cf. 1:4).

The coming rains compounded by the rebuke of the devourer will allow the fruit of the ground to prosper rather than be consumed and destroyed (cf. Hag 2:19; Zech 8:12). These fruits represent the staples of the economy and are the regular focus of covenant blessings and curses (Deut 28:4, 11, 18). The vines of the field deprived of water will produce and not miscarry (cf. 2 Kgs 2:19; Hag 2:16).<sup>590</sup>

The abundance of blessing and the reversal of the curse will be known among the nations, like the name of YHWH in 1:11, which will yield a declaration of blessing upon Judah from the nations. Their meager land will then be known as a Land of Delight (cf. Is 62:4). The terminology is unique but the depiction draws on characterizations from Israel’s tradition. Israel had been the recipient of a glorious land promised to its ancestor Abraham and his enslaved descendants (cf. Ezek 20:6, 15; cf. Dan 8:9; 11:16, 41 for the same language). Yet Israel despised its pleasant land (Ps 106:24), and the exile left the “pleasant land” desolate (Zech 7:14) while promises made before that tragic event ensured a return to the pleasant land (Jer 3:19). Additionally, the “land of delight” may have conjured associations with the royal paradises of the Persian kings.<sup>591</sup> Both represent places nurtured by the king and a place for his dwelling, refreshment, and enjoyment.

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<sup>589</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 218.

<sup>590</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 341.

<sup>591</sup> See discussion on royal paradises in chapter two.

## Moral Consequences

As the priests were experiencing a foretaste of the curse coming upon them for not honoring YHWH (2:2), so too the whole nation is living under a curse: “with a curse you are cursed” emphasized with the repetition of the אָרַח root. The reciprocation associated with giving and withholding was a maxim of the wisdom tradition: “Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want” (Prov 11:24 - NRSV). Yet this community seemingly had not drawn the connection between their tithing and their dismal circumstances. Either “(t)he people were spiritually unable to recognize the religious significance of this judgment”<sup>592</sup> or they concluded God was no longer present and active.

## Moral Motives

Although the motives behind the circumstances addressed by Malachi are not specified clearly, they can be easily imagined. The focus on tithing and agricultural conditions points toward the economic woes of the community. We can surmise that the tithe is being withheld for both practical and theological reasons. The community is experiencing both drought and insect infestation. These factors have diminished production of the soil and vine. In a subsistence economy, the repercussions affect all aspects of life. Families have less to support basic needs and earn a living. Empires show low tolerance for not meeting tribute and tax demands. However, the requirements of temple staff, dependent upon offerings and tithes, do not lessen. YHWH is due honor. In light of these challenging economic circumstances, it is easy to envisage YHWH being

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<sup>592</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 305.

shown short shrift. The community's theological questioning both derives from and exacerbates the practical issues, a reinforcing downward spiral. Where is YHWH? Why do the righteous suffer? Is there any reason not to follow and imitate the actions of the wicked? Is there any benefit in worshipping YHWH? The community's lack of tithing signaled that some in the community were answering the latter questions in the negative. Malachi challenges the conclusions they have reached by asserting YHWH's constancy and calling Israel to return, exemplified by giving tithes and contributions.

### **Serve YHWH – The Righteous, the Wicked, and Day of YHWH (Malachi 3:13-21)**

The strong words spoken against YHWH among the community illustrate its moral world crisis. Their understanding of the mutual relationship between YHWH and the people was unraveling. They failed to see the expected correlation between serving God and living well.<sup>593</sup> The crucial difference in perspective and understanding are illustrated through a number of contrasts in the unit.<sup>594</sup> As in previous units, the dialogue of dispute is cast between YHWH and the people; the people express a contrast between life expected in the realm of YHWH's reign compared to the present state of affairs. The seemingly inverted experience of the righteous and wicked suggests a new reality to many in the community of Israel. Either YHWH had abandoned Israel or had chosen the side of the wicked, blessing them rather than the righteous. The larger unit distinguishes between present experience and future resolution. In comparison to the previous unit in which God challenged Israel to test him in tithing, now it is the arrogant who are condemned for

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 317; Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 221.

<sup>594</sup> See Snyman, *Malachi*, 160-2.

challenging YHWH. Finally, the YHWH fearers are set apart as those whom God hears in contrast to those who do not fear YHWH and are confronted by the king's messenger at the outset.

Malachi again utilizes his typical pattern of statement-question-answer to launch the unit. The section includes three smaller units that address three different groups. In vs. 13-15, YHWH speaks to the community as a whole, which includes a response from those confused or doubtful of YHWH's continued action on behalf of his interests and Israel's. The intensity of the community's language has heightened, recalling the stinging and wearying words of 2:17. In the latest accusation, the community asserts that YHWH contends for the wicked and allows evildoers to prosper without consequence.

The scene shifts in vs. 16-18 with a focus on a new group. Those described as *יְהוָה יִרְאֵי* respond as well to the strong words. The perspective shifts from dialogue to observation, rendered as something of an observation by the messenger. This group gathers and speaks among themselves and YHWH notes their conversation. YHWH speaks to the unfaithful community and points out this group of faithful ones.<sup>595</sup> Baldwin describes them as “those who have taken the rebuke, and they begin to encourage each other to renewed faith.”<sup>596</sup>

Then in vs. 19-21, YHWH turns his address to those who fear him and discloses to them that on the day he acts, all will be resolved. What is doubted about YHWH and his

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<sup>595</sup> Contra Petersen who perceives the God fearers are addressed: “But now, because of this book, both God and at least some Yahwists, namely, the fearers,” will be able to distinguish between the good and the bad within the Judean community.” Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 223.

<sup>596</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 249; As a quasi-technical term for a certain group see, Hill, *Malachi*, 338 and Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*, 284-5.

concern for justice will be answered mightily. What seems to be a reversal of fortunes will be weighed and balanced.

### Moral Foundations

The section hinges on two moral foundations. The first is the *telos* of the righteous and the wicked. Even those who challenge or question YHWH reflect an understanding of the world in which two broad categories of people exist. Petersen summarizes, “As in the Proverbs, there is a bifurcated world in which there are the evil and the righteous, the wise and the fool.”<sup>597</sup> This underlying assumption is illustrated in the contrasts between the two groups proffered throughout and specifically juxtaposed in parallel:

3:18a	You shall turn and distinguish		
3:18b		between	<i>the righteous</i>
			and <u><i>the wicked</i></u>
3:18c		between	<i>the one who serves God</i>
3:18d			and <u><i>the one who does not serve him.</i></u>

Malachi supplements these categories with “the arrogant and evildoers” (vs. 15, 19) and “those who fear YHWH” (vs. 16, 20). Malachi characterizes the wicked as the זדים and עשי רשעה. A concentration of the term זד occurs in Psalm 119: 21, 51, 69, 78, 85, 122.

The זדים are accursed and wander from God’s commandments; they deride and smear the name of the righteous; they subvert the way of others and oppress them; they dig pits for the righteous and disregard the word of God. The description is apt for the same group in Malachi’s critique. The זדים arrogantly and presumptuously believe others to be less than they and of little consequence.

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<sup>597</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 221.

Psalm 119 also bestows praise upon the righteous who in certain places are described as YHWH fearers or his servants, reminiscent of Malachi's language (Pss 119: 63, 74, 76, 84, 122, 124; cf. Eccl 8:12-13). The God-fearers keep the company of other God-fearers, hope in God's word, endure persecution, are guarded by God, experience God's steadfast love, and learn his statutes.

These depictions resonate with the contrast between righteous and wicked throughout wisdom literature.<sup>598</sup> For example, Psalm 1, a frame for the Psalter, sets out the difference between the righteous and wicked.<sup>599</sup> The righteous do not associate with the wicked. Instead, they meditate on God's word while being watched over and kept by God. In contrast, the wicked are mere chaff and of no real substance; they will have no association with the righteous nor endure judgment.

Second, Malachi grounds his message in the assertion that the identity of the righteous and the wicked will become crystal clear on the Day of YHWH, an important aspect of Malachi's symbolic world. Malachi draws on a prophetic tradition available to his audience given their time and place. The messenger uses the stock vocabulary of the larger Day of YHWH tradition to reiterate prominent features of the tradition.<sup>600</sup> The Day entails an appearance of the Great King to rectify wrongs and punish his enemies. Malachi emphasizes that even those among the community who persist in their presumptuous evil doing and do not return to YHWH will be numbered among those

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<sup>598</sup> Cf. Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 370-72.

<sup>599</sup> Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; ed. J.J.M. Roberts; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985). Cf. Snyman, *Malachi*, 175-9.

<sup>600</sup> See Verhoef, *Malachi*, 333-6 on common traits associated with the tradition and the discussion on the day of YHWH in chapter three.

experiencing judgment on that great and terrible day.<sup>601</sup> In contrast, the righteous will celebrate YHWH's victory. On that day, it will be clear that YHWH has not abandoned those who fear him and that he is a God of Justice. While the modes of God's activity and timeline are not specified, Malachi is resolute about the certainty of the results on such a day. Given its certainty, as Baldwin notes, "Malachi is virtually saying, live in the light of that day."<sup>602</sup>

### Moral Expectations

Those who fear YHWH are expected to serve him. The moral expectation is implied in the answer given by YHWH to Israel's question. Israel knows that serving God is expected, but it has seemed futile to them and without profit.<sup>603</sup> The question that expresses the vanity in serving God expresses the expectation in two ways.

The first expansion concerns obedience. Literally, the expression is "to observe what is to be observed".<sup>604</sup> It involves keeping torah and one's relational responsibilities (cf. Josh 22:2-3). It is descriptive of the priestly task of Aaron (Lev 8:35) and the charge given the high priest Joshua (Zech 3:7), but Malachi extends the general expectation to the community. The call to serve is a call to be righteous.

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<sup>601</sup> Cf. Longman III and Reid, *God Is A Warrior*, 47.

<sup>602</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 247.

<sup>603</sup> The nature of reciprocity in the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel is challenging to articulate. The relationship entails promises and expectations, but YHWH is beyond manipulation and negotiation. For example, as we highlighted in our treatment of 1:6–2:9, God expects to be honored with worthy sacrifices because of his greatness and not as a means to an end for the offerer. Yet YHWH promises gracious provision for those who faithfully give (3:7-12). The people's expectation of return or profit is characteristic of the continuity worldview. See John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) for more on this competing worldview. However, it is not explicit in Malachi's text that the people have turned to other gods, but only that their behavior does not conform to the expectations of YHWH.

<sup>604</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 316.

The second expansion entails repentance as the community questions the benefit of “walking as in mourning” before YHWH Sebaoth. Weyde draws attention to the pairing of הלך and קדר in OT texts.<sup>605</sup> The pairing is located among laments, which further supports a mourning depiction. Ideas in parallel with the combination include being bowed down in mourning (Ps 35:14); bowed down prostrate (Ps 38:7); and feeling forgotten by God (42:10; cf. 43:2). This appears to be an allusion to the previous call for returning in repentance (3:7). Hill wonders if repentance had not yielded any benefit.<sup>606</sup> However, the cynicism of the community may be disparaging even the proposition. What is the value of returning to YHWH when he is no longer present nor concerned with Israel?

#### Moral Motives

In the terms prescribed by the messenger, the community has no imagination for becoming recognized among the nations as a land of delight (3:12). The traditional belief has been shattered by new circumstances. New formulas have supplanted the principles of reciprocity and retribution that had governed life in Israel. Pragmatism has replaced tradition. Blessing no longer attaches to faithful, righteous living but to an arrogant life that finds its own reward, profit, and blessing by pushing against the expectations set out by YHWH. The community cites as evidence the prosperity and the apparent divine absolution of those who have countered tradition and engaged in behaviors long held to be evil. The sample is likely weighted toward the arrogant and presumptuous among

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<sup>605</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 353.

<sup>606</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 334.

Yehud, but the success of outsiders and foreigners could just as well have attributed to the conclusion.<sup>607</sup>

The community seems to share the initial perspective of the psalmist (Ps 73:3). “For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” They physically flourish; they evade trouble; they clothe themselves in pride and violence; they satiate themselves; they speak with malice and threaten; they speak against the heavens. “Therefore the people turn and praise them, and find no fault in them.” (Ps 73:10) The inclusion of the personal pronoun in the verbless clause (Mal 3:15a) emphasizes with “selective-exclusive force” the contrast between YHWH and the community.<sup>608</sup> YHWH as standard and measurement no longer applies. Rather the “we” אנחנו have decided what is the new standard: the arrogant are the blessed ones (Mal 3:15).

### Moral Consequences

YHWH lays out two moral trajectories that are antithetical to the community’s perceived present yet fully aligned with their traditional past. YHWH will act on behalf of the righteous and against the wicked. The community has questioned the “profit” (בצט) in serving YHWH. The messenger insists that those who fear YHWH will find profit in YHWH’s “compassion.” The verb חמל carries the meaning of “have compassion” or “spare”. In most cases it is negated indicating a context of judgment. Here the meaning should be taken as positive given the father-son simile and immediate context.<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Contra Verhoef, *Malachi*, 318.

<sup>608</sup> *IBHS* §16.3.3

<sup>609</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 343; contra Verhoef, *Malachi*, 323 who renders as “spare”.

Although the simile is awkward, it may signal the narrowing identity taking place among the community. In this section YHWH has turned his attention upon those who feared him whom we can assume were among those being addressed as Israel, Judah, and children of Jacob throughout. The electing YHWH (1:2) and the One Father (2:10; cf. 1:6) has turned his compassion upon the children of Jacob who have served him.

In his address to the questioning community, YHWH lays claim to those who fear him. YHWH-Fearers are described in certain psalms. In both Pss 115:11-13 and 118:4, they are listed third in a series of the house of Israel and the house of Aaron and fourth in the same series that includes the house of Levi in Ps 135:19-20. The group seems to extend beyond the priestly house as indicated in 115:13 “both small and great” (Cf. Pss 15:4; 22:23).<sup>610</sup> They are both the recipients of God’s blessing and those who bless YHWH and proclaim his steadfast love.

YHWH claims them as his own and his special possession (סגולה), another touch point with the royal metaphor (cf. Eccl 2:8). The term recalls the special covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4).<sup>611</sup> YHWH in his sovereignty over all the nations (1:5,11,14) has special affection and claim on Israel. YHWH has responsibility and claim over all the nations, but it is and has always been Israel as his special possession (cf. this aspect in 1 Chron 29:3). However, the covenantal and royal focus has narrowed in its application.<sup>612</sup> The (סגולה) are those among the community who fear and esteem his name.

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<sup>610</sup> Contra Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 222.

<sup>611</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 249.

<sup>612</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 223.

The Book of Remembrance has garnered several interpretations. Some link it to the heavenly books referenced elsewhere.<sup>613</sup> Nogalski uniquely takes the book as a reference to the collection of the Twelve written for the sake of the righteous.<sup>614</sup> The similarity of the language with the book noted in Esther (6:1) and the royal motif that hovers over all of Malachi points toward hearing the reference foremost in its imperial context. Fox stresses this: “Indeed, Herodotus writes that it was Xerxes’s custom to observe battles and have his scribes record the names of individuals who achieved ‘some remarkable feat.’ This was done so that they could be honored later in more official documents...So, through a messenger lens, the recording of those who revere YHWH in a memorial scroll correlates with the practice of Persian rulers of memorializing and honoring loyal and noteworthy individuals.”<sup>615</sup> The book may then be the basis of God’s dealings with the righteous and the wicked on the Day of YHWH.<sup>616</sup> Unmistakably it makes clear that YHWH is watching the way of the righteous (Ps 1); they have his attention, as YHWH takes note of their conversation in response to the messenger.

The YHWH fearers will bask in the sun of righteousness. The reference very likely recalls the common ancient Near Eastern imagery of the winged sun disk.<sup>617</sup> Fox asserts that the winged disk is representative of Ahuramazda in Persian era, especially Darius

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<sup>613</sup> See an extended discussion of the options in Verhoef, *Malachi*, 320-1.

<sup>614</sup> Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve*, 1061-5.

<sup>615</sup> Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 108; cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.87-88; 8.90

<sup>616</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 321; Hill, *Malachi*, 340.

<sup>617</sup> Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallett; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 27-30.

and Xerxes.<sup>618</sup> The Persian king and Persian god lauded their own efforts and intentions to bring righteousness to the land. So with the imagery, YHWH again effectively asserts himself as over the Persian king and Persian god, promising to bring righteousness to his land.

Through a moral world lens, the image focuses on righteousness.<sup>619</sup> Righteousness is frequently illuminated metaphorically with light imagery. In 2 Sam 23:3-4 the king of Israel celebrates the presence of God proclaiming that the one who rules in righteousness with *the fear of YHWH* is like the light of the morning sun signaling a new kind of day. In Is 58:8, YHWH challenges a nation who lacks righteousness to turn to him from their self-seeking interest so that the community can experience justice and healing at the dawning of a new light. Righteousness connotes both legal norms and relational obligations.<sup>620</sup> Both aspects are at work in Malachi as the community has violated each, not keeping the statutes and failing to meet obligations to YHWH, wives, and each other.

The moral trajectory of the wicked is stated more succinctly. On the day of YHWH, the arrogant and evildoers will be like stubble easily consumed by the fire of that day. Like the wicked of Psalm 1, the wicked are proven to be of little substance and not conducive to surviving the fire of judgment. The refining fire used upon the Levites is stoked to a consuming fire for the wicked.<sup>621</sup> The fire will not only strip the wicked of

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<sup>618</sup> Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 112. This seems more likely than Petersen's contention that sun as righteousness growing out of link between the sun god Shamash and the principle of justice and Beneficence associated with him. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 225.

<sup>619</sup> I am taking the genitive as epexegetical or associative with Hill, *Malachi*, 349.

<sup>620</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 328-9.

<sup>621</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 224.

their fruit and leaf but scorch even their root and branch (cf. Job 18:16-21).<sup>622</sup> On the Day of YHWH, the evildoers will not escape as alleged by those questioning YHWH (3:15).

### **Remember *Torah* and Renew Commitments (Malachi 3:22-24)**

The conclusion of Malachi's message is not as developed as the prior units. Many contend the verses are a later addition serving not only to close Malachi but also the Book of the Twelve and perhaps even the whole of the Prophets.<sup>623</sup> As a way to contribute to the discussion, we will continue to examine the moral world features present. While many of the themes are the same, there are notable differences. The conclusion does not attribute any of the sayings to YHWH Sebaoth, but is presented in first person so that YHWH is assumed from all that proceeds. Additionally, the perspective or questioning of the community is not represented so we are unable to discern any additional moral motives of the community. YHWH has the final word.

### Moral Foundations

The conclusion to the message continues to ground its argument in the anticipation of the Day of YHWH. New to this concept is the association with Elijah, a coming messenger, who had similarly addressed Israel with warnings of impending judgment.<sup>624</sup> It is unclear if he should be associated with one of the messengers anticipated above or is

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<sup>622</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 326.

<sup>623</sup> S. D. Snyman, "Malachi 4:4-6 (Heb 3:22-24) as a Point of Convergence in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of the Intra and Intertextual Relationships." *HvTst* 68.1 (2012): 1-6.

<sup>624</sup> Hoffman, 37-50; Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 495-6.

yet another manifestation or emissary of YHWH.<sup>625</sup> The Elijah traditions include a number of popular theophanies such as the victory at Mt. Carmel and the silent voice at Horeb. In particular the Mt. Carmel theophany demonstrated YHWH's judgment and victory over enemies.

Additionally, the close of the message draws attention to the torah of Moses. Malachi has referenced the torah both as representing torah rulings made by the priest and more broadly in parallel with the legal statutes. Here the specific link is made with Moses, who is designated as YHWH's servant. The special designation links the material with the previous section and its emphasis upon the righteous or those who serve YHWH.

#### Moral Expectations

Malachi commands the community to "remember" the torah of Moses with its "statutes and judgments" thereby naming the standard by which the righteous may continue to serve God. While seemingly addressed to the whole community, the fulfillment of the command relies upon the faithful instructions of the priests as the heart of Malachi's message insisted.

YHWH expects the community to turn their hearts toward one another. This will be the mission of Elijah on the day of YHWH if the community has not. The identity of fathers and children is elusive.<sup>626</sup> Verhoef considers the fathers a reference to ancestors (cf. Is 63:16) and interprets the phrase as a call for this community to restore its covenant

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<sup>625</sup> See Longman III and Reid, *God Is A Warrior*, 92-3, 121-4 for the extension of these themes into the Gospel of Mark.

<sup>626</sup> See Assis, "Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope. A New Reading of Malachi 3,22-24," 207-20.

relationship with YHWH as previous generations had done.<sup>627</sup> Elijah's task may involve the reconciliation of the community.<sup>628</sup> The latter makes more immediate sense and captures some of the issues present in the message, especially the treachery addressed in Mal 2:10-16 between brothers, wives, and children as well as the abasement of the priests in Mal 2:9.

### Moral Consequences

The consequences associated with the Day of YHWH lie behind the warning of this text. The message ends with a dire warning that calls Israel to heed YHWH's messengers or ultimately experience *הרם*. The extreme threat leaves no doubt of the gravity of YHWH's message to Israel expressed first by Malachi and finally by Elijah. As a decree of judgment against the land, presumably Yehud and its environs,<sup>629</sup> the vocabulary recalls the emptying of the land at Israel's beginning and sets up a dark irony for its ending. The term *הרם* also brings to the forefront the royal metaphor present throughout the book as *הרם* is typically administered by kings (1 Sam 15; Is 37:11; Jer 25:9; 51:3). The closing warning of the book further highlights the crossroads faced by Malachi's community. The moral world of his community needs reorientation or else YHWH's return will bring the severe consequences associated with their current moral world trajectory.

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<sup>627</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi*, 342.

<sup>628</sup> Snyman, *Malachi*, 191.

<sup>629</sup> Contra Zech 14:11.

## A Synthesis

This lengthy description and analysis deserves a brief conclusion. We examined each of the traditional sections of Malachi's message for the moral foundations, expectations, consequences, and motives to ascertain the features of his moral world. Table 4.1 (at the end of the chapter) provides a synopsis of these four key elements in Malachi's moral world.

In the introduction, we argued that a moral world analysis answered certain questions. We will take a quick turn at these questions to summarize. First, for the community of Malachi, what norms and traditions shaped their ethics? Given the state of the community's moral world and the singular perspective of the text, we have primarily described Malachi's moral world that he prescribes for his community. Malachi's moral message to this community grows out of his symbolic understanding of the world. He insists that the symbolic world should inform and control the moral world performance of his community. Malachi grounds his message in YHWH's covenant love for Israel and calls them back to the relationship formed in covenant. YHWH Sebaoth asserts that he is the Great King among the nations, overturning the claim of the imperial Achaemenids. YHWH intends for Israel to abide by the traditions shaped by the covenant relationship. YHWH depends upon the priests to represent and recognize his lordship in this relationship, calling them specifically back to the promise made with their ancestor Levi. Because the priests had failed to honor YHWH and instruct Israel, Israel now questioned with strong and wearying words YHWH's constancy. Yet YHWH asserts that "I am YHWH, I do not change." He is the God of justice, the benefactor of the land, and protector of the

righteous. On the day of his appearance, he will remove all doubts and restore justice and righteousness.

Second, what specific priorities, imperatives, and injunctions were deemed important? In response to the moral world demise in Israel, YHWH wants Israel to acknowledge him as the true Great King. He expects Israel to trust him as their protector, honor him for his greatness, and bring their gifts and offerings to fully enjoy in the benefits of his provision, and serve him in righteousness according to his instruction. YHWH expects his messengers to oversee honoring his name and represent him loyally before Israel. His subjects will experience blessing and goodness if they will return to his love. As faithful subjects, he expects each to guard against disloyalty and treachery by being faithful in their tasks and their commitments. This moral vision is encapsulated in priority statements such as “Great is YHWH’s name among the nations;” in exhortations and injunctions such as “Let each of you guard your character and do not act treacherously;” and in imperatives such as “Return, bring the full tithe, and test me in this.”

Third, how did particular material, economic, and political interests shape moral decision-making? Social world influences can be detected by looking at the moral motives inferred from the text, giving us a glimpse of the actual moral world of the community. The moral world for some portion of Malachi’s community had been influenced more by the social world circumstances than the reality expressed through their symbolic world. Theological despair and a lack of instruction combined with imperial demands in a constrained economic context allowed for moral deficiencies. Many of the moral matters critiqued by Malachi can be attributed to the hardship faced

by the community. This aligns with the social world conditions of an economically constrained and sparsely populated Yehud. The hardship likely resulted from imperial demands for tribute and taxes that claimed already diminished agricultural resources. As a result, priests brought defiled sacrifices to YHWH. Men in the community divorced their wives and married foreign women. Many others did not contribute their full tithe for the well being of the priests and the poor. These are but examples of the covenant failures critiqued by Malachi. But the problems seemed to go deeper, extending into the community's symbolic world. Certain portions of the community now doubted and challenged the symbolic world long held by the community. They even called into question the character and identity of YHWH, questioning his presence and concern for justice. They doubted the persistence of the covenant and feared the rise of Edom as a signal of YHWH's changing favor. Some had even concluded that it was more profitable to do evil than serve YHWH.

Finally, how did religious symbols bring together their view of the world and their social values? Malachi laces his moral message with a number of symbols and allusions that leverage the imperial imagery of his day. We have noted Malachi's preferred appellation for God is YHWH Sebaoth, which draws on the imagery of YHWH reigning at his temple and over the cosmos. YHWH has sent a messenger and will send others to make known his expectations and accomplish his refining task for Israel and the priests. YHWH claims the Achaemenid royal description "Great King" for himself. Allusions to table, food, tithes, and land parallel important aspects of the imperial reality. While Malachi utilizes this imagery to make a claim for YHWH, he does not upend the assertions of the Achaemenids and call for a rejection of imperial rule or rebellion. Even though the

social world circumstances are undoubtedly affecting Israel's ability to properly honor God and make provision for his ministers, this is only the case in the mind of Israel. Fulfilling both social world and symbolic world expectations are not mutually exclusive. Instead he envisions YHWH as able to provide enough to satisfy both expectations if Israel will only test him and trust him to do so. Malachi calls on Israel to reorient itself toward its symbolic worldview in order to rectify its moral world problems. The reorientation does not demand a change in the social world, even its imperial realities, only a change in how Israel views it.

**Table 4.1 – Malachi’s Moral World**

<b>Message</b>	<b>Moral Foundation</b>	<b>Moral Expectation</b>	<b>Moral Consequence</b>	<b>Moral Motive</b>
<b>1:1-5</b>	YHWH loves Jacob Protector of Israel	Trust YHWH and Proclaim YHWH’S Greatness	Desolation of the Land Cursed	Rise of Edom Covenant Doubts
<b>1:6–2:9</b>	YHWH Sebaoth is the Great King Covenant with Levi	Honor YHWH Sebaoth Priests: Instruct Israel, walk faithfully, and preserve knowledge of YHWH	Reversal of Priests’ Status: Honored to Despised	Imperial Demands Hardship
<b>2:10-16</b>	One Creator, One Father, and One People	Guard your spirit and be loyal, not treacherous	Cut-off from Jacob	Economic Hardship
<b>2:17–3:6</b>	I am YHWH, I do not change God of Justice	Honor YHWH Priests: Be refined	YHWH Visits for Refining and Judgment	YHWH is Absent Principle of Retribution Void
<b>3:7-12</b>	I am YHWH, I do not change Gardner King	Return to YHWH Bring Tithes Test YHWH	Cursed or Land of Delight	Economic Hardship Principle of Reciprocation Void
<b>3:13-21</b>	Telos of Righteous and Wicked Day of YHWH	Serve YHWH Obey & Return	Righteous Remembered Wicked Consumed	Breakdown of Symbol World Retribution/ Reciprocation Void
<b>3:22-24</b>	Day of YHWH Torah	Remember Torah Fathers-Children Turn	<i>Herem</i>	—

## CHAPTER 5: MALACHI AND OTHER MORAL WORLDS

To better appreciate Malachi's particular perspective and points of emphasis, it will be worthwhile comparing our findings from Malachi's moral world to other moral worlds. First, we will be juxtaposing the results of our excavation of Malachi's moral world to moral world traces discovered in a survey of texts from certain of his contemporaries within the postexilic period. The observations are based on what can be detected from the surface of these texts without the benefit of full moral world analyses. Admittedly, excavations and surface surveys are very different levels of study but may still yield connections and contrasts that provide some enhancement to our moral world analysis of Malachi. Second, we will be comparing what we have unearthed to work done by others who have been examining the OT moral world both in its universality and in its diversity.

### **Other Postexilic Moral Worlds**

#### Haggai

Traces from Haggai's moral world indicate a great concern for honoring YHWH through the rebuilding of his house. Moral action is spawned by the active word of God that questions, challenges, encourages and reassures the community and its leaders. Haggai assumes a relationship between YHWH and the people, describing the moral circumstances and consequences in covenantal terms.

At the forefront of Haggai is a concern for the community to properly honor YHWH.<sup>630</sup> Haggai and Malachi share this moral focus although the means by which God is honored are slightly different. While Malachi is concerned that the table of God is despised, Haggai's focus is the house of God that still lies in ruins, a necessary prerequisite to the concerns of Malachi. In Haggai's moral world, the central moral expectation is a commitment to rebuild the temple. Haggai's community has begun to rebuild, but the work has focused on rebuilding homes rather than the house of God. The community is complacent about rebuilding the temple because they do not deem the time to be right. This may be reflective of dire circumstances in the community.<sup>631</sup> Despite the conditions, both messengers do not give credence to the excuses but call their respective communities to action. Like Malachi, Haggai draws a relationship between present circumstances and the community's moral deficiency to properly honor God. "Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes" (Hag 1:5b-6, NRSV)

Haggai calls the community to action, and unusual among the prophetic witness, the prophet testifies that the community responds to the word of YHWH Sebaoth and sets

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<sup>630</sup> Haggai reflects one of the oldest functions of prophets which was to "defend the honor and interests of the local deity before a neglectful king." Pleins, *Social Visions*, 397. In the absence of a king, Haggai addresses the political and religious leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua.

<sup>631</sup> Verhoef, *Malachi* associates the timing with the work stoppage reported in Ezra 4:4-5, 24 since the people lacked royal authorization, conflict with outsiders, and difficult economic conditions (Hag 1:6, 9-11), 54-6. The latter two reasons seem to be the driving factor since the community had authorization from Cyrus. (Ezra 1:1-2).

to work.<sup>632</sup> Haggai views the word of YHWH as still relevant and vibrant in his postexilic community, calling Israel to participate in YHWH's vision for a renewed Israel.<sup>633</sup> Despite the dismal economic condition, the ruined state of the temple, and the lowered status of Israel's former royal family, only a governor in a Persian province, YHWH still envisages a future glory for his temple in Jerusalem and his chosen successor Zerubbabel. The quick response of the community highlights the optimism of Haggai toward the present and future.<sup>634</sup> In his hopeful outlook, the people are active and reaping the benefits of God's blessing. Even Persian rule is not viewed negatively. These stand in stark contrast with Malachi's community. As the message of Malachi unfolds, the community responds repeatedly with questions that escalate in intensity reflective of the doubt about YHWH's ongoing concern. Conditions may have worsened in Malachi's day given the greater resistance expressed by community. In Malachi, the view of present and future is pessimistic.

Haggai presupposes a present relationship between YHWH and "the people" that calls them to faithfulness and obedience yet is somewhat silent on questions relevant to the period such as the identity of YHWH's people and the status of the covenant.<sup>635</sup> Haggai does not employ traditional names like Israel or Judah. Additionally, unlike Malachi, the covenant is not primary but can be implied from the discussion of blessing and curses and the presumption of an ongoing relationship between YHWH and the

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<sup>632</sup> Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve*, 777.

<sup>633</sup> John Kessler, "Tradition, Continuity and Covenant in the Book of Haggai: An Alternative Voice From Early Persian Yehud," in *Tradition in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 in the Trajectory of Hebrew Theology* (LHBOTS 475; ed. Mark Boda; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 1-39

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. Kessler demonstrates how Haggai emphasizes the golden past as a roadmap for Israel's future.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

people. Haggai interestingly weaves together covenantal blessings and curses with his call to rebuild the temple, effectively combining older Deuteronomic (e.g. Deut 28-30) and Zion traditions.<sup>636</sup> Rebuilding the temple is the sign of this community's covenant faithfulness and will determine their experience of blessings or curses.

Haggai also offers a message of divine encouragement and reassurance. The prophet employs the divine encouragement formula “take courage”  $\text{קַח אִמְנָן}$  three times in 2:4 and the divine reassurance formula “do not fear” (2:5), words spoken and heeded by many great heroes of Israel's faith, to prompt the community to build.<sup>637</sup> The encouragement is motivated by the promise of God's presence: “I am with you” (2:4b) and “My spirit abides among you” (2:5b). Haggai grounds this assurance in the word spoken to the liberated community from Egypt. One way in which YHWH illustrates his presence with Israel as they prepare to exit Egypt is through the consensual plundering of the Egyptians.<sup>638</sup> The Egyptians bestowed upon them gold, silver, and clothing (cf. Exod 12:35-36) which Haggai employs as foreshadowing of the treasure for YHWH when he shakes the nations. So Haggai draws upon the tradition, in this case the Exodus specifically, to encourage his community in light of difficult circumstances to take action that honors God and recognizes his greatness. Malachi employs a similar approach as he leverages the Jacob tradition to remind Israel of his ongoing love for them because they doubt his presence.

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<sup>636</sup> Ibid., 17-8.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 26. The formulas and motifs seem to accompany new and challenging endeavors. For example, see the concentration of  $\text{קַח אִמְנָן}$  in Josh 1:5-9 in preparation for entering the land. I am thankful to Dr. Michael Matlock for this observation.

<sup>638</sup> Pleins, *Social Visions*, 398.

The moral worlds of both Haggai and Malachi concentrate on properly showing honor to YHWH, facilitated by temple and table. Both prophets leverage tradition to encourage and reassure the community to take moral action that honors YHWH and demonstrates trust amidst difficult circumstances. Finally, both exhort the community with warnings of moral consequences expressed in covenantal terms. However, in contrast to Haggai, Malachi contends with a moral worldview that is more pessimistic and less responsive to the empowering word of YHWH Sebaoth.

#### Zechariah 1-8

YHWH's work to restore Jerusalem and its environs is the focus of Zechariah's visions. The visions anticipate a special role for the high priest Joshua. Zechariah frames his visions with a call to the people to return to YHWH by renewing their moral practices.

The prophet primarily describes his visions concerning what YHWH is doing in Jerusalem and Judah to restore the people. This entails his return to Jerusalem to rebuild his house and comfort Zion (1:16-17); to guard Jerusalem with a "wall of fire around it" (2:5); to dwell again in the midst of Jerusalem (2:10-11); and rename the city as faithful (8:3). This brings hope to the people as he calls them to join him by worshipping (2:10-13); supporting the rebuilding with silver and gold (6:9-15); obeying his voice to ensure its fulfillment (6:15); responding to calls for justice (7:8-10; 8:16-17); and being courageous and unafraid (8:9, 13, 15). Boda observes, "Zechariah expands restoration beyond a rebuilt temple (1:16; 2:5; 4:6-10a; 6:15) to include a renewed city and province (1:14, 16, 17, 2:2-5; 8:1-7) and moves beyond physical issues to consider the socio-

religious rhythms necessary for life with a new temple and city.”<sup>639</sup> Framing this vision of the renewed temple and city are calls for the community to repent and reorder their lives around the love of truth and peace (Zech 8:18).

Latent in Zechariah’s call for moral renewal is a community still feeling the effects of past destruction and an incomplete restoration. As Ristau notes, Zechariah’s “vision within visions presupposes an implied present that differs starkly from the exalted expectations of a new, restored Jerusalem... There are persistent signs of a city behind the text that is impoverished and under-populated...”<sup>640</sup> These conditions, also noted in Haggai, seem to persist past Zechariah into Malachi’s day and beyond.

YHWH envisions a special role for the high priest Joshua. YHWH rebukes accusations levied by Satan and takes away the filthy clothing of guilt born by Joshua. Once restored, Joshua is expected “to walk in my ways and keep my requirements” so that he may rule over the house of YHWH (3:1-10). Malachi outlines similar expectation for the priests, showing their increased importance to the postexilic community. Yet Malachi does not point to a singular priestly figure like Joshua, but instead reaches back to priestly origins for a true representative and model for the priests of his time.

Zechariah calls his community to return to YHWH, perhaps even influencing Malachi’s similar call. Boda argues that Zechariah frames his visions with two thematically similar sermons (Zech 1:1-6 and 7:1-8:23) that draw upon “the literary

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<sup>639</sup> Mark J. Boda, “Zechariah: Master Mason or Penitential Prophet?,” in *Yahwism After the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era* (Studies in Theology and Religion 5; ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 49-69, esp. 53.

<sup>640</sup> Kenneth A. Ristau, “Rebuilding Jerusalem: Zechariah’s Vision Within Visions,” in *Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd* (LSTS 73; ed. Lester L. Grabbe; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 210.

tradition of the prophet Jeremiah and the oral tradition of penitential prayer.”<sup>641</sup> In the case of Zechariah, the call to return includes general ethical guidelines: “Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another” (Zech 7:9-10).<sup>642</sup> Similar sentiments are present in Malachi but in the specific context of the call to return, Malachi provides a more specific means of demonstrating repentance—bring the tithe. Boda concludes that for Zechariah, “the focus is not on the call to rebuild, as in Haggai, but rather on the call to ethical purity and covenant loyalty in line with the message of Jeremiah.”<sup>643</sup> In Malachi the concern for the house of God is at the center of the call to return.

Zechariah is less confrontational than Malachi. Zechariah’s vision and hope for renewed Jerusalem presuppose an undeveloped and impoverished Jerusalem and Judah still experiencing the effects of destruction. These conditions seem to persist in Malachi’s day contributing to the moral environment that Malachi confronts. Expectation of the high priest Joshua associated with walking with God and keeping his requirements are asserted by Malachi and traced beyond Joshua to the priestly ancestor Levi. Malachi echoes Zechariah’s call to return, but his expectations focus more narrowly on the house of God rather than broader communal concerns for Zechariah.

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<sup>641</sup> Boda, “Zechariah: Master Mason or Penitential Prophet?,” 51.

<sup>642</sup> On linkage between rebuilding and social justice see also Pleins, *Social Visions*, 402

<sup>643</sup> Boda, “Zechariah: Master Mason or Penitential Prophet?,” 68.

## Ezra

The narrative events preserved in the book of Ezra fall before and after the general consensus dating of Malachi.<sup>644</sup> Despite the difference in genres, both narrative and prophetic texts can provide us glimpse into the social, symbolic, and moral worlds of the respective communities. The public of Ezra and Malachi have different perceptions of God at work. They exhibit different approaches to facing outside conflict and perspectives on God's protection. Each community receives a royal decree, but each display different attitudes in response. Both Ezra and Malachi express concern for purity in the context of marriage. Ezra's community reflects a set of religious practices not depicted in Malachi's description of his moral world.

The book of Ezra depicts YHWH at work among the community, again establishing his ongoing relationship and concern for Israel. Ezra includes three main sections: initial return (Ezra 1-2), rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3-6), and the mission of Ezra (Ezra 7-10). In each, YHWH is guiding the community but behind the scenes. YHWH stirs the spirit of Cyrus to allow a return (Ezra 1:1), he send prophets to prompt temple building efforts (5:5), and guides Ezra in his mission (7:9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31).<sup>645</sup> An explicit word from God is not reported. Even the prayer of Ezra does not seek a response from God but urges the people to embrace its confession and respond with faithful

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<sup>644</sup> The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are widely regarded as a single work that consolidates various traditions. While acknowledging this, we will examine the books separately for moral world traces with some separate consideration given to the larger blocks of material that constitute the combined work. See the related comments in Hugh G. M. Williamson, "The Belief System in the Book of Nehemiah," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 276-87.

<sup>645</sup> Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile," 268.

action.<sup>646</sup> Like Haggai's, many of Ezra's community likewise respond. In Malachi, the disputes and confrontation escalate before a small remnant of those who feared YHWH heed the call of the messenger. Again, Malachi depicts a more pessimistic and troubled community in comparison to his contemporaries. A contingent even questions if God is present at all.

Second, the book of Ezra portrays YHWH and the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius working cooperatively (e.g. Ezra 1:1; 6:22). Since the Persian kings are depicted as being supportive of Yehud and supported by YHWH, the community's belief system reflects the acceptance of Persian power.<sup>647</sup> We noted in Malachi the repeated use of royal metaphors that leveraged imperial ideology to insist on YHWH's greatness. In Ezra, YHWH is able to work in conjunction and through the efforts of the Persian kings. In Malachi, there seems to be underlying efforts to restore the perception of YHWH above the Persian kings, but Malachi does not suggest a need to change or rebel. YHWH is capable of sustaining Israel despite Persian demand and perhaps even through Persian provision as he did in Ezra. Correspondingly, Ezra 7:21-24 outlines the expected response to a royal decree. Consistent with the cooperative spirit palpable in Ezra's perspective, Artaxerxes authorizes the mission of Ezra and allows leeway for needs arising from the commands of Ezra's God. Response to the request should be "done with all diligence" and with "zeal for the house of the God of heaven". Twice the recipients are given the alternatives either to follow the decree by obeying the law or experience "wrath" (7:23) or "judgment" (7:26). Malachi's message from the Great King lays out essentially these expectations and alternatives.

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<sup>646</sup> Matlock, *Discovering the Traditions of Prose Prayers in Early Jewish Literature*, 30.

<sup>647</sup> Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile," 269.

Third, in Ezra, Israel responds positively to their “dread” of neighbors. Realizing their need for God, they energize efforts to build the foundation and seek YHWH, making offerings and keeping festivals. The text implies that they recognized a need for YHWH’s presence to face the challenges around them. However, their resolve had limits as eventually these circumstances negatively motivated their performance (Ezra 4:4-5) until YHWH’s word stirred the hearts of the community’s leaders. Then at the conclusion of the temple rebuilding process, the community “celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy” (Ezra 6:16). The celebration featured numerous sacrifices, and the priests were set to their task in accordance with the law of Moses (Ezra 6:16-18). Malachi presents a stark reversal of attitudes and actions. In the face of conflict, proclamation of YHWH’s faithfulness can only be anticipated not experienced; joy has dissipated into questions and doubts; sacrifices are tainted and flawed; and the priests have ceased fulfilling their responsibilities, negligent in their instruction of torah.

The inner group conflict described in Ezra 7-10 and Malachi provide a fourth point of contact.<sup>648</sup> Ezra discloses a clear interest in maintaining the purity and distinctiveness of the community. Marriage with foreigners is not only to be avoided but also rectified.<sup>649</sup> Malachi expresses a similar concern, but his admonition halts at warning and leaves a remedy unmentioned. Malachi views divorce as violence while also showing concern for foreigners within the community. This produces a moral dilemma which Malachi does not resolve. Ezra is more resolute in dissolving the marriages as the purity of the community outweighed individual consequence. The issue is important

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<sup>648</sup> Pleins, *Social Visions*, 188.

<sup>649</sup> Becking, “Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile,” 270-1.

enough for both to confront, but only Ezra seeks to remedy. An explanation for the different approaches eludes us. It may point to differences between Ezra's and Malachi's perspective on the torah. It could speak to an escalating problem that Ezra viewed as at a tipping point.<sup>650</sup> Additionally, the allegation brought to Ezra that "the holy seed has mixed itself with the people of the land" is supplemented and partially explained as a result of the "officials and leaders have led the way" including priests and Levites. While the early narratives of Ezra generally have a positive view of the priests and Levites, the latter narratives indict some of the priests for participating in the foreign marriages condemned by Ezra and Malachi alike. The vacuum of leadership present in Malachi is front and center in Ezra. Additionally, in contrast with the four contemporaries we are assessing, no specific leaders are addressed or called out by Malachi. Is this an additional signal of the leadership failure that no one with name recognition can even be mentioned?

Fifth, Ezra viewed YHWH as a God of protection (Ezra 8:21-23, 31). Ezra was "ashamed" to ask protection of Artaxerxes because he had posed his request to the emperor for a commission as the will of his God. Ezra asserted, "God is gracious to all who seek him, but his power and wrath are against all who forsake him." (8:22) Presumably the promise of God's graciousness upon the Persian emperor partially motivated the approved mission. Ezra and his community solicited God's aid and traveled safely. Malachi similarly casts YHWH as ready to act graciously toward Israel.

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<sup>650</sup> Yonina Dor, "The Rite of Separation of the Foreign Wives in Ezra–Nehemiah," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary K. Knoppers and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 173-88; Katherine Southwood, "The Holy Seed: The Significance of Endogamous Boundaries and Their Transgression in Ezra 9–10," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary K. Knoppers and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 189-224; Grabbe, *A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, 313-6; Daniel Smith-Christopher, "The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9–10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Post-exilic Judean Community," in *Second Temple Studies: Temple and Community in the Persian Period* (JSOTSup 175; eds. Kent Harold Richards and Tamara Cohn Eskenazi; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 243-65.

Yet Malachi's community is worried about their protection and the rise of old enemies in the south, not believing that God's graciousness will matter in this case.

Finally, in both preparation for their journey and in response to the issue of foreign marriages, Ezra and his community evince habits of prayer, fasting, confession, and penitence. Little hint of these practices appears in Malachi.<sup>651</sup> Ezra too models a great concern for *torah*. By his account, he and his community come to teach the *torah* (7:25) perhaps in response to the uneducated community addressed by Malachi.

Malachi's community is less responsive to demands for action and calls for change. They do not entrust conflict to YHWH or exude confidence in God's protection like the communities in Ezra. Malachi is concerned with marriage purity but does not address it as forcefully as Ezra. Malachi includes the basic features of royal decrees modeled in Ezra, calling the community to heed the decree or experience its consequences.

### Nehemiah

Of his contemporaries, Malachi appears to have most in common with Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah reflects a similar depiction of social world circumstances, symbolic world beliefs, and moral world expectations. Nehemiah is widely understood to include composition layers that accreted around Nehemiah's memoir and woven together with Ezra traditions and other sources of the period.<sup>652</sup> As a result, Williamson cautions

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<sup>651</sup> Malachi references very few liturgical practices in his message. The few exceptions are the call to repentance depicted as "walking in mourning" (3:7,14) and the entreaty of favor by the priests associated with sacrifices. (1:9) The four contemporaries surveyed mention fasting (Zech 7:1-7; Ezra 8:21-23; Neh 9:2-3) singing (Zech 2:10; Ezra 3); celebrating festivals and holy days (Ezra 3; Neh 8; Neh 13); prayer (Ezra 4-6 ; Neh 4:4-9); and confession (Neh 9:2-3). It is an argument from silence, but may point again to the dismal conditions and intense despair felt by the community.

<sup>652</sup> Jacob L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and Its Earliest Readers* (BZAW 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

against analyzing the book for a single belief system, but he concludes the view retained in the Nehemiah memoir and the one found in the rest of the book may derive from differing lay and professional perspectives but are not contradictory in substantial ways.<sup>653</sup>

Nehemiah is moved to return to his home country because of reports of “great trouble and shame” being experienced by the Yehud community still suffering in the ruins of Jerusalem’s destruction (1:3; 2:17). The great need leads to Nehemiah being characterized as “coming to seek the welfare” of the people of Israel (2:10). Nehemiah substantiates some of the imperial demands lying in the background of Malachi. The people are pressed to meet the demands of the “king’s tax” and “the governor’s food allowance” (5:4, 15). Nehemiah claims to have foregone this food allowance and ended the demands of former governors and their servants (5:15)—a possible allusion to the governor being honored in Malachi. Additionally, Nehemiah faced a sparsely populated city (7:4). If Malachi precedes Nehemiah as widely accepted, Nehemiah provides a glimpse of the culminating circumstances faced by Malachi’s community. This further substantiates a significant motivating factor seen throughout Malachi related to social world challenges that precipitated the exclamation of the priests, “What a hardship!” (Mal 1:13; cf. Neh 9:32).

Nehemiah recounts his confrontation with a severe injustice within the community. Families are pledging fields in order to have grain for food, borrowing money to pay interest on other loans and the king’s tax, and even enslaving their children. The picture resembles the hardship experienced in Malachi and the oppression of

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<sup>653</sup> Williamson, “Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile,” 285.

workers. Nehemiah alludes to previous commitments made by the public to restore Jewish kindred to the community, but some of the nobles and officials are undermining these efforts by selling those enslaved to them in order to satisfy debts. Unfortunately, Malachi does not provide the detail like the first hand account of Nehemiah, but the situation may reflect examples of those who swear falsely [note that Nehemiah calls the priests into order to take an oath from the nobles (Neh 5:12)] and a further example of treachery against one another (Mal 2:10; 3:5). In Nehemiah's day, the situation has clearly reached crisis level as it threatens the wall-building efforts of the community and its social cohesion. But Malachi's general description comports with scenarios that may have lead to this. Nehemiah grounds his confrontation of the community leaders in simple theological and practical concerns. "The thing you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the *fear of our God*, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies" (Neh 5:9). Malachi bases his message in the constancy of YHWH and his justice, but in his listing of deeds to be confronted by God in judgment (3:5), which have some parallel in Neh 5, the messenger summarizes his list with the same general designation as those not *fearing YHWH* (Mal 3:5; Neh 5:9).

Nehemiah bears witness to the presence and conflict of outsiders. First, the governor notes confrontations he experienced with a number of outsiders. Chief among these are Sanballat of Samaria (Neh 4:1, 7; 6:1, 5) and Tobiah the Ammonite (4:3, 7; 6:1, 17-19). Additionally, he mentions Geshem the Arab (6:1), people from Ashdod (4:7; 13:23), Ammon (13:23), Moab (13:23), and Tyre (13:16). Nehemiah's record indicates the presence of various outsiders who were influential in the community and were threatened by changes to the *status quo*. Daughters of Israel were married to foreign men

(6:17) and sons of Israel married to foreign women (13:27). Nehemiah seems more concerned with the possible danger of such relationships as he points to the example of Solomon and the conflict of interest inherent in foreign alliances (6:17-19) as well as the possible loss of Jewish identity as the children no longer spoke the language (13:23). However, the community under the leadership of the priests and Levites see the marriages as problematic to keeping torah and promise in their covenant pledge to refrain from these intermarriages (10:30). Like Ezra, Nehemiah provides more specifics of the foreign element present in Yehud and how the community takes action to reverse this course. Malachi lacks this detail and focuses his attention on the issue as an appeal for acting logically and in respect of previous commitments to one's wife. These reports in Nehemiah are significant for understanding Malachi since they substantiate the apparent concern for threats to the south that contribute to doubts of God's ongoing election and a plausible background for intermarriage as a practice threatening the community.

Nehemiah presents a positive illustration of dealing with conflict that reflects reliance upon the essentials of the symbolic worldview that perceived YHWH as a God who protects.<sup>654</sup> Nehemiah prays and urges the community to not be afraid but ready themselves for conflicts (4:4-20). He rallies the community under the belief that "God will fight for us" and credits God, who frustrates the plans of his enemies, for the successful avoidance of engagement (4:20). To this end, he exhorts his community to rely upon the great and awesome YHWH (4:14). Williamson describes Nehemiah's use of the traditions as "unsophisticated" in that it is "the language of the laity drawing general analogy between the present situation and some well-known stories from his people's

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<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 281; Pleins, *Social Visions*, 184.

national history.”<sup>655</sup> Malachi employs a similar practice by drawing upon the traditions of Jacob and Esau to substantiate why Israel should not question YHWH’s love and fear Edom. Sophisticated or not, Malachi substantiates God’s willingness to protect Israel, with a core element of Israel’s identity—God’s beloved and chosen. Drawing Israel back to the core of their identity should have provided even greater assurance of God’s protection.

The core elements of covenant, torah, offerings, and temple are present and emphasized in both Malachi and Nehemiah. Williamson observes that the pledge as part of the covenant renewal (Neh 10:29-40) focuses on the law and concerns for the house of God. The bulk of the pledge involves commitments to bring offerings, gifts, and tithes in support of the house of God. Attention to torah and temple are the “overriding principles which should govern life.”<sup>656</sup> Matlock argues the same point about the Levitical prayer in Neh 9 observing that “the Levite’s prayer is a graphic description of how Torah is to be central for and governing of the people of God.”<sup>657</sup> Concerns for temple and torah are also reflected in Nehemiah’s prayer (1:9) that prompts his mission and the substance of his reforms during his second post in Jerusalem (Neh 13:10-14, 28-31).

In contrast to the belief system of the priesthood and community that pledges commitment to YHWH, rooted in devotion to *tora*h and the service of the temple (Neh 8-10), Williamson characterizes the belief system of Nehemiah the governor as “pragmatic and uncomplicated,” befitting a layman and political leader on an imperial mission with

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<sup>655</sup> Williamson, “Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile,” 278-9.

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>657</sup> Matlock, *Discovering the Traditions of Prose Prayers in Early Jewish Literature*, 49.

obligations to maintain and foster public support. Williamson adds that Nehemiah's prayers reflect "this same pragmatic approach to religion: they reflect a belief that God is available to prosper the undertakings of his servants (2:4; 4:3 [9]; 6:9) to reward the good (5:19; 13:14, 22, 31), to punish the wicked (13:29), and to frustrate the plans of those who would oppose them (3:36-37 [4:4-5]; 6:14)."<sup>658</sup> The same characterization could be made of Malachi based on the expectations he sets regarding tithing as a test of God's blessing and the *telos* of the righteous and wicked. Williamson argues such a perspective is characteristic of a religious layman or non-professional as opposed to the priests and Levites who provide more theological grounding for their concerns (Neh 10:29-40). If Williamson's characterization is correct, does this say anything about the social location of Malachi?

The expectations urged by Malachi are strikingly simple: trust YHWH because he loves you; be faithful to your wife; bring your tithe; heed the coming day of YHWH. The simplicity of Malachi's prescriptions, through Williamson's lens, may point to a layman. However, when Malachi addresses the priests his arguments are more sophisticated, as in the case of the covenant with Levi and torah rulings. This familiarity and more sophisticated cultic concerns have contributed to the broad consensus that Malachi is located to some extent among priestly or Levitical circles.<sup>659</sup> This seems more likely but a more precise group location eludes us. However, Malachi grounds all of his moral world expectations in symbolic world fundamentals. The degree of sophistication in his argument may have more to do with the audience he addresses, that is, the spectrum of

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<sup>658</sup> Williamson, "Continuity and Discontinuity after the Exile," 281.

<sup>659</sup> See discussion in chapter three on Priests and Levites.

general to specific changes as the focus of his message moves along the spectrum from community to priestly leadership.

Nehemiah helps to substantiate the difficult social world circumstances facing Malachi's community and contributing to their moral world crisis. The main elements of Nehemiah and Malachi's symbolic world are shared and serve as the foundation for their moral world confrontations. Nehemiah confirms the existence of outsider influence and conflict and models how the faithful should address contention. Additionally, analysis of Nehemiah's moral world reasoning does not explicitly help to locate Malachi socially but points to his ability to tailor moral arguments to his audience.

#### Summary and Conclusions

Our survey of the above four contemporaries indicates similar social world circumstances. The community of Haggai has delayed its rebuilding efforts because circumstances are not right for reconstruction. Zechariah's vision of a renewed and repopulated Jerusalem implies a city and environs still undeveloped and unpopulated. Ezra depicts a slow rebuilding process that remains incomplete until the time of Nehemiah, who returns to his home city on word of its poor welfare and state of ruin. These circumstances comport with the challenges described in Malachi's social world.

Each of the communities represented above indicate the presence of outsiders that pose a threat to community efforts. Likewise they make plausible the presence of outsiders in Malachi's community representative of the concern for the rise of Edom in the south and marriages to foreign women.

Malachi's community appears to be more pessimistic and less responsive to the messenger in comparison with his contemporaries. The community of Haggai rallies to rebuild the temple. The community of Nehemiah participates in the wall rebuilding efforts, welcomes the teaching of the torah, and renews the covenant. These comparisons highlight the dismal state and feelings of despair that have prompted the deep questioning of the symbol world and the moral world crisis.

### **Malachi and OT Ethics**

Various approaches have been undertaken in the discipline of OT ethics. One school of thought focuses on ascertaining and describing the morals of ancient Israel and its constituent communities and representative figures. Our moral world analysis is suited for this descriptive approach as it has focused on the moral world of Malachi and his community. Many students and readers of these ancient texts reasonably consider how these texts and their moral world pertain to those who share the basic elements of Israel's belief system. In the opening chapter, we outlined two additional approaches to OT ethics that seek to appropriate the moral world of Israel: systematic or paradigmatic approaches and literary or canonical formative approaches. Consistent with the descriptive approach, we have considered a particular moral world as preserved through the text of Malachi. Most descriptive projects stop there. In contrast, as a minor phase of this project, we want to consider how our moral world analysis and the other two approaches may illumine each other. How do these approaches help read and assess Malachi's moral world? How does Malachi's moral world model or provide insight into the systematic and formative approaches within the discipline of OT ethics?

## Malachi and Systematic/Paradigmatic Approaches

Systematic or paradigmatic approaches to OT ethics have sought to determine the moral world of the OT in order to ascertain how the OT may inform contemporary moral choices and perspectives. A variety of approaches have been taken to this end. We will examine two representative of this approach.

First, Walter Kaiser provides one of the earliest extensive forays into OT ethics.<sup>660</sup> He describes five general approaches to OT ethics then makes a case for a more comprehensive approach. He contends that a comprehensive or systematic approach toward the ethics of the OT can help determine universal principles that illuminate the manner of life approved by the OT. Kaiser acknowledges that a systematic approach is dependent upon one's perspective regarding the harmony or diversity of OT texts. Kaiser's supposition of a harmony across texts which makes possible a systematic approach is evident in the following quote: "But the fact that the Old Testament *prescribes* – and what it prescribes has an internal *consistency* with the whole Old Testament canon, which has often been derived from what are specific injunctions in which can be discerned general or *universalizable* principle – forms the heart of the case for the possibility of Old Testament ethics."<sup>661</sup> Kaiser hopes to abstract a center point for OT ethical reflection and appropriation. His review of key moral texts center on legal content (Exodus 20-23; Leviticus 18-20, and Deuteronomy 12-25), which lead him to the conclusion that holiness is the center point of Israel's moral world.

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<sup>660</sup> Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*. op.cit.

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

His book on OT ethics does not include any significant treatment of Malachi. Fifteen citations are included in a variety of discussions including the treatment of widows and orphans, marriage and divorce, the unchangeable nature of God, concern for the nations, and the future aspect of OT ethics. However, in a subsequent book focused on Malachi, Kaiser effectively works out his OT ethics approach.<sup>662</sup> Kaiser does not set up this book on Malachi as an outworking of OT ethics, but his approach mirrors it. In the preface to his book, he asserts that the task of exegesis is “to work to the point of saying how those exegetically derived meanings yield legitimate principles that can be applied to contemporary listeners in a summons for action or response.”<sup>663</sup> Reading exegetically determines principles to apply.

Based on the references he makes to Malachi in his OT Ethics, he sees aspects of Malachi’s call as related to holiness. In his book on Malachi, he focuses on the prophet’s call of response to YHWH’s love. “When times are hard, it is difficult to believe God loves us. All appearances seem to count against such a belief. Yet, that is exactly what this little Book of Malachi is all about. YHWH still loves Israel in spite of all appearances to the contrary. And this same unchanging Lord still loves us.”<sup>664</sup>

As the title of his book on Malachi indicates, Kaiser sees the love of God as the main theme of the book. The message of Malachi is to call his people to live in such a way that responds to God’s love. This interpretation is reflected in the titles of his chapters: A Call to Respond to God’s Love, A Call to Be Authentic, A Call to Love God

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<sup>662</sup> Kaiser, *Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love*.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Totally, A Call to Trust an Unchanging God, and A Call to Take Inventory. While not specifically depicted as holiness, Kaiser's description of the life called for by Malachi could easily be characterized as holiness on the basis of his OT ethics. We will examine chapter two (A Call to Be Authentic) as a means of assessing Kaiser's approach to OT ethics and the benefit of the moral world approach.

Kaiser's second chapter focuses on Malachi 1:6-14, breaking from the traditional boundaries for the second unit because "(1) the section has a suitable climax in 1:14, and (2) there is already more material than can be easily handled in most messages."<sup>665</sup> His purpose for restricting the unit illustrates the primacy of homiletic presentation.

The arrangement and presentation of the content reflect Kaiser's interest to show how exegetically determined meanings yield principles for application. Kaiser's derived principle is "to be authentic". One would not disagree that authenticity is important, but is this the principle stressed by Malachi? He appears to base this on his interpretation of the priestly attitude of "indifference, carelessness, and half-heartedness"<sup>666</sup> that prevented the people from responding to God's love. But one could argue that the people *are* acting authentically. Their moral actions reflect their doubt and uncertainty about God's presence: How have you loved us? How have we defiled you?

Kaiser's arrangement of the unit is depicted in the first two columns of the chart.<sup>667</sup> He concludes that "the text has four separate movements or separate thoughts that develop the overall theme of a call to be authentic. They appear to address four

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid., 32-3.

<b>Subunit</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Homiletic area</b>
1:6-7	An introductory divine proverb	Our profession
1:8-9	A probing question from God	Our gifts
1:10-12	A divine challenge	Our service
1:13-14	A report of a popular conclusion	Our time

areas...and direct the believers' attention to authentic and credible living..."<sup>668</sup> The four areas are indicated in the right column of the chart. Kaiser argues we are called to be authentic in our profession as sons and servants. Our authenticity is revealed through our gifts that reflect a proper response to God's love. Authenticity is manifested in our service and viewing our time of worship as joyful rather than boring. Although he acknowledges at the outset that YHWH is the model of excellence and authenticity, which is why YHWH should be honored, his arrangement buries the heart of the prophet's message and does not punctuate the conclusion—that YHWH is great among the nations—which our analysis indicated was the rhetorical emphasis of the unit.

Kaiser is a sound exegete who advances syntactical-theological analysis of Scripture that probes context, syntax, word meanings, theology and homiletics.<sup>669</sup> In the book on Malachi, his presentation is guided by homiletic concerns, perhaps suitable for the audience of the book, but his homiletical and ethical concerns are congruent. Kaiser's

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>669</sup> See *ibid.*, Appendix A. He offers the book as an outworking of his methodology described more fully in *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981).

central theme may capture the general call of Malachi, but it appears to be too broad. Such a broad approach includes all OT texts, but it can obscure the details of the specific moral world being examined and create the need for adaption of the message in such a way that stretches the initial intentions of the text.

Second, let us consider the OT ethics of Christopher Wright. Rather than searching for the central theme of the OT moral world, Wright approaches OT ethics by way of a paradigmatic approach. Wright understands Israel as a particular case of life with God and others that serves as a paradigm for contemporary ethical reflection. Our moral world analysis suggests there is much to commend in Wright's approach. First, Wright begins with the position that ethics is tied to beliefs or theology: "You cannot explain how and why Israelites or Christians lived as they did until you see how and why they believed what they did."<sup>670</sup> This coheres with the basic approach of Malachi in that he grounds moral expectations in moral foundations or central statements of belief.

Wright deems there to be "three major focal points" in Israel's self-understanding. He describes the angles of this triangularly depicted self-understanding as theological, social, and economic—even more succinctly stated as God, Israel, and the land. The relationship between these three focal points provides the paradigm through which OT ethical teaching can be examined. Wright only refers to the book of Malachi twice so the text is not impactful to his theory, and therefore Malachi's symbolic world provides a helpful test case for assessing his paradigm.<sup>671</sup> Our own analysis of Malachi's symbolic

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<sup>670</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 17.

<sup>671</sup> Wright cites Malachi as example of the belief that the law was the purview of the priesthood (Mal 2:6-7), 302. In a discussion of polygamy and divorce, he cites Malachi to show that divorce was less than God's ideal and that Malachi's denunciation of divorce indicates divorce was more criticized than polygamy (Mal 2:13-16), 332.

world emphasized God and Israel (representative of Wright's theological and social angle). The key difference is the economic angle and this may be more a matter of presentation rather than substance. We will assess our moral analysis through Wright's three angles.

Wright's first angle for approaching OT ethics is theological. He summarizes:

The ethical teaching of the Old Testament is first and foremost God-centered. It is founded on the identity of the LORD, the living God of the biblical revelation. It presupposes God's initiative in grace and redemption; it takes its content from the words of God revealed in the cultural context of Israel; it is framed by the purposes of God, who is sovereign in what he has done and will do in history; it is shaped by God's ways and character; and it is motivated by personal experience of God's goodness in his dealings with his people.<sup>672</sup>

Founded on the identity of God, Malachi portrays God as YHWH Sebaoth - the warrior king of Israel. Their king fights for them and uses the nations for his purposes. YHWH Sebaoth describes himself as the Great King, exerting himself over any Persian claim about its god and king. Malachi begins his message with the reminder of God's love for Israel recalling their past relationship as God's choice of Israel. Israel's actions are still expected to flow in response to that call. YHWH reminds the community and its priests that his instructions should be central to the life of the community. For Malachi's particular context, torah provides guidance on proper worship practices and ethical living. YHWH intends for his name to be great among the nations. Israel in its worship, trust, and even testing of YHWH will reveal God's good intention to bless Israel for the sake of his own name. YHWH Sebaoth asserts his unchanging character – I am YHWH. He has been, is, and will continue to provide for Israel and ensure justice. He has particularly called the

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<sup>672</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 46.

Levites to model torah-led lives and instruct Israel through its torah rulings. YHWH begins his message reminding Israel of his love and his protection - they are not consumed - a reflection of God's unchanging character. Malachi reflects and significantly grounds his moral worldview in terms and emphases congruent with the theological angle that Wright detects as representative of the whole OT.

In the social angle, Wright argues that Israel's ethic was shaped by its special relationship with God and its particular task or mission.<sup>673</sup> Israel's life was to be distinctive as a means of accomplishing its mission. Because they served a unique God, who was seeking not only to redeem Israel but all nations and all creation, Israel's life with God, with each other, and with the nations should set them apart. Religiously they worshiped one God, economically land tenure was a family-right not a royal one, and politically God was their rightful king. Wright's model of Israel's paradigmatic life is largely drawn from preexilic Israel. Does this vision hold in Malachi?

As we have seen in Malachi, and other postexilic texts, Israel continued to conceive of itself in continuity with this past vision hoping for its renewal in their own time. The community had strayed from this vision, questioning God's ongoing relationship with Israel and disregarding his instructions for an honor giving life. However, Malachi calls the community back to the vision in continuity with preexilic Israel. Malachi employs the traditions of Jacob, the covenant with Levi, traditions about YHWH's character, covenantal themes, and the torah to help reorient his community's moral world.

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 48-65.

Covenant is key to the social angle because it encapsulates both God's choice of Israel and his concern for the nations. This is at the heart of YHWH's choice of Abraham, Jacob, and the community of liberated Israel. However, Israel finds itself living in new circumstances - under imperial jurisdiction. The nations dictate life. In a response, Malachi employs covenantal concepts to depict the ongoing relationship between Israel and God and with each other. Israel is the beloved Jacob; unfaithfulness to each other undermines the ancestral covenant and unfaithfulness to wives breaks the covenant which God witnessed; YHWH anticipates his name to be praised among the nations, and what he does with and for Israel reflects this (1:5); YHWH's blessing will make Yehud a land of delight among the nations. However, the true Israel is narrowed, not of God's desire but by the community's choosing. The vision associated with the social angle holds but fewer are willing to embrace it given their difficult social circumstances and the questions that have arisen regarding the symbolic world.

Third, Wright highlights the key role that land plays in the OT's depiction of the relationship between God and Israel.

We have seen that Israel held two fundamental convictions about their land: divine gift and divine ownership. On the one hand, it was the gift of the LORD to them; so they held it securely, provided they remained in covenant relationship with him. But on the other hand, it was still the LORD's land; so he held them morally accountable for their use of the land. Thus the whole realm of Israel's economic life functions as a measurement or gauge of their faithfulness (or otherwise) to the covenant demands of God. There is, therefore, an economic angle to our approach to the ethics of the Old Testament.<sup>674</sup>

The elements of this angle are present in Malachi although we presented them differently in our review of Malachi's symbolic world.

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<sup>674</sup> Ibid., 98-9.

As Wright notes, land serves as a covenant barometer, which is the case in Malachi. First, YHWH points out his ownership and sovereignty over the land in his opening message as he had laid waste the land of Edom. His name will be seen as great beyond the borders of Israel. If Edom is also a foil for Israel in this call to faithfulness, Israel's possession and habitation within the land is provisional upon living faithful to YHWH. Second, this aspect is emphasized in the closing of Malachi's message where Israel and the land will experience  $\text{הָרָח}$  if they do not return to YHWH and toward each other, an emphasis on the relationships in the theological and social angles. Finally, Israel's call to return is tied to economic matters. The land is suffering because the windows of heaven are closed, fruits are devoured, and the vine miscarries. If Israel will entrust a portion of the land's fruit to YHWH as provision for his house, YHWH will bless the land again so that it will become a land of delight.

We examined two different methodologies within the systematic approach to OT ethics. Overall, Wright's paradigmatic approach seems more beneficial than Kaiser's search for a central theme. Our analysis of Malachi's moral world did not isolate a central theme but does substantiate the boundaries proposed by Wright.

The systematic approach's search for central themes and principles does point us toward Malachi's major emphases upon honoring YHWH and keeping commitments. The community is urged to recognize YHWH's greatness and honor him as one would a father, master, and governor. Honor is demonstrated with good gifts and reverential speech rather than defiled offering and wearying words. Those who honor and serve YHWH will be counted among the righteous and preserved on the day of YHWH. Additionally, honor for YHWH is correlated to fulfillment of commitments. Priests should fulfill obligations to

walk with YHWH and sustain the community's knowledge of God through torah instruction and rulings. Men of the community should be true to marriage commitments by guarding their character and remembering the wife of their youth. All members of the community should bring their tithes to support the house of God and those living on the margin. Faithful relationships with each other will be the emphasis of messengers coming in anticipation of the day of YHWH. Related to major themes associated with systematic approaches to OT ethics, Malachi's accent on honor and commitment are more closely aligned with love of God and neighbor rather than holiness as stressed by Kaiser.

Malachi's symbolic world exhibits congruency with paradigmatic approaches. The foundations of Malachi's moral world reflect and substantiate the three angles within which Wright argues that reflection on OT ethics should occur. Within the paradigm proposed by Wright, Malachi's moral expectations lie primarily in the theological and social angles. Moral decisions of the community associated with the theological and social angles impact and are manifested in the economic angle, but obligations and relationships associated with the land are not at the forefront in Malachi's moral world.

More importantly, paradigmatic approaches like Wright's and the recurrence of moral foundations in Malachi's ethical approach remind us that good moral reflection occurs within a framework. Malachi's symbol world provided the boundaries and foundations for his moral reflection and instruction. Paradigms that summarize the OT symbolic world like Wright's are helpful and necessary for contemporary reflection on the OT. Likewise, awareness and articulation of our own symbol worlds are necessary preconditions for our own contemporary ethical reflection especially when we seek to allow the symbolic and moral worlds of ancient texts to inform our moral perspectives.

## Malachi and Formative Approaches

Bruce Birch well articulates another approach to OT ethics asserting that for the moral life (of Christians) Scripture is “primary but not self-sufficient.”<sup>675</sup> Scripture provides the framework for ethical reflection and models communal discernment. Birch stresses the canonization of Scripture as a reminder that the wholeness of Scripture is very important to avoid canon-within-canon approaches or stressing a part without considering its fit within the whole. As a witness of diverse voices, Scripture warrants and models that dialogue is key to discerning what God is doing among his people. It does not permit pluralism nor should unity be artificially imposed on its diversity.

Birch suggests two key constructs for his approach to connecting the Old Testament and ethics. First, Birch argues that God’s character is the means to understanding the essential themes of the witness and also serves as our guide in discerning what God is doing among us today. This is one of the primary things that the Biblical record does; it testifies to the character of God. Second, the framework of the OT is story, that is, narrative not history. Scripture may or may not be a complete and primary witness to the actual practices of the Israelite community, but it is the witness deemed important to preserve by the faith community. It testifies to the interactions between God and his people. It includes all the ambiguities and complexities of the human experience. The actions of humanity are not the normative standard; God is. As such the witness is “visionary in character.” Because of this, attempts to recreate Israel’s actual moral structures cannot be done objectively. Although the moral presentation of the OT is what the Israelite faith community deemed important, it may have been the

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<sup>675</sup> Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 34. See also Goldingay, *Israel’s Life*, 1-50, esp 45-50.

minority view. The Bible does not provide templates for decision-making and certainly does not make all decisions for us. Rather, the Bible informs, prompts dialogue, and provokes the imagination.

A fine example of the formative approach is the collection of essays *Character Ethics and the Old Testament*.<sup>676</sup> The forward by Walter Brueggemann highlights the emphasis of formative approaches: “‘Character ethics’ refers to a way of thinking about and interpreting the moral life in terms of a particular vision of and a passion for life that is rooted in the nurture, formation, and socialization of a particular self-conscious community.”<sup>677</sup> Like Birch, Brueggemann stresses the character of God as the frame for ethical reflection rather than ‘modern reason’ and ‘rule-bound moralism.’<sup>678</sup>

Formative approaches explore and question the world of individual texts using the best tools from literary or moral theory to help spur the moral imagination as a means of forming the character of communities. This approach embraces the diversity and individual perspective of texts as a resource, but not the only resource, for moral formation. Like the systematic approaches, it is interested in contemporary appropriation of OT texts but would not subscribe to a single universal or paradigmatic moral world construed by the OT as a whole. We will survey three representatives of this method from the aforementioned volume and examine how these approaches inform our reading of Malachi’s moral world. Additionally, we will consider how Malachi’s moral world may contribute to this approach.

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<sup>676</sup> Carroll R. and Lapsley, eds. *Character Ethics and the OT*, .

<sup>677</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Foreword,” in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (eds. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), vii-xi, esp. vii.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

In the opening essay, Hiebert argues that biblical scholarship needs to move beyond *Heilsgeschichte* as foundation for reading the OT.<sup>679</sup> He asserts the paradigm should shift toward the world of creation as foundational. Hiebert’s desire to expand biblical readings of the text sets up a false dichotomy between history and nature or time and space, yet his point and questioning are helpful. Hiebert asks how the biblical writers saw “their religious culture—its liturgies, its images of human identity, its daily practices, its values – connected to and grounded in the world of creation in which they lived?”<sup>680</sup>

Our moral world reading of Malachi illustrates that the creation and especially the Creator loom large in the thinking of Malachi. Malachi’s fundamental reality out of which he calls the community to faithfulness is their oneness as family, which he grounds in their shared relationship with God as father and creator. Have we not One Father! One Creator! Malachi insists on commonality that demands relational faithfulness rather than treachery.<sup>681</sup> Second, Malachi implores his community to reflect their honor for YHWH by providing the best of the creation for YHWH. Third, the well being of community is manifested in agricultural realities. YHWH envisions Yehud as a land of delight among the nations.

Cheryl Anderson asserts that biblical laws are ineffective as basis for ethical principles because they do not wholly account for those on the margins—women, poor, and aliens (specifically, the Canaanites). She argues that “certain biblical laws ignore the

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<sup>679</sup> Theodore Hiebert, “Beyond *Heilsgeschichte*,” in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (eds. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 3-10.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>681</sup> The community of Nehemiah depicts a similar sentiment in Neh 5 when they question the behavior of the rich, who are enacting collection efforts even to the extent of selling children of the indebted. “Are we not kinsmen?”

specific circumstances and interests” of these groups.<sup>682</sup> She is concerned that the “biases encoded in the biblical texts” can be brought forward to our context through ethical principles derived from the OT texts.<sup>683</sup> She contends, “A significant difference would be made if biblical interpreters had an obligation to encounter the Other when developing ethical principles from biblical texts.... A principle would only be an ethical one if the Other’s reality were taken into account.... Ultimately, an obligation to the Other shifts the emphasis in ethics from advancing principles and toward developing a process that ensures the obligation has been met.”<sup>684</sup>

In my view, Anderson’s appeal for an “ethics of obligation” essentially insists upon the OT’s broad conception of righteousness, extending beyond mere legal observation but toward fulfilling relational responsibilities and duty. To her point, certain conceptions of obligation or righteousness are culturally bound, just as are ours. An ethics of obligation recognizes the interconnectivity of communities and shared responsibility for achieving the good.

Our moral world analysis detected traces of this approach and concern in Malachi. First, Israel is intimidated by the presence of the Edomites. One could read the opening message as disregard for the Edomites, placing them on par with the Canaanites. However, our reading suggests that Edom primarily functions as a demonstration of God’s love for Israel and exemplar of what Israel could experience if they did not return

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<sup>682</sup> Cheryl B. Anderson, “Biblical Laws: Challenging the Principles of Old Testament Ethics,” in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (eds. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 37-50, esp. 38-9.

<sup>683</sup> She takes issue with aspects of the work of Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*; and Barton, *Understanding OT Ethics*.

<sup>684</sup> Anderson, “Biblical Laws: Challenging the Principles of Old Testament Ethics,” 47.

to God. Additionally, the treatment of the Edomites is left to YHWH with no counsel given to Israel for handling the perceived threat of Edom other than trusting YHWH. Second, Malachi counsels Israel that its greater concern should be the otherness of YHWH - the ultimate Other, who is worthy of honor. Proper concern for the other highlights the inner connectivity of relationship. The priests' disregard for the Other has been to their own disadvantage. Third, Malachi further expresses a concern for those on the margin such as the wives of the community. The messenger calls on Israel to act faithfully by keeping and fulfilling obligations to their wives. Likewise, the call for the community to bring its full tithe likely encompasses a communal effort to provide for temple servants as well as the marginalized.

Carroll R. uses insights from virtue ethics to examine the book of Micah.<sup>685</sup>

Virtue or character ethics seek to articulate the good, understood as the supreme end of human and communal life. Good is embodied through virtues (“character, habits of life and emotional responses”)<sup>686</sup> since the virtues are important for both shaping and sustaining communal world building. Character ethics are modeled by exemplars and transferred via narratives. Carroll R. considers how Micah envisions the good, pointing out that good in Micah can be understood as a concern for the powerless; good entails justice both legally and as a virtue; good is “inseparable from the inner person” and “embodied in the life of exemplars”.<sup>687</sup> Finally, Carroll R. notes that Micah links the good with worship and cultic practices. The cult is the location of communal activities

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<sup>685</sup> M. Daniel Carroll R., ““He Has Told You What is Good”: Moral Formation in Micah,” in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (eds. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 103-18.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

“that should provide the opportunity for encouraging the embodiment of virtues – such as mercy and justice – for sustaining the common good of all people of God.”<sup>688</sup>

Our moral world of analysis of Malachi indicates that the prophet employed a similar approach to urge reformation of his community’s moral world. One, Malachi employs narrative and exemplars to spur his community to reorient their moral world. He alludes to the narrative traditions of Jacob and Esau to remind Israel of God’s favor and protection. He recounts and potentially formulates the covenant with Levi as an exemplar of the priesthood to encourage the priests to walk with YHWH and faithfully instruct the community in torah. Two, Malachi asserts that faithfulness is demonstrated and nurtured through worship practices and cultic support. He admonishes the priests and the community for the impropriety of their sacrifices. Flawed, inadequate sacrifices betray the lack of honor for YHWH. Neglectful withholding of the tithe reveals the ingratitude and selfishness of the community, which fails to support its leaders and the poor. Rectifying these practices and attitudes would move the community toward the good intended for Israel.

#### Malachi’s Approach to Ethics

How does Malachi’s moral world provide insight into contemporary efforts in the discipline of OT ethics? We approach this question with obvious limitations as distant outsiders, without true insight into Malachi’s moral theory or access to this messenger for questions. However, we have attempted to read closely his text and consider carefully his

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 109.

argumentation by which he sought to warn and persuade his community to confront their own moral world and re-orient it.

Systematic and formative approaches describe two different *contemporary* efforts to appropriate the OT in ethical decision-making and character formation. While these represent *contemporary* approaches, Malachi's own ethical process demonstrates that the characteristics of these two approaches are *ancient*. Malachi, using the traditions available to him (those that come to constitute our OT), employs similar methods to morally reason with and persuade his community.

Malachi's approach argues for knowing what you believe, trusting in it, and enacting moral practices that sustain and reflect the view. This illustrates the close proximity between theology and ethics of systematic approaches and the moral vision of formative approaches. Malachi has a certain symbolic view of the world and lives in a certain social context. He judges that certain practices and attitudes do not reflect the prescribed worldview of Israel. So he challenges the practices, attitudes, and questions of a disoriented moral world by asserting foundational claims out of which certain expectations flow. While beliefs are foundational, they are only as good as the practices that sustain them.

Malachi grounds his moral assertions in a variety of traditions and sources of authority. The tradition is primary but not self-sufficient. The state of "canon" available to Malachi is unknown, but he draws from a variety of traditions, such as Deuteronomic, Priestly, prophetic, and wisdom traditions, representative of the whole OT scripture. While Malachi emphasizes the importance of torah, he does not limit himself to the legal traditions. He leverages narratives such as the Jacob and Esau traditions and exemplars

such as Levi. Additionally he makes common sense appeals and looks to everyday wisdom and patterns of social behavior to urge a reformulation of his community's moral world. For example in Mal 2:10-16, Malachi employs a variety of moral reasoning illustrated across the three character ethics essays. Malachi appeals to origins and reason as foundational for proper relationships with each other. Israel should be faithful to one another, especially their wives, because they have one creator. He appeals to reasonable action arguing that those who split from their wives to marry foreign women do not reflect reasonable thinking because of the dire consequences that such actions have on others. Instead, he wants the men of Israel to keep their promises. The prophet appeals to the men of the community to "guard your character" – an appeal to shape the inner person enabling them to keep their commitments. Additionally it seems that Malachi may eschew legal reasoning and precedent dismissing a justification for divorce but rather makes an emotional appeal stressing the relational impact of separating from one wife for another by equating it with bloody violence.

Additional aspects of the formative approach articulated by Birch resonate with Malachi's moral method. First, Malachi models dialogue as part of the moral reasoning process. YHWH's messengers confront and challenge the community for its practices and behaviors. In response, the people raise questions that probe and challenge the assertions of the prophet. In this case, the moral conversation is quite escalated. Nonetheless, the conversation notably has its effect on at least some. Those who feared YHWH, heeding the witness and responses of the messenger to questions about the moral and symbolic worlds, talked among themselves and were noticed by God. Second, Malachi stresses the unchanging character of YHWH and employs this truth as a primary foundation for

reasoning and arguing with his community. Foremost, YHWH is the God of provision who opens himself to testing and the God of justice who distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked. Third, we have acknowledged the difficulties in reconstructing the moral world of Malachi and his community. The witnesses are limited and largely one-sided; Malachi is an explicit minority view among his community. However, we can sketch the basic belief and ethical system through description and tentative conclusions—processes inherent in any interpretive effort.

### Summary and Conclusions

Our moral world analysis and the two primary approaches to appropriate OT ethics mutually illuminate each other. Aspects of both systematic and formative approaches highlight elements within Malachi's moral world as noted above. Additionally, Malachi's moral reasoning exhibits characteristics associated with both of these approaches. In many ways, Malachi's approach primarily resembles the formative approach in that Malachi informs, prompts dialogue, and provokes the imagination. Yet, the moral foundations that Malachi propounds indicate his reliance upon a symbol system that systematic approaches, especially paradigmatic ones, seek to recapitulate toward providing an appropriate framework for OT ethical reflection. Malachi's methods commend the aims of both the systematic and formative approaches.

## CHAPTER 6: REVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

### **Review of Aims and Method**

We have situated this study within the three approaches taken to the discipline of OT ethics: descriptive, systematic, and formative. Descriptive approaches are concerned with the historical world, social context, and streams of tradition out of which OT texts developed and their diverse moral perspectives. Systematic approaches investigate principles and paradigms that encapsulate the unity of the OT and facilitate contemporary appropriation. Formative approaches embrace the diversity of the OT ethical witnesses and view texts as a means of shaping the moral imagination, fostering virtues, and forming character

Specific to the descriptive approach, the *first and major phase* of this investigation pursued a descriptive analysis of the moral world of Malachi. A ‘moral world’ represents an understanding of the world and how to conduct life in it. A moral world analysis examines the moral materials within texts, symbols used to represent moral ideals, traditions that helped shape them, and the social world (political, economic, and physical) in which they are applied.

We examined the moral world of a particular time, place, and people, locating it within a larger social and moral framework for the purpose of better understanding the influences on and the process of moral decision-making. Additionally, the world of Malachi serves as an interesting case study because of its location near the end of the biblical history of Israel. The world of Malachi is awash with the great streams of OT tradition. We considered how these traditions influenced the moral world of Malachi. The

*minor and second phase* of this investigation considered how the moral world of Malachi might inform contemporary ethical reflection upon the OT and his message.

This moral world analysis included four stages. First, we explored the social world of Malachi, highlighting six important features impacting the study of Malachi. Second, we assessed the symbolic world of Malachi with a focus on the traditions preserved in the text. Next, we examined closely the text of Malachi to identify his moral foundations, expectations, motives, and consequences. Finally, we compared Malachi's moral world to his contemporaries and also considered how other approaches to OT ethics and our moral analysis illuminated each other. We will review the main takeaways from these four stages.

### **The Social World of Malachi**

In order to obtain a wider view for assessing Malachi's moral world, we emphasized six features of his social world: 1) an imperially dominated Yehud; 2) an economically constrained Yehud; 3) a small, sparsely populated Yehud; 4) a dismayed Yehud; 5) a family-centered Yehud; 6) a divergent Yehud. By examining imperial institutions, processes, and culture, we observed a number of imperial allusions in Malachi to governmental structures, concerns over the concept of justice, and the royal symbol system reflecting the reality of imperial dominance. Particularly, Malachi partakes in this symbol system with emphasis on messengers, table offerings, and land as a means of experiencing and showing honor to the Great King YHWH.

Second we considered the effect of imperial economic demands and policies on Yehud. The Persian kings displayed interest in local production to the advantage of the

provinces and the empire at large. The empire expected in-kind tribute, taxes, and gifts from rural regions like Yehud. At times, challenges such as diminished rainfall, drought, pestilence, or pests challenged agrarian societies to meet these expectations. Signs of these economic realities and constraints are present in the book of Malachi that impacted the community's offering and tithes to YHWH.

Archeological evidence and glimpses provided by the biblical text point toward a small, sparsely populated Yehud and Jerusalem during the early Persian period and the days of Malachi. Population estimates for Jerusalem in this early period range from several hundred to a couple thousand. Jerusalem and its environs are still undeveloped, potentially contributing to the doubts of restoration and the pressure to meet all economic and religious demands.

Besides Israel, Edom is the only other geopolitical reference specifically named in Malachi. The growing presence of Edomites in the Negev and southern Judah may have been sufficient cause to raise alarm and create dismay among inhabitants of Yehud who had come to expect a ruined and punished Edom.

The family structure still primarily oriented around the father, and the language of Malachi suggests that the household remained the core social unit. Family references are prevalent in the text such as God choosing between two brothers, a son honoring his father as representative of priestly duties, and the expected faithfulness of husband to wife. Additionally, the linkage between marriage and economics may provide some of the motivations for the marriage issues that Malachi confronts.

The social setting of Persian period Yehud and Malachi have been assessed frequently in terms of social conflict. Malachi's disputational style certainly indicates

some contention among groups, but it is difficult to ascertain from Malachi what specific social groups are in conflict. Malachi primarily describes the divergence within Yehud in moral terms. This trait of Malachi's message highlights the importance of understanding his symbolic world.

### **The Symbolic World of Malachi**

Beliefs articulate understandings of reality. To better understand the belief system that directly influenced Malachi's moral perspective, we explored seven important traditions and symbols residual in the text. In Malachi's symbolic world, YHWH Sebaoth is the sovereign king. The name assimilates the traditions associated with God as reigning king and divine warrior. Malachi embraces the name to revive confidence that YHWH Sebaoth will return to Zion and oversee the nations, including the Persian Empire.

Malachi directs his message to the community of Israel. The name embodies a people in long standing relationship with YHWH who have struggled to prevail in faithfulness to their sovereign king. Malachi reminds his generation of Israel that assurance and hope reside in a renewal of the relationship with YHWH. This relationship revolves around symbols such as temple, offerings, covenant, and torah.

As the house of God, the temple was the emblem and location of God's presence among Israel, serving as the primary place for praise, prayer, and sacrifice. Yet Malachi's community questioned YHWH's abiding presence in Jerusalem and the temple. Disregard for the house of God prompted the Great King to prefer the doors be closed rather than his table be defiled with deficient gifts.

Malachi counts himself among the special messengers integral to the symbol world. As messengers in their own right, the priests and Levites had responsibility to mediate the relationship between YHWH and Israel, both at the temple and among the community through their administration of sacrifices and teaching torah. As such, the priests served a critical role in the socialization of the symbol system.

Malachi adheres to covenant constructs that pervade Israel's belief system but reflects the shift toward general usage of ברית in the postexilic period. Covenant connotes mutual and reciprocal commitments that pervade the foundations and expectations associated with Malachi's moral world. YHWH bestows his presence, blessing, justice, and instruction upon Israel. In turn, Israel honors and fears YHWH by bringing its offerings and living faithfully with each other.

Integral to covenant, torah represents the instruction provided by YHWH to Israel for maintaining the covenant relationship, expounding on roles, responsibilities, and obligations that would foster a moral world that acknowledged YHWH's greatness and promoted faithful communal living. For Malachi, torah specifically designates the vital priestly teaching and rulings associated with matters of holiness and sacrificial practices.

Offerings and tithes symbolize the tribute and gifts brought to the Great King YHWH. These tokens from the economic system exhibit Israel's honor for YHWH and serve as economic provision for YHWH's household.

In Malachi's symbolic world, the day of YHWH serves as a warning against Israel's unfaithfulness that will be rectified on the great and terrible day when the Great King appears to claim the righteous and punish the wicked, portrayed through imagery of **היום** upon the land.

Malachi emphasizes these particular traditions in response to the disintegrating symbol system of his community. Socialization has failed and the community's symbolic world needs rebuilding. To address the symbolic and moral world crisis, Malachi focuses on core rather peripheral matters of the belief system in order to stabilize and reorient the community. As a result, we observe Malachi setting expectations around values and practices such as honoring God, keeping commitments, and doing justice.

### **The Moral World of Malachi**

Beliefs are sustained and demonstrated by practices. In light of Malachi's social and symbolic world, we analyzed the seven major sections of Malachi's message using rhetorical analysis and other exegetical tools. Within each passage, we identified the moral foundation of his message that primarily correlated with his symbol system. Next, we looked at the moral expectations in the form of priorities, practices, and injunctions that Malachi advanced that reflected the moral foundation of his message. In tandem, we considered the moral consequences that Malachi outlined the community would experience if their conduct did not change. Additionally, we probed the moral motives that had caused the community to veer from its traditional symbolic and moral world.

Malachi's moral message insists that the symbolic world should inform and control the moral world performance of his community. Malachi grounds his message in YHWH's covenant love for Israel and calls them back to this relationship. YHWH Sebaoth asserts that he is the Great King among the nations and intends for Israel to abide by the traditions shaped by the covenant relationship. YHWH depends upon the priests to represent him and recognize his lordship, calling them specifically back to the promise

made with their ancestor Levi. YHWH reasserts his constancy, which the community questioned with strong and wearying words.

In response to the moral world demise in Israel, YHWH wants Israel to acknowledge him as the true Great King. He expects Israel to trust him as their protector, honor him for his greatness, bring their gifts and offerings to fully enjoy the benefits of his provision, and serve him in righteousness according to his instruction. The priests and community will experience blessing and goodness if they will return to his love. As faithful subjects, he expects each to guard against disloyalty and treachery by being faithful in their tasks and their commitments.

The moral world for some portion of Malachi's community had been influenced more by social world circumstances—partially influenced by the Persian moral world—than the reality expressed through their symbolic world. Many of the moral matters critiqued by Malachi can be attributed to hardship faced by the community. The hardship likely resulted from imperial demands for tribute and taxes that claimed resources already diminished by decreased agricultural production. Additionally, certain portions of the community now doubted the symbolic world long conceived by the community and questioned the character of YHWH, especially his presence and concern for justice.

In response, Malachi orients his moral message around symbols and allusions that leveraged the imperial imagery of his day. YHWH is sending royal messengers to make known his expectations. He claims the preferred Achaemenid royal description “Great King” for himself. Allusions to table, food, tithes, and land parallel important aspects of the imperial reality. Even though the social world circumstances are undoubtedly affecting Israel's ability to properly honor God and make provision for his ministers, this

is only the case in the mind of Israel. YHWH is able to provide enough to satisfy both expectations, but only if Israel will test him and trust him to do so.

### **Malachi and Other Moral Worlds**

The survey of four contemporary moral worlds indicated similar social world circumstances. The community of Haggai delayed its rebuilding efforts because circumstances were not right for reconstruction. Zechariah's vision of a renewed and repopulated Jerusalem implied the city remained undeveloped and unpopulated. The slow rebuilding process continued until the time of Nehemiah, who returned to remedy the poor state of Jerusalem. These circumstances comport with the challenges described for Malachi's social world.

Malachi's community appears to be more pessimistic and less responsive to the messenger in comparison with his contemporaries. The community of Haggai collaborated to rebuild the temple. Nehemiah's community participated in the wall rebuilding efforts, welcomed the teaching of the torah, and renewed the covenant. These comparisons point toward increased feelings of despair that prompted the deep questioning of the symbol world and the moral world crisis.

The results from assessing Malachi in light of other approaches to OT ethics are summarized below.

### **Implications for OT Ethics**

In the second phase of this study, we explored how Malachi's moral world may provide insight into contemporary efforts in the discipline of OT ethics. Malachi's own

ancient practice of ethical reasoning reflects traits associated with contemporary systematic and formative approaches to OT ethics. We noted three important features.

First, Malachi's exemplifies the importance of having moral foundations reflective of a belief system. This illustrates the close proximity between theology and ethics in systematic approaches and moral vision in formative approaches. Malachi has a certain symbolic view of the world lived out in a specific social context. So he challenges the practices, attitudes, and questions of a disoriented moral world by asserting foundational claims out of which certain expectations flow. Moral reflection occurs within a frame that is broader than the character of God while not being inconsistent with it. While Malachi certainly reflects some differences from his contemporaries, they exhibit many similarities in their core belief structure.

For Malachi, ethics is more than just legal application. Malachi grounds his moral assertions in a variety of traditions and sources of authority. Tradition is primary but not self-sufficient. The state of Malachi's "canon" is unknown, but he draws from a variety of traditions, such as Deuteronomic, Priestly, prophetic, and wisdom traditions, representative of the whole OT scripture. While Malachi emphasizes the importance of torah, he does not limit himself to the legal traditions. He leverages narratives and makes common sense appeals, looking to everyday wisdom and patterns of social behavior.

Malachi models the formative approach utilizing dialogue as part of the moral reasoning process. YHWH's messengers confront and challenge the community for its practices and behaviors. In response, the people raise questions that probe and challenge the assertions of the prophet. Additionally, Malachi stresses the unchanging character of

YHWH and employs this truth as a primary foundation for reasoning and arguing with his community.

### **Implications for the Study of Malachi**

The imperial backdrop for the book cannot be overemphasized. This is particularly relevant since the imperial symbol system and expectations, that is, the imperial moral world, have contributed to the disorder confronted by Malachi. We have highlighted a number of royal allusions in the book including YHWH Sebaoth as the primary referent for God, his claim as Great King, and the royal messenger motif encompassing future messengers, the priests, and Malachi himself. We observed a remarkable set of parallels between focal points of Malachi's message and the royal virtues ascribed to the Achaemenid king: the good fighter, the just king, and protector of land and people. First, warrior imagery encloses the message. In the opening passage, YHWH announces that he will make the land of Edom a desolation, demonstrating his favor for Israel. The message concludes with warnings of  $\text{הָרָם}$  to Israel's own land if the community does not heed YHWH's messengers. Second, YHWH responds to calls for the king of justice, demanding loyalty from his subjects. Disloyalty denied the authority of the king. Malachi critiques the priests' loyalty as they have broken from expectations associated with the covenant. As agents of the Great King, they were to model faithfulness and instruct the people. Instead they accepted and allowed defiled sacrifices. Likewise, the people challenged the justice of the king and complained about his absence. Following the work of his messengers, YHWH will come to rectify wrong and punish the wicked. Third, YHWH oversees and protects the land and the people. He instructs both

priests and community, contending that his expectations were intended for their good. The sacrificial system was part of God's gracious provision for the priests. Likewise, promise of numerous blessing accompanied the giving of the tithe. The king challenged the people to trust in his provision by giving the full tithe from theirs. YHWH desired that the land yield abundantly and be known as a land of delight. In Malachi's social world, these royal virtues laid the foundation and set the expectations for the relationship between king and people. In part, adapting to the imperial culture and makings efforts to meet these demands contributed to the community's hardship and diverted attention away from YHWH to the Persian king. Artfully, Malachi casts YHWH as the true Great King announcing his expectations for the community in order to breakthrough imperial culture and reorient his community's perspective.

Reading through a moral world lens offered a few detailed, interpretive alternatives. For example, most commentators portray the priests as wearied by the sacrificial process thus leading to its disregard. We noted that the exclamation by the priests *הנה מהלאה* may be alternatively understood as "What a hardship!" revealing a frustration with their meager circumstances. This fits the larger social world picture and the situation depicted elsewhere within the book. Second, most interpreters propose an emendation to the phrase *כי שונא שלה* in 2:16 while simultaneously making little of the associated appellation YHWH, God of Israel, which is not used elsewhere by Malachi. We suggested the possibility that the appellation signals a tradition used by certain men to justify their divorce. This allows the phrase to be taken literally as a summary of the tradition: "If he hates, divorce." The first possibility arises from reading for social world influences on moral matters; the second, from reading for tradition influences.

Interpreters of Malachi disagree about the unity of the book as we detailed in the history of interpretation. Recent efforts to assert the unity of the book are a positive move in my view. An observation from our moral world analysis may contribute to this discussion. We examined the individual units of the texts to identify moral foundations, expectations, motives, and consequences. While each unit includes these aspects, there does appear to be a general movement across the whole of the message from moral foundation to moral consequence. The primary foundations for the message are dominant in the early units. Examples include YHWH's love for Jacob, YHWH Sebaoth as the Great King who should be honored, and the covenant with Levi. Subsequent foundational claims such as God's assertion that he does not change builds on these earlier assertions. The moral foundation of the latter units center on the day of YHWH and the traditions behind the day, but ultimately the day of YHWH is a moral consequence. The moral consequences receive more extended discussion as the text develops, especially beginning in the third chapter, or the latter four units. YHWH's visitation is announced accompanied by refining and judgment to distinguish between the righteous and wicked. The book culminates in the warning of  $\text{הָרָם}$  if Israel does not heed YHWH's messengers. The movement implies an intentionality and logic in the composition of the message.

Our symbol world analysis gives credence to the thesis that Malachi is not promulgating new prophetic revelation but rather interpreting and applying traditions available to his community that have shaped their long established, orthodox symbolic world. Malachi's symbolic world reflects shaping by a diversity of narrative, legal, prophetic, cultic, and wisdom traditions. This is not surprising as Malachi stands near the end of the OT story and prophetic tradition. While named among the prophets by later

tradition, Malachi views himself primarily as a messenger whose message is grounded in these traditions such as the greatness of YHWH Sebaoth, the choice of Jacob, the covenant with Levi, and the torah of the priests. This possibility raises a question concerning the purpose and origin of Malachi's message. Was it originally specific to a mid-fifth century community in Yehud, or is the message a construct of traditional matters produced as closure to the prophetic canon? There are aspects of Malachi's message that align with a generalist perspective. Notably, unlike his contemporaries, no one is named specifically and people groups such as Israel and Edom may be symbolic rather than specific. Covenant language is generalized and distinctions between priests and Levites are blurred. As our symbol system analysis indicated, Malachi primarily focuses on core matters over peripheral ones. However, there are details that point toward the message being an actual artifact of a specific moral world. As we noted, the mention of Edom is consistent with concerns of mid-fifth century Yehud. The imperial allusions and motifs correspond to an imperially dominated community. Mentions of hardship, crop failures, and imperial demands such as those owed the governor are consonant with an economically constrained and small Yehud. In my view, a middle ground is a viable alternative. It is not incompatible that a message addressed originally to a specific community could have focal points representative of the OT tradition that made it a conducive end to the prophetic corpus, emphasizing central matters relevant to future communities facing moral world crises of their own.

## TRANSLATION

- 1:1 An oracle, the word of YHWH to Israel by the hand of Malachi.
- 1:2a I have loved you,  
1:2b YHWH says.  
1:2c Yet you say,  
1:2d How have you loved us?
- 1:2e Is not<sup>689</sup> Esau the brother of Jacob?  
1:2f YHWH declares.<sup>690</sup>  
1:2g I have loved Jacob,  
1:3a but Esau I have hated.  
1:3b and I made his mountain a desolation  
1:3c and (gave) his inheritance to the jackals<sup>691</sup> of the wilderness.
- 1:4a If<sup>692</sup> Edom says,  
1:4b We have been beaten down.  
1:4c Let us rebuild<sup>693</sup> the ruins.  
1:4d Thus YHWH Sebaoth says,  
1:4e They may<sup>694</sup> build,  
1:4f but I will tear down.  
1:4g They will be called a territory of wickedness  
1:4h and a people whom YHWH has cursed perpetually.
- 1:5a But your eyes will see and you will say,  
1:5b Great is YHWH beyond the territory<sup>695</sup> of Israel.
- 1:6a A son honors a father, and a servant his master.
- 1:6b So if I am a father, where is my honor?

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<sup>689</sup> The particle introduces a rhetorical question expecting assent. See *IBHS* §40.3.

<sup>690</sup> The *BHS* proposal to delete because of meter is rejected since the meter is irregular in oracular prose.

<sup>691</sup> *BHS* suggests reading “I gave”. Others have proposed “pastures” on the basis of Syriac since the plural form is irregular (cf. Verhoef, *Malachi*, 203). I am retaining the MT since the association of jackals with the wilderness, YHWH’s vengeance, and Edom are present in Is 34:13 and Is 35:7.

<sup>692</sup> See Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 90-3, for concessive usage.

<sup>693</sup> Lit. return and build—a verbal hendiadys.

<sup>694</sup> See Hill, *Malachi*, 158 on the use of the jussive here.

<sup>695</sup> I am following the *BHS* proposal to omit the prefixed *lamed* as a case of dittography for a more sensible reading.

1:6c If I am a master, where is my fear?  
 1:6d YHWH Sebaoth says to you, O priests,  
 1:6e who despise my name.  
 1:6f But you say,  
 1:6g How have we despised your name?

1:7a (By) presenting offerings upon my altar of defiled food.  
 1:7b But you say,  
 1:7c How have we defiled you?<sup>696</sup>  
 1:7d When you say,  
 1:7e as for the table of YHWH, it may be despised.<sup>697</sup>

1:8a When you offer a blind animal for a sacrifice, it is not evil!<sup>698</sup>  
 1:8b When you offer a lame or sick animal, it is not evil!  
 1:8c Take<sup>699</sup> one to your governor.  
 1:8d Will he take pleasure in you<sup>700</sup> or show you favor?<sup>701</sup>  
 1:8e [YHWH Sebaoth says].<sup>702</sup>

1:9a. Now,<sup>703</sup> ‘*entreat*<sup>704</sup> the face of God so he will show us favor.’  
 1:9b From your hand was this,  
 will he show favor on account of you?  
 1:9c [YHWH Sebaoth says.]<sup>705</sup>

<sup>696</sup> As an alternative, LXX includes a third person singular suffix: polluted *it*.

<sup>697</sup> The *niphal* participle can have a gerundive meaning describing a state that is “necessary, or proper, or possible.” See *IBHS* §23.3d, 37.4d.

<sup>698</sup> The adverbial particle negates the clause rather than posing a question. The resulting form seems to represent a “sarcastic declaration” (Hill, *Malachi*, 180).

<sup>699</sup> The -א particle is left untranslated. See *IBHS* §34.7a.

<sup>700</sup> Some LXX manuscripts have the third person singular suffix. The MT is sensible.

<sup>701</sup> This is idiomatic for the literal “will he lift your face.”

<sup>702</sup> *BHS* proposes to delete on account of meter. Given Malachi’s style of oracular prose, the lack of irregular meter makes this judgment uncertain.

<sup>703</sup> See *IBHS* §39.3.4f for ועתה marking a “shift in argumentative tack with a continuity in subject and reference.”

<sup>704</sup> For the *piel* of “הלה” *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*: 1:316-7 proposes the definition “appease” (cf. Verhoef, *Malachi*, 219), but this does not seem as suitable as “entreat” (Carl P. Weber, “הלה,” *TWOT* 1:287.). When used idiomatically with פנה, the context favors petition rather than mollification in the majority of instances.

<sup>705</sup> *BHS* proposes to delete on account of meter. Given Malachi’s style of oracular prose, the lack of irregular meter makes this judgment uncertain.

- 1:10a Indeed, who among you will shut<sup>706</sup> the doors  
 1:10b so that you will not set light to my altar for nothing?  
 1:10c I have no delight in you,  
 1:10d YHWH Sebaoth says.  
 1:10e Even a gift I will not accept from your hand.
- 1:11a For from the rising of the sun to its setting,  
 1:11b great is my name among the nations  
 1:11c and in every place incense is presented to my name, that is, a pure gift.  
 1:11d For great is my name among the nations,  
 1:11e YHWH Sebaoth says.
- 1:12a But you profane it<sup>707</sup>  
 1:12b when you say,  
 1:12c the table of the Lord may be defiled,<sup>708</sup>  
 1:12d and its fruit,<sup>709</sup> its food may be despised.
- 1:13a Also you say, “What a hardship” and you set it<sup>710</sup> a flame<sup>711</sup>  
 1:13b YHWH Sebaoth says.  
 1:13c You bring what is looted<sup>712</sup> and the lame and the sick.<sup>713</sup>  
 1:13d You bring an offering.  
 1:13e Should I accept it from your hand?  
 1:13f YHWH<sup>714</sup> says.  
 1:14a Cursed be the one who deceives when there is a male<sup>715</sup> in his flock,  
 1:14b especially the one who vows and sacrifices something blemished to the lord.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> The *vav* functions as an “unmarked connector” linking the clause to the previous introductory clause. See *IBHS* §33.4.

<sup>707</sup> The antecedent is likely “my name.”

<sup>708</sup> See *IBHS* §25.1; 37.4d. Cf. note 10 above.

<sup>709</sup> The duplicate subject נִבְזָה may have arisen from dittography of the verb form נִבְזָה.

<sup>710</sup> My translation mitigates the *tiqqun sopherim* אִתִּי.

<sup>711</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 185.

<sup>712</sup> גָּזוּל lacks the direct object marker like the succeeding objects, evidenced by multiple manuscripts and editions. Some propose an addition, but its grammatical function is sensible.

<sup>713</sup> Cf. Lev 22:17-25.

<sup>714</sup> Many Hebrew manuscripts, LXX, and one Syriac manuscript include “Sebaoth.” This is possible but the absence is not irregular in Malachi.

<sup>715</sup> *BHS* proposes זָכָה but there is no manuscript evidence for the substitution.

- 1:14c For I am a Great King,  
 1:14d YHWH Sebaoth says.  
 1:14d and my name is feared among the nations.
- 2:1a Now, for you is this command, O priests.  
 2:2a If you will not listen,  
 2:2b and if you will not give attention to<sup>717</sup> honoring<sup>718</sup> my name,  
 2:2c YHWH Sebaoth says,  
 2:2d I will send against you the curse,  
 2:2e and I will curse your blessings.  
 2:2f Indeed I will curse it  
 2:2g for you are not paying attention.<sup>719</sup>
- 2:3a Behold, I will rebuke<sup>720</sup> your offspring.  
 2:3b I will spread dung on your faces,  
 2:3c the dung of your festivals then he will carry you to it.
- 2:4a You know that I sent you  
 2:4b this command  
 2:4c to continue<sup>721</sup> my covenant with Levi,  
 2:4d YHWH Sebaoth says.
- 2:5a My covenant with him was  
 2:5b life and peace,  
 2:5c and I gave them to him as fear and he feared me,  
 2:5d and before my name he stood in awe.
- 2:6a The instruction of truth was in his mouth.  
 2:6b Injustice was not found on his lips.  
 2:6c In peace and in fairness he walked with me.  
 2:6d Many he caused to turn from iniquity.
- 2:7a For the lips of a priest guard knowledge;  
 2:7b Torah they seek from his mouth.

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<sup>716</sup> Multiple manuscripts read “to YHWH.” The sense is unchanged.

<sup>717</sup> Lit. “to set to heart.”

<sup>718</sup> Lit. “to give honor.”

<sup>719</sup> Lit. “there is not in you a taking to heart.”

<sup>720</sup> *BHS* & *HALOT* propose an emendation from גַּדַּעַת to גַּדַּעַת “cut off” on basis of context and the LXX. I am preserving the common prophetic word and the more difficult reading given limited evidence. Cf. Eddinger, *Malachi: A Handbook*, 41.

<sup>721</sup> The infinitive construct functions as durative finite verb. See *ibid.*, 44.

- 2:7c For he is the messenger of YHWH Sebaoth.
- 2:8a But you have turned from the way.  
 2:8b You cause many to stumble by torah.  
 2:8c You have ruined the covenant with Levi,  
 2:8d YHWH Sebaoth says.
- 2:9a Indeed, I am making you despised and humiliated before all the people  
 2:9b in as much as you have not kept my ways  
 2:9c and have not shown favor<sup>722</sup> with torah.
- 2:10a Is<sup>723</sup> there not one Father to all of us?  
 2:10b Did not one God create us?  
 2:10c Why do we act treacherously with one another,<sup>724</sup>  
 2:10d profaning the covenant of our fathers?
- 2:11a Judah has acted treacherously;  
 2:11b An abomination has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem.  
 2:11c For Judah has profaned the holiness of YHWH, which he had loved,<sup>725</sup>  
 2:11d and married a daughter of a foreign god.
- 2:12a May YHWH cut off, from a man who does this, offspring<sup>726</sup>  
 2:12b from the tents of Jacob,  
 2:12c even the one who brings an offering  
 2:12d to YHWH Sebaoth.
- 2:13a This second thing you do:  
 2:13b covering with tears the altar of YHWH,  
 2:13c weeping and sighing,  
 2:13d because there is no more turning to (accept) the offering  
 2:13e or taking pleasure from your hand.
- 2:14a But you say, “Why?”  
 2:14b Because<sup>727</sup> YHWH is a witness between you and the wife of your youth

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<sup>722</sup> An idiom related to “lifting up faces”. The NIV and NRSV do not carry forward the negation from the previous clause, rendering the interpretation “show partiality.” See my discussion in chapter four.

<sup>723</sup> The particle introduces a rhetorical question expecting assent. See *IBHS* §40.3.

<sup>724</sup> Lit. “a man with his brother,” idiomatically expressing reciprocity. See Hill, *Malachi*, 227.

<sup>725</sup> I understand the *qal* as a past perfect within the relative clause and “he” referring to Judah. See *IBHS* §30.5.2.

<sup>726</sup> The literal seems to be “waking and answering.” See Gibson, for a survey of the proposed options that have no clear resolution. Gibson’s suggestion that the phrase is an idiom for offspring is reflected here.

<sup>727</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 240; *IBHS* §38.4.

- 2:14c against whom you have acted treacherously.  
 2:14d Yet she is your companion and the wife of your covenant.
- 2:15a But<sup>728</sup> no one does (this)  
 2:15b and has<sup>729</sup> a portion of character.<sup>730</sup>  
 2:15c What (does) the one (do)?  
 2:15d He is seeking a godly offspring.  
 2:15e So let each of you guard your character.<sup>731</sup>  
 2:15f Let no one act treacherously against the wife of your youth.
- 2:16a *‘If he hates, divorce*  
 2:16b *YHWH the God of Israel says.’*  
 2:16c Then violence covers his garment,  
 2:16d YHWH Sebaoth says.  
 2:16e Let each of you guard your character and do not act treacherously.
- 2:17a You have made YHWH weary with your words.  
 2:17b But you say, “How have we made (him)<sup>732</sup> weary?”  
 2:17c When you say, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of YHWH.”  
 2:17d and “In them he delights.”  
 2:17e or “where is the God of justice?”
- 3:1a Behold I am sending<sup>733</sup> my messenger,  
 3:1b and he will prepare the way before me.  
 3:1c Then suddenly he will come to his temple/palace—the lord  
 3:1d whom you are seeking,  
 3:1e and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight,  
 3:1f behold he is coming,  
 3:1g YHWH Sebaoth says.
- 3:2a Yet who will endure the day of his coming?

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<sup>728</sup> See *IBHS* §39.3.2; 152.e and the discussion in Eddinger, *Malachi: A Handbook*, 66-7.

<sup>729</sup> Reading לְ as a *lamed* of possession with a pronominal suffix resuming the subject of the previous clause.

<sup>730</sup> For this interpretive trajectory of “רוּחַ” and this line, see bibliography in *HALOT* 2:1197-1201, esp. 1201 and discussion in chapter four.

<sup>731</sup> See *IBHS* §23.4b for the plural *niphal* reflexive as distributive.

<sup>732</sup> Certain Septuagint manuscripts, Syriac, the Targum, and the Vulgate add the pronominal suffix “him” which is sensible from the context.

<sup>733</sup> “With הִנֵּה the participle clause usually describes immediate circumstances...; because these generally require observation the translation ‘behold’ has established itself in English.” *IBHS* §37.6d.

- 3:2b Who will stand when he appears?  
 3:2c For he is<sup>734</sup> like a refiner's fire  
 3:2d and like a fuller's soap.
- 3:3a He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.  
 3:3b He will purify the sons of Levi, and he will refine them  
 3:3c like gold and like silver.  
 3:3d They will belong to YHWH,  
 3:3e bringing a righteous<sup>735</sup> offering.
- 3:4a It will be pleasing to YHWH,  
 3:4b the offering of Judah and Jerusalem,  
 3:4c like the days of old  
 3:4d as in years past.
- 3:5a Then I will draw near to you for judgment.  
 3:5b I will be a swift witness  
 3:5c against sorcerers and against adulterers  
 3:5d and against those who swear falsely<sup>736</sup>  
 3:5d against the one who oppresses the wages<sup>737</sup> of the worker  
 3:5e the widow and the orphan<sup>738</sup>  
 3:5f and the one who turns aside the alien and does not fear me,  
 3:5g YHWH Sebaoth says.
- 3:6a Indeed I am YHWH, I do not change.  
 3:6b And so<sup>739</sup> you sons of Jacob are not consumed.
- 3:7a From the days of your fathers, you have turned from my statutes and you  
 do not observe (them).<sup>740</sup>

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<sup>734</sup> LXX adds the verb “come” but the MT is sensible.

<sup>735</sup> The  $\square$  could signal specification “righteous offering” or manner “righteously.” In my view, the larger message supports either choice, but I have chosen the former for purposes of translation.

<sup>736</sup> Certain LXX manuscripts add “against my name”. Given limited evidence, the MT should not be emended.

<sup>737</sup> *BHS* suggests this is an instance of dittography that should be deleted, but the MT is sensible.

<sup>738</sup> *BHS* suggests the “widow and orphan” should be deleted or transposed with “turn aside alien” so that “widow and orphan are objects of the verb. This is reasonable but there is no manuscript evidence to support the emendation.

<sup>739</sup> See Hill, *Malachi*, 296 for this translation of the disjunctive *vav*.

<sup>740</sup> *BHS* suggests perhaps inserting “my charges” as the object on the basis of 3:14 but this is unnecessary. I am taking the previous direct object “statutes” as gapped. See *ibid.*, 300; Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger*, 182.

- 3:7b Return to me so that I may return<sup>741</sup> to you,  
 3:7c YHWH Sebaoth says.  
 3:7d But you say,  
 3:7e How do we return?
- 3:8a Will a human rob<sup>742</sup> God?  
 3:8b For you are robbing me!  
 3:8c But you say,  
 3:8d How have we robbed you?  
 3:8e The tithes and the contributions.
- 3:9a With a curse you are cursed.  
 3:9b It is me you are robbing,  
 3:9c the whole nation.
- 3:10a Bring the whole tithe to the storehouse.  
 3:10b Let it be food in my house.  
 3:10c Please test me in this,  
 3:10d YHWH Sebaoth says.  
 3:10e Surely I will open for you  
 3:10f the windows of heaven.  
 3:10g I will empty out blessing for you until there is no need.<sup>743</sup>
- 3:11a I will rebuke for you the devourer  
 3:11b then it will not destroy for you the fruit of the ground.  
 3:11c The vine in the field for you will not be fruitless,  
 3:11d YHWH Sebaoth says.
- 3:12a Then all nations will call you blessed!  
 3:12b For you will be a land of delight,  
 3:12c YHWH Sebaoth says.
- 3:13a Your words are strong against me,  
 3:13b YHWH<sup>744</sup> says.  
 3:13c But you say,  
 3:13d What have we spoken against you?

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<sup>741</sup> The cohortative indicates purpose or result. See *IBHS* §34.5.2; Hill, *Malachi*, 302.

<sup>742</sup> The verb is disputed, but I am retaining the MT. LXX supports the alternative עִבֵּר “deceive” or “betray” for עִבֵּר throughout vs. 8-9. Other Greek manuscripts, the Syriac, and Vulgate support MT. See the discussion in *ibid.*, 303-4.

<sup>743</sup> An idiom used only here...lit. “until without enough.” See “יָדָה” *HALOT* 1:219.

<sup>744</sup> BHS editor suggests Sebaoth should probably be inserted on the basis of LXX. This is reasonable but not consequential.

3:14a You say,  
 3:14b It is vain to serve God.  
 3:14c What is the profit if we keep his charge  
 3:14d and if we walk mournfully  
 3:14e in the presence of YHWH Sebaoth?

3:15a Now we call the arrogant blessed.  
 3:15b Not only<sup>745</sup> do those who do evil live on.<sup>746</sup>  
 3:15c Even though they test God, they escape.

3:16a Then<sup>747</sup> those who feared YHWH spoke each with his neighbor.  
 3:16b YHWH took note and listened  
 and a book of remembrance was written before him  
 about those who fear YHWH  
 3:16c and those who honor his name.

3:17a They will be mine,  
 3:17b YHWH Sebaoth says,  
 3:17c a special possession on the day that I will act.  
 3:17d I will have compassion on them just as a man has compassion  
 3:17e on his son who serves him.

3:18a You shall turn and distinguish  
 3:18b between the righteous and the wicked,  
 3:18c between the one who serves God  
 3:18d and the one who does not serve him.

3:19a Truly, behold!<sup>748</sup> The day is coming  
 3:19b burning like an oven.<sup>749</sup>  
 3:19c All the arrogant and the evildoers<sup>750</sup> will become stubble.  
 3:19d The day that is coming will set them ablaze,  
 3:19e says YHWH Sebaoth,

<sup>745</sup> For this disjunctive function of ׀, see Verhoef, *Malachi* 318; Hill, *Malachi*, 336; *IBHS* 39.3.4.

<sup>746</sup> The *niphal* of “בנה” *HALOT* 1:139.

<sup>747</sup> LXX and Syriac have ταῦτα so BHS proposes reading יה or זא. ז is reasonable so I am retaining MT.

<sup>748</sup> Logical and emphatic *IBHS* §39.3.4c.

<sup>749</sup> LXX adds καὶ φλέξει αὐτούς. The addition would balance the line length, but the idea is present in the succeeding lines so the addition is not necessary.

<sup>750</sup> Reading with multiple manuscripts, editions, and versions that feature a construct ending עשי rather than the MT עשה.

- 3:19f      which will not leave them root or branch.
- 3:20a      The sun of righteousness will rise for you who fear my name  
 3:20b      with healing in its wings.  
 3:20c      You will go out leaping like calves from the stall.
- 3:21a      You will crush underfoot the wicked  
 3:21b      for they will be ashes  
 3:21c      under the soles of your feet  
 3:21d      on the day that I am preparing,  
 3:21e           YHWH Sebaoth says.
- 3:22a      Remember the torah of my servant Moses,  
 3:22b      which I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel,  
 3:22c      the statutes and judgments.
- 3:23a      Behold, I am sending to you  
 3:23b      Elijah the prophet  
 3:23c      before the coming of the day of YHWH,  
 3:23d           the great and the terrible one.
- 3:24a      He will turn the heart of fathers to the children  
 3:24b           the heart of children to their fathers  
 3:24c      lest I come and strike the land with destruction.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>751</sup> The translation of מרס is difficult, but I am using a traditional understanding associated with “destruction”. See K. Lawson Younger, “Some Recent Discussion on the Herem,” in *Far from Minimal: Celebrating the Work and Influence of Philip R. Davies* (LHBOTS 484; eds. Duncan Burns and J.W. Rogerson; London and New York: T & T Clark, 2014), 505-22.

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