

Malachi's Eschatological Day of Yahweh: Its Dual Roles of Cultic Restoration and Enactment of Social Justice (Mal 3:1–5; 3:16–4:6)

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ABSTRACT

The theme of the Day of Yahweh is regarded as a central feature of the prophets' message to their contemporaries. It is the most striking and prominent theme in the Book of the Twelve. While Isaiah focuses on Zion, Jeremiah on the rhetoric of lament, Ezekiel on the Glory of Yahweh, so are the Minor Prophets on the theme of the Day of Yahweh. The Day of Yahweh as envisioned by Malachi is an eschatological day of judgement with a future day of renewal and restoration of the fortunes of those who fear the Lord. Malachi's vision for restoration includes a covenantal messenger, who will cleanse Yahweh's people and restore true worship and obedience to the ethical standards of the law thus giving room for a community of reverence who will enjoy righteousness and healing. Earlier Malachi had castigated the priests and people for their attitude and actions toward sacrifices and the altar. Now in the light of the lawlessness alluded to in 2:17, the corruption of the priesthood in 3:3, the inadequacy of worship in 3:4 and the corruption of personal and civil morality in 3:5, readers are introduced to three urgent issues: the need for messianic intervention, the need for the day of judgement and the need for social justice. In the discussions that follow, this article examines eschatological hope in the OT, the eschatological peculiarity of the discourse of Malachi's Day of Yahweh, the identity of Malachi's eschatological covenant messenger, the roles of the eschatological messenger: namely, cultic restoration and Yahweh's righting of past wrongs and the reversal of sinful societal order in the overall context of the eschatological day of Yahweh.

1 INTRODUCTION

The theme of the Day of Yahweh is regarded as a central feature of the prophets' message to their contemporaries. It is the most striking and prominent theme in the Book of the Twelve. While Isaiah focuses on Zion, Jeremiah on the rhetoric of lament, Ezekiel on the Glory of Yahweh, so are the Minor

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Prophets on the theme of the Day of Yahweh.² David L. Petersen contends that, “the Day of Yahweh is a liminal moment when Yahweh will act as regent, usually in a military manner. The day is ambiguous; it can offer weal or woe, depending on the historical circumstances. It is a day that, Israel could use to interpret all of its significant historical moments.”³ For Greg King, the Day of Yahweh is both historical and eschatological. It is both present and a future reality. The day will occur in history as well as in the final drama of history, the realisation of God’s plan of redemption.⁴ The Day of Yahweh as envisioned by Malachi is an eschatological day of judgment with a future day of renewal and restoration of the fortunes of those who fear the Lord. Malachi’s vision for restoration includes a covenantal messenger, a renewed temple, a land of abundance, and a community of reverence who will enjoy righteousness and healing. The construct phrase *yôm yhw̄h* (“the Day of Yahweh”) is located in the sixth oracle of the last chapter of the book of Malachi (3:13–21, MT).

In Mal 3:1, the announcement of the messenger is heard: *hinnî shōlēḥ mal’ākhi ūphinnāh–dherek^h l^ephānāy* “Behold, I am sending my messenger, and he will clear the way before me . . .” (NASB).⁵ This announcement is within the context of the day of the arrival of the messenger of the covenant. But it is an unbearable one: *ūmî mekhakēl ’eth–yôm bō’ô* “But who can withstand the day of His coming?” (3:2). The question, “who can bear/endure/resist/ withstand the day?” reechoes Joel 2:11, *kî–ghādhôl yôm–yhw̄h w^enôrā’ m^e’ōdh ūmî y^ekhîlennû* “For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?” The question presumes, when the Day of the Lord is near. The description carries the emblem of the traditional characteristics of the Day of Yahweh of judgment and security. The prophet then describes what Yahweh will do on arrival on that day:

² Aaron Schart, “Reconstructing the Redaction History of the Twelve Prophets: Problems and Models,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, SBLSymS 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 34–48; Rolf Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, SBLSymS 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 75–87; John Barton, “The Day of Yahweh in the Minor Prophets,” in *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays: Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart* (ed. Carmel McCarthy and John F. Healey; JSOTSup 375; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 68–79; James D. Nogalski, “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2003), 175–191; David L. Petersen, “A Book of the Twelve?” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, SBLSymS 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 3–10.

³ Petersen, “A Book?” 9.

⁴ Greg King, “The Day of the Lord in Zephaniah,” *BSac* 152 (1995): 16–32.

⁵ All English translations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) or otherwise stated.

And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me, says the LORD of hosts (3:3–5).⁶

The Day of Yahweh is not only a day of judgment for covenant violators but also the Day of hope (Mal 3:16–4:6). The assurance that a day is coming when Yahweh will place all things under divine judgment, and in turn create an entirely new sequence of events whereby truth, justice, equity and righteousness will triumph is one that the book of Malachi holds in common with the rest of the OT. In the discussions that follow, this article examines as a background, eschatological hope in the OT, the eschatological peculiarity of the discourse of Malachi's Day of Yahweh, the identities of Malachi's eschatological figures as well as the dual roles of the eschatological messenger; namely, cultic restoration and Yahweh's righting of past wrongs and the reversal of sinful societal order in the overall context of the eschatological day of Yahweh.

B ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Prophetic literatures that were composed after the return from the Babylonian exile have been the subject of lively scholarly debate in the last half century. Much of this debate centred on the relationship between prophecy and apocalypticism, or between prophetic and apocalyptic literature.⁷ In this regard, post-exilic prophecy was regarded as the grey area between prophecy and apocalypticism, and eschatology was considered their point of contact.⁸ In his attempt to create a distinction between prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology, Paul D. Hanson writes:

Prophetic eschatology we define as a religious perspective which focuses on the prophetic announcement to the nation of the divine plans for Israel and the world which the prophet has witnessed unfolding in the divine council and which he translates into the terms of plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality; that is, the prophet interprets for the king and people how the plans of

⁶ Michael U. Udoekpo, *Re-Thinking the Day of YHWH and the Restoration of Fortunes in the Prophet Zephaniah: An Exegetical and Theological Study of 1:14–18; 3:14–20* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 228.

⁷ Antonios Finitis, *Vision and Eschatology: A Socio-Historical Analysis of Zechariah 1–6* (LSTS 79; New York: T & T Clark International, 2011), 5.

⁸ Finitis, *Vision and Eschatology*, 6.

the divine council will be effected within the context of their nation's history and the history of the world.

Apocalyptic eschatology we define as a religious perspective which focuses on the disclosure (usually esoteric in nature) to the elect of the cosmic vision of Yahweh's sovereignty – especially as it relates to his acting to deliver his faithful – which disclosure the visionaries have largely ceased to translate into the terms of plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality due to a pessimistic view of reality growing out of the bleak post-exilic conditions within which those associated with the visionaries found themselves. These conditions seemed unsuitable to them as a context for the envisioned restoration of Yahweh's people.⁹

What is clear from this distinction is that "both perspectives are eschatological, in the sense that there is the expectation of a future in which God will be revealed to the world and the faithful of God's people will be vindicated."¹⁰ Bill T. Arnold puts it further,

The assumption in prophetic eschatology is that the evil in the world lies *internally* among the people of God. . . . The main problems addressed are idolatry and injustice, and on a broader scale the failure to do *tôrāh* in the world. The solution is for God's people to repent and practice righteousness and justice (wherein the social ethics in the Prophets). The assumption in apocalyptic thinking is that evil in the world is *external* to the people of God. That is, the main problem impeding God's work in the world is the evil and wickedness of empires and rulers and systems that control human history. The main problems addressed are arrogance, pride, abuse of power, and on a broader scale lawlessness and tyranny. . . . The emphasis in this perspective falls on God overthrowing that wickedness in the world so that God's people can live faithfully in the world as his people. Each of these perspectives arises from a particular historical and social context.¹¹

⁹ Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 11–12.

¹⁰ Katrina Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah: A Study of the Formation of a Mantological Wisdom Anthology* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994), 10–11.

¹¹ Bill T. Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (ed. Jerry L. Walls; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23–39 (33).

The term Eschatology (*eschatos logos*) actually means "a doctrine of the last things" or a distinct age beyond the present age.¹² It deals with expectations of beliefs that are characteristic of a certain religion; namely the world or part of it moves to a definite goal (*telos*); and that there is a new final order of affairs beyond the present. It is simply the doctrine of consummation of the world-process in a supreme crisis leading on into a permanent state.¹³ According to Sigmund Mowinckel, eschatology is a doctrine or a complex of ideas about "the last things." Every eschatology includes "in some form or other a dualistic conception of the course of history, and implies that the present state of things and the present world order will suddenly come to an end and be superseded by another of an essentially different kind."¹⁴ This definition, understood in this manner, with particular reference to the OT, reveals that there is little eschatology in the OT. For if eschatology is a doctrine of the end of the world and the history of humankind, there is no eschatology at all in the OT prophets.¹⁵ Seen in this light, Roland E. Clements notes that a major aspect of this conception of eschatology is that the coming consummation lies on the other side of history. A characteristic element of eschatology in relation to the OT hope is the idea of two ages, namely, the present age and the age to come. This is not only developed in later apocalyptic writings, but is present in the OT.¹⁶

In his conception, Rainer Albertz explains that the apocalyptic revelation of the imminent end of history is nothing other than an interpretation of the exilic period. Of course, no one can prove that the apocalyptic conception of an *eschaton* when all prior history would come to an end and an entirely new age of salvation would dawn sprang directly from reflection on the exilic fate of Israel. However, the many substantive and structural points of contact between the understanding of the exile as a period of divine judgment, long-lasting but limited by God's faithfulness, and this new conception of history meant that the latter could be supported, interpreted, and even calculated on the basis of the exile.¹⁷ Thus, it is no accident that this darkest period in the history of Israel could not be integrated fully until there was a historical schema based on the termination of a history gone massively awry. While the exile had forced Israel

¹² Elmer A. Martens, "Eschatology," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 178–185 (178).

¹³ Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* (ed. James T. Dennison Jr.; New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2001), 1.

¹⁴ Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956; repr.: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 125.

¹⁵ Udoekpo, *Re-Thinking the Day of YHWH*, 30.

¹⁶ Roland E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (SBT 43; London: SCM, 1965), 104.

¹⁷ Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (trans. David Green; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 40.

to suffer an abrupt end to its political history, it nevertheless survived. It is therefore probably no accident that in Israel the apocalyptic concept of the end of world history and the beginning of a new age could come to appear so plausible.¹⁸

Old Testament eschatological hope receives its clearest expression from the 8th century B.C.E. onwards and most probably in the post-exilic period, but its roots go deep into Israel's covenant faith.¹⁹ The presence of eschatology in the OT gradually became more prominent in the prophets and in later Jewish apocalyptic texts, which began to appear already in the canon of the OT itself.²⁰ Israelite eschatology is manifested in the expectation of a future *eon* radically discontinuous with the present, in which the circumstances of history will be transformed and the present cosmos redeemed by God.²¹ Thus, central to this Israelite understanding is the idea of the

radical wrongness of the present world and the conviction that radical changes, to make this right, will indeed occur "in that day," that is, at some time known to God. With this in mind, the people of God are called upon to live faithfully to the covenant, hearing Yahweh's call to righteous behavior, resulting in an "eschatological ethic."²²

According to Arnold, the conceptual foundations for Israel's eschatology, then, may be traceable along a historical continuum in the narration of the redemptive history, beginning with the ancestral promises of Genesis (12:1–3),²³ which later become the "realised eschatology" for the Mosaic period (Exod 2:24–25). While the Sinaitic covenant traditions themselves appear to

¹⁸ Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 44.

¹⁹ Robin L. Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Apollos: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 273.

²⁰ Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology," 23.

²¹ It is instructive to note that the temporal orientation of the Hebrew concept of time is connected to spatial categories and that the past is "before" one (*qedhem*) and the future is "behind" (*ahar*). Thus the Israelites, with apparently all other people of the ancient world, perceived themselves standing on a line going from east to west, from past to future, moving along the line backward. See also Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (BibSem 85; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 33–52.

²² Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology," 24–25.

²³ Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology," 25. "The numerical extent of the progeny as 'a great nation' (Gen 12:2), and the geographical extent of the Promised Land (Gen 15:18–21) could not come to reality in the lives of the ancestral generations. The promises themselves are by definition projected into the future." Thus Ernst Jenni could express that the sequence of history is ascertained by the promise which Yahweh gives and fulfills from time to time. "Eschatology is the part of the history of salvation which is still in prospect and which presses for realization." Ernst Jenni, "Eschatology of the Old Testament," *IDB* 2: 126–133 (127).

make little direct contribution to the development of eschatology in Israel, their insistence on future compliance to the covenant stipulations creates a distinctly forward-looking trajectory. At the heart of prophetic eschatology is the consideration given to the Day of Yahweh. The exact phrase *yôm yhwh*, "day of the Lord," occurs first in Amos 5:18.²⁴ While it tells little about the day itself, the prophet (Amos) clearly refers to an idea well established by the eighth century B.C.E.. In some passages, it suggests a day of battle, when Yahweh will finally defeat all those powers that oppose him and will establish his reign.²⁵ Scholarly debate has centred on the punitive origins of the day of Yahweh, with most gravitating to the theory that it was derived from the holy war tradition,²⁶ particularly as these traditions were carried through the royal cult.²⁷

Walter Eichrodt describes it as a day when "the nations as far as the ends of the earth would be crushed before his onslaught, and with them their gods would topple from their thrones, that Israel's God might ascend the throne of the universe alone."²⁸ Mowinckel links the Day of the Lord with the annual enthronement festival, which celebrated God's renewed victory over the forces of chaos, and gave assurance that he would not fail his people. He argues that the theme was later taken up by Deutero-Isaiah after the fall of Jerusalem, though by then its fulfilment focuses on the distant future.²⁹ Under the influence of this traditional element, the prophetic concept of the *eschaton* was also to some extent systematised, that is to say, predictions connected with the

²⁴ The expression *yôm yhwh* occurs in an equivalent form in Isa 2:12; Ezek 30:3; Zech 14:1. It is referred to as *the day of the Lord's wrath* (Ezek 7:19; Zeph 1:15, 18), the *Lord's Day of vengeance* (Isa 34:8; Jer 46:10 cf. Isa 61:2; 63:4), and *of trampling and tumult* (Isa 22:5). Sometimes it is referred to simply as *the day* (Lam 1:21; Ezek 7:7) or *that day* (Isa 2:11; cf. 24:21; 27:1).

²⁵ For example, Isa 13:4–5; 34:1–6; 63:1–6; Jer 46:10; Ezek 13:5; 30:3–4; Joel 2:11; Obad 1; Zeph 1:16; Zech. 14:3. The people of Amos's day clearly hoped and longed for Yahweh's day, in which Yahweh would punish Israel's enemies and deliver them from their troubles. But somehow, the prophet surprisingly and dramatically reversed their popular ideology by turning the day into a judgment, not for Israel's enemies, but for Israel. See examples of dramatic reversal in Amos 3:1–2, 5:4–6, 9:7; as well as Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 182–184.

²⁶ Gerhard von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of Day of Yahweh," *JSS* 4 (1959): 97–108.

²⁷ Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 111.

²⁸ Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (vol. 1; London: SCM, 1961), 460–62.

²⁹ Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 132–133.

expectation of the Day of Yahweh which began from different traditions were to some extent blended.³⁰

While there is nothing intrinsically eschatological about the day of Yahweh, its use takes on a negative expectation, and when tied to the positive expectations of the people rooted and grounded as they were in Sinaitic covenant hopes and Davidic expectations, this prophetic preaching becomes a negative eschatology, as it were.³¹ After the exile, the conceptual foundations at the centre of the saving event of Israel, that is, the creatorship of Yahweh and God of the fathers, Yahweh's covenants with Israel at Sinai and Zion, and the one alone who supports and upholds the Davidic King, coalesced in the post-exilic prophets in a new era of eschatological development. Influential in these developments are the ideologies prevalent during the exile, especially those preserved in the writings of second Isaiah. Post-exilic prophets like Haggai and his associates considered the leftover population to be made up of devoted members of the restoration community.³² In Hag 2:3, the prophet asks: "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?" The acknowledgement by the leftover population that the present temple is unsatisfactory became the encouraging foundation for the earnest expectation and eschatological realisation of the glory to come and of the promises of the covenant in which he has an eye to the Messianic age (Hag 2:4-5).

In the prophetic books of Zechariah and Malachi, the writers' uses of "remnant" (*sh'ē rîth*) are more eschatological in nature. For instance in the book of Zechariah, "Yahweh will deal with a future remnant differently to the way he dealt with Israel in former times. Cursing and judgment will give way to blessing (8:11-13). Even the Philistines can join this remnant (9:7). The remnant is that which survives the eschatological battle against the nations."³³ In Malachi on the other hand, the remnant are not those who survived the exile, but those who are committed and dedicated to Yahweh in the postexilic community and they will thus survive the coming wrath (3:16-18). In this regard, Yahweh is presented as one who is faithfully committed to those whose hearts are directed toward the covenant of the fathers (4:6).³⁴

The restored community however faced poverty, poor harvests, internal adversaries, corruption and idolatry, threat of foreign invasion, and despair. In the light of such deprivation and hardship, these prophets (Mal 1:2-3; Isa

³⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (Bloomsbury: SMC Press, 1968), 99.

³¹ David L. Petersen, "Eschatology OT," *ABD* 2:575-579 (577).

³² Gerhard F. Hasel, "Remnant," *ISBE* 4:131-138 (133).

³³ William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 130.

³⁴ Dumbrell, *The Search*, 130.

58:13–14; 63:7–9) evinced a renewed interest in the ancestral traditions, and the covenants (Zech 9:11; Mal 2:10; 3:1). They explored the implications of monotheism, which was basic for a new political period (Zech 4:10; Mal 1:11). These prophets were concerned with the ethical demands of Israel’s relationship with Yahweh (Zech 7:8; Mal 3:5), and also reflected an increased emphasis on the spirit of Yahweh (Hag 2:5; Zech 4:6, 6:8, 12:10). Their eschatological vision thus started to take on a transformative and cosmic dimension, resulting in descriptions of this new eon that will transcend all current human experiences.³⁵ The focus, then, of the next section, will be specifically on the eschatological peculiarity of the discourse of Malachi

C ESCHATOLOGICAL PECULIARITY OF THE DISCOURSE OF MALACHI’S DAY OF YAHWEH

Malachi gives less of a broad exposition of eschatological ideas than any other prophet, perhaps because he uses the form of the polemic dialogue.³⁶ The distinctiveness of the eschatological dialogue of Malachi consists first of all, in the prevalence of the negative accent on the accusation for sin in contrast to the encouraging message of the good things to come which appears respectively compacted and reserved.³⁷ Malachi’s remarkable eschatological characteristics as relatively established by the negative arrangement, includes: the promise of universalism in which Yahweh’s name will be great among the Gentiles. The key component of this will be that “a pure offering” will be brought from them to Yahweh in the widest compass (1:11), the coming of Yahweh to his temple (3:1), the judgment aspect of Yahweh’s advent namely; “day of wrath” (3:2; 4:1), the rising of the “sun of *ts^edhāqā^h*” (4:2), and preceding the coming of Yahweh is “behold, I send my messenger before me” (3:1) as well as the specific mission of Elijah which is defined as a “turning of the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (4:6).³⁸

The negative accusations of sin is graphically made clear by the remark that the misdemeanour charged to the people’s account bears in its entirety a ritual quality, although the socio-economic elements similar to those of the older prophets are by no means totally absent. These remarkable and discouraging elements include: the bringing of polluted offerings on the altar; of the blind, lame, sick, torn animals to the sanctuary for sacrifice (1:7–8, 13); an attitude of ritual disillusionment and a logical apathy underpinning the offering they bring; the priests’ conspiracy with the ritual negligence – an infringement of the covenant of Levi (2:8 cf. 2:1–3; 3:14); the failure to bring the required tithes to the sanctuary (3:10); the marrying of the daughter of a strange god and the unfaithfulness involved in this to the marital ideal in Israel (2:15). Mala-

³⁵ Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology,” 28–29.

³⁶ Von Rad, *Message*, 225.

³⁷ Vos, *The Eschatology*, 160.

³⁸ Vos, *The Eschatology*, 160–161.

chi's eschatological vision involved the expectation of purifying judgment for God's people. By his time, serious cultic and social problems were manifesting within the post-exilic community (1:6–14; 2:8–17; 3:6–15; 4:6). Indecision with respect to repentance would bring about divine judgment. Yahweh would come as the sovereign Lord to enforce his covenant (3:1). He is to come unexpectedly, and his day is to bring judgment upon the godless; but for those who fear God, "the sun of salvation" will shine forth.³⁹ The idea that Yahweh will send a messenger before his own final advent (Mal 3:1) is only found in Malachi.⁴⁰ The attempt in the following sections focuses on the identity of the eschatological figure as well as the dual roles of cultic restoration and Yahweh's correcting of past wrongs and the reversal of sinful societal order in the overall context of the eschatological day of Yahweh.

1 Malachi's Eschatological Covenant Messenger

Malachi 3:1 is believed to be an enigmatic passage. The personality of the different characters indicated in the passage continues to attract fascinating questions for scholarly debates.⁴¹ The ambiguities in this text have caused exegetes to interpret it in a variety of ways. The text refers to three figures: "my messenger," "the Lord," and "the messenger of the covenant." Are these three really the same person or two or three different beings? With whom therefore is each to be associated? While scholars have answered these questions in totally different manners, there is wide agreement that these verses are a later addition to the book and reveal nothing about the author's intention.⁴² From a redactional perspective, scholars observe

that third person singular forms dominate in 3:1b–4 (he will come to his temple v1; his coming, he appears, he is like fire v2; he will sit, he will purify and refine v3) while 3:1a, 5 is characterized by first person singular forms (my messenger v1; I shall come near, I shall

³⁹ Vos, *The Eschatology*, 161–162.

⁴⁰ Von Rad, *Message*, 225.

⁴¹ See for example, David M. Miller, "The Messenger, the Lord, and the Coming Judgment in the Reception History of Malachi 3," *NTS* 53/1 (2007): 1–16; Stephanus (Fanie) D. Snyman, "Once Again: Investigating the Identity of the Three Figures Mentioned in Malachi 3:1," *VetE* 27/3 (2006): 1031–1044; Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 305–306; Bruce V. Malchow, "The Messenger of the Covenant in Malachi 3," *JBL* 103 (1984): 252–255.

⁴² Snyman, "Once again," 1032; David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 209–212; John M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Malachi* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980), 63.

be v5), and thus conclude that 3:1b–4 represents a later hand at work.⁴³

It is believed that the messenger in Mal 3:1 is Elijah in Mal 3:23–24 [4:5–6 KJV].⁴⁴ Thus the concluding sentences of the corpus of the prophetic book, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal 3:23–24 [4:5–6 KJV]) are an interpretation of the announcement of a preparing messenger in Mal 3:1: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me."

The coming of Elijah will not only be to still the anger of Yahweh but also to assemble Israel's tribes, in order that the duty of the servant of Yahweh (Isa 49:6) is handed over to him.⁴⁵ Robert C. Dentan and Otto Eissfeldt are of the opinion that there is another late attempt to identify the messenger in 1:1, where the author of the book is called "my messenger," *mal'ākhî*. This however, does not make the original meaning of 3:1 clear.⁴⁶ John M. P. Smith and Rex Mason believe that the messenger is an unspecified figure.⁴⁷ It is further suggested that the angel of the Lord and Yahweh are interchangeable and thus, the phrase "the angel of the Lord" 3:1 is a "euphemism for God to emphasize the transcendence of Yahweh."⁴⁸ The angel might be conceived according to the old concept of "the angel of the Lord," who is a manifestation of Yahweh,⁴⁹ and a somewhat independent, spiritual servant of God.⁵⁰ Prophetic interpretations include Malachi himself,⁵¹ and a future, greater prophet.⁵² It is also observed that *mal'ākhî* is an allusion to a prophetic envoy whose duty is that of making ready the eschatological arrival of Yahweh. In this regard, *hā'ādhôn* is

⁴³ Snyman, "Once again," 1032; cf., Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14*, 209–212.

⁴⁴ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Malachi – God's Unchanging Love* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 80; Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 340.

⁴⁵ Markus Öhler, "The Expectation of Elijah and the Presence of the Kingdom of God," *JBL* 118/3 (1999): 461–476 (461–62). In the LXX, the reading of the prophecy of Malachi differs somewhat, saying that Elijah will not only bring the hearts of the fathers to the sons but equally the hearts of the people to their neighbours.

⁴⁶ Robert C. Dentan, "The Book of Malachi," *IB* 6: 1117–1144 (1137); Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 441.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Malachi*, 63; Rex Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (CBC; New York: Cambridge University, 1977), 152.

⁴⁸ Stephen L. White, "Angel of the Lord: Messenger of Euphemism?" *TynBul* 50/2 (1999): 299–305.

⁴⁹ Dentan, "Malachi," 1137.

⁵⁰ Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 405, 421.

⁵¹ Mason, *The Books*, 152.

⁵² Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 298.

an indication of Yahweh visiting his temple while the *malākh habhbh^erîth* (messenger of the covenant) is understood to be "a later addition to the text and identified as a guardian angel."⁵³ Eugene H. Merrill argued that because the word *malākh* is used twice it must be a reference to one and the same person whose task is that of preparing the Lord's way.⁵⁴ This might quite be contrary to the view that "my messenger" is a prophetic envoy while the other two designations in the light of the "strong elements of parallelism between the two lines" aim at the same character who perhaps might be a lesser divine being or a prophetic character "endowed by the same sorts of powerful abilities that Elijah received according to Malachi 3:23–24."⁵⁵

What is remarkable and important here is that Petersen's description does not indicate that *hā'ādhôn* is "the Lord" pointing directly to Yahweh. Karl W. Weyde believes that the allusion to *hā'ādhôn* "the Lord" is Yahweh. To him, the messenger of the covenant is not different from "the angel of the Lord" which is similar to what is found elsewhere in the OT.⁵⁶ Thus with respect to the personality of "my messenger" Paul L. Redditt holds, "it is impossible to determine whether the prophet had himself or an angel of the Lord in mind." In spite of an awareness by some that the clause of 3:1, "and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple" could refer to a messenger, virtually all modern interpreters agree that the "Lord" is Yahweh.⁵⁷ One observation that this is correct is that apparently it could only be said of Yahweh that the Temple was his (Zech 1:16). Again, the reference here to seeking the Lord fits well with the context in 2:17, where Israel had asked where God was. The Lord for whom they were searching will appear. He will come for an eschatological judgment.⁵⁸

Notwithstanding, "messenger of the covenant" is believed to be the same as "the Lord" but the personality of the messenger who is going to come before the Lord is uncertain.⁵⁹ Joyce G. Baldwin, while identifying these different figures notes that even though the personality of "my messenger" is undisclosed, it is to be taken as a figure with a special mission that should be

⁵³ Snyman, "Once again," 1033.

⁵⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 429, 432.

⁵⁵ Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14*, 210–212.

⁵⁶ Karl W. Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Problems, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi* (BZAW 288; Berlin: Walter de Gruyden, 2000), 290.

⁵⁷ Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 176.

⁵⁸ Cf. Malachi 3:5; Malchow, "The Messenger," 252ff.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum – Malachi* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 184.

differentiated from that of the messenger of the covenant.⁶⁰ Malchow stresses that if vv. 1–4 are an addition to the text, whom then did the interpolator consider “the messenger of the covenant” to be? Apart from those who identify this figure with God, there are those who connect this “messenger of the covenant” with the same type of being as the messenger at the beginning of the verse. Thus, some relate the figure in v. 1b to an angel or specifically to a guardian angel or the angel of the Lord.⁶¹ “The messenger of the covenant could also be a prophetic envoy.” However, the terms “messenger” and “covenant” can more easily be identified with a priestly figure in this context.⁶² These terms are used with that kind of association in the book of Malachi, and the interpolator may well have been influenced by the book to continue that same line of thought.

Some interpreters have decided to go for a messianic–Christological interpretation, identifying two different personalities.⁶³ The messenger (*mal'ākhî*) then is associated with the *messenger of the covenant*: a human being linked with Elijah the prophet.⁶⁴ There is therefore a logical link between *hā'ādhôn* as Yahweh and the “messenger of the covenant” with the exception that the “messenger of the covenant” is “to be identified with the pre–incarnate Christ,”⁶⁵ in this situation.⁶⁶ According to Stuart, this verse is “unmistakably messianic doctrine . . . It describes God’s angel who represents God among the people and goes ahead as they leave Sinai for the promised Land, to prepare their way so that they will have success in conquering the promised land.”⁶⁷ In light of this basic perspective Stuart concludes:

Malachi 3:1 and 3:23–24 [4:5–6] together constitute one of Malachi’s special contributions to prophecy. They are the most detailed Old Testament contexts indicating that the coming of the Messiah would be preceded by a precursor who would announce the need to prepare for his coming. In this regard Malachi is even more explicit

⁶⁰ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (TOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter–Varsity Press, 1972), 242–243.

⁶¹ Malchow, “The Messenger,” 252.

⁶² Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 289–290. It is also believed and argued that the messenger could have been a priestly envoy in the light of overwhelming criticisms and curses the prophet placed on the priestly class. See Malchow, “The Messenger,” 252.

⁶³ Kaiser Jr., *Malachi*, 80; Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (vol. 3; ed. Thomas E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 1245–1396 (1350).

⁶⁴ Beth Glazier–McDonald, *Malachi the Divine Messenger* (SBLDS 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 130–133.

⁶⁵ The messenger of the covenant is “God’s own self–revelation, the pre–incarnate Christ of the numerous OT Christophanies.” Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Promise of the Arrival of Elijah in Malachi and the Gospel,” *GTJ* 3/2 (1982): 221–233 (225).

⁶⁶ Kaiser Jr., *Malachi*, 81–82.

⁶⁷ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1350.

than the more famous verses from Isaiah 40:3–5 . . . that speaks of the "voice" that announces the messianic advent.⁶⁸

From the foregoing, it is obvious that several scholarly positions have been noted with respect to the identity and or identities of Malachi's eschatological figures. There are those who hold that *mal'ākhî* ("my messenger") is the prophet himself (Malachi), an unidentified prophet or a prophetic harbinger, with the *malākh habbh^erîth* either as an angel, imprecise eschatological figure or a priestly envoy and *hā'ādhôn* is God or Yahweh. On the other hand, some scholars have chosen not to identify the messenger, while others have decided to go for a messianic–Christological interpretation. In this paper, our conclusion is in line with that of Snyman,

The three figures mentioned are references to two persons, the one human and the other divine . . . A later redactor saw the prophecies of this prophet as the preparation for the coming of Yahweh himself.⁶⁹

2 The Messenger's Dual Roles of Cultic Restoration and Enactment of Social Justice

Malachi's fourth and sixth disputations introduce a new topic namely, the coming of the divine messenger to cleanse Yahweh's people and restore true worship and obedience to the ethical standards of the law. Earlier Malachi had castigated the priests and people for their attitude and actions toward sacrifices and the altar. Now in the light of the lawlessness alluded to in 2:17, the corruption of the priesthood in 3:3, the inadequacy of worship in 3:4 and the corruption of personal and civil morality in 3:5, readers are introduced to three urgent issues: the need for messianic intervention, the need for the day of judgement and the need for social justice. In the discussions that follow, this section of the article examines the reformation of the priesthood and restoration of cultic worship and Yahweh's correcting past wrongs and the reversal of sinful societal order.

2a Reformation of the Priesthood and Restoration of Acceptable Worship (Mal 3:1–4)

Malachi 1:6–2:9 contains the longest disputation directed towards the priests. These verses are about one third of Malachi's oracles.⁷⁰ These disputes are

⁶⁸ Stuart, "Malachi," 1352.

⁶⁹ Snyman, "Once again," 1043.

⁷⁰ Eileen M. Schuller, "The Book of Malachi," *NIB* 6:843–877 (858); Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 173; Sean P. Kealy, *An Interpretation of the Twelve Minor Prophets of the Hebrew Bible: The Emergence of Eschatology as a Theological Theme* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 233; James D. Nogalski,

composed of two distinct speech-acts with Yahweh as the subject of the first (1:6–14) and the Levitical priesthood as subject of the second (2:1–9).⁷¹ Although Malachi reflects the social and religious struggles of the 5th century, however, his primary concern is the priesthood and its cultic activities. In these verses one sees a blunt critique of two sins of the priests: the priests of Yehud are accused of disrespecting, dishonouring, despising, and defiling Yahweh – they question his accusations as if he either lied or was ignorant. But the principal way they despise and defile Yahweh day after day is through deficient and unacceptable offerings (1:6–2:3). They are also accused of causing many to falter by their teaching (2:8).⁷²

The Levitical priests had failed in discharging the duties of their sacred trust – teaching Israel the laws of Yahweh (cf. Deut 33:10) and by implication, the people of Yahweh were led astray for lack of the knowledge of God (cf. Hos 4:6).⁷³ While Mal 1:6–9, 12; 2:1–3 clearly addresses the priests who were responsible for accepting the animals brought to them for sacrifice, the people were also culpable by choosing second-class animals and presenting them at the temple,⁷⁴ at a time when worship is conceived to take place among the nations where Yahweh’s name receives proper respect (1:11–12). This failure causes Yahweh to threaten to do away with temple sacrifices altogether (1:10). The people bring inferior sacrifices which they would not dare present to their Persian governor (1:8).⁷⁵

Even though Yahweh’s people have survived the ordeals of national defeat and disappointment through his sovereignty, Malachi asserts that they cannot carry on properly without the reformation, and or transformation of their leaders. As Zechariah exposes worthless shepherds (Zech 10:2–3; 11:15–17), so Malachi lambasts corrupt priests. Employing direct speech, Malachi levels harsh indictments against the priests who engage in practices that impugn the integrity of Yahweh and set the whole community in severe danger.⁷⁶ The discourse unit (Mal 3:1–4) focuses on their cleansing and restoration of acceptable worship. The announcement of the coming of Yahweh in 3:5 which answers

The Book of the Twelve: Micah–Malachi (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2011), 1003; Mark J. Boda, “Perspectives on Priests in Haggai–Malachi,” in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in honor of Eileen Schuller on the occasion of her 65th birthday* (STDJ 98; ed. Jeremy Penner, Ken M. Penner, and Cecilia Wassen; Brill: Leiden, 2012), 13–33 (15).

⁷¹ Hill, *Malachi*, 172.

⁷² Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *Priestly Rites and Prophetic Rage: Post-Exilic Prophetic Critique of the Priesthood* (FAT 2/19; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 18.

⁷³ Hill, *Malachi*, 173.

⁷⁴ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 214.

⁷⁵ Nogalski, *Micah–Malachi*, 1003.

⁷⁶ Louis Stulman and Hyun C. P. Kim, *You are My People: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 241.

the frustrations expressed in 2:17 is preceded by an announcement that Yahweh will send his messenger 3:1 whose duties will be that of the restoration of cultic worship and judgement of evildoers.⁷⁷ The focal point in the fourth oracle, 2:17–3:5 is the purification of the priests, who are described as “sons of Levi” (3:3–4). They are considered as impure, probably because of sin, or because of contact with impurity. Again the authors shall briefly examine the medium, method, and motive of their purification exercise.

As 3:1 stands, *mal’ākhî* (“my messenger”) is considered to be the agent who instigates and carries out the purification. This messenger is described from Yahweh’s point of view as “one whom Yahweh is ‘sending,’ identified as *mal’ākhî* (‘my messenger’), and from the point of view of the people as *hā’ādhôn* (‘the Lord’), *yābhô’ ’el-hêkhālô* (‘the one who is coming to his temple’) as well as *ûmal’akh habhbh^erîth* (‘the messenger of the covenant’).⁷⁸ This promised messenger of restoration of positive events is described by two clauses as someone whom the audience, including the priests, has asked for: *hā’ādhôn ’āsher-’aththem m^ebhaqshîm* (“the Lord whom you are seeking”) and *ûmal’akh habhbh^erîth ’āsher-’aththem ḥāphētsîm* (“the messenger of the covenant whom you seek”). This indeed, within the prophetic corpus, is no doubt a messianic concept.⁷⁹

The expression *ûphinnā^h-dherekh l^ephānāy* (“and he will clear the way before me”) recalls the great roads in Babylon which were levelled and adorned from the triumphal entry of kings and gods. Unlike these pagan gods and kings, whose glory dwells in their images, Yahweh shows his splendour in that he rescues his people. The expression also recalls the celebratory worship processions in Jerusalem.⁸⁰ The characteristic feature of “the day of the Lord” (*yôm yhw^h*) in the OT is indicated by the expression: *ûphith’ō yābhô’ ’el-hêkhālô hā’ādhôn* (“the Lord will suddenly come to his temple”). As the first of the Day of Yahweh’s passage in Malachi (the second being in the sixth oracle in 3:19 [4:1]), the prophet assigned various elements about Yahweh’s decisive intervention in history: the swiftness and suddenness of the arrival of the Day, its profound bleakness for Yahweh’s enemies, Yahweh’s flawless victory over his foes (including Israel if their sins so warrant), and his judgement, resulting in the righting of past wrongs and the reversal of sinful societal order.⁸¹

In 3:2, the prophet introduces two rhetorical questions about the Day of Yahweh: *ûmî m^ekhalkēl ’eth-yôm bô’ô* (“who will survive the day of his com-

⁷⁷ Julia M. O’Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* (SBLDS 121; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 74.

⁷⁸ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1350; Tiemeyer, *Priestly Rites*, 257.

⁷⁹ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1350.

⁸⁰ Cf. Ps 84:6; James N. Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary of Malachi* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics Inc., 1998), 134.

⁸¹ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1347; Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 135.

ing”) *ûmî hâ’ômēdh b^ehērā’ôthô* (“and who can stand his appearance”) and a description of his character: *kî-hû’ k^e’ēsh m^etsārēph* (“he is like refiner’s fire”) and *ûkh^ebhōrîth m^ekhabbh^esîm* (“like a fuller’s soap”). The two questions which are considered to be synonymous present the imagery of one who does not fall in battle but rather who holds his own in a courtroom and thus those who can stand are those who have faithfully kept Yahweh’s covenant in contrast to those who are no longer under its protection. The two similes: *’ēsh* (fire) and *bōrîth* (soap) characterise Yahweh’s role on his day and indicate that he will make his covenant people morally better.⁸²

As the agent of the covenant, the *mal’ākhi* of 3:1, will not only punish covenant violators (act as judge) but will also purify the priests so as to restore cultic worship to its former purity. In 3:3 the actual method of the purification is then described. The following verbs are used: The primary sense of *tsārāph* (“to smelt”), a secondary sense (“to refine”); of *tāhēr* (“to cleanse, purify” in physical manner) and *zāqqaq* (“to strain out, filter”). In the *pi’el* stem these denote the smelting of metals, for the impurity remains in the crucible, while the refined metal flows away.⁸³ This verse suggests the skill and attentiveness of the divine artisan seated at his work. Here Yahweh is depicted as a refiner who sits over a receptacle containing silver ore until all components or substances are liquidated, leaving only the silver. As a silversmith purifies, Yahweh will purify and refine the sons of Levi (*b^enê-lēwî*) that is the priests like gold and silver. To explain the priority of silver over gold Smith notes:

In Egypt before the establishment of the New Kingdom in the sixteenth century B.C.E., silver was more highly prized than gold. But at the time of Malachi, gold was surely more valuable than silver . . . silver was still mentioned first because the process of refining silver is more delicate and anxious than the process of refining gold. . . . When the silver becomes molten it gives off some twenty times its own volume of oxygen with a noticeable hissing and bubbling. This phenomenon is known as “spitting.” . . . Unless the molten silver is treated with carbon . . . the silver re-absorbs oxygen from the air and loses its sheen and purity.⁸⁴

If there will be purification of Yahweh’s people at all, it must start with the temple and priesthood, those responsible for the religious decline of the people. Their need for purification was made clear in 2:3, where Yahweh threatened to “spread dung of their faces.”⁸⁵ The purification process will begin with the priests (*b^enê-lēwî*) because they serve to mediate the relationship

⁸² Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 140.

⁸³ Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 140–141.

⁸⁴ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984), 329.

⁸⁵ E. Ray Clendenen, “Malachi,” in *Haggai, Malachi* (NAC 21A; ed. Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2004), 203–464 (389).

between Yahweh and the other Israelites. The whole people will, however be later included, as made explicit in 3:4. The essence of this purification exercise is to enable the priests to bring pure offerings again to Yahweh (*w^ehāyû lyhwh (la'dhōnāy) maghghîshê minhā^h bitsdhāqā^h 3:2b*) with the result that the Judahites offerings would please Yahweh anew (*w^e'ārbhā^h lyhwh (la'dhōnāy) minhath y^ehûdhā^h wîrûshālāim 3:4*). The phrase *minhā^h bitsdhāqā^h*⁸⁶ means that the sacrifice will be in accordance with the requirements of the law and by it, the very presentation of right offering, the action is emphasised.⁸⁷ The purified people will continuously offer sacrifices in a way described.

The acceptable offering in the restored cult is called *minhath y^ehûdhā^h wîrûshālāim* (“the offering of Judah and Jerusalem”). Jerusalem here refers to the capital of the nation, Judah, thus the whole nation is referred to in 3:4.⁸⁸ The announced restoration of the cult implies that the presentation of offerings will be as in “the days of old” (*kîmê 'ôlām*) and in “former years” (*shānîm qadhmōniyyôth*). Although *kîmê 'ôlām* is not definite, it most probably refers here to the Mosaic era, which was characterised by Israel’s complete reliance upon Yahweh, perhaps the Davidic era, and the early year of Solomon’s reign are included also.⁸⁹ The purification will enable the priesthood as a whole to function anew and the future sacrifices of Judah will be pleasing to Yahweh, as they were of old.

2b Enactment of Justice in the Light of Lawlessness and Corruption of Personal and Civil Morality (Mal 3:5; 3:16–4:6)

The prophets have long been understood as champions of social justice. In both the Former Prophets (Historical) and Prophetic books, prophets demonstrate broad social concern, which is rooted in the person of God, who is committed to humanity and deeply moved by injustice and the suffering that it causes.⁹⁰ While they seldom accuse Israel of breaking specific laws, rather, they “appeal to known norms of humane conduct of ‘justice and righteousness’ norms which are exemplified in the ‘apodictic law,’ but cannot be limited by it.”⁹¹ Terence

⁸⁶ The right sacrifice reminds one of the sacrifices in Ps 51:19 that conform to the norm of what sacrifices should be. Objects which conform to a certain type are called *tsdq*: just balances, just weights, just measures are objects in conformity with what they ought to be (Lev 19:36; Ezek 45:10). Sacrifices of righteousness or sacrifices offered according to the accustomed rites. See Smith, *Malachi*, 329.

⁸⁷ Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 300.

⁸⁸ Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 144.

⁸⁹ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1355; Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 145.

⁹⁰ M. Daniel Carroll R., “Ethics,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 185–193 (185).

⁹¹ Walter J. Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 70–71.

E. Fretheim says: "In promoting social justice, the prophets were religious conservatives. They built on the ancient traditions of Israel and the central promises of God to call Israel to attend to issues of justice on behalf of the oppressed."⁹² The postexilic community was in a difficult and disappointing situation. In their varied circumstances their religious life was very nominal, and their morality had dwindled as they asked why there was no divine judgment on wrong doing. "Their problem was indeed the problem of every monotheistic religion: the origin of evil."⁹³ Here, the theodicy problem can be discerned: especially Exod 34:6–7, expresses questions about justice and vengeance, and about grace and remuneration from Yahweh's perspective.⁹⁴

In Mal 2:17, the prophet accuses the nation of two sins: practicing evil as if it were acceptable and practicing injustice as if Yahweh would never intervene in their affairs.⁹⁵ The expression *hōgha'tem* the *hip'il* form of the verb *yāgha'* ("to weary, wear out, and tire out")⁹⁶ generally means to tire from physical exertion as a result of prolong labour, travel, or other activity. It can as well refer to emotional disturbance or exhaustion from persistent stresses, sorrow, and trials of life. It is used figurative of God and implies a prolonged and often unpleasant activity that is soon to end.⁹⁷ These complaints grow out of an inner societal division. While the act of unfaithfulness that was rampant in Judah was a case of injustice, Judah could not recognise its own corruption but saw its present socio-economic crises as signs of Yahweh's unfairness and unfaithfulness to them. They expected Yahweh's blessings and abundance but they were reaping divine afflictions and scarcity as an alternative.

The expression *kol-ōsē^h rā' tōbh b'e'ênê yhw̄h ūbhāhem hū' hāphēts* ("Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them" 2:17) is clearly that of frustration and probably also of resignation. To them, the level of sin, crime, and corruption was such that it was as if God were

⁹² Terence E. Fretheim, "The Prophets and Social Justice: A Conservative Agenda," *WW* 28/2 (2008): 159–168 (159).

⁹³ Marjo C. A. Korpel, "Disillusion among Jews in the Postexilic Period," in *The Old Testament in Its World* (ed. Robert P. Gordon and Johannes C. de Moor; *OtSt* 52; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 135–157 (138).

⁹⁴ John Barton, "The Canonical Meaning of the Book of the Twelve," in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (ed. John Barton and David J. Reimer; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 59–73 (71); Raymond C. V. Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," in *Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Scott and William Wiseman; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 31–49; James L. Crenshaw, "Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Scharf; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2003), 175–191.

⁹⁵ Stuart, "Malachi," 1346

⁹⁶ BDB 388.

⁹⁷ Pohlig, *An Exegetical*, 129; Clendenen, "Malachi," 371–72.

encouraging it.⁹⁸ On the one hand there are those who practice evil, and on the other, there are the righteous. The latter are angry by the fact that Yahweh apparently allows the wicked to get away with injustice. This indeed was a radical affront to Yahweh and reflects clearly the crisis which the community undergoes.⁹⁹ The first expression, *kol-’ōsē^h rā’ tōbh b^e’ênê yhw^h ûbhāhem hû’ ḥāphēts* (“Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them”) is more a venting of emotion. The second, *’ô ’ayyē^h ’ēlōhê hammishpāt* (“or where is the God of justice?”) introduced by the rare clausal coordinating conjunction *’ô* and the adverbial interrogative *’ayyē^h* is more a call for explanation, which, of course, the rest of the oracle will provide. Yahweh does not let the challenge to his justice go unanswered. The God of Justice replies: *w^e qārabh^t ’ālêkhem lammishpāth* (“surely, I will draw near to you for judgement,” 3:5).

While Yahweh is pictured as a prosecutor in 2:17, he is described as both a witness and judge in 3:5. Malachi 3:5 rounds out the disputation/oracle by enumerating some of the kinds of practices that caused people to say: *kol-’ōsē^h rā’ tōbh b^e’ênê yhw^h ûbhāhem hû’ ḥāphēts* (“Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them”) or ask: *’ayyē^h ’ēlōhê hammishpāt* (“where if the God of justice?”). The drawing near of Yahweh for judgement is expressed by the verb *qārabh* (“to draw near, come, appear, and step forward”).¹⁰⁰ The verb is used in a forensic sense as often in Isaiah, but always others are called to come before God (Isa 34:1; 41:1, 5; 48:16; 57:3). It is only here that God is referred to as the one who comes.¹⁰¹ The phrase: *ēdh m^e mahēr* (“swift witness”) indicates that when the time comes for Yahweh to judge, he will do so quickly, without hesitation in passing sentence on the evildoers and executing the sentence.¹⁰²

In this juridical function of the Day of Yahweh, several violations of the Mosaic covenants are emphasised. They are mainly infractions of God’s covenant with Israel or simply the Mosaic Law. These infractions are all expressed in the participle, thereby denoting habitual actions.¹⁰³ The first enumeration of law breakers is the *khashsh^e phîm* (“sorcery” or “witchcraft”).¹⁰⁴ The verbal

⁹⁸ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1348.

⁹⁹ Finitsis, *Vision and Eschatology*, 29.

¹⁰⁰ BDB 897.

¹⁰¹ Clendenen, “Malachi,” 392; Stuart, “Malachi,” 1356.

¹⁰² Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 149.

¹⁰³ Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 148.

¹⁰⁴ This is an attempt to control the physical and the spiritual world through magical means such as incantations, charms, and rituals. The practice was an abomination to God (Deut 18:19–22), borrowed from pagan religion (2 Kgs 9:22) and widely practiced in Israel (in 2 Chr 33:6 they are lumped together with those who sacrificed their children in the fire, who practice divination, gave oracles, interpreted omens, cast

expression *kāshaph* is translated by many as a noun: “sorcerer” (KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT NJB, and NRSV). It is also translated as “to practice sorcery,”¹⁰⁵ “to practice witchcraft” (CEV). The fact that sorcery was going on in Malachi’s day reveals the severe level of disregard for the Mosaic Law and covenant in Judah.¹⁰⁶ What may be especially in view in the context of Malachi was probably the use of sorcery to harm people (cf. Ezek 13:18–20).¹⁰⁷

Another example of the violation of law is those who commit adultery (*bhamnā’āphîm*).¹⁰⁸ Adultery in the OT and in ancient Israel is defined as

sexual intercourse between a married or betrothed woman and any man other than her husband. The marital status of the woman’s partner is inconsequential since only the married or betrothed woman is bound to fidelity. The infidelity of a married man is not punishable by law but is criticized.¹⁰⁹

Adultery appears to have been regular, if one takes seriously the many divorces in Malachi which the Jewish husbands committed against their wives. Adulterers were violators of the Mosaic covenant (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18) and were thus certainly illustrations of moral decadence that set aside the covenant and called for divine punishment. Both sorcery and adultery were regular in pagan religious practices. Isaiah calls idolaters “children of the sorceress” (*b^enê’ōn^enā^h*) and “offspring of the adulterer” (*m^enā’ēph*) (Isa 57:3).¹¹⁰

Again, on Malachi’s list of law breakers are those who swear dishonestly by Yahweh’s name (*ûbhannishbā’îm lashshāqer*) namely perjurers, those who swear to a lie (*sheqer*).¹¹¹ In Zachariah, there is the prediction of judgment for the perjurers: God sends a curse to rectify the situation (Zech 5:4) and in Malachi, God’s theophany is imminent. This crime is followed by “those who defraud labourers of their wages” (*ûbh^e’ōshqê s^ekhar–sākhîr*), “those who oppress the widows and fatherless” (*’almānā^h w^eyāthôm*) and “those who mis-

spells, were mediums or spiritists, or who consulted the dead; see also Jer 27:9). These practices deserved execution (Exod 22:17–18). See Clendenen, “Malachi,” 393.

¹⁰⁵ BDB 506.

¹⁰⁶ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1357.

¹⁰⁷ Clendenen, “Malachi,” 393.

¹⁰⁸ The seriousness of the sin of adultery is especially pronounced in Job. Here, it is described as “indecent and disgusting sexual conduct and a criminal offence.” It is also called “a destructive, hellish fire consuming everything I have” (Job 31:11–12).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Mal 2:14–15; and Prov 5:15–20; Clendenen, “Malachi,” 392.

¹¹⁰ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1358.

¹¹¹ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1358. Stuart observes that swearing falsely is considered to be a specialised, elevated form of lying, done in a context designed to avoid lying. Yahweh’s name was legal when invoked in oaths taking (Lev 19:12; Deut 6:13; 10:20), but swearing falsely, perjury, was a serious crime (Lev 19:12). Jeremiah calls it an abomination (Jer 7:9–12). Stuart, “Malachi,” 1358.

treat aliens” (*ûmaththê–ghēr*). It was recognised, not only in Israel, but also in the rest of the ancient Near East, that widows and orphans needed divine and governmental protection. Thus to mistreat widows and orphans was to show gross contempt for Yahweh’s will.¹¹² Like orphans and widows, aliens are listed as examples of dependent people who need the justice of others. Exploitation of aliens was clearly an act of covenant violation.¹¹³ As a summary statement, the final clause, *w^elō’ y^erē’ûnî* (“those who do not fear me – Yahweh”) may be taken to encompass all the various covenant violations that the Israelites of Malachi’s day are guilty of. “This is so, because the fear of Yahweh denotes reverence for him which obligates one to follow his covenant and adopts Yahweh’s concern as his own, including Yahweh’s social concerns, which are in focus in this verse.”¹¹⁴ The concern for the less fortunate ones in Malachi, stresses the significance that the prophet assigned to social justice.

The Day of Yahweh is not only a day of judgment for covenant violators but also the Day of hope.¹¹⁵ In Mal 3:16–17 God promises to write down the list of those who fear him (*sēpher zikhkhārôn*), who will be his special possession or property (*s^eghullā^h*) on the Day the Lord would prepare (*layyôm ’āsher ’ānî `ōsē^h*):

On that day when I act, says Yahweh *Saboath*, they will be my most prized possessions, and I shall spare them in the way a man spares his son who serve him. Then once again you will see the difference between the upright person and the wicked one who serves God and the one who does not serve him.¹¹⁶

Though Malachi’s audience doubts God’s justice, on that day they will clearly acknowledge the distinction that exists between the righteous person and the unrighteous one. In Mal 3:19 (MT), 4:1 (English) the Day of the Lord is described as burning furnace, emphasising the burning power of God’s anger and evil doers would be completely destroyed. Those who fear the Lord will be rewarded on this Day. The sun of righteousness will shine upon them with healing (*shemesh ts^edhāqā^h ûmarpē’ bikhnāphe^hhā*) and they will go about with joy leaping like calves from a stall (*ûphishtem k^e’eghlē marbēq*) (3:20 [4:2]). They would on this Day trample on the wicked (*w^e’assōthem r^eshā’îm*) who becomes nothing but ashes on the feet of the righteous (*Kî–yihyû ’ēpher taḥath kaphphôth raghlêkhem*) (3:21 [4:3]).

The final verses of this prophetic literature are also quite remarkable:

¹¹² See Exod 22:22–24; Zech 7:10; Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 149.

¹¹³ Exod 20:21; Deut 10:18–19; Glazier–McDonald, *Malachi*, 167–68.

¹¹⁴ Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary*, 149.

¹¹⁵ John Proctor, “Fire in God’s House: Influence of Malachi 3 in the NT [I Cor. 3:1; I Peter 1:6–7],” *JETS* 36 (1993): 9–14.

¹¹⁶ Udoekpo, *Re-Thinking the Day of YHWH*, 229.

Remember the Law of Moses my Servant to whom at Horeb I prescribe decrees and rulings for all Israel. Look I shall send you the prophet Elijah before the great and awesome Day of Yahweh come. He will reconcile parents to their children and children to their parents, to forestall my putting the country under the curse of destruction.¹¹⁷

The section of the book, Mal 3:22–24 MT (4:4–6)¹¹⁸ is specially positioned in the HB.¹¹⁹ Malachi 3:22–24 MT (4:4–6) does not only close the book of Malachi, but also the entirety of the *nebi'im* (Prophets), as well as the second portion of the HB. Thus, these verses have been understood as a thoughtfully, well designed and systematised conclusion, not just to the book Malachi, but to the entire prophetic institution within the HB, moving beyond Joshua to Malachi.¹²⁰ Some scholars however, consider this concluding section of the book as the ending to a prophetic collection consisting of the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi¹²¹ the conclusion of the Book of the Twelve,¹²² or simply a conclusion to the Law and the Prophets.¹²³

This section certainly constitutes a kind of appendix to the book of Malachi, which was very significant for subsequent interpretation.¹²⁴ The appendix served to equate the hearers of the oracles of Malachi – along with

¹¹⁷ Udoekpo, *Re-Thinking the Day of YHWH*, 229.

¹¹⁸ It is observed that "Hebrew editions of the Minor Prophets are found in Qumran and Wadi Murabba'at, in Greek in Haḥal Haver. . . All the twelve books are represented in the Qumran fragments (4QMinor Prophets^{a-g} = 4Q76–82), and most of the editions have the Masoretic order." Russell E. Fuller, "The Twelve" in *Qumran Cave 4:X. The Prophets* (DJD 15; ed. Eugene Ulrich, et al.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 221–318 cited in Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise, *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament* (LNTS 377; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 7–8.

¹¹⁹ Stephanus (Fanie) D. Snyman, "Malachi 4:4–6 (Heb 3:22–24) as a point of Convergence in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of the Intra and Intertextual Relationships," *HTS* 68/1 (2012): 1-6 (1).

¹²⁰ See for example, Barry A. Jones, "The Book of the Twelve as a Witness to Ancient Biblical Interpretation," in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (SBLSymS 15; ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 69; Snyman, "Malachi 4:4–6," 1–6; Baldwin, *Haggai*, 251; Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets* (part 2; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 568–69.

¹²¹ Mark J. Boda, "Messengers of Hope in Haggai–Malachi," *JSOT* 2/1 (2007): 113–131; Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve* (BLS 27; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 96–97.

¹²² Hill, *Malachi*, 364; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14*, 233.

¹²³ Redditt, *Haggai*, 185.

¹²⁴ Richard Coggins and Jin H. Han, *Six Minor Prophets through the Century: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 200.

future generations who heard his words in scripture – with the disobedient, indecisive or irresolute people whose national loyalty to the God of their fathers was in danger of being dissolved.¹²⁵ "Since, in 4Q76 (4QXII^a) Malachi comes before Jonah 1:5, 10, 14–16 and 3:5–10, it broadens the hope from Malachi 1:11, 14 towards Malachi 3:22–24 into the expectation of salvation for the Gentile."¹²⁶ The messenger motif of Mal 3:1 has been linked with Elijah in these verses (22–24). It believed that Moses alongside Elijah here meant to reconnect the Prophets and the Torah and with the Writings, which is also reminiscent of Joel 2:31–32. It reinforces the Law of Moses (v. 22), alongside the theme of judgment, repentance, and restoration of fortunes.¹²⁷

D CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that the Day of Yahweh as envisioned by Malachi is an eschatological day of judgment and restoration. The article examines eschatological hope in the OT, the eschatological peculiarity of the discourse of Malachi's Day of Yahweh, the identity of Malachi's eschatological covenant messenger, the roles of the eschatological messenger, namely, cultic restoration and Yahweh's correcting of past wrongs and the reversal of sinful societal order in the overall context of the eschatological day of Yahweh. Malachi's eschatological vision included the prospect of purifying judgment for God's people. By his time, serious cultic and social problems had arisen within the post-exilic community (1:6–14; 2:8–17; 3:6–15; 4:6). Failure to repent would necessitate judgment. Malachi's vision for restoration includes a covenantal messenger, a renewed temple, and a community of reverence who will enjoy righteousness and healing. The Lord Almighty would come as the sovereign Lord of the nation to enforce his covenant (3:1). Yahweh is to come unexpectedly, and his day is to bring judgment upon the godless, but for those who fear God, "the sun of salvation" will shine forth.

The Day of Yahweh as envisioned by Malachi will alter the realities of life for the Yehudites. The Israelites expected a day that will bring divine deliverance from their enemies. They hold, of course, that their enemies were Yahweh's enemies but they were themselves Yahweh's enemies, by reason of their covenant violations. So, while they eagerly await the messenger of the covenant to come (Mal 3:1), in fact, his coming would not be delightful for them. In the decisive events of the day, the prophet discerns with particular simplicity the awesome presence of Yahweh in the world in his ongoing activity of judging those who have violated the covenant, and who invariably are no longer under its protection. A future day of renewal and restoration of the for-

¹²⁵ Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* (VTSup 52; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 22.

¹²⁶ Menken and Moyise, *Minor Prophets*, 7–8.

¹²⁷ Udoekpo, *Re-Thinking the Day of YHWH*, 229.

tunes will come only to those who fear the Lord. It is this eschatological dimension of the Day of Yahweh that intensifies the ethical uniqueness of the book of Malachi. As Clendenen notes, "God's faithful love in the past as elaborated in 1:2–5 and the coming day of Yahweh announced in 3:16–4:6 together were to be the motivating factors for all the exhortations in the book."¹²⁸

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¹²⁸ Clendenen, "Malachi," 238.

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