

**MALACHI'S VISION OF THE TEMPLE:
AN EMBLEM OF ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE (MALACHI 3:1-5)
AND AN ECONOMIC CENTRE OF THE COMMUNITY
(MALACHI 3:10-12)**

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ABSTRACT

This article shows how temples were viewed in biblical Israel and how the prophets understood the temple in their different contexts. The temple is emphasised as the abode of Yahweh by the prophets before the exile. During the exile, it is seen as a symbol of the reestablishment of the people as community of faith, and in the post-exilic era, the temple is conceived as an emblem of the restoration and revival of the people and as a representation of an eschatological hope. These prophetic conceptions of the temple are used by the prophets in their respective contexts to challenge people to move towards their aim. In keeping with these prophetic traditions, the article highlights the fact that in the book of Malachi the temple is discerned as an emblem of eschatological hope, wherein Yahweh's last judgment is determined and the triumph of his people is declared and granted (Malachi 3:1-5) and as an economic centre of the community (Malachi 3:10-12). The consistency of Malachi's vision validates similar prophetic formulae and theological themes.

INTRODUCTION

During the long history of the development of the Old Testament, the phenomenon of prophetic speech is observable in Israel from the monarchical era to the post-exilic period. While it is true that not all the prophets of Israel left deposits of oracles, one finds traces of such early prophetic traditions in the oldest layers of the Torah, in the

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earliest layers of prophetic writings down through the period of the Second Temple. The traditional prophetic heritage may not necessarily be that of envisaging future events but of devotion to morality and truth that can guarantee a colourful and positive future for Yahweh's people. The aim of this article is to demonstrate an understanding of the idea of the temple as expressed by Malachi in his prophetic vision, namely an emblem of eschatological hope and an economic centre of the community. This exploration will necessitate an assessment of how the Old Testament prophets understood the temple in their different contexts of ministry.

In the book of Malachi,² the prophet's message belongs to Israel. Although Israel may be contained within its scope, the book does not belong to the time when Israel and Judah were political powers on the platform of the world empires, but was actually addressed to the post-exilic period, when Judah (or Yehud, as it was often called) had been reduced to a small administrative centre in the massive Persian empire. Thus it was in "this day of small things" (Zc 4:10) when Judah had lost its king and political independence and was struggling to learn new ways of survival, that Malachi continued his prophetic tradition and initiated new perspectives for his time and the generations to come (Schuller 1996:845-46). One finds within the four chapters³ of the book, for example, rich and creative reworking and incorporation of the important covenant themes that motivated earlier prophets. It is clear that the walls and gates of Jerusalem and the temple have been rebuilt and sacrifices revived. The passion for justice, the concern for the less privileged – widow, orphan and labourers – of the eighth-century prophets is combined with a sharp focus on temple, cult, tithes, and priesthood, all of which reflects and addresses the centrality of these institutions for the post-exilic community.

The term temple in this article refers to the conceived house for Yahweh, consecrated or set apart for sacred usage. According to biblical tradition, David's son,

² In this article, reference to Malachi always implies the book. Details of authorship, date of composition, themes and style of writing as well as other issues relating to the book are dealt with in the first author's doctoral thesis (Boloje 2014:120ff.).

³ In the Hebrew Bible the book has only three chapters.

Solomon,⁴ was responsible for building the first temple in the tenth century B.C.E. This was however demolished by the invading Babylonians in 587/6 B.C.E. In 515 B.C.E., the returning exiles reconstructed a moderate temple and it was further remodelled on an impressive scale during the Hellenistic period. The Bible is replete with texts that demonstrate the fundamental role that the temple played in Judah. During the Persian period (and the late Babylonian period), the restoration of the temple became a focal point of discussion for biblical writers (Carroll 1994:34-51; Janzen 2002:490-510). In his literary analysis and synthesis of temples in Semitic literature, Smith (2007:3) attempts to demonstrate how deities and their characteristics are shown or relayed through temples, in addition to various ways in which the ancients situated their relationship to deities via temples. He identifies such forms of relationships as “intersection, recapitulation, participation, and analogy (or homology)”. At the centre of the intersection between a divine presence (theophany) and human presence (pilgrimage) is the temple. Here, ritual provides the context for divine presence, with benediction from the side of the divine, and human presence – priests and pilgrims – with offerings from the human side. This kind of ritual activity in biblical texts has resulted in various significant studies reflected in commentaries on Leviticus and Numbers (Smith 2007:3-4).

Since temple architecture embodies and conveys several divine narratives, temples thus may summarize the understanding of the deities. For example, in 1 Kings 6-9 the cultic fittings and decorations of the Jerusalem temple conveys the narrative of the victory of Yahweh over the sea, his acceptance of the offerings of the people, the accession (or re-accession) to the divine throne within the divine house, and the blessing of the people. Possibly, courtyard symbols communicate Yahweh’s triumphant enthronement. As marked by the presence of objects or cultic action,⁵ the

⁴ The architecture and design of Solomon’s temple, also known as the First Temple, has been a perennial subject of scholarly debates and has benefited from several important studies including its symbolism and religious significance (Hurowitz 2007:63ff.).

⁵ The systematised body of ritual acts that associate human beings to the realm of the deities is known as “cultus”. The expression could also be used lightly to denote the organisation that sustains the practice of all ritual acts. In this regard, one may speak of the “Temple cultus”, as both the ritual activities of the temple and the temple as the institution in which

Jerusalem temple may suggest the model of the divine king ruling over the subjects, both divine and human (Smith 2007:6). Temples are regarded as a point of participation in the power of the deities (cf. Pss 46; 48:13-15), as holy, consistent with the holiness of the deities (cf. Ps 46:4-5) and both divinity and temples are treated in terms of size and attraction (Smith 2007:11, 17). Temples do not only tell where the deities are but what and how they are. Both focus on a variety of relationships that exist between divinity and humanity (Smith 2007:21). Thus, when the prophets and their tradents write, their purpose is simply to maintain what the temple symbolises, namely the presence of Yahweh in the midst of his people. The following sections demonstrate that Malachi's vision of the temple is consistent with earlier prophetic vision. It shows a consistency that validates similar prophetic formula and theological themes. Malachi's conception of the temple as shown in this article conveys Yahweh's solid and positive message of hope for his people, a message that lies in their steadfastness and continued practice of the Torah.

CONCEPTIONS OF THE TEMPLE IN THE PROPHETS

The discussion below focuses on the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic literary and textual conceptions or descriptions of Solomon's Jerusalem temple in 1 Kings 6-7. Although the concept of temples or sanctuaries differs in each of Israel's prophetic traditions, there are shared and coherent elements.

The temple in pre-exilic and exilic prophets

Prophets of the pre-exilic period highlighted the temple as the house of Yahweh. As noted by Ahn (2011:78), the sovereignty of Yahweh in the world is centred in Zion where the Temple Mount is located. The extent to which Isaiah himself may or may

these activities are carried out (Vaux 1997:271). In its cultic sense, a ritual is "a prescribed order of performing religious or other devoted service" (Hrobon 2010:6). The term "ritual as used in OT scholarship is a general label for offering sacrifices, purificatory procedures, and related activities such as fasting or prayer. In the religion of ancient Israel during the first and second temple periods, the main responsibility for performing and maintaining rituals was assigned to priests (Hrobon 2010:6,12).

not support this so-called Zion theology, whereby the temple had a prominent role to play, is open to scholarly dispute (Williamson 2007:123). In Isaiah 6:1, the text shows that the prophet receives his call and commission to a prophetic ministry in the temple at a time in which it was covered with the influence of Yahweh. In this narrative framework, it is argued that the conception of the heavenly sanctuary would inevitably be coloured by the prophet's idea of the earthly. While some aspects of Isaiah 6 are imagined as taking place in the heavenly sanctuary, Williamson (2007:124) notes,

It is now generally accepted that there is considerable degree of overlap between the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries; ... The eyes of the prophet in the vision and of the reader in the text are, rather, constantly redirected ... between the heavenly ... and the earthly temple because we are not dealing with two different holy places but rather of dimensions of God's single dwelling place where the heavenly community joins in praise with the earthly.

Isaiah's perspective of both Yahweh's throne and Yahweh as a figure exceeding the dimensions of the temple building, from a literary point of view makes a simple contribution to ones understanding of the progress of a theology of the temple and its worship in Israel (Williamson 2007:139). In the book of Micah, the prophet, being a contemporary of Isaiah, describes this as truly the sacred dwelling of God wherein Yahweh was approaching (Micah 1:2). The prophet's message about Jerusalem becoming heaps of ruins (Micah 3:12) was only as a result of the injustice of their rulers. In Jeremiah, however, the prophet's message took an undesirable posture with respect to the temple. He is drastically opposed to the sacrificial cultus, maintaining that it did not form any part of Yahweh's worship (Barton 2007:112). The prophet confronted all those who held a misleading attitude to and gratification in the temple, and thus set their confidence and protection in it (7:4), and prompted their memory about Shiloh's sanctuary that was demolished (7:12). However, the prophet's attack was not simply about the temple as an institution but rather for their misleading notions and deceitful cultic attitude (Ahn 2011:78).

Furthermore, during the period of the exile, the temple was conceived to be an

emblem of the re-establishment of Israel's community (Ahn 2011:78). In Second Isaiah (also known as Deutero-Isaiah), Isaiah is noted to have proclaimed the prospect of salvation and the reconstitution of Judah-Israel and Zion-Jerusalem (40:1-2). The restoration of Zion-Jerusalem's enthronement is described in Isaiah 52:1-3 (Baltzer 1994:52; Berges 2010:555). Three realms which cannot be disconnected in Deutero-Isaiah's theological understanding are the city and its destiny, the well-being of the land and its people, and the sense of a final world order (Baltzer 1994:58). Yahweh alone is conceived as God who guarantees the balance between what is at the moment breaking in (43:19) with the promise of rebuilding the temple (44:28).

During the restoration of Yahweh's people, Ezekiel underscored the significance of the temple in two separate visions. First, he had a glimpse of the detestable things that were being done by people in the Jerusalem temple (8:5-6, 10-11, 14-16), where Yahweh's wrath was triggered by its desecration and the abandonment of the people. Second, in chapters 40-48 the temple's sacredness was re-established and the glory of Yahweh reappeared again in the temple, making it his abode (Ahn 2011:78). Chapters 40-48, with their vision of the restored temple, constitute one of the peculiar masterpieces of the book, combining both drama and reality (Joyce 2007:145-147). Additionally, Ezekiel 47:1-12 presents a fascinating picture of a river flowing from the temple down through the desert, resulting in all the trees bearing fruit. With this prophetic vision of the new and glorified temple, the prophet inspires the anticipation and optimism that Yahweh will now publicly manifest himself and dwell in this city and temple, a location or home that will remain once and for all distinct from the ambits of ethical and ritual pollution.

A very remarkable statement at the end of Ezekiel 42 is the verse that indicates a wall around the temple area that will serve as a differentiation with respect to the intensity of sacredness even as the various locations of their accomplishment are specially demarcated (42:20; cf. 44:23). Here divisions, gradation, degree, and access are the themes fundamental to the address (Joyce 2007:152). Simon (2009:416) stresses the reason for this kind of spatial demarcation when he says that the essence of the temple rituals was to preserve the continuing procedure of cleansing, the

cleansing of unavoidable contamination and iniquity. The crucial and burning issue is that of providing opportunities as well as arrangements for the cleansing of the pollution and contamination of the people that made Yahweh send them into captivity. In Ezekiel's theological construct, there is a clear connection between the ideas of the Most Holy Place and the altar of Yahweh. The Most Holy Place to him is an emblem of Yahweh's abode (*kabhodh Yhwh*), while the altar represents the venue of purification.

This vision as noted by Simon (2009:416) is in dramatic disparity with the previous vision of the temple in Ezekiel 8. In about 592 B.C.E., Ezekiel was divinely conveyed to Jerusalem in order to view the temple and bear testimony to the detestable and wicked abominations that the house of Israel were perpetrating there. Afterward, Yahweh disconnects his manifestation and predicts the demolition of his house (i.e., the temple) and the deportation of the remnant back to Babylon. In the restoration vision, the *kābhôdh* (i.e., glory), which is the representation or emblem of the divine manifestation, comes back to the reconstructed Jerusalem temple, while the designation given to the city from that time onward would be *Yahweh shāmmā* ("Yahweh is present", Ez 48:35). This is essentially a magnificent theocentric note for a Yahweh-centred biblical book to end (cf. Joyce 2007:160). Simon (2009:417) further observes that the theological heritage of the priestly class to which the prophet (i.e., Ezekiel) himself is a beneficiary centres on the temple's function and of its rituals for handling the various transgressions and pollutions of the house of Israel.

The temple in post-exilic prophetic tradition

An exploration of the post-exilic prophetic understanding of the temple demands, however, a brief illustration of the historical conditions of the province of Yehud. It is assumed that in the Persian period Israel was in need of a reformatted identity, a new viable self. Three ideas are implied in this sentence: the Persian period is seen as an era following the radical changes caused by the exile and return, Israel is considered as a community of people worshipping Yahweh, and identity is seen as a group of symbols shared by the majority of the community and which help them to cope with

reality (Becking 2003:18-20). Miller and Mays (2006:487) focus on the nature of religious practice in Judah, including questions about the potential location and functions of a new temple and the possibility of ongoing cultic practices in the ruins of the Jerusalem temple. For Moore and Kelle (2011:371), while people and towns remained, all important social and cultural systems fell apart, leaving a poor and scattered population with no meaningful unifying social or economic structures and no important political or national activity.

Moore and Kelle (2011:372) provide a convenient example of this perception. Although they argue that the destruction and deportation were limited in scope, with even the Jerusalem temple perhaps surviving to some extent, they assert that life in Judah was radically disrupted to the extent that the remaining society was marked by "depression, lack of confidence, economic poverty, and political and national inactivity." However, when Babylon fell to the Persians (539 B.C.E.) the destruction of Babylon led some of the Judaeans theologians (Levites) to interpret this event as a sign of salvation for Zion along with the rebuilding of the cities of Judah and of the temple (Groenewald 2003:235-237, 299-300). During this period, two emblems of great significance for the book of Ezra are the temple and Torah. Ezra makes clear the significance of the temple for proper and adequate worship of Yahweh. A literary analysis of his narrative indicates that he wanted to underscore the significance of the temple not as a building as such, but as the place for a correct celebration of the Passover festival. This system of reflection is seen as having divine (Ezra 5:1-2) and imperial (Ezra 6:1-5) support (Becking 1999:257-262). The temple of the restoration period is actually portrayed slightly in Ezra 6:3-4 in the letter to Cyrus the King (Carroll 1994:35).

Biblical texts from the Persian period accentuate the centrality of the temple. According to the book of Ezra the most important agenda of Ezra's visit to Judah was principally concerned with the normalization of the cult in Jerusalem. According to Ezra 7, concern for the law is articulated within the cultic structure which the letter is mostly concerned with. In other words, the context of the royal decree of Artaxerxes points out that the question of imperial authorization of Torah cannot be studied

properly in isolation from the rest of the royal writ (Lee 2011:177). Temples were not ordinary symbols to the Achaemenids. Thus, from their standpoint, temples were a vital connection between local religious societies and local economic activity, from which they could logically derive meaningful political advantage. The temple and its cult are fundamental to the economic makeup of ancient Near Eastern society. There are numerous texts in the Hebrew Bible that demonstrate the essential role that the temple played in Judah. The restoration of the temple during the Persian period became a focal point of discussion for biblical scholars (cf. Carroll 1994:34-36, 45-51; Janzen 2002:490ff; Lee 2011:178-179). Blenkinsopp (1991:23) clearly explains the strategic social and economic impact of temples in the Achaemenid context: "Stimulation of the regional economies by temples serving as storage and redistribution centers, to the evident advantage of the imperial exchange, helps to explain why they were supported by successive Achaemenid rulers."

Both prophets and historians of the Persian period are characteristically interested in the accurate restoration of religious life in Yehud which was disrupted by the Babylonia invasion. Middlemas (2005:123) aptly notes, "The Babylonians thoroughly disrupted the ability of Jerusalem to function as a political and religious centre through their termination of the influence of the Davidic line and the priests of the temple." Thus the volume of instructive, reflective, interpretive, and oracular dialogue about the destruction and restoration of the temple, describing the various theological and ideological perspectives dominant at that time, bear witness to the leading position of the temple in the social, economic, political and religious dimensions of Judeans' national identity (Lee 2011:179). In the light of the traditional and central role of the temple in society, the one institution in Judah that had the potential to embody the local administrative organisation, having been staffed by leading individuals who represented religious and intellectual leadership in ancient Israel (Blenkinsopp 1995:66-114), one may be correct in assuming this to be the reason the Achaemenids' political strategy toward the Judean province was primarily focused on the temple in Jerusalem

Prophetic texts that are treated as clearly the outcome of the "Temple of

Restoration” or “Second Temple” period are those of Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi. In Ezra 5:1-2, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are connected with the reconstruction of the second temple. In the book of Haggai, efforts toward the rebuilding task of the temple are presented in a predictive manner and the reconstruction process is described as a widespread venture (Carroll 1994:37). Clines (1994:66) observes that the “Temple of Restoration” was not simply a building constructed by the Judeans; in addition, it was an intellectual piece built by prophet Haggai. The rebuilt temple in Haggai’s construction links with “glory”, and “glory” links with silver and gold, silver and gold connects with national disorder and national disorder in turn links with the appropriate time for the temple’s reconstruction. In Haggai, the temple is conceived as the place of Yahweh’s presence, a symbol of Yahweh’s glory with an eschatological significance, a centre of God’s self-manifestation, a centre of divine worship, a place of human meeting with the divine, a social centre, required for both the survival of Israel and a focus of a universal religion, thus a religious centre of the world (cf. Is 2:2-4; Groenewald 2013a:2-4). It is further conceived of as a channel of salvation, an emblem of, or a channel for the community’s autonomy and distinctiveness as well as the economic and administrative centre of the post-exilic Judean community (Clines1994:67-70).

Haggai shows no defence for self-interest in the light of the situation of the temple of Yahweh. While lack of resources on account of the harsh economic situation has been noted as an excuse for the people’s neglect or refusal to rebuild the temple, the curses of Haggai 1:5-11 and 2:15-17 are interpreted to be the result of cultic or ethical infractions (Bedford 1995:74). In his diagnosis and explanation on why there was a delay or neglect in the reconstruction of the temple, the simple causal explanation, namely poor economic situation as a factor responsible for the neglect or delay to reconstruct the temple (1:6), is turned into neglect or delay to reconstruct the temple as a reason for the poor economic situation (1:9-11). Thus Haggai’s theological presuppositions reflect the religious idea of his time (Japhet 1991:229). Another inventive dimension of the prophecy of Haggai is the declaration that the survival of the temple guarantees the economic prosperity of the nation (Assis 2008:6). In Haggai

2, the prophet's essence of the divine house is that of a stock market, or centre of the creation of wealth. It appears more like a royal taxation centre than a holy house. In this regard, the absence of a divine house is explained to mean the reason for the nation's economic hardship and deprivation and thus the function of such a rebuilt divine temple must be seen in terms of its ability for wealth creation. Thus at the moment the temple's foundation was laid, the blessings of Yahweh were assured (Hag. 2:20-23; cf. Meyers & Meyers 1987:68; Carroll 1994:41). Thus the rebuilding of the temple will bring near economic prosperity and political revitalization. Here lays the prophet's understanding of the temple, namely that of an emblem of the restoration of the Judean community that extends to the future in an eschatological manner (Ahn 2011:81).

The prophet Zechariah is also considered in close connection with Haggai as one who promoted the building of the second temple. Both prophets appear together in the book of Ezra (5:1-2; 6:14). Marinkovic (1994:96) argues that in his message Zechariah only advocates an idea of the living community in Jerusalem. "In short the basic issue of Zechariah 1-8 concerns the renewed establishing of the relationship between Yahweh and his people in Jerusalem" (Marinkovic 1994:96). While Haggai emphasises the restoration of the temple, Zechariah is concerned with the building of Yahweh's community in Jerusalem (Marinkovic 1994:102). Laying further stress on the internal reason behind the building of the temple in Zechariah's message, Marinkovic (1994:103) states:

The rebuilding of the temple does not serve as an end in itself ... Rather; it is a symbol and visible sign of the relatedness of God and God's people and their living together as a community in Jerusalem. Thus, the temple will become a visible sign of the renewal of the Covenant, the relationship between YHWH and his people, but the actual goal is the renewed community itself, the community that exist between God and God's people and not the mere building of the temple.

Although Zechariah's visions⁶ give little attention to the temple itself (Petersen 1991:92), viewing its completion as a future event (cf. Zc 6:15; Japhet 1991:219), in Zechariah (8:9-13) the prophet characterises the temple as a venue for economic activity and the economic expansion of the nation is linked closely with temple reconstruction (Carroll 1994:43).⁷ According to Zechariah (1:12-17), the delay in the rebuilding of the temple was because Yahweh had been absent from Jerusalem after the tragedy of 587 B.C.E. and was now set to return to Jerusalem (Zc 2:14, 16; 2:10-17 [Eng. vv. 2:6-13]; 8:1-8, 20-23) (Bedford 1995:82). The expression of hope and confidence that such a day would witness the termination of business in the temple (14:21) is simply symptomatic of the fact that the temple is a type of commercial city, known for trade and commercial operations. The sacred language of 14:20-21 may represent a hope for the alteration of Jerusalem (the temple city) from a business centre to solely a cult centre (Carroll 1994:43). While eschatological features do manifest in Zechariah (e.g., the use of the term "On that day", Zc 14, etc.) as they do in Haggai, the reconstruction of the temple implies the restoration of Yahweh's community followed by both economic and political aspects.

In the study of the temple and its role in the corpus of Isaiah 56-66, it is argued that the attempts to gain control of the temple by competing groups play a dominant role in Trito-Isaiah's material. The temple construction serves as an incentive for the development of the Isaianic prophecies, with the central issue being that of the possession of the temple (Middlemas 2007:164-165). Although the temple has already been completed and the round of sacrifices are being offered, there appears to be a portion of the people who are engaged in apostate worship practices (57:3-13; 58:1-5), of illicit cultic rituals (Smith 1995:155-59), and a crisis of faith in the absence of the manifestation of promised wealth by the earlier prophets following the completion of

⁶ Carroll (1994:41) examines the literary device of the prophet's night visions which focuses on the rebuilding of the temple in various ways and is a highly reflective construction.

⁷ Other facets of the temple language and routine are used in Zechariah, namely mountain of Yahweh of hosts, the holy mountain (8:3) or the clothing of Joshua the High Priest (3:1-5), visions or oracles about the day of Yahweh when all parts of Judah and Jerusalem would be sacred. These ideas hardly afford any concrete information about the temple (Zc 14:20-21) (Carroll 1994:43).

the temple (66:6). This gives rise to the observation that the temple does not symbolise the full measure of significance which had been expected of it by the people (Petersen 1991:93).

While one can observe the prophetic pronouncement of judgement (57:13; 65:11-15) on the one hand, Yahweh's consolation of his people is celebrated in the temple's mount in Jerusalem (66:10-14) on the other hand. In the nucleus material (60:1-63:6), the prophetic tradents consider the sanctuary in Jerusalem as only a mirror detail within the greater scheme of the advent of Yahweh's planned redemption. The message of this section radiates with themes of salvation, joy, celebration and blessing which are described differently as the wealth of nations flow into Jerusalem. There is no trace of indictment here since the focus is basically on the fulfilment of the anticipated earlier promises of Second-Isaiah, and through it the turnaround of the awful predictions of Proto-Isaiah (cf. 60:1-2, 17-19 and 9:1-3; 60:3, 5, 14, 17 and 2:1-4; 60:14 and 12:6; 62:4 and 1:7; 62:10-12 and 11:10). Thus as Yahweh's people are being blessed through his intervention, the temple will be blessed as well (Middlemas 2007:169-170).

In these core sections, the temple serves as a medium for expressing the restoration of the economic buoyancy of the people. These restoration blessings of the new era result in the rebuilding of the temple and the recommencement of ritual activities in it (Middlemas 2007:171). As the place of the righteous ruling of the transcendent and the occupant of a cosmic throne, of the God of Israel who is concerned with the poor and oppressed (66:1-2), and locus of the divine intervention in history, the prophet thus seeks to exhort the people to align their attitude to the ethical demands of Yahweh in preparation for his imminent advent (Middlemas 2007:182; cf. Groenewald 2013b:712). The temple thus functions as both a symbol of divine judgment and consolation in Trito-Isaiah. Innovative aspects of the temple in Trito-Isaiah, however, include the recognition given to foreigners and the eunuch within his people (56:3-8), the question about the human temple (66:1-2), and the imaginative idea of the temple as the prayer house for every nation, which invariably goes outside the narrow confine of ethnic traditions and cultic orientation (Ahn

2011:89).

What is clear from the foregoing exploration is that the temple is the abode of Yahweh, the God of Israel. The prophetic emphasis on the temple provided the Israelites with national security and uniqueness, and contributes significantly to our understanding of the progress of a theology of the temple and its worship in Israel. This following section will now highlight Malachi's vision of the temple which we argue validates similar prophetic formulae and theological themes.

MALACHI'S VISION OF THE TEMPLE

In the book of Malachi, references to the temple deal with questions about altar pollution and acceptability (or otherwise) of offerings on the altar (cf. 1:6-14; 2:13; 3:4). Additionally, in Malachi 3:10-12, Yahweh's house (i.e., the temple) is associated with a storehouse (*bêth hā'ôtsār*). The exhortation to bring all the tithes into the storehouse secures the prosperity of the land by giving "food" for the temple and brings economic buoyancy to the community. The explanations given for the inequalities with respect to the temple are not only hard economic reality, but, more critically, disillusionment and gloom arising from the lack of confirmation of the words of the prophets that a new, more prosperous and glorious messianic age was about to manifest itself. The tidal waves of enthusiasm that had been created by the preaching of earlier prophets had by then crashed on the rocks of reality.

The disillusionment of the postexilic Jewish community was prompted by several theological misunderstandings, including the expectations for wealth that Haggai had promised once the second temple was rebuilt (Hg 2:7, 18-19), the restoration of the Davidic covenant predicted by Ezekiel (Ez 34:13, 23-24) and the implementation of Jeremiah's "new covenant" (Jr 31:23, 31-32) (Hill 2012:527; Blenkinsopp 1996:210). Strong and harsh denunciations are directed against priests (2:1-9), but they will be purified by the "messenger of the covenant" (3:1-4). Yahweh is represented as coming "suddenly to his temple" (3:1), for an eschatological judgment (3:5; 4:16-18). The book underscores that reverential obedience is the key that guarantees blessings,

happiness and shalom and the promise blessings and healing is expressed through abundant agricultural provision. In this regard, the temple is discerned as an emblem of eschatological hope, wherein Yahweh's last judgment is determined and the triumph of Yahweh's people is declared and granted. It also serves as the venue for the economic buoyancy of the community. An elaboration of these ideas is presented in the following discussions.

The temple as an emblem of eschatological hope (Malachi 3:1-5)

The term eschatology (*eschatos + logos*) means “a doctrine of the last things” or a distinct age beyond the present age (Martens 2012:178). It deals with expectations or beliefs that are characteristic of a certain religious perspective, namely that 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 (Vos 2001:1). According to Mowinckel (2005:125), eschatology is a doctrine or a complex of ideas about “the last things”. Old Testament eschatological hope receives its clearest expression from the eighth century B.C.E. onwards and most probably in the post-exilic period, but its roots go deep into Israel's covenant faith (Routledge 2008:273). The presence of eschatology in the Old Testament gradually became more prominent in the prophets and in later Jewish apocalyptic texts, which began to appear already in the canon of the Old Testament itself (Arnold 2010:23).

In Malachi, the distinctiveness of the eschatological dialogue of the prophet 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 (Vos 2001:160). Malachi's remarkable eschatological characteristics which are 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 *tsdhāqā*” (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) (Vos 2001:160-161).

The negative accusation 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 social-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 – the blind, lame, sick, and torn animals brought 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); and the marrying of the daughter of a strange god and the unfaithfulness involved in this to the marital ideal in Israel (2:15).

Malachi'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 to his temple 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 (Vos 2001:161-162). The idea that Yahweh will send a messenger before his own final advent (Malachi 3:1) is only found in Malachi (von Rad 1968:255). The attempt in the following paragraphs focuses on Malachi's vision of an eschatological messenger coming to his temple for the purpose of cultic restoration and righting of past wrongs and the reversal of sinful societal order which serve to fulfil the hope of the people.

In Malachi 3:1 one finds the coming of the divine eschatological messenger to cleanse Yahweh's people and restore true worship and obedience to the ethical standards of the law. 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-hēkhālô* ("the one who is coming to his temple") as well as *ûmal'akh habhbh rîth* ("the messenger of the covenant") (Stuart 1998:1350; Tiemeyer 2006:257). This promised messenger of restoration of positive events is described by two clauses as someone whom the audience, including the priests, has asked for. This indeed, within the prophetic corpus, is no doubt a messianic concept (Stuart 1998:1350).

The expression "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 (cf. Ps 84:6; Pohlig 1998:134). The characteristic feature of "the day of the Lord" (*yôm yhw̄h*) in the Old Testament is indicated by the expression "the Lord will suddenly come to his temple". As the first of the Day of Yahweh passages 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 (Stuart 1998:1347; Pohlig 1998:135).

As the agent of the covenant, the *mal'ākhî* 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 described. 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"); the *pi'el* stem denotes the smelting of metals, for the impurity remain in the crucible, while the refined metal flows away (Pohlig 1998:140-141). 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 it is liquidated of every external component or substance 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.

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 on their faces" (Clendenen 2004:389). The purification process will begin with the priests because they serve to mediate the relationship 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 with the result that the Judahites' offerings would please Yahweh anew (3:4). The phrase *minhā bitsdhāqā* 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 emphasized (Weyde 2000:300). The purified people will continuously offer sacrifices in a way described.

The acceptable offering in the restored cult is called "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 (Pohlig 1998:144). 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 qadhmonîyyôth*). Although *kîmê 'ôlām* is not definite, it most probably refers here to the Mosaic era, which was characterized by Israel's complete reliance upon Yahweh, and perhaps the Davidic era and the early years of Solomon's reign are included also (Pohlig 1998:145; Stuart 1998:1355). 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.

Another important dimension of the eschatological hope is the description of Yahweh's coming to his temple in a dual role as both a witness and a judge (Ml 3:5). The text summarises the disputation by itemising some of the practices that caused people to say "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them" or ask "where is the God of justice?" (2:17). The drawing near of

Yahweh for judgement is expressed by the verb *qārabh* (“to draw near, come, appear, and step forward”) (BDB 1997:897). The verb is used in a forensic sense as often in Isaiah, but it is always others who are called to come before God (Is 34:1; 41:1, 5; 48:16; 57:3). It is only here that God is referred to as the one who comes (Stuart 1998:1356; Clendenen 2004:392). The phrase “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 (Pohlig 1998:149).

In this juridical function of Yahweh’s visitation to his temple, several violations of the Mosaic covenants are emphasized. 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 (Pohlig 1998:148). The first enumeration of law breakers is the *khashsh phîm* (“sorcery” or “witchcraft”). Another example of the violation of law is those who commit adultery (*bhamnā’ăphîm*). Again, on Malachi’s list of law breakers are those who swear dishonestly by Yahweh’s name, that is, perjurers, those who swear to a lie (*sheqer*). In Zechariah, there is the prediction of judgement for the perjurers: God sends a curse to rectify the situation (Zc 5:4), and in Malachi, God’s theophany is imminent. This crime is followed by “those who defraud labourers of their wages,” “those who oppress the widows and fatherless” (*’almānā w^eyāthôm*) and “those who mistreat aliens” (*ûmaththê-ghēr*). It was believed, 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 (see Ex 22:22-24; Zc 7:10) (Pohlig 1998:149). 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 (Ex 20:21; Dt 10:18-19) (Glazer-McDonald 1987:167-168). As a summary statement, the final clause *w lō’ y^erē’ûnî* (“those who do not fear me”) 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 adopt Yahweh’s concern as his own, including Yahweh’s social concerns, which are in focus in this verse” (Pohlig

1998:149).

In addition to the purification of the priest and people and judgement of covenant violators, there is the promise of hope. In Malachi 3:16-17, Yahweh promises to write down the list of those who fear him (*sēpher zikkhārôn*), who will be God's special possession or property (*s^eghullā*) on the day the Lord would prepare (*lāyyôm 'āsher 'ānî 'ōsē*) (see vv. 17-18; Udoekpo 2010:229). 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. Those who fear the Lord will be rewarded. The sun of righteousness will shine upon them with healing and they will go about with joy leaping like calves from a stall (*ūphishtem k^e'eghlē marbēq*) (3:20 [4:2]). They would, on this day trample on the wicked (*w'assōthem r^eshā'im*) who becomes nothing but ashes on the feet of the righteous (3:21 [4:3]). Here, Malachi's vision of the eschatological advent of Yahweh to his temple is discerned as an inspiration and motivation of the hope of his people who reverently hold fast to the Torah as well as the restoration of the fortune of life in the whole community.

The temple as an economic centre of the community (MI 3:10-12)

While Malachi's vision of the eschatological advent of Yahweh to his temple is discerned as an inspiration and motivation of the hope of his people, his vision of the temple also serves as the venue for the economic buoyancy of the community. In Malachi, the pragmatic economic situations which the Judahite population met were very discouraging. The Samaritans, who were considered to be a miscellaneous tribe from the northern part of Israel, had come in and taken ownership of their belongings and possessed large holdings and estates, and many had become rich and were in affluent situations (Blenkinsopp 1988:68). The returnees could not count on being welcomed by those who had been left behind, especially since economic conditions in Judah were poor (Hg 1:6, 9–12; Zc 8:10). These hard and unwelcoming economic realities of Yehud were particularly noticeable in the remarks made by the prophet on some ritual impurities (for example the desecration of the table of Yahweh, 1:7, 8, 13-14, or failing to bring the tithe, 3:8-10).

The economic centre of Israel's community focuses attention more on the land that was considered "not just a neutral stage where the drama unfolds" but "a fundamentally theological entity" (Wright 1983a:50). The land was an important category as well as a defining theme in Old Testament tradition (Brueggemann 2002a:120). Although Yahweh graciously gave the land to Israel as their heritage, they were to live in it in total reliance on him (Lv 25:23). Thus the manner in which the land was considered and treated by Israel along with its yield was a key feature of their assignments under Yahweh's covenant (Brueggemann 2002b:50). The land along with all its produce was to serve as a constant reminder and declaration of Israel's reliance and Yahweh's trustworthiness, as evidence of the relationship between God and Israel. This historical land-gift tradition engendered individual property rights in Israel and the follow-up to the Naboth incident opens up the prophets' preoccupation with economic exploitation (Wright 1983b:51-55).

The sterility of the land in Malachi presumes that although the reconstruction of the temple has been achieved, once again the people are attempting to defraud Yahweh by keeping back their contributions and tithes as well as the appropriate sacrifices. Unless they have a change of attitude and return to Yahweh, Yahweh will not bring back the fortunes and abundant fruitfulness of the land for them to experience and enjoy. The prophet then assures the return of rain and the elimination of the destroyer as soon as the people return to Yahweh and with their full tithe to the temple (Ml 3:10-11). Alden (1985:721) observes that since "he was dealing with an agrarian society, the 'blessings' had to do with crops and the like." The anticipated blessing is threefold: (1) Yahweh will open the windows of heaven; (2) He will restrain the devourer from destroying their crops; and (3) the vines will not fail to be fruitful. The restoration of abundant fruitfulness after chastisement (cf. Amos 9:13-14; Joel 2:12-27) is an obvious indication that their covenant affiliation with Yahweh has once again been re-established (Nogalski 2007:129-130).

As observed by Stuart (1998:1369), verse 10 is a combination of imperatives and promises. It starts with commands and ends with conditional imperfects describing what can happen if the addressees obeyed the command. The expression *bêth hā'ôtsār*

refers to the public storehouse (cf. Nh 13:10-13), for the goods tithed by the people for the priests, Levites, and the less privileged of the nation. Nehemiah called the storehouse “a great chamber” (Nh 13:5) (Pohlig 1998:161). A literal Hebrew meaning of “house of supplies” has been suggested (Verhoef 1987:305). The primary emphasis of the verse then is on the motif of bearing the tithes to the storehouse, namely, *wîhî tereph* (“so that there may be food in my house”). The meaning of the term *tereph* is “food, provision, consumption, meat, nourishment” (Pohlig 1998:161) or “fresh food” (Petersen 1995:217). The parallelism of *bêth hā’ôtsār* with *b^ebhêthî* (“in my house”) in this verse allows the deduction that the temple complex could indeed store large contributions. Yahweh then makes an offer: *ûbh hānûnî nā’ bāzō’t* (“test me now in this”). As O’Brien (1990:75) puts it, “if you will honour me what is due me, I promise to make you prosper”.

The *qal* imperative *bh^ehānûnî* from *bāhan* (“to test, prove try”) (BDB 1997:103) is given the explicit idea that these words constitute a challenge (Pohlig 1998:161). The idea of testing Yahweh in the text appears to be very uncommon and has an undesirable meaning in certain passages of scripture. However, according to Mounce (2006:718) the term also carries the idea of trying to describe something appearing to be real. The result of the test is made very clear; Yahweh will accomplish what he had declared to do. The promise approximates the language of the covenant blessings. Profound fruitfulness and felicitations lie in wait for the nation once the people come back to Yahweh. It is the nation as a whole that will reap the blessings. The point of emphasis, however, is that “the promise is, however, corporate not individual, as are virtually all Old Covenant promises of abundance” (Stuart 1998:1369).

Yahweh’s response to the people’s dedicated loyalty is found in the expression “If I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.” The phrase *’ărubhbhōth hashshāmayim* (“floodgates of heaven”) is taken to be indicative of rain, the key to agricultural prosperity at almost all times and places in world history (Stuart 1998:1370; Clendenen 2004:424). For the rain to descend, heaven’s floodgates (*’ărubhbhōth hashshāmayim*) had to be opened (cf. Gn 7:11-12). Their closure was threatened by Yahweh as punishment for disobedience to him (Dt

11:16f.) (Pohlig 1998:164). The promise of rain indicates that Malachi and his contemporaries may have been experiencing a want of it, which invariably is an indication of a covenant curse (Lv 26:19; Dt 28:22-24) (Stuart 1998:1371). The Hebrew verb *rîq* translated “pour out” refers to being empty. Here it is understood to mean the abundant blessings that would answer the people’s submission to Yahweh (Clendenen 2004:425).

The anticipated reply to the obedience of the people begins and this is further specified in 3:11 and 3:12. Here the focus of the promise lay in the physical condition, fitness and productiveness of the land. Abundant rain is not the sum total of what is needed for agricultural productivity. Absence of crop pests and crop diseases is also needed. Yahweh then promises further to reproach the destroyer and restrain it from wreaking havoc on their fruit (*p^erî*) and vine (*gephen*) (3:11). The verb *gā’ar* “to rebuke, reproach, forbid, banish to restrain” (BDB 1997:172) is part of the vocabulary of cursing in the Old Testament. It denotes the retraining of something in order that it will not work as it should or so that it will be destroyed (see 2 Sm 22:16; Is 50:2; 51:20). According to Keil and Delitzsch (2002:660), the devourer probably refers to locusts which could destroy any crops, leaving barren land behind. Mounce (2006:916) observes that the verb *gā’ar* could also be interpreted as to reprimand or prevent, with special allusion to insects.

As he had been against them in the past for their wickedness (Lv 26:17-25; Dt 11:17; 28:20), so Yahweh promised to be for them: in the opening of the floodgates of heaven, in pouring out of blessing, and in rebuking whatever was destroying their crops, in protecting their agricultural harvest from destruction and their vines from unfruitfulness (cf. Joel 2:19, 23-25; Zc 8:13-15; Mt 4:2) (Clendenen 2004:426). The restoration blessings upon Israel are made manifest in verse 12: Israel will be so impressive that all nations of the world (*kol-hagghôyim*) will call her blessed and, as a nation, Israel will be, to the general recognition of all, delightful (*’erets hēphets*) (Stuart 1998:1371). While the expression “call you blessed” could be translated as “will congratulate you” (Deutsch 1987:106), the *’erets hēphets* indicates that the land will be an object of pleasure, both to the nations and to Yahweh who created,

graciously bequeathed, and beautified it (Clendenen 2004:428). Thus the people will no longer be able to say "God delights in the wicked" (2:17), for it will be obvious that they, the righteous, are the *'erets hēphets* (land of delight).

CONCLUSION

This article presented a brief assessment showing how temples were viewed in biblical Israel and how the prophets understood the temple in their different contexts. From the perspectives of those prophets prior to the exile, their perception and assessment of the temple was that it was an abode of Yahweh. This understanding of the temple no doubt persisted even in the period of the exile regardless of the nation's tragedy in 587 B.C.E. In their restoration vision, the exilic prophets positioned the restoration of Israel in the temple. Although there was no temple, the anticipation of the renewal of Israel rested in the temple. This to some reasonable extent may have served as a viable alternative the prophets of this period had with which to animate those who were in exile in order to arouse or stimulate their identity as a nation and their religious integrity. In the post-exilic era, the temple is conceived as an emblem of the restoration and revival of the people, and as a representation of an eschatological hope. In the book of Ezra, the significance of the temple is underscored not as a building as such, but as the place for the correct celebration of the Passover festival. This system of reflection is seen as having divine (Ezra 5:1-2) and imperial (Ezra 6:1-5) support. The temple in Haggai assures economic wealth: an emblem of the restoration of the Judean community that extends to the future in an eschatological manner. The reconstruction of the temple, for Zechariah, implies the reestablishment of Yahweh's faith community followed by both economic and political aspects, and in Third-Isaiah the temple serves as both an emblem of divine judgment and consolation of Yahweh's people.

In Malachi the temple is discerned as an emblem of eschatological hope, wherein Yahweh's last judgment is determined and the triumph of Yahweh's people is declared and granted. It is also treated as an economic centre of the community: a

centre and well-spring of gladness from which the divine benedictions are made manifest. Malachi's crucial message of hope for Yahweh's people lies in their steadfastness and continued practice of the Torah. Undoubtedly, the depressed and dispirited Judeans had reservations about the validity and usefulness of Torah compliance (Malachi 3:14; cf. 3:15). To them, Malachi communicates Yahweh's solid and positive message that such loyalty will not be unrewarded (3:16). Most sincerely, Malachi makes the case that humble dedication is the true key that guarantees blessings, happiness and *shalom*. Malachi's vision for restoration includes a covenantal messenger, a renewed temple, and a community of reverence which will enjoy righteousness and healing. The promises of blessing and healing are expressed through abundant agricultural provision. Locusts will vanish and new grains, vines and wine will be plentiful (Malachi 3:10-11). The relationship that exists between the temple and fecundity of the land may indicate older relationships of land and hallowed reserve. However in Malachi it "seems to represent the same point made in Haggai and Zachariah about the temple as an economic centre of the community" (Carroll 1994:43-44). In this regard, the consistency of Malachi's vision validates similar prophetic formulae and theological themes.

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