

### CHAPTER III

#### MALACHI'S ESCHATOLOGICAL FIGURES: AN EXAMINATION OF MAL.3:1-5; 4:5-6

Ralph L. Smith argues that the Book of Malachi deals with four primary theological themes: covenant, cult (worship), ethical conduct (justice and morality) and the future.<sup>1</sup> It is certain that the Book of Malachi contains a number of theological ideas such as God's covenantal love, His covenant, the ideal priesthood, the universalistic perspective,<sup>2</sup> and the eschatological promises. The word "covenant" occurs six times in the book. O'Brien argues, "Malachi employs much of the terminology, theme and form of the covenant lawsuit."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Book is a kind of the covenant lawsuit. Malachi, as the prophet and representative of the Lord, confronts the priests of Israel for their defilement, reminding them of a faithful priest--a messenger of the Lord--who rebukes the people of Israel for their unbelieving hypocritical worship and unethical conduct, requests them to restore true worship, and proclaims a message of hope by predicting the forerunner of the Lord who prepares the way before the Lord comes. Malachi is commissioned by God to participate in a divine dialogue between Him and His rebellious people who comprise the remnant of Israel. The time of Malachi is the era of covenant breach. The priests violate the covenant of Levi (2:1-9), and the people break the

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph L. Smith, "The Shape of Theology in the Book of Malachi," *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, no. 30 (1987) 24-27.

<sup>2</sup> Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987) 179.

<sup>3</sup> Julia M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, Society of Biblical Literature: Dissertation Series, ed. David L. Petersen, vol. 121 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990) 79.

Mosaic covenant<sup>4</sup> by their intermarriage and divorce (2:10-16). Malachi also denounces them for breaking the covenant of marriage (2:14-16). In short, all the people of Israel despise the Lord and deal treacherously with their brothers and thus violate the covenants. Though they do not recognize their own sins, doubting God's justice and righteousness, they confront Him. In response to their unfaithfulness and challenge, God proclaims His promise in Mal. 3:1 and the following verses. Mal. 3:1 is a key verse to understanding the entire prophecy of Malachi, "for this verse is pivotal; it looks back to the past of the prophecy itself (1:11), answers questions posed by the present (2:17) and points toward the future (3:22f)."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the most significant passage of the book, which contains the key verse of the book, deserves to be carefully studied. This chapter will place the focus on Mal. 3:1-5 and 4:5-6.

### 3.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Mal. 3:1-5 is a prophetic announcement. The message of a prophet usually reflects his historical setting, since the historical situation demands that prophets declare God's message. God calls His messengers to speak His words to exhort, correct, or encourage His people. Therefore, the knowledge of a prophet's historical background greatly helps the reader in understanding his prophecy, which is true regarding the theme of Malachi's eschatological messengers. Unfortunately, the Book of Malachi does not offer any explicit indication of the date of its composition. The historical setting can be ascertained to some

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<sup>4</sup> "The covenant of our fathers" in Mal. 2:10 is regarded as the Mosaic Covenant, but it is thought of as the Abrahamic Covenant by some scholars.

<sup>5</sup> Beth Glazier-McDonald, *The Divine Messenger*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987) 129.

degree by the issues with which the Book of Malachi is dealing, because the particular issues addressed are provoked by social situations. The Book of Malachi does not mention a contemporary ruler, or any datable historical event. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the book was written or composed at some point during the Persian period. The date can be surmised because of several historical references.

### **3.1.1. The Contrast Condition between Israel and Edom**

In understanding the date of the Book of Malachi, there are only historical references implying its historical setting. The book begins with a word of contrast between God's love of Israel and God's hatred of Edom. Malachi describes Edom as being desolate and in ruins. Scholars argue that the devastation of Edom "refers to the expulsion of the Edomites from their homeland at the hand of the Nabateans,"<sup>6</sup> but even the suggestion does not provide a date when it happened.

### **3.1.2. Worship and Offerings in the Temple**

There are references that Israel had been presenting offerings on the altar, to the sanctuary of the Lord, and to the Lord's temple. These references imply that there was certainly a rebuilt temple. Malachi's mention of both the sanctuary and the temple means that there was a built or rebuilt structure. Malachi is not concerned about the rebuilding of the temple, but about the offerings and worship in the temple. While Haggai encourages

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<sup>6</sup> Joel F. Drinkard Jr., "The Socio-Historical Setting of Malachi," *Review and Expositor*, no. 84 (1987) 388.

his people to rebuild the temple of God, Malachi speaks of the offerings presented at the temple. That offerings were offered implies that “the Temple itself is presupposed.”<sup>7</sup>

### 3.1.3. The term “Governor”

The word “governor” in Mal. 1:8 implies that a governor was ruling Judah at least during Malachi’s ministry. The term was used in the Persian era to designate a governor. A Persian governor must have received gifts from the Israelites. Malachi’s days can be dated in the post-exilic period, but that does not provide an exact date. Malachi points out that there were mixed marriages and a lack of social justice. He seems to make no distinctions between priests and Levites. Therefore, it can be concluded that Malachi wrote his book during the time of Nehemiah, that is, 450-425 B.C.<sup>8</sup>

## 3.2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOOK OF MALACHI

It may be said that each book of the Bible has its own characteristics and significance in its literary style and emphases. The Book of Malachi may be neglected and its message regarded as a colorless document, but the more carefully readers read it, the clearer and brighter color they will discover it to be. According to Emerson, “The Book of Malachi presents a striking contrast to the preceding book of Zechariah.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a major difference exists between the two books. Zechariah abounds with visions and powerful figurative language, but Malachi is basically concerned with practical matters,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Craig A. Blaising, “Malachi,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck ([Wheaton]: Victor Books, 1985) 1573.

<sup>9</sup> Grace Emerson, “Malachi,” in *Prophets and Poets: A Companion to the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Grace Emerson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997) 296.

expressing himself in a plain speaking way.<sup>10</sup> To observe some characteristics of the Book of Malachi, especially literary and thematic characteristics, will both directly and indirectly help this study to determine the theme of Malachi's eschatological figures.

### 3.2.1. Literary Characteristics

The Book of Malachi shows the literary characteristics of its writer, who employs some fascinating literary methods.

#### 3.2.1.1. *The Form of the Prophecy*

The most characteristic literary method of Malachi's prophecy is "the rhetorical question."<sup>11</sup> The use of rhetorical questions is sometimes found in the prophetic books. Jeremiah 13:12-14 uses a question including dialogue between the prophet and hearers. They ask, "Do you think we do not know that every wine-jar should be filled with wine?" The prophet announces that God is preparing to fill the land with His wrath. Their question "serves as a prophetic device very similar to those of Malachi."<sup>12</sup> Questions in dialogue in Ezekiel 18:1-4 and 19-32 are also similar to those of Malachi.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994) 380.

<sup>12</sup> Donald K. Berry, "Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After," in *Forming Prophetic Literature. Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, ed. James W. Watts (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 273.

The structure of Malachi's prophecy is called "prophetic disputation,"<sup>13</sup> "catechetical format,"<sup>14</sup> or "confrontational dialogue,"<sup>15</sup> because Malachi employs the question and answer pattern. God quotes His people's complaining questions and confronts them. The confrontations, of which, there are six confrontations,<sup>16</sup> shape the key themes of Malachi. It is usually argued that there are six oracle units<sup>17</sup> in the Book of Malachi. It also should be noted that the prophecy of Malachi is addressed to a double audience: priests, and the people of Israel.<sup>18</sup> According to Dorsey, the Book of Malachi has a chiastic structure as follows:

- A Yahweh is just: He loves (the faithful remnant of) Israel but will utterly destroy the wicked Edom (1:2-5)
  - B Priests and people have cheated YHWH in their offerings (1:6-14)
    - C In the past Levi served in righteousness but Levites have turned from Yahweh (2:1-9)
      - D CENTER: Stop being faithless (2:10-16)
      - C' In the future Yahweh's messenger will come and Levites will

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<sup>13</sup> D. F. Murray, "The Rhetoric of Disputation: Re-Examination of a Prophetic Genre," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38 (1987) 110.

<sup>14</sup> James A. Fischer, "Notes on the Literary Form and Message of Malachi Corpus," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1972) 315. Glazier-McDonald, Malachi: The Divine Messenger, 19.

<sup>15</sup> John D. Hendrix, "'You Say': Confrontational Dialogue in Malachi," *Review and Expositor* 30 (1987) 465.

<sup>16</sup> The six confrontations are as follows:

- The first confrontation: You say, "How has God loved us?" (1:2)
- The second confrontation: You say, "How have we despised God's name?" (1:6)
  - You say, "How have we defiled God's altar?" (1:7)
- The third confrontation: You say, "For what reason (does not God accept our offerings)? (2:14)
  - You say, "How have we wearied God?" (2:17)
- The fourth confrontation: You say, "How shall we return?" (3:7)
- The fifth confrontation: You say, "How have we robbed God?" (3:8)
- The sixth confrontation: You say, "What have we spoken against God? (3:13)

<sup>17</sup> Ronald W. Pierce, "Literary Connectors and a Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984) 282.

<sup>18</sup> Paul L. Redditt, "The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 (April 1994) 244.

be purified (2:17-3:6)

B' People have robbed Yahweh in tithes and offerings; but if they change, God will bless them (3:7-12)

A' Yahweh is just: He will reward the righteous but will utterly destroy the wicked (3:13- 4:3 [3:13-21])

Conclusion: The Day of Yahweh (4:4-6 [3:22-24])<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2.1.2. *The Literary Methods*

#### 3.2.1.2.1. *Polyptoton*<sup>20</sup>

Malachi uses the word מַלְאָךְ in several moods or tones. The names of prophets often reveal the themes of their messages. As has been discussed, “Malachi” in 1:1 is a personal name which represents the writer of the Book of Malachi. Malachi refers to his vocation as YHWH’s messenger<sup>21</sup> and his name foreshadows YHWH’s messenger (3:1), who is promised to come before the messenger of the covenant comes to his temple. Berry writes, “The Hebrew word מַלְאָךְ ‘the messenger/angel’ plays a multi-dimensional role in the narrative. The messenger functions as priest (2.7), and the messenger assumes *the* role of prophet (3.1). The messenger acts as the divine emissary (angel) announcing God’s advent. The term is used as fully as possible.”<sup>22</sup> Though the Hebrew word מַלְאָךְ is a personal name, it functions as the bearer of God’s message. It seems that the prophet

<sup>19</sup> David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999) 323.

<sup>20</sup> E. W Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989) 267. Polyptoton is the repletion of the same noun in different inflections.

<sup>21</sup> J. N. Heflin, “The Prophet Malachi, His World and His Book,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 30 (Fall 1987) 6.

<sup>22</sup> Berry, “Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After,” 290.

Malachi makes a word play in order to enhance his message throughout the whole prophecy.

### 3.2.1.2.2. Antitheses

Snyman argues, “Antithesis in the Book of Malachi is a typical and prominent feature throughout the book.”<sup>23</sup> The Book of Malachi begins with an antithesis right after the introduction.

- Mal. 1:2. אֶהְבֵּתִי אֶתְכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּפִמֹּה אֶהְבֵּתָנוּ

It consists of a chiastic structure. God says to the descendants of Jacob: “I have loved you.” However, they respond with a negative statement: “How have you loved us?” They imply, “You (God) did not love us.”

- Mal. 1:2-3. אֶהֱבֵ אֶת־עַקְבֹּב וְאֶת־עֵשׂוֹ שְׂנֵאתִי

It also shows a chiasmus in which “love” and “hate” take an antithetical parallel.

- Mal. 1:4. Two opposite words, “build” and “tear down,” occur in the following sentence: וְנִבְנְנָה חֲרָבוֹת and וְאֲנִי אֶהְרָס and in the following clause אֶהְרָס הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְנִבְנְנָה יְבָנוּ וְאֲנִי.

- Mal. 1:6-7. Malachi uses antithetical words in these verses: “honor” and “contempt,” and “respect” and “defile.”

- Mal. 1:6-14. According to Malachi, the priests defiled God’s altar by

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<sup>23</sup> S. D. Snyman, “Antitheses in the Book of Malachi,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 16 (1990) 173.



presenting unqualified offerings, but the nations will offer pure grain offerings to God. The name of God is despised by the Levitical priests, but His name will be great among the nations.

- Mal. 2:2. Even though the priests bless the Levitical benedictions, or as priests they receive benefits, God will turn the blessings into curses. Blessing and curse shape an antithesis in this verse.

- Mal. 2:7. The priests as the messengers of the Lord should preserve, keep and teach the Law, but they have turned aside from it, causing many to stumble, and have corrupted it.

- Mal. 3:2-5. The Levites will be purified, but the wicked will be judged.

- Mal. 3:16-4:3. The evildoers will be entirely destroyed by the burning power of the divine wrath, but the righteous will be perfectly healed by the sun of righteousness. This is a complete contrast between the evildoers, who will be entirely destroyed in the Day of the Lord, and the righteous, who will be God's own special treasure.

Malachi employs various antithetic word-pairs: love and hate, good and evil, the righteous and wicked, those who serve God and those who do not serve God, blessing and curse. Questions and answers given by both God and His people take the forms of antithesis in the Book of Malachi. The purpose of antithesis is “to underline, to give prominence to, to emphasize and to exert a continuous influence in the mind of the hearer.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 178.

### 3.2.1.2.3. *Anacoenosis*<sup>25</sup>

This style appears in Mal. 1:6: “If then I be a father, where is my honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, who despise my name.”

### 3.2.1.2.4. *Divine Irony*

Irony means “the expression of thought in a form that naturally conveys its opposite.”<sup>26</sup> In this case the speaker is God. In Mal. 1:9 God puts some words into the mouths of the priests, and His answer is given as the opposite of the appeal. Even though they ask God for help (“Lord, please be gracious to us”), God will definitely say “no.”

In addition to the previous figures of speech, Malachi uses other figurative language.<sup>27</sup> In Mal. 1:2, <sup>3</sup><sup>28</sup> he employs metonymy, because the names of Esau and Jacob represent their posterity. In other words, “Jacob” in Mal. 1:2 does not indicate the Jacob in the Book of Genesis, but refers to Jacob’s descendants. The “food” in Mal. 1:7 may represent all kinds of food offerings, which would make the expression a synecdoche.<sup>29</sup> Mal. 2:10 can be regarded as a proverb and Malachi seems to quote it in a way that

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<sup>25</sup> Anacoenosis is “a figure by which a speaker appeals to his opponents for their opinion, as having a common interest in the matter in question” (Bullinger, 968).

<sup>26</sup> Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 807.

<sup>27</sup> Ogden Graham S. Ogden, “The Use of Figurative Language in Malachi 2:10-16,” *Bible Translator* 39 (April 1988) 223-314.

<sup>28</sup> Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 608.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 627.

indicates it is already in common use.<sup>30</sup> Malachi in 2:14 does not repeat words out of the preceding clause (2:13), a technique usually called “ellipsis” or “omission.”<sup>31</sup>

#### 3.2.1.2.5. Repetition

Malachi repeatedly uses the phrase, אָמַר יְהוָה זָבֵאוֹת (1:4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13; 2:2, 4, 8, 16; 3:1, 7, 10, 11, 12, 17, 4:1) which occupies a significant portion of the short prophecy. The message delivered by the prophet is strongly accentuated by the repetition formula--that is, the word of the prophet is so sure that the listeners should quickly obey it. The word also has divine authority; it is not merely the message of a human prophet. It is the word of the Almighty and Sovereign God who reigns over all the nations, as well as over Israel.

#### 3.2.1.2.6. Deuteronomic Elements (Vocabularies)

It has been argued that “Malachi is immersed in Deuteronomic theology,”<sup>32</sup> because there are not a few Deuteronomic elements. The following are typical Deuteronomic terms.

- אָהַבְתִּי and שָׂנֵאתִי (love and hate)

“Love” in covenant texts is a technical term; it means choice or election to covenant relationship. That God loved Jacob indicates that God in His sovereignty chose Jacob as His people. The prophet stresses “the common Deuteronomic themes of God’s

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 763.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>32</sup> Berry, “Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After,” 289.

love of Israel (Mal. 1:2; Deut. 7:7-8) and the father-son relationship (Mal. 1:5; 2:10; 3:17; Deut. 1:21; 32:56).”<sup>33</sup>

- זָכָרוּ (remember)

The imperative “remember” frequently occurs in the Book of Deuteronomy (9:7, 27; 24:9; 25:17; 32:17). With this command Malachi seems to summarize his admonition in Mal. 4:4. The modern reader may have an impression that the warnings and exhortations of all the prophets, including the Twelve Minor Prophets, are summed up in this verse. The appeal to remembrance in Mal. 4:4 may be taken literally. The descendants of Jacob should know and remember their origin, God’s election, all God’s redemptive works, and the rebellious acts of their ancestors as well. Among all things they should remember חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים because “action in the present is conditioned by what is remembered.”<sup>34</sup> That is, memory encourages activity. Blair is right in saying that “to forget is to forsake.”<sup>35</sup>

- חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים (decrees and stipulations)

Deuteronomy fits the ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaty texts that have the general stipulation section and specific stipulation section. Deuteronomy chapters 5-11 are the general stipulation section, and chapters 12-26 are the specific stipulation section. The general stipulation section pertains to the general principles of the relationship

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<sup>33</sup> Eric M. Meyers, “Priestly Language in the Book of Malachi,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1987) 228.

<sup>34</sup> Edward P. Blair, “An Appeal to Remembrance: The Memory Motif in Deuteronomy,” *Interpretation* 15 (1961) 43.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

between God and Israel in the form of apodictic law, but the specific stipulation section spells out “the specific cases or potential cases”<sup>36</sup> in the form of casuistic law.

Deut. 12 as the specific stipulation section begins with **חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים**. It is usually argued that the term **חֻקִּים** refers to “the cultic ordinances,” and the word **מִשְׁפָּטִים** refers to “civil law,” but it is difficult to define the words exactly. The words usually appear in the texts that demand Israel as the covenant partner of the Lord to respond properly. The words are technical terms that occur in the covenant texts. Glazier-McDonald argues, “The phrase **חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים** is part of the deuteronomic vocabulary.”<sup>37</sup>

The fact that these words are borrowed from Deuteronomy is supported by the word **בְּהָרֵב** in Mal. 4:4, because Horeb is described as the mountain of the law in Deuteronomy, although Sinai is named as the mountain of the law elsewhere. Meyers argues, “Malachi uses the deuteronomic terms ‘abominations’ in 2:11 and ‘special treasure’ in 3:17.”<sup>38</sup>

Berry concludes,

Connections between Malachi and Deuteronomy begin with the first verse of each. Both are addressed to Israel, even though Malachi’s words are primarily directed to those of the temple area . . . . Malachi begins with the beginning of Deuteronomy and concludes with references to Moses and Elijah . . . . Deuteronomy 18:18 implied that all future prophets would resemble Moses . . . . It is precisely the mediation of the law that indicates the divine use of Moses and by which the future prophet would resemble Moses.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994) 144.

<sup>37</sup> Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, vol. 98, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation, ed. J. J. M. Roberts (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 246.

<sup>38</sup> Meyers, “Priestly Language in the Book of Malachi,” 228.

<sup>39</sup> Berry, “Malachi’s Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After,” 289.

### 3.2.2. Thematic Characteristics

The Book of Malachi deals with several primary theological themes and minor themes. Though one cannot argue that one overall theme covers all the ideas,<sup>40</sup> the themes and motifs are interrelated in the Book of Malachi.

#### 3.2.2.1. Priesthood and Cultic Worship

Malachi's main concern is with the religious questions concerning worship, temple, and priesthood.<sup>41</sup> Priests and Levites played the leading role in the cultic worship of Israel; the task of the priests' offering sacrifices was an essential part of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. The priests of Malachi's day despised the covenantal relationship by neglecting their functions. After rebuking Judah as a nation, Malachi confronts the priests who have despised God's name and defiled the altar of the Lord. Malachi deals with the function and purpose of the priests and the Levites.

The origin of the Israelite priesthood is not discovered in the Old Testament. There were earlier priests before YHWH commanded Moses to establish the priesthood for Israel (Exod. 19:22-24). God designated Aaron and his descendants as the priestly tribe (Exod. 28). Gray's statements are helpful:

Apart from the purely temporary priesthood of Moses, held for the purpose of the solemn institution of the priesthood, Aaron was the first Hebrew priest, and all subsequent priests were descended from him. But by descent Aaron was a Levite, and therefore, in the sense that the priesthood was within the tribe of Levi it was

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<sup>40</sup> Ralph L. Smith, "The Shape of Theology in the Book of Malachi," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 30 (1987) 24.

<sup>41</sup> Emerson, "Prophets and Poets: A Companion to the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament," 296.

always Levitical: On this theory at all times all priests were Levites, though at no time were all Levites.”<sup>42</sup>

The Israelite priests took their office by inheritance. In principle, the priests in Israel were the Levitical priests. (There is an exception: Melchizedek, whose genealogy is not traced from the sons of Levi. There were times that particular persons acted as priests. For example, Samuel acted as judge, prophet, and priest). The Levitical priests were the descendants of the tribe of Levi.

The priests could enter the sanctuary and there serve the Lord. The Israelites who were not priests needed priests to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Although they had a certain active part to play in offering sacrifices, everything that was in contact with the sacrificial altar was reserved for the priests. In other words, the sacrificial offerings at the altar were made through the mediation of priests. It was the priests who slaughtered the bulls, took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. They were in charge of setting out the showbread, and some of them compounded ointment mixture of the spices. Aaron and his sons offered on the altar of burnt offerings and on the altar of incense to make atonement for Israel. It was the priests who offered the burnt offerings to the Lord. The worshippers themselves offered their offerings, but the priests could take a portion of the offerings for their sustenance.

Priests ministered to the Lord and pronounced blessings in His name forever (Num. 6:24-26). The priests used Urim and Thummim to discern the divine will. They functioned “as consultors of oracles.”<sup>43</sup> In the early period of Israel’s history when the primary

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<sup>42</sup> G. B. Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1971) 239.

<sup>43</sup> Aelred Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) 13.

function of the priests was oracular, the priests dispensed oracles. Whenever the people of Israel (or an individual Israelite) had to decide a difficult task they asked the priests for guidance, since priests acted as official mediators for a divine oracle. Urim, Thummin and ephod were used as the means to discover the divine counsel. The wise ones among priests took part in the judiciary activities pertaining to the temple court, which means that priests played some judicial role in the cultic matters in the temple court.

From the period of the monarchy on, Torah was assigned to priests so that they began to function as teachers (2 Chron. 17: 8, 9). For example, Ezra was not only a priest but also a teacher of the law. The Book of Malachi itself shows that “teaching was a duty of the priests” (Mal 2:6-7).<sup>44</sup>

In Chronicles, priests play a significant role in transferring the ark of YHWH first to Jerusalem, the cultic center of Israel during the reign of David, and second, to the most holy place of the temple during the reign of Solomon. Also in Chronicles, the priest Jehoiada carried out the crowning of Joash and removed Athaliah by armed personnel, which included the priests (2 Chron. 23:4).

Priests performed the role of the gatekeepers. A specific group of priests was appointed to guard or keep the sanctuary. Priests were also commissioned to help in building the temple of God. They collected the temple tax to restore the temple, and they cleansed the inner part of the temple. Priests were those who served the Lord both inside and outside the sanctuary. They were assigned to serve in various ways inside the sanctuary.

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<sup>44</sup> Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 15 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987) 121.



The offerings given to the Lord were the priests' portion. The tithes the sons of Israel offered as an offering to the Lord were assigned to the priests. The sons of Israel were to give to the Levites, including the priests, the inheritance of the possession, cities in which to live and pastures around the cities (Num. 35:2). The Levitical priests had diverse functions and various benefits, but the greatest blessing they received from the Lord is found in the following promise of the Lord: "The Lord said to the Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, 'The Lord is their inheritance'" (Deut. 18:2).

In describing the priesthood, Malachi uses several priestly terms. He does not use the term "the sons of Aaron," which can cause questions such as, "Does Malachi have the concept of the Levitical priesthood?" "Does Malachi have a notion that all Levites can be priests?" Malachi's terminology for the priesthood has been interpreted in several different ways. O'Brien argues that "Levi" in the Book of Malachi represents "an ideal priest."<sup>45</sup> She maintains that the terms, כֹּהֵן, לֵוִי, and בְּנֵי־לֵוִי (3:3) are "treated as equivalent in the book,"<sup>46</sup> which means that they exercise the same functions as the activities of sacrifice and teaching. The covenant of life and peace that God had made with their ancestors may continue with them. In the Book of Malachi priests are asked to restore their genuine priesthood and the covenant of Levi.

In sum, priests had the privileges and responsibilities of offering sacrifices, pronouncing blessings, and teaching the Torah.

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<sup>45</sup> Julia M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, vol. 121, Society of Biblical Literature, ed. David L. Petersen (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 141.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

### 3.2.2.2. *Covenant* (בְּרִית)

Among the key themes in the Book of Malachi is the issue of covenant accounts for the whole book. According to Heath, “Covenant is the primary theme in Malachi.”<sup>47</sup> Since Malachi does not define “covenant” but assumes it, it seems that the concept of covenant in Malachi is derived from various segments of the canon law and prophets. The word “covenant” occurs six times in the Book of Malachi. The so-called “covenant of Levi” is referred to three times, in Mal. 2:4, 5, and 8. The covenant of the fathers is seen in Mal. 2:10. The covenant of marriage is mentioned in Mal. 2:14. The messenger of the covenant occurs in Mal. 3:1.

#### 3.2.2.2.1. “*The Covenant of Levi*” (בְּרִית הַלְוִי)

The word “covenant” could easily be used to refer to the Mosaic Covenant or Davidic Covenant, but in the Book of Malachi it primarily refers to the covenant of Levi. Hence “the messenger of the covenant” can be related to a priestly figure.<sup>48</sup> God made the covenant with Levi so that Aaron, a member of the tribe of Levi, became the first high priest, and his descendants became priests throughout the history of Israel. “Levi” in Mal. 2:4-9 represents a generic noun of class, meaning that “Levi” refers to the Levitical priesthood.<sup>49</sup> The covenant of Levi in Mal. 2:5-9 may refer to the covenant with Phinehas in Num. 25:11-13. The latter is called “a covenant of peace.” When thousands of Israelites

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<sup>47</sup> Elaine A. Heath, “Divorce and Violence: Synonymous Parallelism in Malachi,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 28 (1996) 2.

<sup>48</sup> Bruce V. Malchow, “The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984) 253.

<sup>49</sup> Herbert Wolf, *Haggai and Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967) 80.

were engaged in sexual and spiritual immorality with Midian women, the priest Phinehas slew a man of Israel and a Midian woman. Moses said, “He was zealous for God and made atonement for the children of Israel” (Num. 25:13). After the priest’s bold action, the plague that the Lord had already launched against the people of Israel was suspended. The Lord commended the priest, attributing to him the interdiction of YHWH’s wrath and the salvation of Israel. For this the Lord made “the covenant of peace” with Phinehas. It is also called “the covenant of an everlasting priesthood.” God says in Mal. 2:5 that Levi revered the Lord and stood in awe of God’s name. The priests in the day of Malachi, however, despised the Lord and defiled His name. God reminds the priests that the faithful priest became the recipient of life and peace because of his reverence for YHWH’s name. Phinehas brought his people life and peace from the Lord and turned many back from iniquity (Mal. 2:6), whereas the priests of Malachi’s day made the people turn aside from the covenant of Levi.

#### 3.2.2.2.2. “The Covenant of Our Fathers” (בְּרִית אֲבוֹתֵינוּ)

It can be said that “one father”<sup>50</sup> in the context indicates one of the patriarchs either Abraham or Jacob (Israel),<sup>51</sup> and that “we” could also mean “fellow Jews.” In Deuteronomy the “fathers” refers to the patriarchs. But the “our fathers” in Mal. 3:7 could be either “the Sinai/Horeb generation”<sup>52</sup> or the covenant people in Israel’s history before

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<sup>50</sup> Some argue that “one father” refers to God the Father, because they think “one father” is a parallel to “one God.”

<sup>51</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman, vol. 24 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972) 237.

<sup>52</sup> Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983) 551.

the period of Malachi.<sup>53</sup> “The covenant of our fathers” in Mal. 2:10 may refer to the patriarchal covenant<sup>54</sup> or to the Sinaitic Covenant.<sup>55</sup> The interpretation depends on the identity of “our fathers” in Mal. 2:10. McKenzie and Wallace comment on the “covenant of our fathers” as follows: “Our inclination is to regard the ‘covenant of our fathers’ in Mal. 2:10 as a reference to the patriarchal covenant. It could be that the passage is deliberately ambiguous, regarding all the covenants mentioned as standing in continuity with the original covenant of election.”<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2.2.2.3. Marriage Covenant

Ogden thinks that the terms such as “wife,” “divorce” and “marriage” are metaphors,<sup>57</sup> and argues that Malachi’s language should be figuratively interpreted. However, most scholars take a literal interpretation of Mal. 2:10-16.<sup>58</sup> The parallel expression אִשְׁתְּ בְרִיתְךָ (“the wife of your covenant”) should be used to define אִשְׁתְּ נְעוּרֶיךָ (“the wife of your youth”). “The wife of your youth” refers to the woman an Israelite man married when he was young. The Lord witnessed the pledges of mutual loyalty between the bridegroom and the bride when they were married. Just as Sarah was the wife of Abraham’s youth, the wife of one’s youth may refer to the first and only wife. Therefore, “‘the wife of your covenant’ refers to a literal marital covenant between ‘you,’

<sup>53</sup> Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 300.

<sup>54</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 237.

<sup>55</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 415.

<sup>56</sup> McKenzie and Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” 552.

<sup>57</sup> Ogden, “The Use of Figurative Language in Malachi 2:10-16,” 223-230.

<sup>58</sup> Gordon Paul Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law & Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994) 339.

i.e., the husband, and ‘your wife.’”<sup>59</sup> Mal. 2:11 shows that the men of Israel married foreign women. They must have forsaken their wives to do so. Since Mal. 2:11 shows that adultery--that is, the breaking of a valid marriage relationship--is a picture of idolatry,<sup>60</sup> it can mean two different ideas: marriage or idolatry. Malachi is dealing with a social and a religious offense. Those who married foreign women were lured to the women’s cults and gods.<sup>61</sup> It is, therefore, natural that the word “abomination” points to idolatry.<sup>62</sup>

Rogerson’s argument seems proper:

If there were Israelites who were married to foreign women who worshipped other gods in the community addressed by Malachi 2:11, how did these women practice their religion? Even if we allow for a certain amount of private religion, if there was such a thing in ancient times, there must have been major festivals or other occasions on which the foreign women needed to take part in communal or institutionalized worship of their god. If such communal or institutionalized worship was not available, it is hard to see how an Israelite could be seduced to worship a god that did not have a cult . . . . It is a nice point whether such a sanctuary, not being dedicated to Yahweh, would be regarded as breaking the deuteronomic law of the single sanctuary, for all that it would be seen as an abomination.<sup>63</sup>

Malachi 2:11 deals with both intermarriage and idolatry caused by adultery or mixed marriage. Then Malachi especially rebukes divorce and domestic violence. Marriage can be considered as a covenant between a husband and his wife.<sup>64</sup> God hates

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>60</sup> David J. Clark, “Sex-Related Imagery in the Prophets,” *Bible Translator* 33 (October 1982) 411.

<sup>61</sup> Beth Glazier-McDonald, “Intermarriage, Divorce, and the *Bat-'El Nekar*: Insights into Malachi 2:10-16,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (December 1987) 610.

<sup>62</sup> John William 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*, ed. P. J. Harland and C. T. Robert Hayward, vol. 77, *Vetus Testamentum. Supplements* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 173.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>64</sup> David E. Garland, “A Biblical View of Divorce,” *Review and Expositor* 84, no. 3 (1987) 420.

divorce because it is the breaking of the marriage covenant. Therefore, the “covenant” in Mal. 2:14 refers to the solemn covenant of marriage.

“The messenger of the covenant” will be carefully investigated. Malachi uses covenant language such as the references to the love of God for Israel. The word “special treasure” (Mal 3:17) is also a covenant term.

### 3.2.2.3. *The Day of the Lord* (3:2-5, 17-18; 4:1-3, 5)

Like some other Minor Prophets, Malachi also deals with the Day of the Lord. In the Book of Malachi, the Day of the Lord is the day when the messenger of the covenant arrives. Right after mentioning the coming Day of the Lord, Malachi, in Mal. 3:2, asks two similar questions to emphasize that the Day is great and terrible (4:5): “Who can endure the day of his coming?” “Who can stand when he appears?” There can be two answers to the questions. The wicked can neither endure the Day nor stand in His presence, but those who fear the Lord can endure and stand. The Lord is symbolized as refiner and purifier. The symbolic word, “fire,” displays two opposite functions; one is to purify precious metal, and the other is to burn the dross. As a refiner purifies the precious metal like silver<sup>65</sup> by using fire in removing the dross, the Lord will remove the wicked from the righteous. As a cleanser washes clothes with soap, the Lord will wash away the vile.

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<sup>65</sup> Alan Robinson, “God, the Refiner of Silver,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11 (April 1949). According to Robinson, the reason why Malachi mentions silver instead of gold is because “the process of refining silver is, in every way, a more delicate and anxious operation than the purifying of gold,” 18.

Mal. 3:5 explicitly reveals the nature of the Day.<sup>66</sup> The Day of the Lord is not only the Day of Judgment but also the Day of hope.<sup>67</sup> “The day” in Mal. 3:17 also refers to the Day of the Lord.<sup>68</sup> On that day God will spare those who fear Him, who are His own special treasured possession (3:17). Though Malachi’s audience doubts God’s justice, on that day they will clearly acknowledge the distinction between the righteous and the wicked (3:18). In Mal. 4:1 [English version] the Day of the Lord is described as a burning furnace, emphasizing the burning power of God’s wrath. The evildoers and the vile will be completely consumed by the intense heat of the divine wrath. Therefore, the Day of the Lord has a twofold purpose. One is to destroy the wicked; the other is to deliver and save those who fear the Lord. The phrase, “The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings (4:2),” is open to different interpretations. Though it is difficult to know the exact meaning of the passage, it is obvious that Mal. 3:2 speaks of healing given to the righteous through God’s presence. Whatever the word “sun” means, it is certain that the verse emphasizes “righteousness” and healings (physical or spiritual or both). The Day will be the victorious day for the righteous people of God.

#### 3.2.2.4. *Ethical Issues*

Malachi strongly emphasizes the sanctity of marriage and family life. He calls his people to repentance, demanding that their external lifestyle should reflect their genuine

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<sup>66</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, “Fire in God’s House: Imagery from Malachi 3 in Peter’s Theology of Suffering (1 Pet 4:12-19),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 3 (1986) 288-289.

<sup>67</sup> John Proctor, “Fire in God’s House: Influence of Malachi 3 in the NT [1 Cor 3:1; 1 Peter 1:6-7],” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993) 13.

<sup>68</sup> Wolf, *Haggai and Malachi*, 116.

relationship with God. Tillman argues, “The primary issue of the book of Malachi is the challenge of the prophet for the people to identify and to live out of a sense of holiness.”<sup>69</sup> Although Tillman’s argument seems to be an overstatement, it is obvious that Malachi addressed some moral issues such as divorce, intermarriage (Mal. 2:10-16), adultery, lying, oppression (Mal. 3:5), stealing (Mal. 3:8), and enmity and dissension between family members (Mal. 4:6). Divorce was an abomination to God, and profaning the covenant as well as a personal and social evil. Malachi confronts and rebukes the religious leaders and laymen for their injustice and iniquity. Although the Book of Malachi is small, it calls to “Israel to rekindle the fires of faith”<sup>70</sup> and to repent of their immoral lives.

#### 3.2.2.5. *A Book of Remembrance*

In addition to the major thematic issues above, there are some other interesting features in the Book of Malachi. Berry states, “One of the most interesting features of Malachi is the mention of the book of remembrance.”<sup>71</sup> Malachi offers no explicit indication of what type of document this is. Moses once asked God that his name be blotted out of the book God had written (Exod. 32:32). Moses also mentioned the book of covenant (Exod. 24:7). In Exod. 17:14 God said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” After Malachi mentions that a book

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<sup>69</sup> William M. Tillman Jr., “Key Ethical Issues in Malachi,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 30 (1987) 42.

<sup>70</sup> Claude F. Mariottini, “Malachi: A Prophet for His Time,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 26 (1998) 150.

<sup>71</sup> Berry, “Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After,” 284.



of remembrance was written for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name, he asks Israel to remember the Law of Moses. God remembers His people, so His people must remember His Law.

#### 3.2.2.6. *YHWH's Name*

The noun “name” as God’s name appears nine times in the Book of Malachi. Malachi points out that the priests despise the “name” of the Lord (Mal. 1:6), but the priests respond that they do not despise the “name” of God. To present defiled offerings on the altar of the Lord was to despise the name of the Lord (Mal. 1:6; 2:2). YHWH announces that His name will be great and feared among the nations (Mal. 1:11, 14). In the Old Testament God’s name usually refers to His revelation of His nature and character.<sup>72</sup> Mal. 1:11 may mean that the Gentiles will know God and worship Him in the eschatological future.<sup>73</sup> Levi, the faithful priest, revered God and stood in awe of God’s name (Mal. 2:5). God wrote a book of remembrance for those who feared and honored His name (Mal. 3:16). Those who fear God’s name will be completely healed (Mal. 4:2). “Name” seems to be a key word in the Book of Malachi. The command, “Fear the name of the Lord” underlines the entire book.

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<sup>72</sup> James Swetnam, “Malachi 1:11: An Interpretation,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31 (April 1969) 202.

<sup>73</sup> Åke Viberg, “Wakening a Sleeping Metaphor: A New Interpretation of Malachi 1:11,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45 (1994) 305.

### 3.2.2.7. *Cursing and Blessing*

The words, “blessing and curse” in the Book of Malachi appear in Mal. 2:2; 3:9-12; 4:6. The phrase, “Cursing your blessing” in Mal. 2:2 is very unique. Malachi uses familiar ideas common in Israel, but places them within the framework of negative imagery. The people of Israel understand the idea of curse and blessing well, but Malachi prophesies that God will turn the blessings into curses. This expression may be interpreted in several different ways. Most scholars regard the blessings as the priestly benedictions with which the priests bless the people in the name of the Lord (Num. 6:22-27). This view holds that even though priests bless the people in the name of the Lord, God Himself will not bless them but curse them. Some think that the blessings are probably the benefits that the priests receive.<sup>74</sup> In other words, the blessings are the pest-free crops and fruitful vines in Mal. 3:11 which the people bring as tithes. According to this view, that God curses their blessings indicates that they will suffer from drought or some other calamity. As far as pronouncing a curse, God says that He has already cursed them. Some consider the blessings as “an essential aspect of the covenant with Levi.”<sup>75</sup> This view in a sense puts together the two previous views. It seems obvious that the blessing and the curse are directly related to the priests. The curse Malachi pronounces is terribly shocking (Mal. 2:3); YHWH says that He will spread dung on the faces of the priests. This is remarkable in that, “The dung of the sacrificial animals is never referred to in quite this way.”<sup>76</sup> This

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<sup>74</sup> Robert L. Alden, “Malachi,” in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985) 714. Greathouse, “The Book of Malachi,” 419.

<sup>75</sup> Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 239.

<sup>76</sup> Berry, “Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After,” 279.

expression is symbolic, meaning that they will be bitterly humiliated and thus unfit to perform their priestly duties. The blessing in Mal. 3:10-12 concerns the fruits of the soil. Mal. 3:9-12 pronounces blessings and curses to the laity of Israel, while in Mal. 2:2 Malachi announces them to the priests. In the day of Malachi, the people refrain from bringing tithes and offerings to the temple. They are cursed because they disobey the deuteronomic statutes regarding sacrifices.

### 3.2.3. Canonical Position of the Book of Malachi

Some scholars doubt the authenticity of Mal. 4:4-6, arguing that the verses were taken from a different collection and added to the original composition.<sup>77</sup> The reason they believe that Mal. 4:4-6 is an addition is because the verses do not seem to fit in the immediate context. Malachi's mention of Moses and Elijah in the context is indeed puzzling. Berry's comment on Mal. 4:4, 5 (3:22, 23 in Hebrew texts) helps the readers to get the proper reason:

The relationship between Moses and Elijah in these verses (3. 22, 23) stands as a symbol of the dual design of the final form of the book. Malachi serves as a summary-conclusion to the prophetic books (and the prophetic era) and as an introduction to the day of the Lord. This enables the book to function as a canonical bridge between two very different perspectives on history. Moses represents the Torah and traditions of nascent Israel. Elijah represents prophecy as well as its eschatological vision.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Redditt, "The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting," 249.

<sup>78</sup> Berry, "Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After," 295.

Some scholars suggest that the twelve books of the Minor Prophets have unity.<sup>79</sup> Especially the last three books of the Minor prophetic books have often been grouped together in Old Testament studies.<sup>80</sup> The Book of Malachi in its canonical position appears to have “intentional design for the purpose of closing a chapter in the development of canon.”<sup>81</sup> First, Malachi seems to summarize all the messages of the Minor Prophets in the following words: “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.” Second, God met Moses at Horeb and gave the law--what is called the Law of Moses-- through fire (Deut. 5:1-5). Similarly, at Horeb God also revealed Himself by speaking to Elijah after displaying His power in the midst of fire. Both Moses as the representative of the law, and Elijah as the representative of all the prophets, “serve as future as well as past figures.”<sup>82</sup> The function of all the prophets was “to call God’s people to remember the Law of Moses.”<sup>83</sup> The Book of Malachi as the last book of the Minor Prophets ends with a pointer to the future.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, it can be maintained, “Malachi sums up the message of the twelve and prepares for the future.”<sup>85</sup> The last verse of Malachi indicates Elijah’s mission, even though the meaning of the verse needs a careful study. Though Huey interestingly argues that “the OT ends with a curse

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<sup>79</sup> Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, vol. 97, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, ed. David J.A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990) 9-244.

<sup>80</sup> Pierce, “Literary Connectors and a Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi Corpus,” 277.

<sup>81</sup> Berry, “Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After,” 272.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>84</sup> Emmerson, “Prophets and Poets: A Companion to the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament,” 297.

<sup>85</sup> Berry, “Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After,” 301.

and the NT ends with a blessing (Rev. 22:21),”<sup>86</sup> the Book of Malachi does not end with the announcement of a curse, but of a blessing of restoration. Concerning the canonical position, House writes:

The prophecy (i.e. Malachi-mine) effectively summarizes major segments of the Twelve. The emphasis on love and divorce remind the reader of Hosea. The admonitions of the priests echo Joel and Zechariah. The stressing of Yahweh’s day of punishment links the book with Amos, Zephaniah, etc. Malachi’s conclusion ties together the Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus by claiming that all facets of restoration will indeed take place. Secondly, Malachi concludes the restoration section of the Twelve by showing that temple construction (Haggai) and the restoration of Jerusalem (Zechariah) only have significance if the people themselves turn to God, appreciate their covenant heritage, and observe correct temple practices. Still the restoration will come.<sup>87</sup>

One of Malachi’s characteristics is that the book is the conclusion of the Old Testament as well as of the Twelve Minor Prophets. The Old Testament ends with the prediction of the coming of the Lord’s forerunner,<sup>88</sup> but the New Testament ends with the announcement of the Lord’s coming. The Book of Malachi points both directions: Remember the Law of Moses (retrospect), and await the future Elijah (prospect).<sup>89</sup>

### 3.3. YHWH’S מְלִאֲכָה IN THE BOOK OF MALACHI

The subject matter מְלִאֲכָה seems to be regarded by most of the biblical scholars as an insignificant theme in the Book of Malachi. Most studies of Malachi deal with some

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<sup>86</sup> F. B. Huey Jr., “An Exposition of Malachi,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 30 (1987) 21.

<sup>87</sup> House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, 108.

<sup>88</sup> It is premised on the argument that the Book of Malachi was written later than any other Old Testament book.

<sup>89</sup> Andrew Hill, *Malachi*, Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1998) 390.

critical details or other themes, but מַלְאָךְ may be one of the most important themes in the book.

מַלְאָךְ is referred to in each chapter of Malachi. The Hebrew word מַלְאָכִי occurs four times in the Book of Malachi (1:1; 2:7; 3:1-twice). In its first occurrence in 1:1, the word is used to describe the messenger of the word of the Lord. In 2:7 the priest is מַלְאָךְ of the Lord. מַלְאָךְ in Mal. 3:1a is described as the forerunner of the Lord, and מַלְאָךְ in Mal. 3:1b is identified as the messenger of the covenant.

### 3.3.1. Mal. 1: מַלְאָךְ as the Bearer of the Word of the Lord

The name “Malachi” comes from the Hebrew word מַלְאָכִי, which means “my messenger” or “my angel.” The Hebrew word מַלְאָכִי does not occur in any other place in the Old Testament as a proper name.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, some scholars argue that “Malachi” should be regarded as a title given to a prophet. It seems that the Septuagint regards “Malachi” as a title given to an unknown prophet, because the rendering is ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ in Mal. 1:1. In other words, according to the argument Mal. 1:1 reads: “The oracles of the Lord to Israel by the hand of His messenger.” Others think that the Book of Malachi is a part of the Book of Zechariah, because Zechariah 9:1 and 12:1 and Malachi begin with the title מְשִׁיחַ. The Hebrew word is sometimes regarded as a prophetic oracle, but this is an assumption without enough evidence for certainty.

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<sup>90</sup> Mariottini, “Malachi: A Prophet for His Time,” 150.

The scholars who do not accept Malachi as a proper name have two main reasons for their thinking. First, there is lack of historical information about such a person. Second, the noun מְלֶאכִי may not be suitable as a proper name. Since the word means “my messenger” or “my angel,” no father would give his son the name.<sup>91</sup> Some scholars, therefore, view that מְלֶאכִי is an abbreviation of מְלֶאכִי הוּא. In both cases, the name of the prophet denotes “the messenger of the Lord” or “the angel of the Lord.” There are some similar parallels: אֲבִי (2 Kgs. 18:2) and אֲבִיָּה (2 Chron. 29:1), and אֲרִי (1 Kgs. 4:19) and אֲרִיָּה (1 Chron. 11:41).<sup>92</sup>

The arguments against Malachi being a proper name are neither convincing nor conclusive. Gleason L. Archer is correct: “Every other prophetic book in the Old Testament bears the name of its author. It would be strange if this one were left anonymous.”<sup>93</sup> There can be several reasons to regard Malachi as a proper name, and the one who composed or prophesied the prophecy of Malachi. Just as all the prophetic books have a heading introducing its writings, the Book of Malachi has a similar heading. The titles of other prophetic books refer to their own authors; the Book of Malachi also has the same formula. According to Verhoef, “When the expression בְּיַד (Mal 1:1) is used to indicate the human instrument of God’s revelation it is normally followed by a proper

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<sup>91</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 28.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>93</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974) 416.

name.”<sup>94</sup> The renderings of the Pheshitta, Theodotion, Symmachus, and the Vulgate support the fact that מְלֹאֲכִי (Mal. 1:1) is a proper name. 2 Esdras also regards the word as a prophet’s name, because it names Malachi as one of the twelve Minor Prophets.<sup>95</sup>

The prophet Malachi delivered the prophecy of the Lord to Israel. Though there is no direct information about the life of the prophet, his little book reveals his “intense love of Israel and the services of the Temple.”<sup>96</sup> Some scholars think that the prophet could be a priest (cf. 2:7), but this is not certain. The prophet Malachi shows that the Almighty God is the central figure and chief spokesperson because, “Out of a total of fifty-five verses, forty-seven record in the first person the address of the Lord to Israel (the exceptions being 1:1; 2:11-15, 17; 3:16).”<sup>97</sup> Malachi must have considered himself to be an instrument in God’s hand.<sup>98</sup> He employs the phrase, אָמַר יְהוָה זָבָאֹת, over and over. It is very interesting that the prophet Malachi talks about, מְלֹאֲךָ, who is the priest of the Lord (2:7), and that he prophesies about the divine מְלֹאֲךָ as well as מְלֹאֲךָ as YHWH’s forerunner. Among the מְלֹאֲכִים, “The prophet Malachi himself serves as messenger only in a partial or temporary sense.”<sup>99</sup> Malachi himself is a messenger of the Lord as Elijah was. In his day Malachi is an Elijah, and he prophesies about a future Elijah. The issue of

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<sup>94</sup> Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 155.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-56.

<sup>96</sup> William M. Greathouse, “The Book of Malachi,” in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. Oscar F. Reed and Armor D. Peisker, vol. 5, Bacon Bible Commentary, ed. W. T. Purkiser. 10 vols. (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966) 407.

<sup>97</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 216.

<sup>98</sup> Heflin, “The Prophet Malachi, His World and His Book,” 7.

<sup>99</sup> Berry, “Malachi’s Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After,” 291.



Elijah has been debated and will be discussed a little more. B. S. Childs explains about some connections between Malachi and Elijah as follows:

Like Malachi, Elijah addressed ‘all Israel’ (1 Kings 18. 20). The people of Israel were severely fragmented by indecision of faith (18. 21). A curse had fallen on the land (18.1; Mal. 3.24, EVV 4.6). Elijah challenged all Israel to respond to God by forcing a decision between the right and wrong (Mal. 3.18). He did it by means of the right offering (Mal. 3.3) and a fire which fell from heaven (Mal.3.3, 19).<sup>100</sup>

מְלִאֲךָ in Mal. 1:1 is seen as the bearer and deliver of God’s message. The prophet

Malachi is מְלִאֲךָ of the Lord.

### 3.3.2. Mal. 2: מְלִאֲךָ as the Priest, the Sharer of the Lord’s Covenant and Teacher of the Law

The term מְלִאֲךָ in the Book of Malachi seems to have a significant relationship with the key themes of Malachi’s prophecy. In Mal. 2:8 a priest is described as מְלִאֲךָ of the Lord. The Hebrew word כֹּהֵן “represents a generic noun of class.”<sup>101</sup> Malachi rebukes the priests because they neglect their duties of offering sacrifices, defile the altar of the Lord by presenting disqualified offerings, and despise God’s name by their faithless priestly ministry. In verses 4-9 Malachi is dealing with another important priestly task. The priests had been “the custodians of learning, both the preservers and pioneers of scholarship.”<sup>102</sup> Malachi’s chapter 2 shows that a priest is the messenger of the Lord as the

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<sup>100</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1979) 495-496.

<sup>101</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 210.

<sup>102</sup> Alden, “Daniel-Minor Prophets,” 715.

sharer of the Lord's covenant and teacher of the law. מְלֹאֲךְ in the Book of Malachi is a title used for at least prophets and priests. YHWH reminds the priests of Malachi's day of the faithful priest who revered the Lord and ministered in awe of the Lord's name, and encourages the priests to follow his example. It seems that the past faithful priest foreshadows both the future messenger of the Lord and the coming ideal messenger of the covenant, because the two eschatological figures have some aspects of their missions in common.

### 3.3.3. Mal. 3: מְלֹאֲךְ as the Forerunner of the Lord and מְלֹאֲךְ as the Messenger of the Covenant

The word מְלֹאֲךְ is not only a proper name, but also an important term which bears a meaningful biblical theme. In Mal. 3:1 the Hebrew word מְלֹאֲךְ occurs twice. He cannot be identified with either the prophet Malachi or the priest who is also called "the messenger of the Lord" in 2:7, because the messenger in Mal. 3:1a will be sent by the Lord in the future. The identity of מְלֹאֲךְ in Mal. 3:1a may be different from that of מְלֹאֲךְ in Mal. 3:1b, or they may be the same figure. Berry argues, "The messenger of Mal. 3.1 comprehensively names the prophet, the divine visitor of Exodus, the Levitical priest, and the eschatological prophet who is Elijah."<sup>103</sup> Just as the identity of the messengers (or angels) has been dealt with in a previous chapter of this study, it has given rise to various views and will be investigated further.

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<sup>103</sup> Berry, "Malachi's Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes After," 281-82.

### 3.3.4. Mal. 4: מְלֹאֲךָ as the Future Elijah

The Hebrew word מְלֹאֲךָ does not appear in the fourth chapter (English version) of the Book of Malachi. It has been suggested that Malachi connects the forerunner מְלֹאֲךָ in Mal. 3:1 with the future Elijah in Mal. 4:5-6. In Mal. 3:1-3 Malachi prophesies that God will send the forerunner מְלֹאֲךָ before the Day of the Lord (or the messenger of the covenant), and in Mal. 4:5 God promises that He will send Elijah before the Day of the Lord. Hence it seems obvious that מְלֹאֲךָ as the forerunner in Mal. 3:1a is related to Elijah in Mal. 4:5. The identity and mission of Elijah will also be studied.

#### 3.4. AN EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF MAL. 3:1-5

Mal. 3:1-5 appears to consist of both divine restoration and judgment. Since Mal. 3:1 is the most significant verse in the first part, verse 1 will be thoroughly examined.

MT Malachi 3:1 (BHS)

הֲנִי שִׁלַּח מְלֹאֲכִי וּפְנֵה-דֶרֶךְ לִפְנֵי וּפְתָאֵם יָבֹא אֶל-הַיְכָלוֹ הָאֵרוֹן אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם מְבַקְשִׁים וּמְלֹאֲךָ הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם חֹפְצִים הִנֵּה-בָא אָמַר יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת:

LXX (Alfred Rahlfs) Malachi 3:1<sup>104</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Some comparisons between the MT and the LXX in Mal. 3:1 are the following:

MT	שִׁלַּח (verb/participle but it is used to denote an immediate action. It may have a futuristic meaning).
LXX	ἐξαποστέλλω (verb/present indicative--futuristic present). The LXX' rendering takes the MT's meaning.
MT	מְלֹאֲךָ (messenger or angel)
LXX	ἄγγελος (messenger or angel)
MT	פְּנֵה (make clear)
LXX	ἐπιβλέψεται (ἐπιβλέπω) The LXX takes a future tense (look on with favor/have regard for)
MT	הַיְכָל (palace or temple)

ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐξαποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου καὶ ἐπιβλέψεται ὁδὸν πρὸ προσώπου μου καὶ ἐξαίφνης ἥξει εἰς τὸν ναὸν ἑαυτοῦ κύριος ὃν ὑμεῖς ζητεῖτε καὶ ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς διαθήκης ὃν ὑμεῖς θέλετε ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ

The Hebrew title of this book מַלְאָכִי (Malachi) is derived from the author of the book, as with the other Minor Prophets. The name “Malachi,” meaning “my messenger” or “my angel,” comes from the Hebrew word מַלְאָךְ which means “angel” or “messenger.” As previously stated, the Hebrew word מַלְאָךְ occurs four times in the Book of Malachi. In its first occurrence in 1:1, the word is used to designate the messenger of the word of the Lord. In 2:7 the priest is מַלְאָךְ of the Lord. The Hebrew word מַלְאָכִי again occurs in Mal. 3:1. There are several views regarding the identity of מַלְאָכִי. Malachi often combines words and phrases from two different passages in a new or expanded expression in his book.<sup>105</sup>

LXX	ναός (The LXX takes the meaning of “temple”)
MT	מְבַקְשִׁים (שָׁקַב) (verb/participle)
LXX	ζητεῖτε (ζητέω) (verb/indicative/present)

The writer will detail the meanings and differences of the renderings in Mal. 3:1.

<sup>105</sup> Karl William Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Problems, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, ed. Herausgegeben von Otto Kaiser, vol. 288 (Walter de Gruyter: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2000) 307.

### 3.4.1. The older Old Testament Passages in Mal. 3:1

Mal. 3:1 seems to contain a combination of Exod. 23:20 and Isa. 40:3, because the verse reflects the promises of the two different verses.<sup>106</sup>

#### 3.4.1.1. Examination of Exod. 23:20-33<sup>107</sup>

Glazier-McDonald states, “The relationship between Mal. 3:1 and Exod. 23:20 is too striking to be accidental.”<sup>108</sup> Thus it is important to examine Exod. 23:20. To understand Exod. 23:20, it is necessary to expound its immediate context. Exod. 20:22-23:33 is called “the Book of the Covenant,”<sup>109</sup> even though the title occurs in Exod. 24:7. Exod. 23:20-33 is “the conclusion or epilogue to the Book of the Covenant.”<sup>110</sup>

The passage is also a new section as well as a unit. It contains the confirmation of God’s promises for His people. It consists of a series of exhortations or admonitions which are “a mixture of warnings and of promises for the future, particularly for the

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<sup>106</sup> James B. DeYoung, “The Function of Malachi 3.1 in Matthew 11.10: Kingdom Reality as the Hermeneutic of Jesus,” in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series: Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity* 3, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, vol. 104 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 69-70.

<sup>107</sup> Exod. 23:20-33 may be outlined as follows:

- A Be faithful to the covenant-relationship for perfecting the Exodus (in the wilderness) (vv. 20-22)
  - a YHWH’s promise of sending the messenger/angel’s guidance for entering the land (v. 20)
  - b Israel’s obedience is commanded (vv. 21-22)
  - c YHWH’s promise of sending the messenger/angel’s guidance for entering the land (v. 23a)
  - d YHWH’s promise for Israel’s possessing the land (the completing of the Exodus) (v. 23b)
- B Be faithful to the covenant-relationship for preserving the Exodus (in the Promised Land) (vv. 23-33)
  - a Israel’s obedience is commanded (vv. 24-25a)
  - b YHWH’s promise of Israel’s blessings for her obedience (vv. 25b-26)
  - c YHWH’s promise of sending His terror and the hornet possessing the land (vv. 27-31)
  - d Israel’s obedience is commanded (vv. 32-33)

<sup>108</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *The Divine Messenger*, 130.

<sup>109</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and John D. W. Watts, vol. 3 (Waco: Word Books, 1987) 305, 315.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

promised land.”<sup>111</sup> God’s concern is that “the integrity of Israel’s relationship to Yahweh be guaranteed.”<sup>112</sup>

In this section Israel’s faithfulness to the covenant with Yahweh is also strongly demanded. First of all, Israel’s obedience is stressed.<sup>113</sup> Verses 20-21 introduce YHWH’s מְלֶאכֶּיךָ. The nation Israel is addressed as “you” in singular form. They are required to listen to Him; God says that the messenger will not forgive their rebellion because His name is in him. God does not say that the messenger possesses the ability to forgive, which means that the messenger is unable to forgive because “forgiving is solely YHWH’s prerogative.”<sup>114</sup> If they listen to the voice of the messenger, God will protect them when the messenger leads them to the Promised Land. The messenger who represents YHWH will take their sin and rebellion so seriously because he is an agent or a representative of the Lord. Thus he will refuse to forgive their sin. Though he has the authority to guide and guard Israel in the wilderness, he is not able to acquit their sin by himself. The messenger/angel whom God sends before Israel will guard them in the way, and this protective leading in the way is to bring them into the land. His task and role is to protect Israel in the way and to lead them to the Promised Land.

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<sup>111</sup> John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, vol. 30, Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series, ed. Claude E. Cox (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 369.

<sup>112</sup> Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 65.

<sup>113</sup> John D. Hannah, “Exodus,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary. Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck ([Wheaton]: Victor Books, 1985) 144.

<sup>114</sup> Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, vol. 3, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. Cornelis Houtman et al. (Leuven [Belgium]: Peeters, 2000) 275.

The nation of Israel is to obey YHWH's מַלְאָךְ because he will bring them to the place Yahweh has promised. "The place" here apparently refers to the Promised Land.<sup>115</sup> Verse 23 describes how YHWH's מַלְאָךְ keeps and leads Israel in the way to the land. Yahweh, by sending His agent, intervenes and dispossesses Israel's enemies. In short, the mission of YHWH's מַלְאָךְ is to prepare the place by clearing the obstacles so that Israel may enter the land. However, it is not the messenger, but YHWH, who will drive out the peoples of the land. Durham argues, "The reference to the messenger whom Yahweh is to send out, here as everywhere in the OT a reference to an extension of Yahweh's own person and Presence, is in fact a restatement of the promise and proof of Presence motif that dominates the narrative of Exod. 1-20."<sup>116</sup>

Promising to send His messenger, God says, "My name is in him" (Exod. 23:21). The phrase, "My name is in him," may mean that "the Divine Will and Power manifests itself through this heaven-sent messenger."<sup>117</sup> However, by translating the Hebrew word בְּקִרְבּוֹ into ἐπ' αὐτῶ (LXX employs ἐπ' instead of ἐν) in Exod. 23:21, LXX shows that it does not identify the messenger of the Lord with YHWH. J. W. Wevers states: "Exod throughout avoids any interpretation that might identify the angel with Yahweh; his name

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<sup>115</sup> Nahum M Sarna, *Exodus. The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Tradition Commentary*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991) 148.

<sup>116</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 335.

<sup>117</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 148.

is not within him; he is not himself the Lord - the name is rather upon him, - nor can he forgive sins; rather he can and must carry out God's orders as his messenger."<sup>118</sup>

First of all, it needs to be remembered, that "Surely the most striking element of this passage . . . is the pervasive consciousness of the covenant with Yahweh."<sup>119</sup> Here in Exodus, YHWH stresses that His presence through the guidance of the messenger demands covenant obedience. After God promises that He will send His messenger for His people's entering the land, He gives them a warning against making covenants with the native inhabitants or their gods. Then the covenant between God and His people is ratified by a sacrificial ritual. The Book of the Covenant is read to the people and the blood of sacrifices is first sprinkled on the altar and next on the people. The covenant ratification is completed with a covenantal meal (Exod. 24:11),<sup>120</sup> and Israel experiences YHWH's visionary presence. Then Moses is summoned to climb Mount Sinai to receive the tablets of YHWH's commandments and instruction. YHWH's glory--that is, YHWH's presence--is explicitly emphasized in Exodus 24:15-18. In YHWH's presence, Moses as His chosen intermediary receives instructions and directions for the Tabernacle and its service in Exodus 25-31. The Tabernacle is the dwelling place of the Lord (Exod. 25:8). "The ark of the Testimony" or "the ark of the Covenant" in the sanctuary is a meeting place of the Lord and Moses.

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<sup>118</sup> John W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, vol. 30, Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series, ed. Claude E. Cox (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 370.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Wingate Mann, "Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions: The Typology of Exaltation" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1975) 250.

<sup>120</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 150.



It is noteworthy that the messenger of YHWH appears in the Book of the Covenant section. The role and task of YHWH's messenger is detailed before the ratification of the covenant. The messenger is to prepare the way for YHWH and His covenantal people to enter His Promised Land. He does not make the covenant with Israel or enforce it. He is only a preparer for the Lord to enforce the covenant for the covenant people. It is remarkable that in Exod. 23:21 LXX employs “my voice” (τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς) instead of “his voice” (קְלוֹי). It means that LXX regards it not as the voice of the Lord's messenger (or angel) but as God's voice.<sup>121</sup>

The theme of YHWH's מַלְאָךְ should be understood in the context of the Covenant of Sinai, the promise about the completion of Israel's Exodus based on her obedience, and YHWH's presence. In brief, the messenger is not depicted as a covenant enforcer. Rather, he is merely a guardian for Israel. Israel will fulfill their Exodus by keeping the covenant made with YHWH. The Lord's presence (glory) and blessings depend on whether they obey or disobey the covenant when they are guided and guarded by the messenger in the wilderness until they enter the land. The messenger's mission may be finished when Israel enters the land. YHWH is the redeemer who fulfils the Exodus of His covenant people.

#### 3.4.1.2. Examination of Exod. 32:1-33:3

YHWH's מַלְאָךְ mentioned in Exod. 23:20-23 again appears in Exod. 32:34-33:3.

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<sup>121</sup> Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, 371.

The passage belongs to the account of Israel’s covenant renewal in Exodus 32-34.<sup>122</sup> When Moses receives God’s instructions on Mount Sinai, the people of Israel break the covenant by asking for a god. They say to Aaron, “Come make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” (Exod. 32:1). They request a god who “will go before” them. The request in effect, therefore, equates Moses with a god. God informs Moses of Israel’s covenant violation, and tells him that He may destroy Israel and make a great new nation beginning with Moses. However, Moses intercedes for his people, reminding the Lord of the Abrahamic Covenant (Exod. 32:13). As the mediator of the covenant-relationship, Moses pleads for the forgiveness of the transgression of Israel who has broken the covenant.<sup>123</sup> As Moses descends Mount Sinai, he confronts Aaron and the people and judges the unrepentant, calling for the Levites to punish them. Since Moses recognizes the guilt of the whole nation, he again entreats the Lord for the forgiveness of their rebellion. After listening to Moses’ intercession, God commands Moses to lead the nation to the Promised Land. Then God again tells Moses that YHWH’s מלאך will go

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<sup>122</sup> The following outline of Exod. 32-34 may be helpful in understanding the section:

- A Israel’s rupture of the covenant-relationship (32:1-33:3)
  - a Israel’s covenant-violation (32:1-6)
  - b Moses’ covenant-enforcement (32:7-29)
  - c Moses’ mediatory prayer for Israel (32:11-13, 30-33)
  - d YHWH’s announcement for sending His messenger/angel (32:34-33:3)
- B YHWH’s restoration of the covenant-relationship (33:4-34:35)
  - a Moses’ mediatory prayer for Israel (33:5-13, 15)
  - b YHWH’s promise of His presence (33:14)
  - c Moses’ mediatory prayer for YHWH’s presence/His glory (33:15-16, 18)
  - d YHWH’s promise for His presence/His glory (33:17, 19-23)
  - e YHWH’s renewal of the covenant-relationship (34:1-35)

<sup>123</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, in *Pentateuch*, Keil and Delitzsch Commentaries on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949) 223.

ahead of Israel to aid in entering the land. Moses instead requests “God’s Presence rather than the intermediation of an angel.”<sup>124</sup> Thus God says, “My presence shall go with you” (Exod. 33:14). Therefore, “The sending of divine messenger here simply means that Yahweh himself is not fully present--and this self-imposed distance is as much gracious as it is punitive, for it prevents the destruction of a sinful people by a wrathful God.”<sup>125</sup>

The role of YHWH’s messenger in Exod. 32:34-33:3 is essentially related to the covenant renewal and God’s presence (God’s glory). The Promised Land is the place for the covenant community. If they have broken the covenant, they have to renew it.

In conclusion, the mission of the messenger is not to enforce the covenant but to help Israel enter the land. The context of Exod. 32-33 clearly differentiates the appearance of YHWH’s מַלְאָכִים from YHWH’s presence. Though the messenger is seen to possess divine power, he is not identified as the Lord. To drive out the peoples of the land is not the messenger’s mission, but YHWH’s work.<sup>126</sup> He is merely God’s agent to prepare the Way of the Lord in which God will fulfill the Lord’s Exodus for His people. Moses plays the role of the only mediator between God and His people. When Moses knows that Israel has violated the Sinai Covenant, he plays the role of enforcer of the covenant by purifying all the Levites and punishing the covenant violators (Exod. 32:15-29). No violators of the covenant could stand before his purification and judgment.

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<sup>124</sup> Joe M. Sprinkle, *‘the Book of the Covenant’: A Literary Approach*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, vol. 174 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994) 34. He thinks that Moses himself is the angel (or ‘agent’).

<sup>125</sup> Mann, “Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions: The Typology of Exaltation,” 259.

<sup>126</sup> The LXX rendering is that the messenger, rather than YHWH, will drive out the peoples of the Promised Land (ἐκβαλεῖ).

Moses is described as the agent who helps Israel to establish/confirm the Sinai Covenant (Exod. 24), the enforcer of the covenant (Exod. 32), and the mediator of the covenant-relationship between YHWH and Israel (Exod. 32-33). Further, he helps Israel to restore or renew the covenant-relationship between YHWH and the nation (Exod. 34). In reality it is not Moses or Israel, but YHWH, who restores the covenant-relationship between Him and Israel. All the activities of Moses are to secure YHWH's glory or His presence among Israel, without which Israel's Exodus is meaningless.

Chapters 23 and 33-34 in the Book of Exodus describe YHWH's messenger as a preparer or guide/guard for Israel to enter the Promised Land. The messenger prepares the way of Israel for her Exodus and helps her to complete the Exodus. Israel should always be faithful to the covenant-relationship between YHWH and herself because the completion of the Exodus requires Israel's covenant obedience. Even though Israel violates the covenant and breaks the covenant-relationship, God renews the covenant and restores the covenant-relationship by His grace. Israel's Exodus is completed by entering the land, but they need to preserve the purpose of the Exodus once living in the land. Israel's royal obedience to the covenant makes her experience YHWH's presence/glory forever. The theme of YHWH's messenger/angel in Exod. 23 and 32-33 is linked with the Exodus theme, the messenger's preparation of the Way for Israel's Exodus journey, the Sinai Covenant, and YHWH's presence/His glory. YHWH is described as redeemer/Savior and judge.

### 3.4.1.3. Examination of Isa. 40:3

פָּנֵי דְרָךְ יְהוָה in Isa. 40:3 is an outstanding parallel to פָּנֵי דְרָךְ לְפָנַי in Mal. 3:1,<sup>127</sup> because the pronoun “me” in Mal. 3:1 refers to YHWH. Without the aid of the Gospel writers it can be easily recognized that the sending of the Lord’s messenger for the preparation of His Way in Mal. 3:1 is linked with Isaiah 40:3 and its embracing themes: the sending of God’s messenger, his preparation of the Lord’s Way, and the manifestation of God’s glory. In other words, key common themes are found in both passages. It seems that Malachi employs the themes of Isa. 40:3. If Mal. 3:1 is imbued with the themes of Isa. 40:3, it is necessary to examine the Isaiah passage.

Isa. 40:1-11 is viewed as the prologue to chapters 40-66.<sup>128</sup> Chapter 40 begins with the themes of God’s comfort for His people and His restoration of them. The themes are prominent in the entire section of chapters 40-66. The phrase פָּנֵי דְרָךְ in 40:3 again appears in 57:14 and 62:10, which command the preparation of the way for God’s people. Another similar phrase, “a highway in the desert,” occurs in 11:16, 35:8, 43:19 and 49:11.

Ancient Near Eastern literature has the motif of “preparing the way” before the god in battle used for a cultic procession in the context of a “divine journey.” For example, in the Erra Epic (I. 95-99) Erra charges his vanguard Išum, “Open the way . . . . Go before me.”<sup>129</sup> A similar motif occurs in Isa. 40:3. Isaiah chapters 40-66 contain Yahweh’s message of consolation and restoration to national Israel, who is about to be

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<sup>127</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 136.

<sup>128</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, “Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Their Adaptation in the New Testament,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 8 (1980) 25.

<sup>129</sup> Mann, “Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions: The Typology of Exaltation,” 111-31.

destroyed and deported to Babylon because of her sins. Isaiah gives assurance that Yahweh will restore the nation to their land and establish His kingdom of peace with prosperity to the land. The relationship of the one who cries in his “voice” in the wilderness, and those who receive more commands from Yahweh who gives the imperatives to console the nation, is not clear. The LXX understands that those who should address the Lord’s comforting words to God’s people are priests by inserting ἱερεῖς (priests--noun vocative). The one of the crying voice is not Yahweh Himself; on the contrary, the voice’s imperatives are given only on behalf of “our God.” The voice is thus probably a human’s--a third party--other than Yahweh Himself. The prophet hears the voice calling from “a position within” (it could be the meaning of the prepositional prefix ב in the word בַּמִּדְבָּר) the wilderness here.<sup>130</sup> What the voice is saying as he cries in the wilderness is giving commands to another group of people. Another possibility is that the activity of the preparation of the Lord’s way is to be taken in the wilderness,<sup>131</sup> because the command of making a highway for our God, which is a parallel phrase to the preparation of the Lord’s way, is to be made also in the wilderness. The command to them is to “turn,” or “turn and look.” However, it seems that this verb is used for making YHWH’s pathway free from obstacles. The genitive in the construct יְהוָה יִרְדָּה could be an objective genitive (a way that has its object in Yahweh),<sup>132</sup> and יִרְדָּה here could imply

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<sup>130</sup> F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *The New Brown Driver Briggs Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendricksen, 1983) 88.

<sup>131</sup> Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1969) 37.

<sup>132</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, 2nd English ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910) 128.

the pathway in which God moves.<sup>133</sup> It is thus probably a command to the discouraged people of the nation Israel, who are going into captivity, to turn and focus on the pathway YHWH moves so as to free it from obstacles (as He brings the restoration news). This could reflect a call for moral conduct to Israel.

The same could be true of the second half of this strophe **בְּעֶרְבָה מִסְלָה לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׂרָו** (“make straight in the desert a highway for our God”) which stands as synonymous parallelism<sup>134</sup> to the first. In the Old Testament, **יִשְׂרָו** (“make straight”) is also used for moral uprightness and pleasing God, in an ethical sense (Hab. 2:4). **מִסְלָה** is a public highway,<sup>135</sup> a raised highway (Isa. 59:7; 7:3; Num 20:19). The Isaiah Targum’s rendering understands that the road work is not for the Lord, but for the people of God: A voice of *one who* cries: “In the wilderness clear the way *before the people* of the Lord, level in the desert highway *before the congregation* of our God (italic--Targum’s rendering). Thus Bascom argues that “the highway (35:8) in the wilderness (35:1, 6) is explicitly the road the exiles will travel on their way home (35:9-10).”<sup>136</sup> Regarding the passage, Toy says:

The passage in Isaiah is a description of Israel’s return to Canaan, from the exile in Babylon, across the desert; the removal of all obstacles out of the way is represented under the form of the construction of a smooth road through the

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<sup>133</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The New Brown Driver Briggs Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 203.

<sup>134</sup> Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 350.

<sup>135</sup> David Noel Freedman, “The Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11,” in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen’s Sixtieth Birthday July 28, 1985*, ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 186.

<sup>136</sup> Robert A. Bascom, “Preparing the Way—Midrash in the Bible,” in *Issues in Bible Translation*, ed. Philip C. Stine, United Bible Societies Monograph Series, vol. 3 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) 223-24.

wilderness; and the march of the people is described as the march of Yahweh, God of Israel, who would lead his people home.<sup>137</sup>

The passage was also used in the Old Testament as a figure for upright conduct (Prov. 16:17; Psa. 84:6). Thus this phrase could imply that Israel should be upright in her conduct toward Yahweh, due to the restoration program which He has promised for the nation. It can be argued that the purpose of the activity described here is to enable Yahweh to bring His exiled people back to their land.<sup>138</sup>

To sum up, YHWH's messenger (whose voice is calling) is sent to remove obstacles so that YHWH will perform His restoration plan for the nation of Israel. The messenger's task is to clear the way for the Lord by making Israel turn to YHWH. Thus Dumbrell remarks,

The redemption from Babylon, to which 40:1 refers, will take the character of a second Exodus (40:3-5) and will thus (this second Exodus motif is pervasively expressed throughout these chapters, cf. Isa. 42:16; 43:16, 19; 49:9, 11; 51:10; etc.) presumably lead to a *re-institution of the covenant* [italics-mine] and certainly to what the prophecy always has in view, the ideal occupation of the land.<sup>139</sup>

40:1-2 implies that Israel is God's covenant people. God calls Israel "My people." In the Book of Exodus, when the title "my people" (3:7, 10; 5:1; 7:4, 16; 8:1/MT 7:26; 8:20/MT 8:16, 21/MT 8:17; 9:1, 13; 22:25/MT 22:24) is mentioned by YHWH, it indicates that Israel is YHWH's covenant people, denoting the covenant-relationship

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<sup>137</sup> Crawford Howell Toy, *Quotations in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884) 18.

<sup>138</sup> Freedman, "The Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 187.

<sup>139</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Exeter, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1984) 191.



between YHWH and Israel.<sup>140</sup> Exodus 2:24-25 shows that God's activity for Israel's Exodus in Exodus 3 and the following chapters is based on His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. When YHWH makes the Sinai Covenant with Israel he again says to Israel that the nation will be His people, His precious possession: "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5, 6). The covenant nation Israel is called "My people"<sup>141</sup> by the Lord also in the Book of Isaiah.<sup>142</sup>

God's punishment against Israel and the fully-paid price for her sins are the results of her violation of the covenant made with God. In Isa. 40:2 God states that Israel's sins are forgiven. Thus the divine call to "comfort" in 40:1 is a call to proclaim God's forgiveness. Israel's covenant relationship with God is restored based on God's forgiveness and Israel's repentance. God's forgiveness is given, but Israel's repentance is required. That is, the people of Israel are "to prepare the way for the Lord, and this they are to do by means of repentance."<sup>143</sup> While Isa. 40:2 speaks of God's forgiveness of Israel's sins, 40:3-4 demands that the people of Israel repent of their sins. The glory of the Lord will then be revealed (40:5). Just as in the Exodus, the phrase "the glory of

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<sup>140</sup> The covenant-relationship with God is emphasized in the Book of Isaiah: 24:5; 33:8; 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 56:4, 6; 59:21; 61:8.

<sup>141</sup> There is one exception in Isa. 19:25, in which Egypt is called "My people."

<sup>142</sup> John Martin, "Isaiah," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985) 1091.

<sup>143</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah 40–66: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972) 28.

Lord” and its equivalents basically imply the idea of the glorious theophany.<sup>144</sup> According to Davis, the two phrases, “Prepare the Way of the Lord,” and “make straight in the desert a highway for our God” in Isa. 40:3 are “the initial stages of a new exodus motif in Isaiah which points to the glorious presence of God.”<sup>145</sup> The New Exodus motif and YHWH’s glorious presence repeatedly occur in chapters 40-48.<sup>146</sup> The New Exodus puts emphasis on “the return of Yahweh’s actual presence.”<sup>147</sup> It is noteworthy that, “The goal of the New Exodus is the enthronement of Yahweh in a restored Jerusalem-Zion.”<sup>148</sup>

In conclusion, the Exodus motif is often found in the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah 11:16 is a good example: “There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.” It has been agreed that the preparation of the Lord’s way in Isa. 40:3 is a New Exodus motif or theme. The New Exodus of Israel, done by the intervention of the Lord’s messenger, is based on the re-institution or restoration of the covenant with God and is followed by God’s glorious presence. The LXX’s rendering from Isa. 63:9 is interesting: “It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them.” It distinguishes between the coming of God’s messenger and God’s presence. YHWH is the redeemer of His covenant people.

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<sup>144</sup> Carl Judson Davis, *The Name and Way of the Lord: Old Testament Themes, New Testament Christology*, vol. 129, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 66.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>146</sup> John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 25 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987) 79.

<sup>147</sup> Rikki E. Watts, “Consolation or Confrontation: Isaiah 40-55 and the Delay of the New Exodus,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 1 (1990) 33.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

### 3.4.2. Examination of Mal. 3:1

The prophet Malachi assures his people that YHWH still loves them and that He is faithful to His covenant. Malachi contrasts God's covenantal faithfulness with His people's unfaithfulness, and urges them to restore their faithfulness. Mal. 3:1 belongs to the fourth oracle (2:17-3:5). In this section, the prophet points out that his people lost all faith in their God. The section begins with the prophet's reproof. He quotes the people's complaints: "How have we wearied Him?" "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and He is pleased with them." "Where is the God of justice?" Mal. 3:1-5 is the answer to the questions of the people. The section can be structured as follows:

- A Israel's complaints are shown through the prophet's reproof (2:17)
  - a How have we wearied Him? (2:17a)
  - b Where is the God of justice? (2:17b)
- B God's response to their complaints (3:1-5)
  - a The coming of the Lord's messenger in preparation for the coming of the Lord (3:1a)
  - b *Ha Adon's* sudden coming to His temple (3:1b)
  - c The coming of the covenant messenger (3:1c-5)

Mal. 3:1 begins with "behold" (הִנֵּנִי) which literally means "behold me." שִׁלַּח is a participle denoting "immediate action."<sup>149</sup> YHWH does not want His justice challenged. He says that He is about to send His messenger, the identity of which needs to be defined.

#### 3.4.2.1. The Identity of מַלְאָכִי in Mal. 3:1a

Many theories have been suggested to identify this messenger. Some think that he is Malachi the prophet, whereas others regard the messenger in verse 1a as an ideal

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<sup>149</sup> Ralph L Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 32 (Waco: Word Books, 1984) 326.

figure.<sup>150</sup> YHWH Himself defines the task of His messenger-forerunner. פָּנֶה (in piel) with accusative פָּנֶה־יָרֵךְ means “make clear,” or “free from obstacles.”<sup>151</sup> The messenger is surely a forerunner of the Lord because the Lord says that His messenger will clear the way before Him (לְפָנָי). According to BDB, מַלְאָךְ is used variously in the Old Testament:<sup>152</sup> 1) Human messenger: A) One sent with a message. B) A prophet. C) A priest. D) A messenger from God acting as an interpreter and declaring what is right. 2) Angel, as messenger of God. 3) The theophanic angel. Regarding מַלְאָךְ in verse 1a, it seems best to see him as a future figure, because after he clears the way before the Lord, the Lord will come. The first promise is that the Lord will send His messenger. Regarding the task of the messenger, Kaiser explains פָּנֶה as follows:

Under the oriental figure of an epiphany or arrival of the reigning monarch, the text urged for a similar removal of all spiritual, moral, and ethical impediments in preparation for the arrival of the King of glory. Whenever a king would visit a village, the roadway would be straightened, leveled, and all stones and obstacles removed from the road that the king would take as he came to visit the town.<sup>153</sup>

פָּנֶה־יָרֵךְ is used in the figurative sense of an ethical movement in Malachi. God accuses the priests of Malachi’s days: אַתֶּם סִרְתֶּם מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ. The “way” is “the divine way of YHWH’s covenant made known to Israel through the teaching of His statutes and

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>151</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The New Brown Driver Briggs Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 815.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 521.

<sup>153</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985) 82.

ordinances.”<sup>154</sup> The plural form, “ways,” in Mal. 2:9 also “refers to the statutes, precepts, and ordinances that constitute the law (*tôrâ*) of Yahweh, the guide posts marking out the divine way.”<sup>155</sup> The words, “the way” and “the ways,” are used in the context to where “the covenant of the Levites” is referred. In conclusion, in Exodus, Isaiah, and Malachi the role or task of YHWH’s מְלַאֲכֵי is to prepare the way for the Lord to inaugurate His salvation program, and for Israel to be ready for the Lord’s salvation by restoring faithful obedience to Him and His covenant. The task of YHWH’s messenger is to let Israel get out of her disobedient condition. The theme exodus<sup>156</sup> or covenant restoration may be a unifying key theme in the composite quotation. It is remarkable that YHWH’s מְלַאֲכֵי is involved in each covenant theme. Because of that, some scholars hastily identify YHWH’s messenger as the messenger of the covenant. The identity and function of YHWH’s forerunner will be more fully exposed when Elijah’s identity and function in Mal. 4:5-6 are explained.

#### 3.4.2.2. *The Identity of מְלַאֲכֵי in Mal. 3:1b*

The second promise in Mal. 3:1 is that the Lord will come; when the preparations are completed by YHWH’s messenger, the Lord will suddenly come. Therefore, the מְלַאֲכֵי

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<sup>154</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 214.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>156</sup> Richard Schneck, ed., *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark I-Viii, BIBAL Dissertation Series* (Vallejo, CA: BIBAL Press, 1994) 41.

in verse 1a is not the Lord, but a forerunner who prepares the way before YHWH. There may be questions concerning the identity of **הַאֲדֹנָי** and the relationship between **צְבָאוֹת** **יְהוָה** and **הַאֲדֹנָי**. The identity of **הַאֲדֹנָי** constitutes a problem in understanding the verse. “*Adon*” in Mal. 1:6 refers to an earthly master or slave owner. In Mal. 1:12, 14 **אֲדֹנָי** is used as an epithet for YHWH. “*Adon*” is also used as a title of YHWH’s angelic messenger in Zech. 1:9; 4:4, 5, 13 and 6:4.<sup>157</sup> “*Adon*” usually refers to a human master, an angelic being, or YHWH. If YHWH implied that **הַאֲדֹנָי** referred to Himself, He would say, “Behold! I will send my messenger and he will clear the way before me. And *I* (instead of **הַאֲדֹנָי**) will suddenly come to *my* temple” [italics mine]. The argument may be strengthened by YHWH’s use of the first pronoun in the same verse.<sup>158</sup> In verse 5, YHWH again uses the first pronoun: “**קָרַבְתִּי**” (I will come near), “**הִיְיָתִי**” (I will be), and “**יִרְאוּנִי**” (they fear me). Therefore, YHWH must have distinguished Himself from **הַאֲדֹנָי** in the immediate context of the passage. It is exceptionally unusual that YHWH refers to the third party as “the Lord.” It cannot be suggested that YHWH calls a human messenger or an angelic messenger “the Lord.” Of course he is not YHWH’s Lord but the

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<sup>157</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 268.

<sup>158</sup> YHWH uses the first pronoun in the following words in verse 1: **הִנְנִי** (“behold me”), **מַלְאָכִי** (“my messenger,” if it is not a proper name), and **לְפָנַי** (“before me”).

audience's Lord. Thus the identity of יהוה is mysterious. יהוה is neither YHWH himself nor merely a human messenger, nor an angelic messenger. The Hebrew definite article (ה) in the word יהוה implies that the Lord to come is the deity<sup>159</sup> whom the nation seeks. Ironically even in their sin the people of Israel are seeking the Lord's coming. YHWH implies that Malachi's audience awaits the coming of יהוה. It needs to be remembered that the word יהוה is "commonly used for a mediator, as in Psalm 110, and also in Dan 9:17."<sup>160</sup> The title in Psalm 110:1 refers to the Messiah.<sup>161</sup> Commenting on Psalm 110, Anderson states,

The Messiah is invited to sit at the right side or hand of Yahweh. Both biblical and extra-biblical sources support the concept of enthronement beside Yahweh, resulting in a co-regency for the two after the actual enthronement. This enthronement appears to be a waiting period. The Messiah is to sit beside Yahweh on his throne until Yahweh makes the enemies of the Messiah a stool for the Messiah's feet.<sup>162</sup>

Therefore, Merrill states, "The Christological significance of Mal. 3:1 thus becomes immediately evident, for if John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus,

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<sup>159</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 268.

<sup>160</sup> J. Calvin, *A Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1986) 568.

<sup>161</sup> R. L. Harris, Archer, G. L., and Waltke, B. K., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985) 13.

<sup>162</sup> David R. Anderson, *The King-Priest of Psalm 110 in Hebrews*, *Studies in Biblical Literature*, ed. Hemchand Gossai, vol. 21 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001) 53.

then the *Adon* of Malachi can be none other than the Messiah.”<sup>163</sup> Consequently, it can be argued that  $\text{יְהוָה אֱדוֹן}$  is the Messiah whom Malachi’s audience seeks and desires.

### 3.4.2.3. *The Significance of $\text{יְהוָה אֱדוֹן}$ ’s Sudden Advent to His Temple*

Haggai’s audience was encouraged to rebuild the temple of God, but the people of Malachi’s day are commanded to be true worshippers in the temple of God. Though they worship the Lord in the temple, they do not experience the Lord’s presence and so they complain, “Where is the God of justice?” The coming of *Ha Adon* will be YHWH’s answer to the complaint of the people who ask where the God of justice is. YHWH promises that *Ha Adon* whom the people of Israel seek will suddenly come to His temple. The Hebrew word  $\text{בִּקֵּשׁ}$  (“seek”) occurs in Mal. 2:7, 15 and 3:1. Mal. 2:7 demands that the people of Israel should seek the Torah from the lips of a priest who is a messenger of the Lord. To seek the Torah is to seek the Lord. In Mal. 2:15 the Lord is seeking a godly seed. Weyde argues that the verb  $\text{בִּקֵּשׁ}$  used in the Hebrew Bible is “a legal (juridical) term, having the sense ‘require.’”<sup>164</sup> His argument may be proved by the fact that  $\text{בִּקֵּשׁ}$  (“seek”) is used in the covenant contexts in the Book of Malachi. The concept, “seeking God,” is frequently found in the Books of the Chronicler. Schaefer argues that the use of

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<sup>163</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994) 431-32.

<sup>164</sup> Karl W. Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Problems, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi*, vol. 288, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentlich Wissenschaft, ed. Herausgegeben von Otto Kaiser (Walter de Gruyter: Walter de Gruyter Gmbh & Co., 2000) 264-265.



“seeking God” is “an all-inclusive term which means ‘to worship.’”<sup>165</sup> The question, “Where is the God of justice?” indicates that Malachi’s audience is seeking the Lord. That they are seeking the Lord is an irony because they do not know that they are evil in the eyes of the Lord and that their seeking of Him brings His punishment on themselves. *Ha Adon* whom they seek will unexpectedly come to his temple. The glorious divine presence in the temple, foretold by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, is again envisioned by the promise of YHWH in the Book of Malachi.

The relationship between the *Ha Adon* and His temple may be a clue in determining the identity of *Ha Adon*. YHWH says, “*Ha Adon* will suddenly come to His temple,” an announcement which implies that the temple is *Ha Adon*’s. No one can claim the temple as his own except YHWH—who calls the temple “my house” (Mal. 3:10; Isa. 56:7). The Hebrew word *הֵיכָלוֹ* (His temple) in Mal. 3:1 is often used in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 22:7; Jer. 50:28; 51:11; etc), and unless it indicates a pagan temple,<sup>166</sup> the “his” refers to YHWH. The Hebrew word “*הֵיכָלְךָ*” (thy temple) sometimes appears in the Book of Psalms. It is certain that “thy” refers to YHWH; the temple is always called YHWH’s temple. *הֵיכָלְךָ*’s sudden (or unexpected) coming to His temple may be a significant event.

First of all, it is necessary to know that “in Old Testament descriptions the Temple was in many respects like a palace, and the scene was completed by references to

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<sup>165</sup> Glenn Edward Schaefer, “The Significance of Seeking God in the Purpose of the Chronicler” (Th. D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972) 58.

<sup>166</sup> The word “his temple” in 2 Chron. 36:7 refers to a pagan temple.

a royal throne.”<sup>167</sup> The kingship of the Lord has been one of the most popular themes in the Old Testament. Especially in the Psalms, the Psalmists describe God as the most majestic king, and Isaiah as well frequently describes God as king. For example, after Isaiah sees the heavenly throne of the Lord in a vision in the temple, he confesses that he has seen the king, the Lord of hosts (Isa. 6:1-7). Eskola remarks,

The cultic ideal is fundamentally in agreement with the covenantal idea that can be seen in the theocratic ideology. The purpose of the cult was to maintain communion between God and Israel. When this purpose was fulfilled, God remained the King of the people. Therefore the sacrifice had the power of fulfilling the most significant purpose of Jewish faith: maintaining belief in the kingship of God.<sup>168</sup>

Malachi also shows that Israel’s disqualified sacrifices break the communion between herself and God, “a great king” (Mal 1:14). Israel’s faithful sacrifices recognize God’s kingship. The coming of the Lord (יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ) to His temple is also to reign over His people so that His name may be honored among them. Clowney is correct in arguing, “God’s presence in Jerusalem was linked with the rule of God’s Anointed.”<sup>169</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that *Ha Adon*, the Messiah in Mal 3:1, will come to His temple--symbolizing His throne--to be honored by His people. *Ha Adon*’s coming is “sudden” (פֶּתָאֵם). It is noteworthy that the Hebrew word is juxtaposed with Hezekiah’s covenant renewal, the temple and God’s preparation in 2 Chron. 29:35-36. Of the twenty-five usages of the word “sudden” (פֶּתָאֵם), most of them occur in connection with disaster or

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<sup>167</sup> Timo Eskola, *Messiah and the Temple: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, ed. Jörg Frey, Martin Hengel, and Otfried Hofius, vol. 142 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 50.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>169</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, “The Final Temple,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 no. 2 (1973) 165.

judgment. 2 Chron. 29:36 is the only exception if its use in Mal 3:1 is not the case, because the verse has a pleasant sense. So it is possible that the statement, “the Lord shall come to His temple suddenly,” refers to the Messiah’s first advent. The suddenness is the result of God’s plan. In conclusion, from the viewpoint of Malachi, the Messiah as King of kings will suddenly come to His temple in the future.

#### 3.4.2.4. *The Identity of the Messenger of the Covenant in Mal. 3:1c*

Since Mal. 3:1 contains a seemingly complex passage, some scholars say that the mention of “the messenger of the covenant” is a later addition.<sup>170</sup> A minority of commentators argues that “the messenger of the covenant” in Mal. 3:1c refers to “my messenger” in Mal. 3:1a.<sup>171</sup> However, the parallel phrases, “*Ha Adon* whom you seek” and “the messenger of the covenant whom you desire,” refute the view that the two figures (YHWH’s forerunner and the messenger of the covenant) are identical. Rather they demonstrate that *Ha Adon* can be identified with the messenger of the covenant because the *waw* (ו) in וּמַלְאָךְ הַבְּרִיתִית may be an “epexegetical *waw*.”<sup>172</sup> It may be an intensified appositional *waw*.<sup>173</sup> Therefore, מַלְאָךְ הַבְּרִיתִית is identical with הַאֲדֹנָי. This is supported by the verb form, which is singular (בָּא). Even in verse 1, הִנֵּה is used twice--once for the coming of the Lord’s messenger, and the other time for the coming of the

<sup>170</sup> Malchow, “The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1,” 253.

<sup>171</sup> Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 431-32.

<sup>172</sup> Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, 82.

<sup>173</sup> James N. Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary of Malachi* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998) 133.

Lord. The Lord says that the messenger of the covenant is the figure whom the people of Israel desire (הַפְּצִיִּים). The Hebrew word הַפְּצִיִּים is used in Mal. 1:10; 2:17 and 3:12. In 1:10 the Lord says that He takes no pleasure in the priests who offer inferior sacrifices. The Lord seeks and delights in those who offer pure sacrifices and offerings. The phrase הַפְּצִיִּים אֶרֶץ in 3:12 is a combination terminology; it is the delightful land blessed by the Lord. So the land is the place where God's people desire to receive His blessings. In Mal. 3:1 YHWH says that the people of Israel delight in or desire the messenger of the covenant. That Malachi's audience delights in the messenger of the covenant is also ironical<sup>174</sup> because they do not know what His coming will bring to them. The title מְלֵאךְ הַבְּרִית is found nowhere else in the Old Testament.<sup>175</sup> Malachi employs several new coined terms such as "the covenant of life and peace"<sup>176</sup> (Mal. 2:5), "a book of remembrance" (Mal. 3:16) and "the sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2)." They do not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament. They are the products of Malachi's terminological combination. Malachi seems to have combined two different ideas into a new, expanded concept.<sup>177</sup>

"The messenger of the covenant" is an angel, a divine messenger, or a human messenger. Most commentators do not think that He is simply an angel; He is depicted as

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<sup>174</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 243.

<sup>175</sup> John Merlin Powis Smith, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Malachi," in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah*, ed. Hinckley G. Mitchell, John Merlin Powis Smith, and Julius A. Bewer, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, ed. Samuel Rolles Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Augustus Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) 63.

<sup>176</sup> In the MT, there is no Hebrew word "covenant" before the word "the life." The phrase "the covenant of peace" occurs in Numbers 25:12 ("my covenant of peace") and in Ezekiel 34:25.

<sup>177</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 307, 362.

a messenger. Glazier-McDonald identifies YHWH with “the messenger of the covenant” and argues that “the messenger of the covenant” is the covenant enforcer.<sup>178</sup> The imagery of a messenger contains the images of “His being-sent” and “His mission.” It means that “the messenger of the covenant” has His sender and His mission. It is noteworthy that the messenger as a forerunner for the preparation of the Lord’s Way in Mal. 3:1a is described as the one who is sent by the Lord, but that “the messenger of the covenant” is portrayed as the one who “will come” to accomplish His task by Himself. Therefore, “the messenger of the covenant” is not YHWH Himself, but one quite different from the Lord’s messengers, including the messenger in Mal. 3:1a. The fact that the imagery of “the Day of the Lord” in Mal. 3:2-5 is applied both to “the messenger of the covenant” (3:2-4) and YHWH (3:5) demonstrates that though “the messenger of the covenant” is distinct from YHWH, His authority is equal to YHWH’s. The argument that the messenger of the covenant is identified with *Ha Adon* is supported by the fact that the theophany phrase, Mal. 3:2-4 is applied to the messenger of the covenant. Mal. 3:2-4 also refers to the consequences of *Ha Adon*’s sudden coming to His temple. Some who identify the messenger of the Lord in Mal. 3:1a with the messenger of the covenant in Mal. 3:1c have the tendency to diminish the theophanic meaning of Mal.3:2-4. Others who do not identify *Ha Adon* with the messenger of the covenant, at the time arguing that Mal. 3:2-4 refers to the activity of *Ha Adon*, cannot explain why the third person in the phrase “in His coming” in Mal. 3:2 refers to *Ha Adon* instead of the covenant messenger. The problem can be easily solved by the same figure theory (*Ha Adon*--the messenger of the covenant).

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<sup>178</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 132.

The mission of “the messenger of the covenant” is defined by His relationship with “the covenant.” “The messenger of the covenant” may imply one or more of the following: (1) the messenger who makes the covenant (with someone) or; (2) the messenger who makes the enforcement of the covenant--that is, the covenant enforcer or; (3) the messenger who fulfills the covenant or; (4) the messenger who proclaims or announces the covenant or; (5) the messenger as an agent or a mediator who helps two parties in making a covenant with each other or; (6) the messenger whom the covenant promises or foretells. There is no exact parallel to the terminology “the messenger of the covenant.” The phrase **אִשְׁתְּ בְרִיתְךָ** (“the wife of your covenant”) in Mal. 2:14 does not seem to provide any valuable aid in understanding the meaning of “the messenger of the covenant.” It means “the wife with whom you make the covenant.” Both “the wife” and “you” should be faithful to each other by keeping the covenant. She is the object of the covenant. “The messenger of the covenant” may mean “the messenger with whom the people of Israel make the covenant,” or “the covenant enforcer,” or “the messenger whom the covenant foretells.” The identity and mission of “the messenger of the covenant” could be more expounded upon in the immediate context (Mal. 3:2-5).

As previously mentioned, YHWH emphasizes *the coming* of *Ha Adon* and the messenger of the covenant, but He stresses *the sending* of “my messenger” and Elijah. “My messenger,” Elijah, is sent by YHWH, but *Ha Adon*, the messenger of the covenant Himself, descends. It seems to assure the people who regard the Lord as unfaithful that He surely and quickly will save His people and punish the wicked. Another question may be raised regarding to what the covenant refers. It is not clear whether the covenant refers to the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, or the Covenant of Levi. The

immediate context seems to imply that the covenant refers to the Covenant of Levi, because the first and main role of the messenger of the covenant is to purify the “sons of Levi.” Malachi, however, does not seem to have any particular covenant in mind. Malachi confronts his people, telling them to return to the Lord so that He may be honored as their king. To fulfill the goal for the people of Israel is to seek the Lord by renewing the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, Malachi’s main concern is that his people experience a new Exodus. Among the key themes in the Book of Malachi, the issue of covenant is throughout the whole book. Malachi does not define “covenant” but assumes it; it seems that the concept of covenant in Malachi covers various covenants in the Old Testament. In fact, Malachi is not the only case where this shows itself. Even the prophet Ezekiel, in Ezek. 37:24-26, seems to combine allusions to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants “with a word of prophecy concerning Israel’s future covenantal expectations.”<sup>179</sup> Jeremiah implies that the Davidic Covenant is essentially united with the covenant of Levi: “My covenant may also be broken with David My servant that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers. ‘As the host of heaven cannot be counted, and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to me” (Jer. 33:20-22). Malachi in 3:1 also seems to combine the ancient several covenants into “the covenant,” since there are allusions to the covenant of Levi and the Mosaic or Sinai Covenant in Mal. 3:2-5. It is obvious that the people of Israel would have expected the Messiah promised through the Davidic Covenant. The messenger of the covenant does

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<sup>179</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980) 42.

not refer to Yahweh Himself, but to a third party. Therefore, “the messenger of the covenant” must refer to the Messiah of Israel. The “messenger of the covenant” in Mal. 3:1c may refer to the messianic King who will restore the Davidic kingdom. Andrew E. Hill thinks that Malachi has in mind “the new covenant.” He states,

There are several reasons why it seems likely that Malachi has in mind the “new covenant” announced by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 34:25; 36:26-28). First, Malachi’s audience has already alluded to this new covenant in their dispute with the prophet over divine justice. Second, the eschatological context of the fourth disputation is firmly established (2:17). Third, even if the prophet spoke sarcastically of the people’s expectant desire for divine intervention, such anticipation is difficult to explain if Malachi refers only to Yahweh’s past covenant initiatives. Fourth, the allusion to Ezek 43:1-5 and the return of the divine presence to the Temple hints at the “new covenant” era.<sup>180</sup>

At first glance, “the messenger of the Lord” in Exodus 23 seems to be identified as “the messenger of the covenant” in Mal. 3:1. The messenger of YHWH in Exodus 23 is a divine agent, but not YHWH Himself, because YHWH Himself distinguishes between His presence and the messenger’s presence in Exodus 32-33.<sup>181</sup> The Exodus in the Book of Exodus is accomplished by the messenger’s miraculous preparation for the covenantal people of God. The preparatory task for the achievement of the Exodus of God’s people requires divine power and so requiring that the agent be a divine messenger (angel). The mission of the Lord’s messenger in Isaiah is an ethical task; therefore, the messenger is a human agent. YHWH’s forerunner in the Book of Malachi is also a human messenger, but “the messenger of the covenant” is the Lord. The role of the Lord’s messenger in Exodus is the same as that of the Lord’s messengers in Isaiah and Malachi.

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<sup>180</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 289.

<sup>181</sup> It is natural to argue that the messenger in Exodus 23 and 32-33 is the same messenger.



The role of the covenant messenger is not found in the Book of Exodus,<sup>182</sup> but is portrayed in different ways in the Book of Isaiah.

In Mal. 3:1 YHWH promises that His messenger will prepare His Way before Him, meaning that the messenger will restore Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord. That is, the Lord's forerunner will help Israel to fulfill an Isaianic Exodus. The accomplishment of the messenger's task will accompany יְהוָה's glorious presence in the temple. This is the coming of the messenger of the covenant as the covenant enforcement agent, and who is the Messiah. Mal. 3:1 encapsulates the Exodus theme and the New Exodus (Isaianic) theme.

### 3.5. A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF MAL.3:2-5

In Mal. 3:2-5, YHWH now announces the task which the messenger of the covenant will carry out in the future.<sup>183</sup> "The day of His coming" is reminiscent of "the Day of the Lord." In fact, the day of the covenant messenger's coming is the Day of the Lord. The rhetorical question, "Who can endure the day of His coming?" anticipates the negative reply, "No one."<sup>184</sup> Thus, "the day of His coming" cannot be any other day except the Day of the Lord. It is the "great and dreadful Day of the Lord" (Mal. 3:5). The Day will burn up "all the arrogant and every evildoer" (4:1). Mal. 3:2-5 introduces the

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<sup>182</sup> Moses may be described as a messenger of the Sinai covenant.

<sup>183</sup> It is natural to think that the third person in 3:2 refers to the messenger of the covenant because the promise of the coming of the covenant messenger is immediately followed by verse 2.

<sup>184</sup> The answer may be positive: "The faithful people of God."

consequences of the coming of the Day of the Lord.<sup>185</sup> While Mal. 3:1 implies that יְהוָה is identified with the messenger of the covenant, Mal. 3:2-4 shows that the covenant messenger's power and authority is equal to YHWH's. Mal. 3:2-4 also presents the duty of the covenant messenger. He is described as a covenant enforcer whose role requires divine power and authority. The messenger of the covenant will purify Israel by purging out evildoers and the wicked (verse 3), and will initially purify the sons of Levi (verse 3). He cannot be identified as the ideal priestly figure in Mal. 2:5-6, even though the priest may be called "the messenger of the Lord." It is true that the past faithful priest foreshadows both the eschatological Elijah and the messenger of the covenant. YHWH made the covenant of life and peace with the past ideal priest. The ideal priest had a right relationship with the Lord, and gave true instruction and turned many from sin. However, sitting on the throne as a mighty king, the messenger of the covenant will be able to purify the Levites (Mal. 3:3). Though the messenger of the covenant is to purify the Levites as well as enforce the covenant, a priest as the messenger of the Lord is to lead his people to return to the Lord. The role of a priest is merely to help his people renew the covenant made with YHWH, not to purify the Levites. It is the messenger of the covenant who will purify the Levites, who are the representatives of Israel. Malachi does not specify how He will purify them. That they are purified means that they are cleansed from their sin. His mission is to turn His people (including the Levites) from their sin. The descriptions in Mal. 3:2-3 seem to be reminiscent of Moses' activity in Exod. 32, the religious reform of King Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29), the reform of King Josiah (2 Chron.

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<sup>185</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 142.

34)<sup>186</sup> and the reform of Nehemiah (Neh. 13:30).<sup>187</sup> Though Moses seems to be described as a type of the eschatological covenant enforcer and the purifier of the Levites (Mal. 3:1c-4), his role is substantially different from that of the covenant messenger. Moses simply helps Israel to restore the covenant-relationship between YHWH and the nation of Israel. The real restorer of the covenant can only be God, who alone can justify the violators of the covenant. While Moses is a guide or mediator for Israel's covenant-restoration, the messenger of the covenant himself renews the covenant and restores the covenant-relationship. The messenger of the covenant is not only the mediator between YHWH and Israel,<sup>188</sup> but also the restorer of the covenant/the covenant-relationship. The following statement well explains that the passage refers to the activity of a divine being, not that of a human character:

The messenger of the covenant is equated not only as refiner's fire but also a smelter and purifier. Only YHWH is equated with 'fire' in the Hebrew Scriptures. He is described as the embodiment of fire (e.g., Exod 24. 17; Deut 4. 24; Isa 30. 27-30; and Ezek. 22. 20-21), the source of fire in terms of judgment (e.g., Lev 10. 21; and 2 Kgs 2. 11). No place in the Hebrew Scriptures is a prophet, a king, or even a priest described in such terms. Furthermore, YHWH is described as the refiner of silver and gold. Notice the similarities between Zech 13. 9 and Mal 3. 2-4. Both passages mention coming (בוא), refining (צַרְרֵה), with fire (אֵשׁ), both silver (כֶּסֶף) and gold (זָהָב), and the overriding theme of both passages is the restoration of God's people.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 296-299.

<sup>187</sup> William J. Dumbrell, "Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms," *The Reformed Theological Review* 35, no. 2 (May 1976) 42-52.

<sup>188</sup> He restores/renews the covenant and the covenant-relationship between YHWH and Israel by purifying the Levites because they represent the nation Israel (Mal. 3:3). Mal. 3:3 implies the restoration of the sacrificial system of the entire nation.

<sup>189</sup> David M. Hoffeditz, "A Prophet, a Kingdom, and a Messiah: The Portrayal of Elijah in the Gospels in the Light of First-Century Judaism" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Aberdeen, 2000) 21.

The messenger of the covenant will not only purify Levites but will also fully restore the sacrificial service of the consecrated community (verses 3, 4).

As discussed, the messenger of the covenant is the Messiah who is to come. His kingship is affirmed by the proper sacrifices of His people. The future purification cannot be compared to the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms. “The days of old” may refer both to the days of Moses and of David.<sup>190</sup>

On one hand, on the Day of the Lord the messenger of the covenant will enforce the covenant by purifying the sons of Levi, the representative true seekers of Yahweh. On the other hand, Yahweh Himself will enforce the covenant by judging and punishing the violators of the Mosaic covenant (verse 5). This part explains that Yahweh will enforce the covenant by judging the violators of the covenant. His judgment will include the entire Hebrew nation. The Mosaic Law prohibits all the crimes mentioned in Mal. 3:5. The God of justice will finally remove all the sinners who commit the crimes. Thus Israel’s question regarding God’s justice will be answered on that Day. Though God punishes the covenant violators, He will spare His remnant who seeks the Lord. There may be a question regarding the time when this happens. Mal. 3:2-5 seems to prophesy that Yahweh’s judgment of Israel will take place after her restoration, including the purification of the sons of Levi by the messenger of the covenant. Kaiser’s following statement may be helpful in understanding the passage:

The prophets’ words were closely connected with the history of the times and that they had a unique prophetic perspective which compressed events, sweeping massive amounts of time into the space of a brief horizon . . . . The near event appeared to be joined to the distant future event with hardly any space or time

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<sup>190</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972) 244.

between them, much as a near and a distant mountain may from certain vantage points appear to have little or no space between them.<sup>191</sup>

In short, the messenger of the covenant will enforce the covenant of the Lord to the entire nation of Israel, including the sons of Levi. He will justify YHWH's people by fulfilling His task. Mal. 3:2-4 basically describes the redemption given to YHWH's covenant people by the messenger of the covenant, the Messiah. The passage speaks mainly of the divine eschatological salvation given to God's people by the Messiah. Verse 5 depicts God's final judgment against sinners. *Ha Adon*, the messenger of the covenant who is the Messiah, is the redeemer/Savior for His faithful covenant people. He is also the judge against the wicked and evildoers.

### 3.6. A BRIEF THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF MAL.4:5-6

The role of eschatological Elijah may be similar to that of Moses or of the Tishbite Elijah. Whether it is regarded as a later addition, as secondary or as the original epilogue of the book, Mal. 4:4-5 [MT 3:22-24] is the conclusion of Malachi's prophecy. These verses focus on Moses and Elijah. The two figures are integrally related to Malachi's major themes of the covenant, the New Exodus and the Day of the Lord.

Some scholars identify Elijah as the messenger of the covenant<sup>192</sup> because they think that the covenant messenger's task mentioned in Mal. 3:2-4 is similar to that of Elijah in Mal. 4:6. Verse 6 depicts the prophetic ministry of reconciliation of the

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<sup>191</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Back Toward the Future: Hints for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989) 42.

<sup>192</sup> Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 346.

eschatological Elijah.<sup>193</sup> The description of the reconciliation between the fathers and their children signifies covenant renewal between YHWH and His people.<sup>194</sup> Elijah is “the agent of repentance and reconciliation.”<sup>195</sup> His role is similar to the faithful priest in Mal. 2:6. The broken relationship among the family members of the covenant people resulted from their unfaithfulness to their God. His mission is to turn the people to YHWH. YHWH’s command toward Israel concerning spiritual restoration is found in Mal. 7: “Return to me, and I will return to you.” The Tishbite Elijah tried to help the covenant nation of Israel restore the covenant relationship toward YHWH. Before his contest with the prophets of Baal, “he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was in ruins” on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:30). The phrase implicitly shows Elijah’s role; he encouraged his people to return to the Lord. Elijah’s task is to encourage and exhort his people to restore the covenant relationship between YHWH and them. The eschatological Elijah is also a helper or guide, who encourages the covenant people to restore the covenant relationship.

In summary, just as did the past faithful priest in Mal. 2:5-6 and the Tishbite Elijah in the history of Israel, the eschatological Elijah will turn many from their sin. The faithful priest is reminiscent of the historical Tishbite Elijah, who tried to turn the people of Israel from their sin. He also foreshadows the eschatological Elijah. The messenger of the covenant will purify the Levites, restoring their religious life. God’s people will return to the Lord by offerings acceptable with the Lord. Contrary to the unfaithful and

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<sup>193</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, 386.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.

<sup>195</sup> Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 268.

wicked religious life of Israel in Malachi's days, there will be an acceptable and pleasing worship to the Lord.

There are significant inherent differences between the tasks of the two figures-- the messenger of the covenant and Elijah. First, the coming day of the covenant messenger is the Day of the Lord and the duty of the covenant messenger will be performed at the Day of the Lord. The covenant messenger's activity is one of the consequences of the coming of the Day of the Lord. On the other hand, Elijah will carry out his role *before* [italic-mine] the Day of the Lord. His role is to prepare for the Day of the Lord to come. Second, the messenger of the covenant as the covenant enforcer will purify His covenant people by purging out the wicked and sinners on the Day of the Lord. Elijah will prepare the Day of the Lord's purification and judgment before the Lord comes. The messenger of the covenant will justify the sons of Levi, the representatives of YHWH's covenant people, making them righteous. No one but God can make Israel righteous. From Isaiah's perspective, He is the suffering servant (cf. Isa. 52:13 - 53:12). Elijah cannot make Israel righteous. He cannot justify them. Therefore, Elijah is the same figure as the messenger of the Lord in Mal. 3:1a.

### 3.7. CONCLUSION

The passages at issue (Mal. 3:1-5; 4:5-6) are full of unique themes including the New Exodus theme, preparation of the Lord's way, the Lord's presence in His temple on the Day of the Lord, and restoration and judgment on the basis of keeping the Lord's covenant. Careful examination of Malachi's texts and of the several significant Old Testament texts has shown that the messenger of the Lord as the Lord's forerunner is not

an enforcer of the Lord's covenant, but merely a guide for Israel's spiritual restoration, just as was the messenger of YHWH who led Israel to enter the Promised Land. The Lord's messenger in Exod. 23 cannot be identified as the messenger of the covenant in Mal. 3:1 or the pre-incarnate Messiah. Exod. 32 and 33 obviously distinguish between YHWH's presence and that of the messenger. There is no valid reason for the Lord's messenger in Exod. 23 to be a different figure from the messenger in Exod. 32 and 33. Though the messenger has miraculous powers, he is simply a guide--or even a mere protector--of Israel. He prepares the way for Israel to enter the Promised Land. He prepares the way for the covenant community of Israel to accomplish the Exodus. To prepare the way for Israel to enter the land is to prepare the Way of the Lord. The Lord appears to Israel as their King in the land. In the Books of Isaiah and Malachi, the messengers of the Lord are the Lord's agents who prepare the Way of the Lord for His people. Therefore, it must be argued that the role of "my messenger" in Mal. 3:1a is similar to that of the messengers in Exodus and Isaiah. In the Book of Malachi, the Lord's forerunner is introduced as an eschatological Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6). "My messenger" in Mal. 3:1a cannot be identified with the messenger of the covenant in Mal. 3:1c. In the Books of Exodus and Isaiah, the preparation of the Lord's messengers for the Way of the Lord is followed by the Lord's glorious presence. In 3:1-5 Malachi also implies that the glorious theophany is followed by the preparation of the Lord's Way made by the messenger of the Lord. The messengers perform their tasks in relation to the covenant between the Lord and His covenant people. The same motifs are found in the Book of Malachi. After the Lord's forerunner prepares the Way of the Lord and His people, *Ha Adon*, the messenger of the covenant, will appear. In Mal. 3:1-2 YHWH declares that *Ha*



*Adon*, who is the messenger of the covenant--Messiah--will appear on the Day of the Lord. Some types of the Lord's messengers in the Book of Malachi--that is, a prophet who prophesies divine oracles, a faithful priest who teaches the Torah and the Lord's forerunner Elijah who prepares the way of the Lord--foreshadow certain aspects of the covenant messenger or foretell His coming. The messenger of the covenant will Himself come to the nation of Israel. Malachi emphasizes the covenant messenger's own initiative. *Ha Adon's* presence--that is, the covenant messenger's coming--is the very same presence of YHWH. Mal. 3:2-4 depicts that the messenger of the covenant will enforce the covenant of the Lord. He will purify the sons of Levi. Nobody except the messenger of the covenant will be able to fulfill the task. The covenant in the phrase "the messenger of the covenant," must consist of the covenants of Abraham, Moses, and David, and even the New Covenant. The covenants are actually "successive stages of a single covenant."<sup>196</sup> The Book of Malachi, as the last book of the Minor Prophets, ends with a pointer to the future. Mal. 3:1 not only looks back to the works of the Lord's messengers, but also anticipates the role of the future messengers of the Lord. The Book of Malachi points to both directions: remember the Law of Moses--retrospect, and await the future Elijah--prospect. The messenger passages in the Books of Exodus and Isaiah do not reveal the appearing of Messiah and His mission, but chapters 3-4 in the Book of Malachi implicitly reveal it. God will send His messengers before the Messiah comes to establish His Davidic kingdom. The Book of Malachi promises that the Messiah will come to deliver the righteous and to punish the wicked on the Day of the Lord. The Messiah's coming will be glorious. Before His presence, His forerunner will prepare the way for

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<sup>196</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 41.

both the Messiah and His covenant people. Malachi encourages his audience to remain faithful to the covenant-relationship with their God. Though the messenger passages describe YHWH as redeemer in the Books of Exodus and Isaiah, the Messiah as the messenger of the covenant is depicted as redeemer in the Book of Malachi. Malachi does not explicitly distinguish between the Messiah's first and second comings. The motif of the eschatological figures in the Book of Malachi is expected to be revealed and expounded in the New Testament because it is God's promise not yet fulfilled in the Old Testament. As the readers read the themes of the Book of Malachi, they naturally wonder, expect how and when the prophecy is fulfilled, and wait in expectation of its fulfillment (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-11).