



Malachi's concept of a *Torah*-compliant community (MI 3:22 [MT]) and its associated implications

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This article focuses on Malachi's distinctive claims that guarantee a well-ordered community, namely the validity and feasibility of a *Torah*-compliant community. Since *Torah* compliance is a fundamental core of Israel's life, in the book of Malachi, Yahweh's *Torah* functions as the reliable and invariable authority for the community well-being as a whole. Community well-being as pictured by Malachi is created not only by Yahweh but also as the consequent contemplation and action of community. Malachi notes clearly that it is the sins of the community as a whole that renders it inconceivable that Yahweh's blessings should attend to them as they are now, and Malachi demands certain definite and substantial actions as preconditions to the manifestation of the desired expectations. To him the secret of creating and maintaining a healthy, viable community and living as people in covenant relationship with Yahweh, is by 'remembering' (upholding and practicing) Yahweh's *Torah*. Accordingly, Malachi enjoined his audience to remember the *Torah* of Moses, which constitutes the fundamental dimensions of their relationship with Yahweh. This article is thus an attempt to understand Malachi's concept of a *Torah*-compliant community and its associated blessings of happiness and shalom.

Introduction

In the prophetic literature, a key assumption that summarises prophetic indictment of Israel is their forsaking of Yahweh's *Torah*, disclosed to them at Sinai – or Horeb, which is the common name in Deuteronomy for the mountain better known as 'Sinai' (Am 2:4; Hs 4:6; 8:1; Is 5:24). Since *Torah* compliance is a fundamental principle of Israel's life, in the book of Malachi, Yahweh's *Torah* functions as the reliable and invariable authority for the community's well-being as a whole. At the beginning of his message, Malachi reproached contemporary degenerate clergy, who were the guardians and interpreters of the *Torah*, for their lack of ministerial integrity, having failed to preserve the purity of the sacrificial cult and having caused many to stumble (MI 1:6–2:7–8). The prophet brings his prophetic oracle to a close by laying a special and final emphasis upon the inevitability of *Torah* compliance. Malachi's final admonition (MI 3:22 [MT], 4:4 [ET]): 'Remember the law of Moses my servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel', is significant in the interpretation of book's message as a whole:

Indeed, this verse is the prophetic crescendo establishing an important critical perspective in the light of which Malachi's disputation assumes its proper place. The imperative זָכֹר forcefully reminds the people that the whole nation of Israel still stands under the law of Moses and that the law of Moses still functions as the unchanging authority for the covenant community. (Glazier-McDonald 1987:251–252)

Whilst Malachi claims that the perils of the post-exilic Yehudit community are aggravated by the unethical life of the people, the prophet astonishingly imagines its reinvigoration. Community well-being, as pictured by Malachi, is created or wrought not only by Yahweh but also as the consequent contemplation and action of community. Malachi notes clearly that it is the sins of the community as a whole that renders it inconceivable that Yahweh's blessings should attend to them as they are now, and Malachi demands certain definite and substantial actions as preconditions to the manifestation of the desired expectations. To him, the secret of creating and maintaining a healthy, viable community and living as people in covenant relationship with Yahweh, is by 'remembering' (upholding and practicing) Yahweh's *Torah*.

The significant imperative exhortation to all Israel of the necessity of *Torah* compliance serves to motivate the people toward the creation of a healthy, viable and liveable human community in which there is commitment to matters of covenant and community relationships: a community that puts high premium on devotion to Yahweh, Yahweh's teachings and Yahweh's people, and who, in response, lives as a reverential community in covenant relationship. This article, therefore, focuses on Malachi's distinctive claims that guarantee a well-ordered community, namely the

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validity and feasibility of a *Torah*-compliant community. As a background, the article examines the religious temper and socio-economic outlook of Malachi's post-exilic community, as well as the prophet's concept of a *Torah*-compliant community, and concludes by reflecting on the implications of a *Torah*-compliant community as a significant concept in the interpretation of the book's message.

Religious temper and socio-economic outlook of Malachi's post-exilic community

The book of Malachi¹ – considered as the conscious, literary masterpiece of Malachi – addresses lived realities in a post-exilic restoration community of Judah. Whilst little is known about the prophetic personality, his interest in and knowledge of cultic phenomena imply that he may have indeed been a cult prophet (Glazier-McDonald 1987:273–274). Like the rest of the prophetic books, the book of Malachi is rooted within the framework of the environmental circumstances of the prophet's period. Having as its backdrop the Persian Period of ancient Near Eastern history (539–330 BCE), Malachi's audience (i.e. Yahweh's chosen people, Israel) were still a colonial people in the Persian Empire (Carter 1994:106f; Hill 1998:62, 2012:33–34; Kessler 2010:309f.; Lee 2011:163, 202; Lipschits 2003:323f, 2005:261f; Stuart 1998:1253). The book's perspective of lived reality divides the prophet's audience into various groups (Bedford 1995:72; Boda 2012:15; Tiemeyer 2005:178–179).²

Malachi's post-exilic community was composed of a resident population with a proportion of people of various interest groups – at least three principal categories. There was the first wave of immigrants to Jerusalem, led by Sheshbazzar, a Judean prince and the first (Persian-appointed) governor of the Hebrew restoration community (Ezr 1:5–11). A second group of returnees arrived in Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua at about 522 BCE, following the inspiration they received from the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah to mobilise the Judean community in an attempt to re-establish themselves and rebuild the Jerusalem temple (Ezr 5:11–12). A third group consisted of those who remained in the land of Judah following the Babylonian invasion and destruction of their kingdom in 587 BCE (Bedford 1995:72; Hill 2012:33–34). Those who had returned from exile, however, had their problem compounded by the resistance of surrounding hostile foreigners who could not bear to see the returnees apply their family privileges and rights to the possessions on which they (the remnants) depended upon for maintenance and support (cf. Ezr 4:4–5; Albertz 1994:444, 2003:121–125;

Hill 2012:34). These different groups held different belief systems and values (Berquist 1989).

Whilst there was relative peace in Malachi's world, it was not a particularly happy moment for the Judean population. In this period of international tranquillity, Israel had little sense of vitality and direction, as there was a collapse of internal discipline. Depression and discontent were the prevailing feelings in Malachi's day (Assis 2010:355; Craigie 1985:225). The expectations of a preceding generation had crashed on the rock of reality. Whilst the Second Temple had been completed, the achievement did not usher in the awaited Messianic Age (Ml 3:6–12; cf. Zch 8:9–23). Those who had hoped for the establishment of a new international order following the restoration of the temple (Hg 2:7, 9, 18–19; Ezk 43:1–5) and kingdom promises made to David (Ezk 34:13, 23–24), were sadly disappointed as these promises remained unrealised. The people had inherited hopelessness, which could not equip them to adequately cope with the gloomy and seemingly unchanged world in which they now found themselves.

Malachi's generation, like that of Haggai and Zechariah, faced harsh and serious socio-economic situations and lived in an atmosphere that was unenthusiastic for the practice of religious faith (Assis 2010:356). In the religious dimension, the situation culminated in the superficial and heartless performance of duty. The altar of Yahweh was disregarded (Ml 1:6–8, 13), vows were offhandedly fulfilled (Ml 1:14), justice was perverted (Ml 2:6–9; 3:5) and hypocrisy took place in the area of tithes and offerings (Ml 3:6–12). More than any other prophet, Malachi indicted the priests and people, and exposed them to themselves (Boda 2012:15; Glazier-McDonald 1987:17; Hill 1998:173; Kealy 2009:233; Nogalski 2011:1003; Schuller 1996:858). Malachi was thus faced with a wall of indifference and apathy. He interpreted their thoughts, put them in the abrupt, naked language and pictured them as protest to every charge brought against them. He spoke of the esteemed faith to a people for whom religion had become a routine and who were apathetic in their observance of cherished ancient traditions.

Socially, Malachi's oracles pinpoint the cynicism that spread through the community to which he belonged (Boloje & Groenewald 2014a:3). Their despair and disappointment from the unrealised expectations of the restored nation after the exile, gave way – in Malachi's era – to an idealisation of the reality:

This is a well-known sociological phenomenon adequately attested to in historiography. A society cannot allow itself to wallow in despair, so it adjusts ideologically to conform to new realities and situations, if you will, to make a virtue out of necessity. (Assis 2010:365)

Their sense of values showed vividly that no one considered devotion to Yahweh to be worthwhile or of any significance. Many of them had abandoned ancient traditions and

1. See Boloje (2014:120–175) for a comprehensive treatment of issues related to authorship, date of writing, recipients of the message, style of writing, prominent themes, structure, and context of the book.

2. Tiemeyer (2005:178–179) labels the audience of Malachi to be the priests and the people. See also Boda (2012:15) and Berquist (1989:124), who consider the majority of the addressees in the book as largely shaped by the priests, as well as those who are influenced by their teaching and who follow their actions.



principles for mere empirical methodology. The moral principles were abandoned for a series of ethical compromise, in which case personal success and benefits were principle standards for decision-making (Craigie 1985:244). This clearly manifested in a positive attitude towards intermarriage with foreign women and the growing prevalence of divorce that undermined ancient traditions. The ruined lives, the collapse of hopes, and the loss of faithfulness was an abomination to Yahweh (MI 2:10–16; Boloje & Groenewald 2014b:1–10). The feeling that Yahweh abandoned them gave way to the feeling that Yahweh have not treated them justly, and this was only a pathway to the theological conclusion that Yahweh does not rule his people according to a principle of justice (Assis 2010:365–366). In their opinion, the admirable persons were the ones that prosper whilst ignoring the faith, but the righteous poor were only to be despised for that ignorance and folly. This attitude manifested in rampant social injustice depicted in both the fourth and sixth oracle (MI 2:17–3:5; 3:13–4:3). Such an attitude is an affront to Yahweh (Craigie 1985:245).

Again, the promise and hope of the Messianic Age did not live up to the people's expectations as the economic situations were extremely difficult (cf. Blenkinsopp 1988:66–68; Clendenen 2004:214–215; Rogerson 1999:177–179; Wells 1987:40), and there was no political independence (Schams 1998:45). The Davidic leader was not a powerful king, but only a Persian governor that was subjected to the great Persian king (Assis 2010:363). For the former Hebrew captives the problems of survival in Judah were amplified by the resistance of hostile foreigners, who could not bear to see Yahweh's people prosper (cf. Ezr 4:4–5), an agricultural community tormented and distressed by drought, locust plagues and blighted vineyards failure (Hg 1:6, 11; MI 3:10–11), as well as economic depression and pervasive lawlessness (Zch 8:9–11; Boloje & Groenewald 2014c:2–3; Hill 2012:34). In the face of persistent apathy and disillusionment, Malachi addressed a community stingy at heart – this is reflected in his elaboration of one particular area in the community's life in which their actions were tantamount to robbery of Yahweh. The robbery manifested in the area of tithes and offerings (MI 3:8–12). The community's failures to give to Yahweh and temple services became blight on the nation's personality as a whole (Craigie 1985:244).

As a book permeated by covenant failures (cf. MI 2:4–8; 2:10, 14) and of a people whose entire history is pervasively marked by habitual and continual waywardness (cf. MI 3:7), Malachi was obviously affected by what he experienced. He confronted the immediate community circumstances and the community – disheartened, resentful and doubtful – reacted by questioning all that he said. Finally, Malachi is forced to issue the imperative to 'remember' Yahweh's *Torah* mediated through Moses.

The rest of the paper focuses on the reference to the *Torah* in Malachi's epilogue. How does one interpret the noun *Torah*? What constitutes the Mosaic *Torah* in Malachi? What

does Malachi's final emphasis upon the necessity of *Torah* compliance imply for his community?

Malachi's concept of a Torah-compliant community (MI 3:22 [MT])

Whilst in the interest of time and scope, an extensive discussion on the complex and problematic concerns of the editorial development of the text cannot be presented here, it is nevertheless important to note that there are editorial and critical elements in the text of the book of Malachi (Snyman 2012:1–2). This paper presents a brief orientation regarding the discussion on the reconstruction history of Malachi's epilogue. Malachi 3:22–24 plays a vital role in the reconstruction of the history of Malachi, the Twelve and the *Torah* Prophets collections (Fuller 2012:371). The sequence of the last three verses of Malachi in the Masoretic Text (MT) differs from the sequence of the last three verses of the Septuagint (LXX) of Malachi. In the LXX of Malachi, the Moses and Elijah verses reflect in the reverse order, with the Elijah verses occurring first, followed by the Moses verse (Fuller 2012:372; Snyman 2012:2). Scholars have argued that these verses were editorial or scribal inclusions to the book (Fuller 2012:372–373; Schart 2000:45) – comprising one or two appendices (epilogues, postscripts) or a colophon³ (Assis 2010:356, 2011:208–209; Hill 2012:361; Petersen 1995:227) – added either to bring an ending to the book of Malachi (Hill 2012:361; Smith 1999:82), to conclude the Twelve (Coggin 1996:84; Hill 2012:361; Jones 1995:236; Petersen 1995:233), or to serve as a conclusion of the Law and the Prophets as a whole (Blenkinsopp 1996:209; Coggin & Han 2011:199–200; O'Brien 2004:315; Rendtorff 1993). Regarding the placement of Malachi at the end of the collection of the Twelve, Van der Toorn (2007) notes:

If Malachi is a scribal construct created to obtain the canonical number of twelve, it follows that the book of Malachi would originally have been placed at the end of the Minor Prophets. In this respect, the Masoretic manuscripts of the Minor Prophets preserve the original order. Further corroboration of the position of Malachi at the end of the Minor Prophets is provided by the occurrence of an editorial colophon that pertains to the Minor Prophets as a whole. (p. 253)

Glazier-McDonald (1987:245) believes that the passages conclude Malachi and that they are not later editorial additions. The probability exists that these final verses are the conscious literary product of Malachi himself. Malachi 3:22–24 are essentially related to the preceding six oracle units – both thematically and linguistically – and familial disharmony may be viewed as a consequence of conditions in the Persian Period. These verses fit well within the context of Malachi:

Mal 3:22–24 comprises the climax of the prophecy. In them Malachi brings together elements from his preaching into

3. Hill (1998:366) believes that the appeal to the figure of Moses at the conclusion of Malachi has significance beyond the prophet's own message. These verses form an integral part of the original work penned by the prophet (Floyd 2000:568; Glazier-McDonald 1987:245). The colophon, according to Hill (1998:370), serves primarily to append a literary tradition (the Latter Prophets) to the earlier and already 'inscripturated' tradition of the '*Torah* of Moses' (and the whole of the Primary History). See also Rendtorff (2000:86).

sharper focus. Indeed, all the major themes of the prophecy are found in these final verses: the stress on the law (3:22, cf. 2:6-8; 3:7), the coming prophetic figure whose task it is to prepare for Yahweh's appearance (3:23, cf. 3:1), the day of Yahweh itself (3:23, cf. 3:1f, 17-21) when Yahweh will judge and destroy the evildoers (3:24, cf. 3:5, 18-19, 21). (Glazier-McDonald 1987:267)

If the Book of the Twelve is regarded as a book, the verses can be canonically understood as possessing and serving a dual function – both as a self-contained prophecy and a unified conclusion to the Book of the Twelve (LeCureux 2012:207, 226) – and thus provides an overall framework and clue to the application of the Twelve (Watts 2000:209f). For O'Brien (2004):

If such an understanding of the book's compositional history is accurate, it bears great import for the history of the development of the biblical canon. It would indicate that the materials that are now included in the Hebrew Bible (or at least in the *Torah* and the Prophets) were consciously edited to be read together as part of a single, mutually supporting collection. (p. 317)

Chapman (2003:139), commenting on Malachi 3:22-24 as the conclusion of the Prophets as a whole, holds that the section was composed for its position in Malachi and then took on a wider canonical function secondarily. In this regard, one reason why Malachi appears last within the Book of the Twelve and why the Twelve often occupies a place at the end of the prophetic corpus may be that Malachi 3:22-24 was thought to provide a fitting conclusion to these wider canonical units as they formed. The textual evidence of Malachi 3:22-24 as the conclusion of the Book of the Twelve in the LXX and MT arrangements is particularly helpful in examining the role of this passage in the canonical development of the Twelve (Jones 1995:236). Jones (1995) notes:

In the context of its MT reading and placement, the reference in 3:22-24 to the *Torah* of Moses and to the return of Elijah the prophet may indeed encompass a literary horizon that includes a corpus of Scriptures containing the *Torah* and a collection of prophetic writings. (p. 237)

The Hebrew noun, *Torah* ('law'), is considered to be a cornerstone in the theology of the Old Testament and in the study of Old Testament religion, as it embodies a number of different interpretations and/or meanings in numerous communal backgrounds of ancient Israel's society. Ben-Dov (2011) notes:

In the Wisdom literature it denoted the meaning of a general, usually secular instruction, which never takes written form. On the other hand, in priestly literature the word *tôr h* denotes a short instruction which relates to the ritual realm – sacrifices, purity, leprosy, etc. This kind of instruction, always supplied by priests, was committed to writing in a series of short scrolls, and is presently collected into one priestly continuum in the Pentateuch. Side by side with the above connotations, the prophetic literature retained yet another meaning for *tôr h*, which is closer to the cognate Akkadian term *têrtu(m)*. In Akkadian (especially in Mari and in Neo-Assyrian but also in the Neo-Babylonian inscriptions of Nabunaid) this term means 'oracle, decision', as well as 'the instruction of the liver by extispicy', and thus remains part and parcel of the semantic field of divination and oracular instruction. (p. 50)

The more general meaning of the word is 'instruction given', and only occasionally is specifically legal material taken into consideration (Clendenen 2004:457; Groenewald 2013b:697). According to Ben-Dov (2011):

The book of Deuteronomy, when referring to itself as *tôr h*, amalgamates several of the meanings adduced above, on its way to a radical change of the concept of writing and revelation in ancient Israel. (p. 51)

The word appears four times in Malachi's reproach of contemporary degenerate clergy (Ml 2:6-9), and there it refers to the process of instruction in Yahweh's truth. In Malachi 3:22 it refers to the content of that truth: the covenant document of Moses that the priests were expected to teach (Dt 33:10) and by which Israel was reproached for its violation (Clendenen 2004:457). In line with the Deuteronomists' perspective, it is the law, given by Moses, set out and expounded in Deuteronomy, which provides the norm for the people's life and the life of the king – the standard by which they are judged (Glazier-McDonald 1987:248).

In the text under consideration, the clear purpose of the postscripts appear to be that of uniting the Book of the Twelve with the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and the Primary History (*Torah* or Pentateuch + the Former Prophets or historical books of Joshua through Kings) by means of the two ideal figures representing these literary collections. The ideal figure of Moses represents the literary collection of the *Torah* in the Hebrew Bible, whilst Elijah represents the literary collection of the Latter Prophets. This serves to invest the Latter Prophets with the same divine authority associated with the *Torah* and the Primary History of the Hebrew Bible (Hill 2012:362). This final paragraph relates to the previous one in Malachi 3:16-4:3 (MT 3:16-21) as the command for which the motivation has just been furnished, namely, since Yahweh knows those who fear him and will distinguish and reward them on the coming day, he thus commands Judah through Malachi to remember the *Torah* of Moses, his servant. The address began with the command to return to Yahweh by repenting false, disobedient and arrogant attitudes and behaviour regarding material possessions. The command to 'remember the *Torah* of my servant Moses' simply fills out what is involved in returning to Yahweh, since Yahweh and his word are inextricably bound together (Clendenen 2004:454).

This final paragraph of the admonition also leads back to the book's beginning in Malachi 1:2. The issues of declining faith, disrespect or even contempt for Yahweh, empty religious rituals, self-seeking betrayal of marital vows and of the rights and needs of others, greed, injustice and materialism all have their solution in remembering Yahweh's instruction to Israel through his servant Moses. Malachi commences his address by drawing attention to Israel's past and then concludes by referring to an impending, yet to come future (retrospect and prospect; Ml 4:4, 4-6 [MT 3:22, 23-24]). This he does by properly and adequately positioning the ethical significance and effect of the book in the twin categories of

Israel's redemption and eschatological hope. This no doubt assures that Yahweh's work of redemption will be completed – establishing justice and peace (Clendenen 2004:454–455). In these verses, one can see that eschatology and ethics stand side by side in perfect harmony (Barton 1986:16).

The imperative זָכֹר ['remember'], which starts this final section of the address, clearly marks it as expressing the command element of hortatory discourse. It is of note that the exhortation to 'remember' Yahweh's *Torah*⁴ is found nowhere else in the Old Testament. The majority of instances where someone is directed to 'remember' are in prayers where Yahweh is to remember the supplicant (Ex 32:13; 2 Ki 20:3; Jr 14:21; Ps 25:6; Neh 5:19). The imperative 'to remember' is given by Yahweh elsewhere, but not involving the law (1 Chr 16:12; Neh 4:14, 13:31; Ps 105:5; Is 44:21, 46:8–9; Jr 51:50; Mi 6:5; cf. Clendenen 2004:456). To 'remember' implies more than memorialisation of the past by means of the intellectual activity of recalling Yahweh's deeds in history. Instead, it is an exhortation to *act* upon that understanding, by connecting the will in conformity and obedience to Yahweh's instructions (Hill 2012:362). Remembering the *Torah* will cause Israel to fear Yahweh and honour his name, even as Yahweh's 'book of remembrance' would cause him to act on behalf of those who feared him and honoured his name (Mi 3:16).

The *Torah's* impact on the power and autonomy of the priesthood is evidenced in a variety of texts from the period of Nehemiah (Neh 13:1–3) and other works critical of priests in the Second Temple Period. Priestly practice was open to discussion on the basis of the contents of the *Torah* and universal access to the authoritative text is expressed in Deuteronomy (Himmelfarb 2013:95–96). Clendenen (2004:457) observes that each and every time 'the law/instruction' (*hattorah*) is mentioned, beginning with Deuteronomy (Dt 1:5; 4:8, 44; 17:18; 27:3, 8, 26; 28:58, 61; 30:10; 31:9, 11), it refers to God's written instruction to Israel through Moses. The *Torah* of Moses thus refers to the stipulations of the covenant code enacted by Yahweh and accepted by Israel – first at Mount Sinai (Ex 19–24), and again in the region of Moab close to Mount Nebo (Dt 1:5–6; Hill 2012:362–363).⁵ A straightforward reading of the biblical text indicates that Yahweh's law or *Torah* cannot be excluded from Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel – it is a logical extension of Israel's election and integral to the covenant relationship, especially in Deuteronomy (Dt 6:24–24; Miller 2012:194).

4.The combination of the words 'remember' and '*Torah*' appears here in the Old Testament. The closest parallel is seen in the Joshua's exhortation to the Transjordan tribes to 'remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you' with respect to the conquest (Jos 1:13), and Nehemiah's prayer to Yahweh to 'remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses' (Neh 1:8; cf. Clendenen 2004:456; Hill 2012:362).

5.The relationship between Yahweh and Israel - which was sealed by the covenant at Sinai following Yahweh's great deliverance at the Red Sea - is expressed by the Sinai Covenant Theology. Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel at Sinai constitutes the theological centre of the body of Old Testament literature (described as Deuteronomical or Deuteronomistic), expressed basically in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua through 2 Kings, as well as in certain prophetic books and psalms. The making of the covenant is also described in Exodus 19–24 and 32–34, although the language of these passages differs from that of Deuteronomy (Kessler 2013:196–98).

The *torat mosheh* ('law of Moses'),⁶ which comes to signify the entire Pentateuch (or *Torah* of the Hebrew Bible), is intentionally confusing here, since the larger intention of the first epilogue is to connect the collection of the Latter Prophets with the *Torah* of Moses – that is, the whole Pentateuch comprising the covenant stipulations, civil and ethical instruction, and the narrative traditions associated with Moses as lawgiver (Hill 2012:363).

The reference to the figure of Moses as the 'servant of Yahweh'⁷ is an honorific epithet well known in the Primary History (Gn – 2 Ki), ascribed to Abraham (Gn 26:24), Isaac (Ex 32:13), Jacob (Dt 9:27) and David (2 Sm 3:18), amongst others. The title describes the ideal role of the Israelite ruler in intimate functional relationship to the sovereignty of Yahweh (Hill 2012:363). Malachi's use of the expression 'the *Torah* of Moses my servant' validates his awareness of the tradition that Moses was the mediator of Yahweh's instruction and indicates that he sees in Moses' service (מִשְׁעָה עֲבָדָי) a paradigm of the conduct that is most pleasing to Yahweh (Glazier-McDonald 1987:249). The covenant stipulations, or law regulating Israel's relationship with Yahweh, are summarised in the phrase variously translated 'decrees and regulations', or 'statutes and ordinances' (Hill 2012:363; Kessler 2013:199). The phrase 'keeping Yahweh's commandments, statutes, and ordinances' (Dt 6:1, 3; cf. Dt 4:23; 5:1, 22; 6:3–4; 7:11–12) stresses Israel's ongoing responsibility to live in faithfulness to the terms of the covenant in order to continue to enjoy its benefits and to maintain the nation's relationship with Yahweh in good order (Kessler 2012:199). Thus, Israel understood that, should they violate the covenant, the nation could be visited with a variety of misfortunes – even complete destruction (Dt 6:15; 7:4; 9:8, 19; 28:58–68). Prophetic preaching in the Old Testament is saturated with language concerning Israel's covenantal duties and consequences of covenant violation. This is why the prophets are sometimes referred to as 'covenant enforcers' (Kessler 2012:225).

The common ground between the two biblical figures (Moses and Elijah) in the postscript is a mountain. At Horeb (the common name in Deuteronomy for the mountain better known as 'Sinai') Moses received the laws that comprise the covenant (cf. Ex 19:1–11; Dt 5:1–5). In Deuteronomy, on the plain of Moab where Israel was ready to cross the Jordan and occupy the Promised Land, Moses mediates a covenant between Yahweh and all Israel (Dt 29:1). The comprehensiveness of the expression 'all Israel' is made clear

6.There are obviously differing opinions in scholarly debates regarding the meaning of *torat mosheh* ('law of Moses'): Nogalski (2003:195–196) assumes it could be a reference to the book of Malachi, Floyd (2000:625) regards it to be an allusion to the book of Deuteronomy and scholars like Glazier-McDonald (1987:246), Redditt (1995:185), Hill (1998:366), are generally of the opinion that it refers to the Pentateuch as a whole. The specific phrase is found 13 times besides here (cf. Jos 8:31–32; 23:6; 1 Ki 2:3; 2 Ki 14:6; 23:25; 2 Chr 23:18; 30:16; Ezr 3:2; 7:6; Neh 8:1; Dn 9:11, 13), and 'the book of Moses' is found an additional four times (2 Chr 25:4; 35:12; Ezr 6:18; Neh 13:1), whilst 'the law' that Yahweh 'commanded through Moses' is referred to in Nehemiah 8:14 (cf. Neh 9:14; Clendenen 2004:456).

7.According to Clendenen (2004:457), Moses is referred to as the servant of Yahweh about 40 times – almost half of which are in Joshua. This is the only place (i.e. Mi 3:22) in the Prophets, however, where it is found (except Dn 9:11).

in verses where it is stated that the covenant community encompasses:

... your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, *even* all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. (Dt 29:9–11, NASV)

Additionally, Deuteronomy 29:14–15 indicates that those who were not present at the ceremony indicates bound by the stipulations of covenant (Brown 1996:204; Clark & Hatton 2002:466; Glazier-McDonald 1987:250; Hill 2012:363).

Malachi's emphasis here is that the *Torah* of Moses was indeed the law of Yahweh, in which case 'all Israel' describes the covenant community in its entirety. No one may exclude himself or herself from compliance with Yahweh's *Torah* mediated by Moses. With the use of the imperative זָכוּרָהּ:

Malachi reminds his recalcitrant contemporaries (cf. 2:7) that they too are part of 'all Israel', the covenant community, and that they too are responsible for the fulfilment of the conditions enjoined on the generation which directly participated in the Mt. Sinai experience. It may be said that for Malachi 'all Israel' connotes the totality of the covenant community past and present and the mutuality of its responsibility before Yahweh. (Glazier-McDonald 1987:250–251)

Implications of *Torah* compliance for Malachi's post-exilic community

It has been noted and described that in the different phases of its existence, Israel is an ethical community – a community that serves to stimulate ethical identity, the custodian of ethical heritage, the stronghold of ethical conversation and the agent of ethical action. This idea of ethical community is expressed in the Hebrew Bible on the basis of Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh – a relationship that encompasses ethical behaviour and conduct arising from its knowledge of Yahweh, emulating Yahweh and obeying him (Birch 1995:119, 134–135; Sloane 2008:30). Since in the Sinai Covenant Theology, Yahweh's *Torah* is given as a *response* to his salvation/deliverance and not as a *means of attaining* Yahweh's salvation/deliverance, the fundamental response called for in cases of sin, disobedience, or rebellion is 'remembering' and 'returning' to Yahweh. Such 'remembering' and 'returning' is then followed by Yahweh's 'remembering' and 'returning' to the people (cf. Zch 1:3; Ml 3:7), and forgiveness. The goodness and blessing of Yahweh's covenant *Torah* includes stability, fruitfulness, prosperity and vindication. Rejecting it makes individual, community and national life unstable and insignificant, and leads to ultimate failure and disqualification (cf. Ps 19:7–11; Kessler 2013:252–253).

Malachi's exhortation to a *Torah*-compliant community combines, as so frequently in the Prophets, present relevance and future perspective. For Malachi, the model community is a *Torah*-compliant community – one that appreciates the sovereignty and justice of Yahweh, and thus lives reverentially and in conformity with Yahweh's instructions,

whilst maintaining humble relations with one another in a covenant community (Stulman & Kim 2010:240–243). Indeed, Malachi's closing message, which begins with the imperative זָכוּרָהּ ('remember'), situates itself at the threshold of a new era in which everything will be transformed. To 'remember' means more than simply recalling the past – it means to re-enact and follow what has been set in the past in all of its potential for the present and future (Brown 1996:204). The particular issue in Malachi's imperative exhortation to *Torah* compliance is that of communal restoration, which was hinged on faithfulness to Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel. Sweeney (2000) remarks:

Malachi's rhetorical goal appears not only to be to exhort the priests and people to observe YHWH's *Torah* but to convince them to do so as a united community in which the strife that has divided its members over proper understanding of YHWH and observance of YHWH's *Torah* is overcome. (p. 750)

Though Israel has not perished because of Yahweh's sustaining grace and abiding fidelity to his covenant, Yahweh's commitment to the covenant does not in any way vitiate the call to faithfulness. Adherence to the *Torah* of Yahweh mediated through Moses, as Malachi exhorted, marks nothing less than radical reorientation of life and character of the community – a redirection that Yahweh promises to meet at least halfway (Brown 1996:202). The imperative exhortation to *Torah* compliance conveys a sense of urgency, and places a demand for immediate and specific action upon Malachi's audience. If the people desire Yahweh's restoration of blessing and shalom and want to avoid covenant curses, they must 'remember' Yahweh's *Torah* and must do so quickly. By this understanding, Malachi's message of return (cf. Ml 3:7) is directly connected with *Torah* compliance. For Malachi's listeners, this would be another emotionally depressing experience (LeCureux 2012:220).

Malachi's exhortation to all Israel of the necessity of *Torah* compliance implies that the vitality of the post-exilic Judean community's religious life is dependent upon its absolute capacity to reassociate with the past. Judah's present state and future hope are always conditioned by its ability to remember Yahweh's covenant instructions and deeds in the past (cf. Ex 13:3; Dt 5:15; Ps 77:11). The *Torah* of Moses no doubt underscores the life and mission of Israel. Yahweh's *Torah* is life and death, blessing and curse for Israel (cf. Dt 30:15–20; Hill 2012:367). According to Groenewald (2013a; cf. Groenewald 2013b:696):

Yahweh's *word* and *Torah* are instructive: they teach Israel to do good and all the nations to cease their warfare. The result of 'judging' rightly is a society living in justice and a world at peace. (p. 1)

Malachi's exhortation to *Torah* compliance is a call to a lifestyle guided at all times – not by human wisdom, ambition or societal expectations, but by the thoughtful application of Yahweh's Word. It is only through this divine lighthouse that Yahweh's people can be guided to avoid destruction on 'that great and dreadful day'. The call to *Torah* compliance is an exhortation that ignites hope for a people and community

in mortal peril, whose enemy has wormed its way into their very hearts. Clendenen (2004) notes:

The law calls Israel both to deny what may seem right and expedient to oneself and to obey Yahweh even when the final outcome cannot be foreseen and assessed from merely human perspective. Israel must trust Yahweh to be wiser than Israel in all the decrees of his law. (p. 459)

Malachi's exhortation to all Israel of the necessity of *Torah* compliance is thus a call to an appropriation of the essential requirements and ideal of covenant relationship – of Yahweh's sovereignty in all of creation and thus confidence and trust in him, and of moral integrity, faithfulness, and justice. This implies mutual commitment and responsibility as members of Yahweh's covenant community. He demands an unconditional and committed return to Yahweh's *Torah* (MI 3:22) – a demand that requires no less than a wholehearted return to Yahweh himself (MI 3:7b). It is only through this that Yahweh may be counted on to fulfil the promises made through the prophets (Glazier-McDonald 1987:274). Furthermore, Malachi's exhortation to all Israel of the necessity of *Torah* compliance implies a call to return to Yahweh and the right cult. His promise is that their repentance will lead to a responsive turning on Yahweh's part – he will pour out upon his people the blessings they earnestly desire. The exhortation situates him as a reformer, calling both his priestly colleagues (who had not conducted worship properly and had failed to instruct their people in the knowledge of Yahweh) and the larger community to renewed fidelity to Yahweh's covenant. Malachi's ideal would not be the abandonment of worship, but its return to the proper and approved standards. For a community that was stingy at heart, Malachi's exhortation serves as a motivation for the restoration of the quality of their relationship that will provoke generous giving to Yahweh from a full heart, and this will in turn affect the temper of the community. The joy and practice of generous giving towards both Yahweh and the need of fellow citizens create a healthy community and a more even distribution of wealth (Craigie 1985:244).

The significant imperative exhortation to all Israel of the necessity of *Torah* compliance serves as a motivation for the faithful remnant, as well as a powerful caution regarding Yahweh's involvement in the world's future. Yahweh will not abandon his people. Some would be refined and purified, and would continue in proper worship of Yahweh, whilst the evildoers, who corrupted whatever they touched and extinguished the torch of justice towards which the oppressed yearn with longing (the sorcerers who played on superstitions and desires, the adulterers whose licentious lives made a mockery of the notion of faithfulness, the oppressors who exploited the weak and underprivileged for their own advantage), would be disposed of on the eschatological day of Yahweh's advent (Craigie 1985:240–241).

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that Yahweh's *Torah* stands at the heart of Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh

and serves to safeguard the primary needs of Yahweh's people. However, the people's neglect of his *Torah* invariably resulted in the neglect and disrespect of their religious, social and economic duties. Malachi accuses his people of committing worship offense, entering into unholy marriage alliances, divorcing, social violence and failing to tithe, which are all violations of their covenant relationship with Yahweh. Malachi bemoans the people's neglect and disrespect of their religious, social and economic duties – not because they are important in and of themselves, but rather because such neglect reveals the people's lack of reverence, faith and affection for Yahweh. Malachi notes clearly that it is the sins of the community as a whole that renders it inconceivable that Yahweh's blessings should attend to them as they are now, and Malachi demands certain definite and substantial actions as preconditions to the manifestation of the desired expectations.

From the perspective of Malachi, the secret to creating and maintaining a healthy, viable community and living as people in covenant relationship with Yahweh, is by 'remembering' (upholding and practicing) Yahweh's *Torah*. Malachi's exhortation to all Israel of the necessity of *Torah* compliance echoes the significance and necessity of a wholehearted return to Yahweh and his *Torah*. In this retrospective imperative exhortation, Malachi enjoined his audience to remember the *Torah* of Moses, which constitutes the fundamental dimensions of their relationship with Yahweh. The instructions given to Israel at Horeb were never intended to be a burden, but rather were gifts that established the norms of life in relationship with Yahweh and which could lead to life in all its fullness (Craigie 1985:248; Watts 2007:60–61). The map of the future may be very impressive – however, such an impressive future is utterly flawed if there is no significant, honest and heartfelt devotion to Yahweh, Yahweh's instructions and Yahweh's people. This absolutely makes *Torah* compliance a crucial element for community well-being (Stulman & Kim 2010:243).

Malachi's imperative exhortation to all Israel of the necessity of *Torah* compliance is a call for a renewal of heart, which includes a return to a covenant relationship that involves all aspects of Israel's community – both social and cultic. The significance of Malachi's exhortation to *Torah* compliance – and in fact his prophecy – should not be underestimated. His message extends far beyond his own historical context. By specifically addressing the bitter conflicts of his day, Malachi was no doubt able to apprehend the wider picture of Yahweh's redemption for all people. The church, through the ages of its existence, has recreated the conditions of Malachi's era, making his message ever timely and relevant.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

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