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Editorial: Reading and Apply Malachi Today

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Reading and applying the Old Testament (OT) to today's church is not always well done. Our tendency either is to allegorize OT stories so that they have some direct relevance for us, or merely to read the OT to draw various moral lessons for us today. No doubt, especially in regard to the latter, all of Scripture, including the OT, is for our instruction including our moral life. However, the problem with both of these approaches is that they fail to interpret and apply Scripture in its canonical context and thus miss how the OT unfolds God's glorious plan of redemption now brought to fulfillment in Christ.

In truth, as Christians, we stand in the second most significant place in all redemptive history. The best place to be is still future to us, namely, the second advent of our Lord Jesus. The great hope and longing of the church is for the day when our Lord returns to consummate what he began in his first advent and to bring all of history to its God-appointed end (Eph 1:9-10). Yet, today, living between the advents of Christ, we live in the next best place in history. Why? Because we live after the first coming of our Lord

who has ushered in God's long-awaited kingdom, and by his life, death, and resurrection, has inaugurated the beginning of the new creation and the new covenant age.

In Matthew 11:13-15 Jesus makes this very point. Our Lord views John the Baptist as the last of the OT prophets and, amazingly, the greatest man born among woman up to that point in time. Jesus views John this way because he views John in relation to himself! John is so great because he had the supreme privilege of serving as Christ's forerunner, and unlike any OT prophet, he had the glorious privilege of directly pointing out who the Messiah is. Yet, we, who are least in the kingdom, because we live after the cross and know of Christ in terms of his death and resurrection—something John did not experience in his life nor any other OT prophet or saint—are greater than John, and by extension any other person in the OT era.

One entailment of our privileged place in redemptive history is that we should be able to grasp better what the OT is saying, where it is pointing, how it has reached its fulfillment in Christ, and thus how to apply it rightly to our lives. Yet, as I noted above, we often do not do this well, and as such, one of the significant goals of this issue of *SBJT* is to help the church read and apply the OT better, especially the prophecy of Malachi.

The book of Malachi, which is the last book of the Minor Prophets, unfortunately, is often neglected in our preaching and teaching. If we do preach from it, it is usually to encourage people to give more money to the church (Mal 3:8-12) or to address the issue of marriage and divorce (Mal 3:16). Although both of these areas are important, there is much more to the book than these two points. In fact, the book rightly placed in its canonical context reminds us of crucial truths central to the gospel and which we must take to heart today. Specifically, I want to focus on three truths which the book of Malachi teaches us today—truths that are foundational to our understanding of the gospel and essential to Christian theology, life, and hope.

First, Malachi reminds us of the sinfulness of the human heart and that apart from God's covenant promises and determination to redeem his people we have no hope or salvation. The best illustration of this is the nation of Israel. Malachi, by a series of six disputations (1:2-5; 1:6-2:9; 2:10-16; 2:17-3:5; 3:6-12; 3:13-4:3) along with its conclusion (4:4-6), describes the sad state of the nation of Israel. Although God has brought them back from the Babylonian exile and restored them to their land with a rebuilt temple, the

return from exile has not changed their hearts. One would think that after experiencing the curses of the covenant in exile, the people's hearts would not remain the same, but, sadly, this is not the case. Malachi reminds us that the priesthood is corrupt (1:6-2:9), the covenant has been violated through intermarriage (2:11-12), there is marriage breakdown in the people (2:13-16), God is being robbed (3:8-10), social injustice is taking place within the nation (3:5), and there is an overall cynicism towards God and his promises deep within the hearts of the people (2:17-3:15). The people's hearts have not changed. What the previous prophets had anticipated in terms of new hearts, the dawning of the new creation, and ultimately the establishment of a new covenant (Isa 65-66; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:25-27) has not taken place. God will have to do something more than merely bring the nation back from exile; he will have to provide a better servant, an obedient Messiah, who will usher in the Day of the Lord in judgment and salvation. Apart from God initiating to save in this latter sense, there is no hope for the nation of Israel, and by extension to the entire human race.

Second, Malachi reminds us that it is only in God's provision of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of God's promises and new life results. In describing the desperate situation of Israel, Malachi also points forward in hope to God's sovereign action to redeem. How will this come about? Consistent with the teaching of all of the prophets, it will come about by God himself bringing salvation and judgment. In judgment, God will defeat our enemies, purge his people, and accomplish our salvation in his Messiah (2:17-3:5; 3:13-4:3). In this way, Malachi looks forward to the coming of his messenger—Elijah (3:1; 4:5-6)—who will ultimately prepare the way for the coming of the Yahweh himself (3:1; 4:1-3). In the NT, these prophetic anticipations come to fruition in the coming of John the Baptist (Matt 11:14-15; Luke 1:17; John 1:21) who prepares the way of the Lord Jesus who is nothing less than the eternal Son made flesh (John 1:1, 14). From Malachi and the entire NT, we are reminded that it is only by our triune God acting in sovereign grace to provide his own Son that we have salvation. All of God's OT promises are only truly and fully fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Third, in light of these truths, like the people of faith described in Hebrews 11, we, as the church, learn to trust God's promises more now that Christ has come. As we read Malachi, we can see how God has kept all of his covenant promises perfectly in Christ. We gain confidence that just has God kept his

Word in terms of Christ's first coming, we, in greater confidence than OT saints, can know that all of God's promises for the consummated end, will assuredly be fulfilled. No matter what is going on around us in the world, we can trust God's promises because our triune God is completely trustworthy in all he says and does.

Malachi, if properly read and applied, is a precious book for the church today. The goal of each contributor to this issue of *SBJT* is to enable us to understand and apply Malachi to us today for the good of the church and for the glory of Christ. My prayer is that this issue on Malachi will encourage the church today to live in greater confidence in the gospel, and to learn anew how *all* of Scripture is for our correction and instruction (2 Tim 3:1-17), and that by God's Word our hope will be renewed in confident trust, obedience, and service.

The Book of Malachi in Biblical-Theological Context

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The Importance of Biblical Theology

Are Christians required to tithe? Should the ministers of churches be called "priests"? Are Christians permitted to divorce? These are some of the issues that arise in Malachi on which Christians disagree, sometimes passionately. In addition to disagreements among Christians, some outside the faith think Christians are selective in their use of the Bible. They ask, why do Christians obey some commands of the Bible and not others? To them Christians seem to have double standards. Is this criticism valid? We all know that if you quote parts of the Bible out of context, it is possible to make the Bible say almost anything. Are we guilty of proof-texting to make the Bible say just what we want to hear? To make it fit our own agendas?

These questions all underline the crucial importance of biblical theology (BT) in reading and applying the Bible. BT seeks to understand verses and passages of the Bible in the wider context of the Bible as a whole, so that

their meaning is correctly understood, applied and lived.[1] It understands the Bible not as a hodgepodge of disconnected parts, but as a unified whole, telling a story that begins with creation and ends with a new creation, with the kingdom of God that has come in Jesus Christ at the heart of the story. When the parts of the story are read in light of the whole, it explains why the application of some of the commands and instructions of God have changed through time. It explains why some of the religious and cultural practices of the Jewish people are no longer practiced by Christians today. It is not a matter of Christians arbitrarily deciding which bits of the Bible they think are relevant; rather, it is seeing how the unfolding story of the Bible itself, which climaxes in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, determines Christian belief and practice.

Coming at the end of the Prophets, the book of Malachi provides an important perspective on how the Bible fits together. Malachi looks back over the story of Israel, with all its hopes and failures, and looks forward to the NT which explains how the various strands of OT hope are realized in the messiah Jesus and his kingdom. Two central biblical-theological themes in the book of Malachi are covenant and the Day of the Lord. These themes resound through all of the Bible and later in this article I will trace their development to show how Malachi fits into the unfolding story of the Bible and its major themes.[2]

Malachi's Historical Context

The book of Malachi is located in the post-exilic age, a period often neglected in biblical-theological treatments of the storyline of the Bible, even though the period "from the exile to Babylon until the Messiah" is one of the three distinct epochs identified by Matthew in the way he structures the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matt 1:12-17). Before exploring the significance of this period for BT, I will briefly outline something of its history in relation to the people of Judah.

The main biblical sources for this period are the two earlier post-exilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah (who were contemporaries of each other), and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (which cover the period from the return from exile to Nehemiah's administration of Judah).[3]

Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC (see 2 Kings

25), and almost fifty years later, in 539 BC, the Persian king Cyrus had incorporated Babylon into the Persian Empire and decreed that those peoples whom the Babylonians had earlier exiled to Babylon could return to their homelands and rebuild their temples. This included the Jewish people (Ezra 1:1-4). The first group to return to Jerusalem was led by the Persian-appointed Judean governor Sheshbazzar in 538 BC (Ezra 2:64-65). Upon their return they gave offerings to rebuild the temple (2:68), built an altar (3:3), began again the sacrifices and festivals (3:4-6), and laid the foundation of the temple (3:10). Yet the people of God soon faced many difficulties including famine (Hag 1:9-11; 2:15-19), economic stress (Hag 1:6; Zech 8:10), infighting (Zech 8:10), and concerted opposition from the neighboring province of Samaria (Ezra 4; Nehemiah 2–4, 6). This all became so overwhelming that the initial work of rebuilding the temple came to a standstill (Ezra 4:24), and did not advance for some twenty years until the time of the Persian king Darius. At this point, God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to rouse the people to complete rebuilding the temple, which they finished about four years later in 515 BC (Ezra 6:14-15). However, even though the temple was rebuilt, the book of Malachi indicates that many of the economic difficulties the people faced continued (Mal 3:10-11), along with additional social problems such as a lax priesthood (1:6–2:9), intermarriage with those who were not of the Jewish faith (2:11-12), marriage breakdown and divorce (2:13-16), social injustice (3:5), neglect of the tithes and offerings (3:8-10), and a general cynicism about God and his ways (2:17; 3:14-15). These are some of the pressing issues that Malachi confronts.

There is some uncertainty about the precise setting of Malachi within the post-exilic period. Unlike the books of Haggai and Zechariah, the book of Malachi contains no dates. It also lacks any reference to persons (such as Ezra or Nehemiah) which would help to locate it. All that seems certain is that there is a functioning temple (Mal 1:10; 3:1, 10), which places it after 515 BC. Malachi addresses similar issues that faced Nehemiah: a corrupt priesthood (Neh 13:28-31), marriages outside the covenant faith and divorce (Ezra 9:1-15; Neh 13:23-28), immorality and social injustice (Neh 5:1-13; 13:15-22), and neglect of the tithes and offerings (Neh 13:10-12). Some scholars locate Malachi before or contemporaneous with Ezra and Nehemiah in the mid-fifth century, since Nehemiah brought about a measure of reform in these matters.[4] Yet these reforms were only short-lived as the people reverted

quite quickly to their earlier behavior soon after Nehemiah took leave from Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 13). Others date Malachi earlier in the fifth century, between 500 and 475 BC, which is certainly possible.[5] However, it seems significant that neither of the books of Ezra or Nehemiah refers to Malachi, though the book of Ezra refers to the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (in 5:1; 6:14), and the book of Nehemiah refers to Ezra (in 7:73b–8:18). Why does neither of these books refer to the prophet Malachi, especially since his message would have provided support for both Ezra and Nehemiah? This silence suggests to me that on balance, Malachi is to be located shortly after Nehemiah, who served as governor in Jerusalem from 445 BC until 434 or 433.[6] Yet it must be noted that this is an argument from silence, which at the end of the day means certainty is impossible. Whatever the case, it is clear that providing the precise location was not important, otherwise the book would contain at least one date. Indeed, Malachi is fruitfully read against the broader historical backdrop of the post-exilic period, from the completion of the temple to the end of the Persian Empire (c. 332 BC).

Malachi in Salvation History

The post-exilic period must also be considered in the context of salvation history, that is, the unfolding biblical story of God's purpose to redeem a people for himself through his son for his glory. As noted above, Matthew's gospel breaks up this story into three parts: "from Abraham to David … from David until the exile to Babylon … and from the exile to Babylon until the Messiah" (Matt 1:17, HCSB). I will summarize the important elements in each period, and particularly focus on the third, in which Malachi is located. While doing this, I will trace the themes of covenant and the Day of the Lord, which are key themes in Malachi.

From Abraham to David

Israel's story begins with the promises to Abraham that his descendants will become a great nation (Israel), who will inherit a land, be blessed by God, gain a great name, and mediate blessing to all the peoples on earth (Gen 12:1-3). Essentially these promises state God's intention to establish his kingdom. Behind these promises lies God's intention to bless all of creation (Gen 1:28; 2:3), and the promises to Abraham reaffirm God's commitment to establish

his kingdom in spite of the stark episodes of human sin in Genesis 3–11.

God's promises to Abraham are formalized in a covenant in two places in the Genesis narrative – chapters 15 and 17.[7] They are also reiterated to the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob (e.g., Gen 26:3-5; 28:13-15; 46:3-4), and drive much of the storyline of Genesis (and the rest of the Bible). The promise of a great nation finds its fulfilment in the deliverance of Abraham's descendants from slavery in Egypt, from where they will journey to the land of Canaan, their promised inheritance (Gen 15:13-14, 18; Exod 2:24; 6:4-5). Subsequent to their exodus from Egypt, God brings them to Sinai where he enters into a covenant with the nation, mediated through Moses. Before the requirements of the national covenant are stipulated (in Exodus 20–23), God explains the purpose of his covenant relationship in Exodus 19:5-6. Israel is to be God's "own possession out of all the peoples …. My kingdom of priests and My holy nation" (HCSB). In other words, as Israel lived out their covenant relationship with the Lord, they were to be distinct ("holy") and so mediate (like "priests") the knowledge of God to the nations ("all the peoples"), bringing the blessing to the nations that God had promised Abraham and which he had purposed in creation (Gen 1:28; 2:3). Chris Wright summarizes this:

> As the people of YHWH they would have the historical task of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations, and bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God. The Abrahamic task of being a means of blessing to the nations also put them in the role of priests in the midst of the nations. Just as it was the role of the priests to bless the Israelites, so it would be the role of Israel as a whole ultimately to be a blessing to the nations.[8]

The covenant relationship was the means by which Israel fulfilled their role. Therefore, their obedience to the stipulations of the covenant was crucial; their holiness would be evident in their ethics. God's entering into a covenant relationship with Israel showed his love for them (cf. Mal 1:2), and they were to show their love for God in obedience to his commands (e.g., Deut 6:4-9). God's purpose was that Israel would serve like a "show house" or "model home" that displayed his character to the nations. Israel was meant to live in such a way that attracted the nations to their God (e.g., Deut 4:5-8).

It is essential to appreciate that this covenant relationship between God

and Israel, set out in the Torah (or Pentateuch), is fundamental for Malachi (indeed it is fundamental for all the prophets, even when they do not explicitly refer to it).[9] At its heart, the prophets' role involved calling Israel back to obedience to the national covenant. They warned of divine judgment in situations where the covenant was being broken and called on people to repent (e.g., 2 Chron 24:19). In these contexts, the prophets often declared the law to the people (e.g., Zech 7:12). This role is summarized in 2 Kings 17:13:

> Still, the Lord warned Israel and Judah through every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commands and statutes according to the law I commanded your ancestors and sent to you through My servants the prophets." (HCSB)

The prophets not only warned of divine judgment, but also promised blessing if the people should repent and obey the Lord (e.g., Jer 22:4-5; Zech 6:15). In many instances the prophetic predictions were not stating any more than had been revealed to Moses in the lists of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience at the end of the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.[10]

In addition to the prophets, the Levitical priests were required to teach God's covenant law to Israel (e.g., Lev 10:11; Deut 31:9; 33:8-10; cf. Hag 2:11; Mal 2:5). This also involved a judicial role at the tabernacle/temple where they provided rulings based on the law for those who sought settlement of a dispute (e.g., Deut 17:8-13; 19:17). Malachi refers to a "covenant with Levi" (Mal 3:4), and while this phrase does not appear in the Torah, the role established for the priests in the Torah where they are given a special relationship with God that entails responsibility and privilege, can be understood in covenantal terms (see Num 18:19). Numbers 25:12-13 speaks of a "covenant of peace" and "a covenant of perpetual priesthood" that is made with Phinehas and his descendants and this is most likely what Malachi is referring to (Mal 2:4-5, 8; compare 1 Sam 2:30; Jer 33:21; Neh 13:29).[11]

Tragically, the story of Israel is one where more often than not they failed to live out their calling and fell under the curses of the covenant. While God again and again proves faithful to his side of the covenant, Israel proves to be an unfaithful covenant partner. The book of Judges exhibits how Israel became worse than the nations in its moral life, but God continued to judge

and to save. The end of the book of Judges also anticipates a king who will establish God's kingdom (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

From David until the Exile to Babylon

After king Saul, there is a foretaste of the kingdom of God under the reigns of David and Solomon as Israel experiences its golden age. God is seen to have kept his covenant promises to Abraham with the result that Israel flourished and mediated blessing to the world. Yet at the same time the kingdom was set on a downward path on account of David's failure to rule with justice and righteousness, using his kingly power in self-service (2 Samuel 11–12). His sins led eventually to his personal exile from Jerusalem, foreshadowing the later exiling of the nation for their sins. Similarly, despite his wisdom, Solomon disobeyed all the laws for the king set out in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.[12] Particularly damaging was marrying foreign wives and supporting them in their worship of other gods which turned Solomon's heart away from the Lord (1 Kgs 11:1-6). In response, God pronounced to Solomon that he would "tear the kingdom away from you" (v. 11) and this punishment brought about the division of Israel, after Solomon's death, into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Successive kings of Israel and Judah turned from the national covenant to other gods and the people followed. Forsaking the Lord, they also forsook his ways. God sent his prophets to call the people back to himself, but the people hardened their hearts and refused to listen (Zech 7:11-12). Punishment fell on the northern kingdom through the agency of the Assyrians in 722 BC (2 Kings 17). The people of the southern kingdom of Judah failed to learn from this and were judged by God through the agency of the Babylonians in 586 BC at which time Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, the Davidic king was removed from his throne, and many of the Judean population were sent into exile (2 Kings 25).

Many prophets predicted these events. Indeed, the great prophet Moses was pessimistic from the outset about Israel's ability to live faithfully in the land and seemed to expect that the Lord would uproot them from the land in his wrath and throw them into another land because they would abandon the covenant (Deut 29:24-28). Yet mercifully, the scattering of "exile" was not God's final word to Moses. Instead, God promised a new work where he "will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, and you

will love Him with all your heart and with all your soul so that you will live" (Deut 30:6, HCSB). This work of God in circumcising his people's hearts is what would enable them to return to him in covenant obedience (Deut 30:2) and appears to be the basis for what the prophet Jeremiah later calls the "new covenant," when God says "I will put My teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people" (Jer 31:33, HCSB; cf. 23:3; 32:37-41). Ezekiel associates this with the work of God's Spirit (Ezek 36:25-28; cf. 34:25; 37:26). Along with a new covenant with a new people of God (the faithful remnant), the prophets also promise a new exodus (Isa 43:15-21; Jer 16:14-15; 23:7-8), a new entry and possession of a new land (Isa 32:14-20; 35:1-10; Jer 23:7-8; Ezek 34:11-16); a new Jerusalem (Isa 44:24-28; 49:14-21; 51:3), a new temple (Isa 2:2-4; 44:28; Ezekiel 40–42), a new David (Isa 9:6-7; 11:1; 16:4-5; Jer 22:4; 23:5-8; 30:9; 33:15-16; Ezek 21:26-27; 34:23-25; 37:24-28; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:7–5:6; Amos 9:11-15), and a new creation with blessings often pictured in terms of agricultural abundance (Isa 51:3; 65:17-21, 25; Ezek 36:33-36). These blessings will not be restricted to Israel, but overflow to those of the nations who seek the Lord in keeping with the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3; cf. Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:1-4).[13]

For the prophets, the judgment of God which would culminating in exile, and the subsequent salvation of his people will happen on the Day of the Lord (Isa 13:6-9; Joel 1:15; 2:1-31; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:7, 14; 2:1-3). Hafemann summarizes:

> On this 'day', God will decisively judge this evil age and in so doing deliver the people once and for all from sin and its consequences. Through this coming day of judgment, God will establish his unrivalled rule and reign as King and, under his undisputed sovereignty, bring about the new creation and its covenant.[14]

The prophets before and during the exile looked forward to this day, when God would establish his kingdom with all its glory. The book of Zephaniah immediately precedes the post-exilic prophets in the book of the Twelve Minor Prophets. It finishes on a note of hope and eager expectation about what will happen "on that day" (3:11, 16):

> At that time I will bring you back, yes, at the time I will gather you. I will give you

> fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes. Yahweh has spoken. (Zeph 3:20, HCSB).

From the exile to Babylon until the Messiah

These positive elements of the Day of the Lord explain the great expectations among many of the exiles who first returned to Jerusalem after the decree of the Persian king Cyrus. The prophet Jeremiah had prophesied seventy years of desolation for the land of Judah (25:11-12; 29), and these seventy years were nearing their end for those who had returned to the land to rebuild the city and the temple (cf. Zech 1:12).[15] The priesthood and the sacrificial system were reinstituted. The Davidic line was re-established in Jerusalem with the Persian-appointed governor Zerubbabel (Hag 2:20-23; Zech 4:6-10). Remarkably (given Israel's history of rejecting the words of the prophets), the "remnant" who returned to the land responded to the words of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah with obedience (Hag 1:12-15; Zech 1:6).[16] Similarly, Malachi reports a group who fear the Lord (Mal 3:16). This response raises the question—is this the new covenant? Is God establishing again his kingdom and ushering in the new era promised by the earlier prophets? Is this the restoration of fortunes promised by Zephaniah?

While the post-exilic prophets prophesy during a time when God is restoring the kingdom, each prophet also highlights the way in which God's people still fail to live out the requirements of the national covenant mediated through Moses. They each show that even though the nation has endured the fire of exile, those who emerge as the remnant are not yet purified. The exile has not dealt finally with the fundamental problem that led to it, namely the nation's sin; the sinful human heart still needs circumcision (cf. Deut 30:6). In Haggai, the people do not have the Lord's priorities, reflected in their neglect of the temple (2:4, 9). They are defiled and so is the work of their hands and their offerings (2:14). Zechariah identifies numerous covenant violations which continue to exist within the post-exilic community: theft, false-swearing, iniquity, wickedness, lies, hatred, perjury, idolatry and false prophecy (5:1-11; 8:16-17; 13:2-6).

The sins of the post-exilic community are particularly evident in the book of Malachi as the form of the book itself reflects its content. Malachi quotes the people and responds to their poor attitudes and behaviors in a series of

six "prophetic disputations." Three speeches are accusations directed by God against the people for their sins (the second, third and fifth).[17] The other three speeches are God's response to the complaints of his people against him (the first, fourth and sixth).[18] This analysis shows that both sides are making accusations against each other, reflecting a breakdown in relationship. In this way, the form of the book reflects its content, namely the continued breakdown of the covenant relationship between God and his people.[19]

The book of Malachi reveals that the people fail to appreciate God's love for them (1:2-5). The priests lack respect towards God by simply going through the motions and do not appreciate their high calling. They turn a blind eye to the second-rate offerings of the people (1:7-14) and neglect to live out and teach faithfully the ways of the Lord (2:1-9). The people exhibit covenant unfaithfulness, particularly in their marriages (2:10-16), but also in sorcery, adultery, false-swearing, oppressing the widow and fatherless, cheating the wage-earner, denying justice to the foreigner (3:6), and in their failure to support the priests by paying the tithes and offerings (3:8). The book reveals that some have assimilated with the nations and their gods (2:11; 3:5). To top things off, the people even defame God by accusing him of delighting in evil (2:17; 3:14-15). In all of these ways, the people effectively deny their calling to mediate the knowledge of God to the world (cf. Exod 19:5-6). What Malachi tragically reveals is that rather than being like a show house that displays God's character to the nations, they are more like a hovel. Covenant unfaithfulness remains an enduring problem, even within the remnant who have returned to Jerusalem after the experience of exile.[20]

While the earlier prophets looked forward to a glorious restoration after exile, which would happen "on that day," Malachi (as well as the books of Haggai and Zechariah) indicates that even though the people have been through the judgment of exile and returned to the land, the full experience of the Day of the Lord still lies in the future.[21] Reference to "the day" occurs six times in the final chapter of Malachi (from 3:2).[22] Like the earlier prophets, it is a day of judgment and salvation—a day when the difference will be seen between the righteous (the "one who serves God") and the wicked (the "one who does not serve Him") (Mal 3:18). God's judgment will be against those who do not fear him, evident in the fact that they continue to violate the terms of the covenant (Mal 3:5-6). The coming day will burn like a furnace and all the arrogant and wicked will be consumed like stubble

(4:1). The wicked will be trampled under the feet of the righteous (4:3). At the same time, it is a day when God will come and refine and purify the sons of Levi so that the offerings of his people might please him (3:3-4). It is a day where those who repent and fear the Lord will be God's "treasured possession" and so fulfil Israel's calling (3:17; cf. Exod 19:5). It is a day when God will bring righteousness and healing to those who fear his name so that those who experience it will leap about in new-found freedom, like "calves from the stall" (4:2). With echoes of Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1, God promises his people that their enemies will be subjugated "under the soles of your feet" (4:3). In preparation for this day, God will send the prophet Elijah, who "will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the heart of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Mal 4:6, HCSB). In this way, Malachi indicates that there will be another Day of the Lord still to come before the kingdom of God will finally arrive in all its glory and fullness.

For the Gospel writers, this Day of the Lord comes with Jesus, who brings judgment and salvation. John the Baptist is the eschatological Elijah announced in Malachi 4:5-6, who prepares the way for the Lord. John was not Elijah in person (cf. John 1:21), but came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). He wore the clothing of Elijah (Matt 3:4; Mark 1:6; cf. 2 Kgs 1:8), and preached a message of repentance in view of God's coming judgment (Matt 3:12; Mark 1:2-4). Luke explains John the Baptist's mission in terms of Malachi:

> He will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people. (Luke 1:16-17, HCSB)

Remarkably, the coming of the Lord God in Malachi is the coming of the Lord Jesus to establish God's kingdom, which involved dealing finally with sin. It is because Jesus fully kept the requirements of the law of Moses that he could be both a true representative and a substitute for unfaithful Israel and sinful humanity. On the cross, Jesus took the curse that the last verse of Malachi threatens (Mal 4:6; cf. Gal 3:13); he bore the judgment for our sins, so that Christians are now God's "special possession" (HCSB) or "treasured

possession" (NIV) (Mal 3:17; cf. 1 Pet 1:17-21; 2:9).

All the prophetic hopes are realized in Jesus. He is the faithful remnant, the "true Israel" who brings salvation to the nations (e.g., Matt 2:11; 4:1-11; 12:18-21; 28:19). He is the new David (Matt 1:1, 20; 15:22; 20:30) and the new temple (John 2:19-22). His death brought about the new exodus (Luke 9:31) with redemption and the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:14). His resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit are the firstfruits of the new creation (1 Cor 15:20; 2 Cor 5:16-17). Jesus established the promised new covenant (Luke 22:20; Heb 9:15), which is not only for the Jew, but also for the Gentile, bringing the blessings promised to Abraham (Gal 3:14). He brings about Malachi's hope for the praise of God's name among the nations (1:5, 11, 14; 3:12).[23] Indeed, the worship of God "in every place" (Mal 1:11; probably in contrast to the one "place" of Deuteronomy 12) is one of the motivating ideas behind Paul's mission (see 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 2:14).[24]

As well as the Day of the Lord referring to the first coming of Jesus, the NT also uses it to speak of Jesus's second coming when the purposes of God will find their consummated fulfilment. It is a day that will test the quality of the work of those who seek to build the temple of God's church (1 Cor 3:12-15; cf. Mal 3:2-3). On this Day of the Lord, the lawless one (who stands behind evil, or is a personification of evil which the people in Malachi's day complain about in 2:17 and 3:15) will be unmasked and Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth (2 Thess 2:8). Jesus's return will bring the final judgment and establish "the new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell" (2 Pet 3:13; cf. Rev 21:1; Mal 4:2). In these ways the NT teaches that the Day of the Lord has come and is to come, often expressed as the "already and not yet" of the kingdom.

Reading Malachi Today

The post-exilic period bears many similarities to the time in which we live, between the two comings of Jesus Christ. Recognizing this provides an important framework for applying the message of Malachi today. Like Malachi's first audience, Christians are to look at how God has kept his promises in the past and how he is keeping them in the present as a basis of hope for the full realization of his promises at Jesus's return. Christians are to fear the Lord, while living faithfully in accordance with his word in

order to honor him (Mal 1:6; 3:16). When it comes to living according to his word, there are many elements of continuity between Malachi's time and ours, but also some significant elements of discontinuity. BT helps us to determine what these are, by placing the teaching of Malachi into the larger flow of salvation history.

Since God has not changed (Mal 3:6), and God's people are called to reflect his character, many ethical proscriptions of the old covenant continue into the new covenant, such as those listed in Malachi 3:6: sorcery (Gal 5:20); adultery (Heb 13:4); swearing falsely (Eph 4:25); oppressing the widow and the fatherless (Jas 1:27); cheating the wage earner (Jas 5:4); and denying justice to the foreigner (Heb 13:2). Similarly, Malachi's teaching on marriage and divorce in 2:10-16 is to be understood in relation to God's purposes for marriage in creation which span the Bible's covenants. Genesis reveals God's purposes for marriage include: the birth and nurture of godly children (Gen 1:28; cf. Mal 2:15); the provision of a different and complementary companion to follow the divine mandate to subdue the earth (Gen 1:28; 2:23); and for the expression of natural instincts and affections (Gen 2:25; Exod 21:11). The first problem that Malachi addresses in relation to marriage is that some in the community have married "the daughter of a foreign god" (v. 11). This probably means that some in Judah had married outside the faith (i.e., women who worship foreign gods). For the nation of Israel, where ethnicity was tied to faith, the problem was fundamentally one of allegiance to the Lord. Deuteronomy forbids Israelites from intermarrying with people from the land "because they will turn your sons away from Me to worship other gods" (Deut 7:4, HCSB; cf. 13:6-9). The wider OT narrative shows that even in the OT, this requirement was an issue of belief rather than race, for there are several instances where foreign women marry Israelites and the narrative celebrates this fact because they were women who trusted in the Lord (e.g., Tamar, Zipporah, Rahab, Ruth). Similarly, under the new covenant, race is not the issue; rather believers are only to marry other believers (1 Cor 7:39; cf. 2 Cor 6:14).[25]

The translation of 2:16 in the main text of HCSB, ESV, and NIV2011 is to be preferred over other translations that say "God hates divorce." While the Hebrew is difficult, the subject of the verb "hates" more naturally refers to the one who divorces, rather than to God, so: "'If he hates and divorces his wife,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'he covers his garment with injustice'"

(HCSB). Sadly, divorce is a recognition that we live in a fallen world. The OT law allowed for divorce, and it provided protection for women where an Israelite man had to write a certificate of divorce for his wife, which would allow for her to remarry and be provided for (Deut 24:1).[26] The only legitimate grounds for divorce in the law were adultery (Deut 24:1), or failing to provide food, clothing, and conjugal love (Exod 21:10-11). The situation in Malachi's day was that men were divorcing their wives without legitimate grounds and this is considered an unjust or violent act (Mal 2:16). Marriage is a covenant relationship, witnessed by God, which requires covenant faithfulness by both parties. Jesus reiterates God's creation purposes when he is asked about divorce and states that divorce without adequate grounds (for "any grounds") is adultery (Matt 19:3). Like the Mosaic law, Jesus permits divorce when the marriage vows have been violated (Matt 19:9). Because marriage is founded in creation, Malachi's teaching on divorce remains directly applicable today—divorcing, simply because one falls out of love, is a treacherous and unjust act against one's spouse. Marriage requires faithfulness.[27]

There are also significant differences between Malachi's day and ours which are crucial to recognize, especially when dealing with questions surrounding Israel's worship. The most important difference is that now that the Messiah Jesus has come, Christians are no longer bound by the old covenant and many of its requirements. For instance, since Jesus fulfilled all that the temple stood for, we must not go back to temple worship with its sacrifices and priests. As the great high priest, Jesus has offered the once-for-all sacrifice that makes the system redundant (Heb 7:27; 9:26-28; 10:11-18). Christian pastors are not priests in the sense of offering forgiveness through sacrifice, as is the teaching of some theological traditions.[28] At the same time, Malachi shows that priests were not only responsible for sacrifices, but also for teaching the word of God to God's people (2:7). This teaching function is also democratized under the new covenant (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16), but pastors/elders have a special responsibility to teach God's word and this function of the OT priesthood carries into the pastoral role (1 Tim 4:13; 5:17; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9). Indeed, the apostle Paul saw himself as having a priestly role of proclaiming God's good news, so that the gentiles might be an acceptable offering (Rom 15:16). Malachi demonstrates the dire consequences when leaders fail in their teaching (e.g., Mal 2:8-9).

A related issue is Malachi's instruction on tithing, which is often

misunderstood today when the weekly collection at church is called "tithes." Since Jesus has fulfilled all that the temple stood for, Christians are no longer under the Mosaic law requiring tithing. The tithe (giving a tenth) was a means of supporting the priests as they maintained the temple system. Since the temple has been superseded by Jesus, it makes sense that there is no command in the NT for Christians to tithe. In addition, there is no sense in which Christians can earn God's blessings by giving money to the church or anyone else—we already have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3). Craig Blomberg makes an important observation in this regard:

> The New Testament carried forward the major principles of the Old Testament and intertestamental Judaism [concerning material possessions] with one conspicuous omission: never was material wealth promised as a guaranteed reward for either spiritual obedience or hard work.[29]

However, the principle of supporting those specially set apart to teach God's word certainly continues into the NT. This is seen when Paul reminds the Corinthian church about the command of the Lord Jesus "that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel" (1 Cor 9:14; cf. 1 Tim 5:18). In addition, Paul commends those who have financially supported him in his missionary work, even referring to their money gift as an "offering" (Phil 4:15-18; cf. 2 Cor 11:8-9). The NT does not specify a percentage to give, and a couple of passages propose giving in proportion to income (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:13-15). This suggests that different life circumstances will allow Christians to give greater or lesser amounts. If a tenth was the measure of generosity under the old covenant, this proportion might be considered the beginning of the measure of generosity under the new covenant. Indeed, Christians should not feel restricted to a tenth and for many it will be possible to give much more than this to the work of the Lord. The OT principles of contentment (Prov 30:8) and generosity towards others in view of God's grace (Deut 15:7) continue under the new covenant (1 Tim 6:6-8, 18) and fruitful application of Malachi's teaching about tithing can be found here.[30]

These are just a few illustrations of the way that Malachi is to be read in its BT context, in light of the coming of Christ and his fulfilment of the national covenant with Israel. This approach helps us to appreciate Malachi not only in its first context, but also how the book continues to speak into our own

contexts, teaching us about God and his ways, and what it means for us to honor him in all of our lives.

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1 For an introduction to biblical theology (BT), see Brian S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds.; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 3-11, or D. A. Carson, "A Biblical-Theological Overview of the Bible," in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* (D. A. Carson, ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2637-2639.

2 For an overview of these themes in the book of the Twelve, see T. R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 397-409.

3 The book of Esther is also set in this period, but it is located in Susa (the winter residence of Persian kings) rather than Jerusalem.

4 For example, John L. Mackay, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi* (Focus on the Bible; Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 274.

5 For example, E. Ray Clendenen, "Malachi," *Haggai, Malachi* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004), 202-464 (207); Andrew E. Hill, "Malachi, Book of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012b), 525-33 (526).

6 So also, Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 156-60. Nehemiah 13:6-7 indicates Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem for a time (not specified) and then returned to find that many of his reforms had come undone.

7 A good case can be made that God makes two distinct covenants with Abraham, given the different elements, the time gap, and the ceremonies involved in each stage of the Genesis narrative. See Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (NSBT, 23; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 84-93; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (3rd ed; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 173-82. However, the difficulty with speaking of two covenants with Abraham is that the rest of the Bible never speaks in this way. It only ever speaks of a single covenant with Abraham and/or the Patriarchs (e.g., Exod 6:4; Lev 26: 42-45; Deut 4:31; Neh 9:8; Acts 3:25). For a critique of Williamson, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 275-80.

8 Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 331.

9 So Aaron Chalmers, *Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding and Preaching from the Worlds of the Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 72: "The importance of the Sinai Covenant traditions for the prophets is easy to see. The prophets are not essentially radicals or innovators; instead, they are better characterized as traditionalists and conservatives who are responsible for calling Israel back to their covenantal obligations to the Lord."

10 For instance, compare Ezek 5:10 with Deut 28:53, 64, and compare Amos 5:27 with Deut 28:63.

11 See further, Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed*, 105-06; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom*, 526-28.

12 See the treatment by J. Daniel Hays, "Has the Narrator Come to Praise Solomon or to Bury Him? Narrative Subtlety in 1 Kings 1–11," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (2003): 149-174.

13 See further, Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 132-49.

14 Scott J. Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity* (Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House, eds.; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 20-65 (27). See also Paul R. House, "The Day of the Lord," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity* (Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House, eds.; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 179-224.

15 There is debate today (as there probably was then) about how the seventy years should be reckoned. Is it a literal seventy years, or symbolic, representing a lifespan? The temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. and rebuilt in 515, which is almost exactly seventy years. Daniel also wrestles with this question (in Dan 9:2) and is told by Gabriel that it will be "seventy weeks" (lit. "seventy sevens"; v. 24). This could be a way of speaking of a long indefinite period since Jesus uses the expression "seventy times seven" in this way in Matt 18:22. For an alternative proposal that links it to jubilee years, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum,

Kingdom, 531-64.

16 The earlier prophets use the term "remnant" to refer to the purified and faithful community who will emerge on the other side of exile (e.g., Isa 10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 28:5; 37:4, 31, 32; 46:3; Jer 23:3; 31:7; Mic 2:12; 5:6-7; 7:18; Zeph 2:7, 9; 3:13).

17 The second speech comprises 1:6–2:9; the third 2:10-16; and the fifth 3:7b-12.

18 The first speech comprises 1:2-5; the fourth 2:17–3:7a; and the sixth 3:13–4:3.

19 Elie Assis, "Mutual Recriminations: God and Israel in the Book of Malachi," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 26 (2012): 212-19 (217-18).

20 Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 349.

21 The phrase "day of the Lord" occurs once in Haggai (2:23) and twenty-five times across the book of Zechariah.

22 Mal 3:2, 17; 4:1 (x2), 3, 5. There are also two references to earlier "days" (Mal 3:4, 7).

23 On the eschatological hope for the recognition of God by the nations, see Greg Goswell, "The Eschatology of Malachi after Zechariah 14," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (2013): 625-38.

24 See further, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 57.

25 If Christians find themselves married to an unbeliever (because they are converted after marriage, or their spouse gives up the faith, or they were disobedient), then 1 Cor 7:12-16 teaches that they must not initiate a divorce. They are not defiled by such a marriage; rather, they have the potential to save their spouse and children by living out the gospel (cf. 1 Pet 3:1).

26 See further, Joe M. Sprinkle, "Sexuality, Sexual Ethics," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 741-53 (743-45).

27 See further, Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi* (AOTC 25; Nottingham: Apollos, 2015), 344-58.

28 There are several places in the NT that describe all of God's people as priests, just as the nation of Israel was to be a kingdom of priests (1 Pet 2: 9; Rev 1:6; cf. Exod 19:6).

29 Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (NSBT, 7; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 242.

30 See further, Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*, 369-75.

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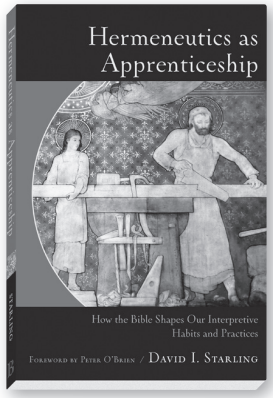

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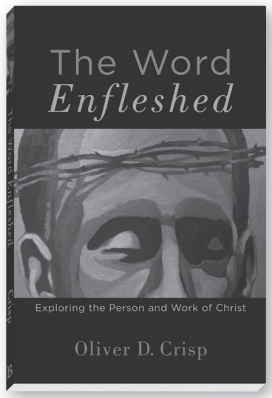

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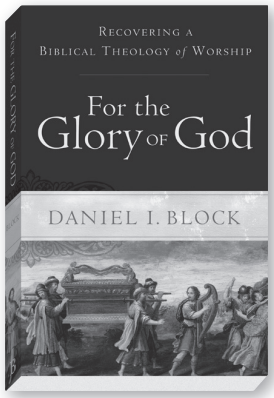

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Malachi as a Model for Preachers

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Is it right to look at the prophet Malachi as a model for preachers? His name means, "My messenger," and Christian preachers today are also God's messengers. However God has different kinds of messengers, and preachers today do not have the role of Old Testament prophets. So we need to think carefully before treating Malachi as a model preacher.

There are three reasons to follow up this question. The first is that, in the famous words of J. I. Packer, "Scripture is God preaching."[1] This does not mean that every part of Scripture comes in the form of a contemporary sermon, but it does mean that every part of Scripture is a verbal message of God. God has spoken, and the record of his diverse verbal revelation comprises the books of the Bible. God has addressed us by Scripture, and God continues to bring us the same message by the same means. We know the mind of God through the mouth of God in the words of God. There are many literary forms in the Bible, including history, wisdom, prophecy, gospels, and epistles. Prophecy, especially in the form of direct quotation of God's words by the prophet, is in the same form as a sermon. The messenger speaks the message of God to God's people. So there may be some things

we can learn from the Bible as "God preaching."

The second encouragement to pursue a study of Malachi as a model for preachers is that the Bible includes what we call sermons. Deuteronomy includes sermons that Moses preached to God's people before they entered the Promised Land. There are sermons in the Gospels and Acts, some preached in synagogues, and others preached in other places. The New Testament book which is most like a sermon is the letter to the Hebrews. It describes itself as "a word of exhortation," "paraclesis," and we find the same word "paraclesis" used in Acts of the sermon which Paul preached in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:15). Hebrews, furthermore, reads as a series of expositions of Old Testament passages, namely a collection of quotations from the Psalms (especially Psalms 2, 95, and, 110), then then Jeremiah 31. Perhaps Hebrews originated from a series of sermons.

The third encouragement to see Malachi as a model for preachers today is Calvin's observation on the role of prophets in the Old Testament. He sees them as preachers of the Law of Moses, applying an ancient text to their contemporary audience. Calvin traces the ministry of Old Testament prophets to the Law of Moses, "from which they derived their doctrine, like streams from a fountain." The Law consists chiefly in three parts, according to Calvin: "first the doctrine of life; secondly, threatenings and promises; and thirdly the covenant of grace, which, being founded in Christ, contains within itself all the special promises." The ministry of the prophets followed this three-fold pattern:

> The prophets, therefore, enter more largely into the illustration of the doctrine, and explain more fully what is briefly stated in the Two Tables, and lay down what the Lord chiefly requires from us. Next, the threatenings and promises, which Moses had proclaimed in general terms, are applied by them to their own time and minutely described. Lastly, they express more clearly what Moses says more obscurely about Christ and his grace, and bring forward more copious and more abundant proofs of the free covenant.[2]

Calvin's claim is supported in the many places in Malachi in which he tackles issues raised by the Law, as also in these words, "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel" (Mal 4:4).[3]

Of course the Law of God, the first five books of the Bible, contains much more than God's laws. We learn that God created the world and humankind. We learn of the fall, as we learn of God's promises to Abram. We see God the deliverer, rescuing his people from Egypt, making a covenant with this people, and coming to live among them. We learn of the sacrifices made in the Tabernacle, and especially of the sacrifices by which sin was atoned. We learn how the holy God made his people to be holy, and called them to holiness, and we learn of God's faithfulness to his people in bringing them to the edge of the Promised Land. The Old Testament word for "the Law," Torah, means "the teaching," and "the Law" is a literary category, which includes wider theology than is found in its specific laws.

As Malachi expounded, taught, and preached the Law of Moses to God's people, so we too expound, teach, and preach the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to God's people today. We can see him as a model of how to preach ancient texts, though of course we preachers do not have the authority or inspiration of Old Testament prophets, and we function in the new covenant, not the old.

So what may we learn from Malachi to benefit and enrich our preaching today? Malachi's preaching focused on six areas:

- God.
- God's covenant love.
- The gap between God's words and the words of the people.
- Atonement and judgment.
- The corporate life of God's people.
- Their words to each other.

God

The first words of the book of Malachi make it clear that the priority of the book is God's word to his people: "A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi" (1:1).[4] There is no introductory narrative with information about the historical context, or the identity and background of the prophet. The "word of the LORD" is of primary importance. The words of God are found in forty-six of fifty-five verses in the book. The words of God reveal the mind of God, the thoughts of God, the responses

of God, and the opinion of God. We also learn of the spiritual condition of the people, and we hear their words which express that condition. But the initiative in the conversation is with God. From his first words, "I have loved you" (1:2), God is revealing himself. God's people, are called Israel (1:1) in this book.[5] They seem to be ignorant or forgetful of God, and value their own opinions, and the opinions of others in the community. Their greatest challenge is to hear, trust, and obey God. The message is God-centered, not man-centered; theocentric, not anthropocentric. The main issue in the book is the "vertical" relationship of the people with God, not the "horizontal" relationship of the people with each other. It is God-centered, not people centered, and not self-centered.

What a challenge for preachers today, when people want preaching that is practical, easily-understood, and simply implemented. At the same time, what a challenge for God's people today, when individualism, self-centeredness, and consumerism infect us all. We focus on what we think, what we feel, what we want, what we like and dislike, what we fear, and what we hope for. How painful and frustrating to be stopped in our tracks, interrupted in our social conversation, and to be contradicted by "the word of the Lord" (1:1). When we shape our lives, our families, our work, our friendships, and our participation in our human community by what we want, what a shock to hear what God wants. When we want to express our opinions, speak our mind, declare our likes and dislikes, and tell others what we feel, what a shock when God gets the microphone, expresses his opinion, speaks his mind, declare his likes and dislikes, tells us what he feels, and what we must know and do! Our most important relationship is with God, and this, like all other human relationships, founders when we fail to listen, fail to trust, and fail to respond.

With the words, "I have loved you" (1:2), God takes the initiative and from then on sets the agenda, most often in contradiction to the words of his people. The reply, "How have you loved us" (1:2), reveals the chasm between God and the people he loves. Notice that they do not directly contradict him: instead they ask him to prove it. Rather than trusting God's words, they prod him to produce evidence. They want to take the dominant role in the relationship, and they want their needs to be met. They could play this game for many generations: "I have loved you," "How have you loved us?" (1:2). What should their answer be? It should be "We know that you love us, because you have told us that you love us, shown us that you love us: and

we love you with heart, soul and strength." Or, more simply, "Yes." For they knew that God loved them, from the book Deuteronomy,

> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments (Deut 7:6-9).

There is a world of difference between asking "What do we want?," "What do I want?" and asking "What does God want?" Congregations today are likely to ask the first two questions, and not the last question. Our greatest sin is always our sin against God, for our first duty is to love God, as we read in Deuteronomy.

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deut 6:4-5).

Next, we see that their distrust of God led them to despise God's name. The priests show contempt for God's name (Mal 1:6), whereas they should "resolve to honor my name" (2:2) and be like their ancestor Levi, who "revered me and stood in awe of my name" (2:5). And later we see that some of the people responded to Malachi's words, and "feared the Lord and honoured his name" (3:16), and God promised the sun of righteousness to shine on those "who revere my name" (4:2). To refuse God's declaration of love is to despise his name, his self-revelation: it is to despise God.

God's Covenant Love

The message of Malachi is based on the covenant love, the promised love, of the Lord God. God himself reveals this covenant love for his people to

Moses in these words:

> The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation (Exod 34:6-7).

The prophets have reinforced this message of God's faithful love. So we find these words in Isaiah:

> For the LORD comforts his people
> and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.
> But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,
> the Lord has forgotten me."
> "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
> and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
> Though she may forget,
> I will not forget you!
> See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
> your walls are ever before me (Isa 49:14-16).

In Jeremiah we read God's words to his people: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness" (Jer 31:3).

The generosity and effective power of God's sovereign and grace-filled love is clear if his people compare their situation with that of Edom.

> "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, "How have you loved us?"
> "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."
> Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins."
> But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. You will see it with your own eyes and say, "Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!" (Mal 1:2-5).

It is significant that God's people are addressed as "Israel," and that the Lord declares "I have loved Jacob" (1:1, 2). For Jacob was renamed Israel (Gen 32:28): both names refer to the same person.

Esau's descendants were the Edomites, and Jacob's descendants were God's people, whose God was "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."[6] God is saying to his people, "Edom is where you would be if I had not chosen you and loved you." While Esau and Jacob were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, God chose Jacob, the younger twin and not Esau, the older twin. We find God's words to Rebekah in Genesis:

> "Two nations are in your womb,
> and two peoples from within you will be separated;
> one people will be stronger than the other,
> and the older will serve the younger" (Gen 25:23).

In the words of Ralph Smith, "When Yahweh says, "I have loved Jacob," he means "I chose Jacob," and when he says "I hated Esau," he means "I did not choose Esau."[7]

Here the message of the Law of Moses is being reinforced and spoken directly to God's people. They are God's covenant people, those he has loved and chosen. They were chosen because they were loved, as we have seen in Deuteronomy 7:7-8. God's relentless love is seen most clearly in contrast to God's relentless judgment, as God's eternal love is seen most clearly in contrast to God's eternal judgment.

In Romans Paul shows the significance of God's choice of Jacob.

> Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
> What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses,
> "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."
> It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy (Rom 10:10-16).[8]

God's words, "I have loved you" are the foundation of the rest of of Malachi's prophecy. If only they knew that God had loved them, then they would not have fallen into their constant sins: failing to respect and honor God (1:6), showing contempt for and profaning God's name (1:7-14), faithlessness (2:10-17), wearing the Lord with their words (2:17), failing to return to the Lord Almighty (3:6-7), and robbing God (3:8). Serious sins cast long shadows, and the sin of failing to trust in God's electing love leads to all kinds of shadows and sins. As I have written elsewhere,

> While they were not actually running away from God, and were not worshipping idols, as they had in the past, they seemed to lack the energy to serve God wholeheartedly. They tried to live in neutral territory, neither serving God too enthusiastically nor turning away from God too enthusiastically ….They thought they were in a grey no-man's land …. In fact they were in a vicious circle, a terrifying whirlpool, sinking further and further to destruction ….To deny that God has loved them is to deny God. This contradiction of God lies deep within the heart of the people.[9]

Their refusal to allow God to assure and convince them of his covenant love is their most serious sin, and the source of all their other sins. They will not allow God to convince and assure them of his saving love, and so they distance themselves from all his other words.

The Gap Between God's Words and the Words of the People

Here I want to show you a great strength in Malachi's prophecy, which should also be a great strength in our preaching. Malachi, inspired by the Holy Spirit, shows that he knows the mind of God, and that he knows the mind of the people of Israel. He "exegetes" God, and he "exegetes" the people. See these characteristic contradictions between the words of God and the words of the people.

- "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, "How have you loved us?" (1:2).
- "It is you priests who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, "How

have we shown contempt for your name?" "By offering defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, "How have we defiled you?" "By saying that the LORD"s table is contemptible (1:6-7).

- You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask (2:17).
- Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty "But you ask, "How are we to return?" "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, "How are we robbing you?" (3:7-8).
- "You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, "What have we said against you?" (3:13). "You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, "What have we said against you?" "You have said, "It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it"" (3:13-15).

Malachi knows the words of God and he knows the words of the community. He contrasts them showing that the people contradict God. This contradiction is not as vivid as an outright denial, but it is equally damaging. It is a failure and refusal to trust, and a practice of doubting God's words by asking him to provide them with convincing evidence. The people act as if they are the master, and God is their servant. They may delay their positive response to God by asking delaying questions forever.

In my younger years as a preacher, I used to spend all my preparation time on the passage of Scripture, delighting in the discovery of the depths of the text. I would not spend any time thinking about the people who were to hear the sermon. These sermons would end with the words, "May God show us how to put this into practice in our lives." This was code for, "I have no idea why this part of the Bible is important, nor have I thought about its implications and application!" I now discipline myself to spend half my preparation time on the passage of Scripture, and half my time praying for the people who will hear the sermon, and trying to work out what they will find hard to understand in the Scripture passage, what they need to know to make sense of it, what they will welcome, what they will object to, and how I can get them to receive God's words with faith, obedience, and joy.[10]

Malachi seems to have listened to God's people with as much attention as he listened to God. And he seems to be painfully aware of the gap between the mind, thoughts and words of God, and the mind, thoughts and words of God's people.[11]

My favorite example of a preacher doing this is Calvin on Ephesians 5:22-26 expounding the words, "Wives be subject to your husbands," "Husbands love your wives." After explaining what Paul meant, he then articulates what people listening may be thinking.

> The husband may plead, I have a dreadful and stubborn wife; or else she is proud, or has a wicked head, or else is too talkative. Again, perhaps another is a drunkard, another is idle, and another of some other disposition … The wife also for her part will not be without stock of excuses. So often her husband may be irritable and quarrelsome, with little regard for what God has called them to. Some are niggardly and frequenters of taverns, or else act like spendthrifts in gaming and other dissolute practices … But when we come to God, we are bound to hand down our heads, for it will profit use nothing to be insolent towards him.[12]

In Richard Lints' words, we preachers must "lay bare the fundamental assumptions of a culture,"[13] as well as lay bare the pure words of God. This is just what Malachi is doing so starkly and so powerfully.

Preachers who know their people can do this. According to Calvin, this is one of the reasons God gives preachers to congregations.

> God did not content himself to put forth the Holy Scripture that every man might study it, but he devised of his infinite goodness a second means to instruct us; he would have the doctrine that is therein contained preached and expounded to us. And for this end and purpose he has appointed shepherds in his church which have the office and charge of teaching. This aid God thought good to add because of our slowness. It was already very much that he had given us his word and caused it to be written that every one of us might read it and learn it. God showed himself herein very liberal toward us. But when we see he deals with us after our weakness and chews our morsels for us that we might digest them the better, in that he feeds us as little children, we shall never be able to excuse ourselves, unless we profit in his school.[14]

An obvious example of the need for this pastoral awareness comes when we preach on any Bible passage about sickness and healing. We need to clarify and preach what the particular message of the text. We, however, should be keenly aware of various views among our people when we do so. Some would never ask God to heal them, but trust in medical treatment and medicines. Some regard every illness as a spiritual matter, and so avoid medical treatment and tackle it with repentance and faith. Some think that illness is always the result of their own personal sin, so will focus their energy on finding the relevant sin and repenting of it. We need to address these issues, because, although they may not exactly match the message of the text, they are present in the community, and also present elsewhere in the Bible. We must know our hearers as well as we know our Bible, as Malachi knew the thoughts and words of his hearers as well as he knew the thoughts and words of God.

Atonement and Judgment

The people will not allow God to convince and assure them of his saving love, and this leads them to distance themselves from all his other words. It also leads the priests and the people to show their contempt for God by offering defective sacrifices. Malachi 1:6-2:9 is addressed to the priests, and 1:6-14 focuses on the sacrifices they offer. Sloppy sacrifices mean spiritual sickness. The people brought blind, lame, and diseased animals, and the priests accepted them and offered them. What a traitorous travesty of true worship! For they could read in the Law of Moses this warning:

> Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf … Do not offer to the LORD the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as a food offering presented to the LORD (Lev 22:20, 22).

Some sacrifices were offered to atone for sins: these were the burnt offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering (Lev 1:1-17, 4:1-35, 5:14-6:7). What bizarre behavior to offer a sacrifice for the atonement of your sin, but to offer a defective sacrifice, a sick sacrifice! It was the extraordinary sin of despising the means of atonement and forgiveness provided by God. They

were not only despising God, but also despising the means of atonement and forgiveness that he had provided.

We can see the seriousness of this sin if we think of the sacrifice of Christ, which was foreshadowed in the very sacrifices God's people were offering so shoddily in Malachi's day.

> Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Heb 10:11-14).

And it is through the blood of this sacrifice that we can enter the presence of God.

> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:19-22).

What severe judgment is pronounced on those who set aside, deny, reject or despise Christ's atoning sacrifice! For that person has "trampled the Son of God underfoot … treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and … insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:29).

Other sacrifices in the Temple were offered as an expression of love and fellowship with God, such as the grain offering and fellowship offering (Leviticus 2-3). Again how bizarre to go to the trouble of offering one of these sacrifices and not mean it! Sick sacrifices are signs of sick people, people and priests who show their contempt for God at the very moment when they come into his temple to sacrifice to him. It is bad to be a hypocrite to show off to others: it is futile to be a hypocrite when approaching God. No wonder God says, "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar!" (2:10). God's people

have regressed to Isaiah 1:12: "who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?"

Atonement and judgment fit together. If there is no judgment, then there is no need for atonement: if there is no atonement then we are all condemned. God's people in Malachi's day are in dire straits, for they despise God's atonement and ignore God's judgment. Their attitude to God's judgment is perilous, and wearies God.

> You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask. By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?" (2:17).

And they have spoken arrogantly against him.

> "You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, "What have we said against you?" "You have said, "It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it"" (3:13-15).

If they knew God's covenant love they would know that he delayed his judgment to give them time and opportunity to repent, as he was doing through the words he gave Malachi for his people.

What, then, will happen if God's people refuse his words of love and his warnings of judgment?

While God will save those who fear him and honor his name (3:16-17), his judgment is sure. Its delay is not a sign of his weakness, but of his mercy. God's judgment is as certain as his love. And after the coming of the messenger, after the Lord himself comes to the temple, and after the coming of Elijah (3:1-5, 4:5-6), God warns: "I will come and strike the land with total destruction," or more literally, "with the curse" (4:6). This is the covenant curse described in Deuteronomy 27-28. Malachi is applying the Law.

Yet, as we know, when God's judgment was poured out, and he did strike the land with a curse, he also sent his Son to bear that curse.

> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Gal 3:13-14).

For, as Peter assures us,

> "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet 2:24).

May we know God's love for us in the atoning death of his Son. For, in Paul's words, "if anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed" (1 Cor 16:22).

The Corporate Life of God's People

For the first fifteen years of my ministry I did what I had heard other preachers do, and that was to preach to individuals in the congregation. This aim was reflected in my prayers before I preached. I always prayed that God would bring his words home to many, and that each person would respond with faith and obedience.

Then I suddenly realized that most of the Bible is not addresses to individuals but to the people God. The Bible addressed the corporate life, the body life of the people of God. The Bible addressed their shared assumptions, their shared experience, their shared sins, their structural sins, and their shared life of trust and obedience. The Law and the prophets clearly addressed God's people in the Old Testament, and most of the letters in the New Testament are addressed to churches, not individuals: "To the church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess 1:1). And even those letters addressed to individuals such as the letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, were also intended to be read and heard by churches.[15]

We are more likely to make the mistake of taking what God says to his people and applying to individuals instead because in the English language we have only one word, "you," which can refer to an individual and also to many people. We are likely to read an individual "you" instead of a plural

"you" when we are reading the Bible on our own, and because of the individualism of our society and of our Christianity. We even make this mistake in Revelation 2-3, where it is very clear that the Lord Jesus is addressing churches, not individuals, even in Revelation 3:20!

There are prophetic words to individuals, such as Nathan's rebuke of king David in 1 Samuel 12:1-15. However mostly the prophets, from Moses on, address the people of God, and, on some occasions, other nations. This is what we see in Malachi. He is not addressing individuals, but the whole community of God's people, "Israel" (1:1). He does speak a particular word to the priests (1:6-2:9), but it is to the priests as a group, not to individual priests.

It is easy to imagine how an individual responds to the word of God. How do groups of people respond? The answer is that when a group responds, individuals respond not only in terms of their individual lives, but also in terms of their participation in their community, and their contribution to the standard and style of the life of the community. And when a group responds, the leaders of the group play a key role in the response. If they do not lead in responding to the word of God themselves and also encouraging the community to respond as a whole, then it will be hard for the community to respond. This, no doubt, is why Malachi has a particular message for the priests, as the teachers of the Law of Moses, and leaders of the community.

When God speaks to a group, as in Malachi, it increases individual responsibility. So, for example, God says,

> "Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, "How are we to return?" "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me." "But you ask, "How are we robbing you?" "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me" (3:7-9).

What, then, is the responsibility of the individual Israelite? Of course that person must ensure that his own tithes and offerings are complete and up to date. But that is not enough. That person must exhort and urge others to do the same. That person must make sure that robbing God is not a joking matter among friends, and that the matter is taken seriously by the leaders of the community. That person will no doubt pray fervently that everyone in the community will stop robbing God, and that robbing God will be treated as a serious sin by the whole community. He will work to ensure that

people give cheerfully and joyfully, not grudgingly and resentfully, so that the shared values of the community make everyone to know that robbing God must stop, and that "cheerful giving" is the norm, not an exception.[16]

And the leaders of the community, the priests in this case, must repent of their version of robbing God, offering polluted food on God's altar (1:6-8).

If we have a shared culture of prayerlessness in our church, think of the results. Prayerful people will get no encouragement to pray and may give up. Young people and new converts will get the impression that Christianity is prayerless, and accept that as the norm. Shared sins damage a community, and shared sins damage individuals. Church communities are especially blind to their shared sins: sin blinds us corporately as well as individually. And sin binds communities together, for mutual protection. Sin blinds and binds communities! My experience is that churches do not mind it when I tackle individual sins, but get very cross when I tackle corporate, shared sins!

Conversely churches can have shared strengths. The churches of Macedonia had the shared value of great generosity even in the midst of poverty (2 Cor 8:1-4). The church of the Thessalonians suffered for Christ, following the example of the churches of Judea (1 Thess 2:14-16). They also loved their fellow-believers throughout Macedonia (1 Thess 4:9-10). The Lord Jesus commends both the church in Smyrna and the church Philadelphia in Revelation 2:8-11, 3:7-13. He finds no fault in them, whereas he does find fault with the other five churches. Shared strengths in a church are very attractive, and also strengthen every believer in that church to live the same way.

In Malachi's day, the situation was very different. God's people as a whole were complicit in many sins, and their shared sins bound them together. At every point they contradicted God's words, and refused to acknowledge their sins. Like the churches of Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea they either committed sins or tolerated them (Rev 2:1-7, 12-29, 3:1-6, 14-22).

It seems that the people of God as a whole did not respond to the prophecy of Malachi. Some did respond, and God would eventually make plain the distinction between those who did and those who did not.

> Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those

> who feared the LORD and honored his name. "On the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not (3:16-18).

It looks like the creation of a true church within a larger church, *ecclesiola in ecclesia,* a remnant of God's people who feared the Lord. Malachi's prophecy condemned the corporate sin of God's people, created and sustained those who received it, and made plain the difference "between righteous and the wicked, those who serve God and those who do not."

If we individualize the message of Malachi, we will miss its meaning. For Malachi speaks against the common practices of the community, against its shared values, against the structure of its shared attitude to God. It was not enough for individuals in Malachi's day to respond to his words: the whole people of God must repent and return to God. So it is today.

Their Words to Each Other

Moses told God's people in Deuteronomy that they should love the Lord their God by keeping his words. To keep God's words is to preserve them in the living consciousness of the community, and to ensure that the community obeys them.

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut 6:4-9).

The words are to be recited and talked about, remembered and discussed. And as they are to shape action and thought ("hand" and "forehead"), so they are to shape the life of the family ("the doorposts of your house") and the life of the community ("your gates" [of the city]). The covenant words are

to be remembered and discussed within families and within the community.

Within the Old Testament people of God, the priests had the duty of teaching the Law of Moses, and discussing its implementation (2:5-9, and Deut 33:9b-10, Jer 18:18, Hag 2:10-13, Ezra 7, Neh 8). The prophets were preachers of the Law and its covenant, as we have seen. In Malachi's day, if the priests had been teaching the Law of Moses, and if the people had responded, there might have been no need for the prophet.

> For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth (2:7).

And the people also had the duty of encouraging each other in keeping the covenant by reciting the words of the covenant, and talking about them with others, as we have found in Deuteronomy.

> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise (Deut 6:7).

The New Testament equivalent of this is the mutual ministry of teaching, admonishing and encouraging each other:

- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God (Col 3:16).
- And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10:24-25).
- Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God (1 Pet 4:10-11).

Mutual teaching, encouragement, and admonition among God's people is the expected norm in Old and New Testament alike.

How painful then to read the dreadful words the people of God are saying to each other in Malachi's day:

- "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'" (1:2).
- "It is you priests who show contempt for my name." "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' "By offering defiled food on my altar." "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD"s table is contemptible" (1:6-7).
- You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask. By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?" (2:17).
- "Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'" (3:7-8).
- "You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?' "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? 15 But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it" (3:13-14).

Here are four sins:

- They fail to encourage each other to trust in God and obey him.
- They spread distrust, discontentment and bitterness against God.
- They complain about God, rather than speaking to God.
- They debase God's people as a whole by speaking these words, hearing these words without refuting them, thinking these words, and repeating these words to others.

This sounds like the warning we read in Psalm 1.

> Blessed is the one
> who does not walk in step with the wicked
> or stand in the way that sinners take
> or sit in the company of mockers,
> but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
> and who meditates on his law day and night (Ps 1:1-2).

Would that they had heeded those words! And would that they had heeded the words of the Lord God through the mouth of Malachi the prophet.

The contrast is made clear by the good news of Malachi 3:16: "Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard."

Notice those who feared the LORD "talked with each other," that is, they counteracted the cancerous common talk of others, which spread despair, discontent and disobedience. They encouraged and taught and exhorted each other, and as the LORD knew the destructive words spoken by others, so the LORD listened and heard their words of mutual encouragement. And see that the LORD honored them by including them in his book of remembrance. "A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name" (3:16). And he claimed them as his own treasured possession, and promised his compassionate deliverance on the Day of Judgment:

> "On the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not" (3:17-18).

We are profoundly influenced by our fellow believers. By the words they speak to us, they either encourage or discourage us, either warm our faith or dampen it down, either challenge us to trust God, or drive us to doubt and distrust. And we influence our fellow believers, either encouraging or discouraging them in their life with God. None of us is free from the powerful influence of the church we belong to. We are either being drawn to God, or dragged away from him, by the words of our brothers and sisters.

God through Malachi targets not the thoughts of his people, but their

words, and then their actions. Of course their thoughts will shape their words and actions, but it is their words which are corroding others, and choking trust and obedience among God's people as a whole.

And from a New Testament perspective, believers who complain about God, and speak against him to their fellow-Christians, and most unlikely to be commending God to unbelievers.

We do not know if we should call Malachi a successful prophet. It does not seem that his preaching resulted in complete and comprehensive repentance by God's people. We do not read of it. But some heard, and some responded, feared the LORD and spoke with each other. How God must have loved those words of mutual encouragement! Those people were indeed his "treasured possession" (3:17), even if other Israelites were not.[17]

The shared values of a church are promoted, received and reinforced by what people do and say. What we do and say to each other is often more powerful that what the minister says and does.

By what we say to each other, we can either draw others to God, or drag them away from God. And if we do not speak of God at all in our conversations, if we fail to "teach and admonish one another" (Col 3:16), then we will fail to draw our fellow-believers to God. The Christian life is not designed to be lived alone in isolation from other believers, though God can sustain those who are forced to live this way. We need the verbal encouragement, admonition and teaching of our fellow believers. We see in Malachi how to get it wrong. We see in Colossians 3:16 how to get it right: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom". How sad when churches provide friendships, and not real fellowship, in which we all give and receive teaching and admonition.

Conclusion

If we are preaching the book of Malachi, our preaching will need to focus on God, God's covenant love, the gap between God's words and his people's word, atonement and judgment, the corporate life of God's people, and their words to each other. Preaching is well described as "a projection of the eloquence of Scripture,"[18] and we should project the eloquence of Malachi when we preach this book.

We can learn from the prophet Malachi how to identify and preach these

themes. These lessons should also enrich our preaching of other books of the Bible.

Furthermore, I hope this chapter will also alert us to learn pastoral and preaching wisdom from other Bible books as well. I have learnt much pastoral and preaching wisdom from the Bible, especially Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Jeremiah, Malachi, John, Colossians, Hebrews, James, and Revelation. I urge you to do the same, reading Malachi and other Bible books as models of ministry to gain rich wisdom for our preaching and pastoral ministries!

May God in his mercy continue to train us in godliness and good ministry through his word.

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1 J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 97.

2 John Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah 1-32* (trans. William Pringle; Calvin Translation Society; Vol. 7, 1843; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), vol 1, xxvi.

3 Other references to the Law of Moses in Malachi include his focus on God's covenant love and covenant curse from Deuteronomy, marriage from Genesis and Deuteronomy, and priests, their sacrifices and their teaching, from Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

4 All Bible quotations are from NIV 2011.

5 The name "Israel" was often used of the Northern kingdom, but is here used of God's people, from both the Northern and Southern Kingdom. Its use is significant, as we will see in 1:2.

6 See Exod 3:6, Matt 32:22.

7 Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (Word Biblical Commentary 32; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 305.

8 The quotations are Genesis 25:23, Malachi 1:1-2, and Exodus 33:19.

9 Peter Adam, *The Message of Malachi* (The Bible Speaks Today; Nottingham: IVP, 2013), 15,16, 35.

10 Paul uses a similar method in Romans, when he anticipates, articulates and answers questions prompted by his presentation of the gospel.

11 See Isaiah 55:8-13.

12 John Calvin, *Sermons on The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 566.

13 Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 119.

14 John Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus* (trans. L. T., London, 1579; facs. reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 945.

15 See 1 Tim 6:21, 2 Tim 4:22, Tit 3:15, and Philemon 2.

16 2 Cor 9:7.

17 Exod 19:5.

18 Chamberlin describes John Donne's preaching as "a projection of the eloquence of Scripture," John S. Chamberlin, *Increase and Multiply: Arts-of-Discourse Procedure in the Preaching of Donne* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 28.

Syncretism after the Exile and Malachi's Missional Response

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Introduction

"The chief enemy of faith in the Old Testament is magic."[1] With this statement Edwin Good's begins an exploration of *magic* in Israel, not as the craft of the illusionist but rather the desire to control unseen powers for one's own benefit. More than being a set of occult practices, magic is the superstitious worldview that "the right deed at the right moment, or the wrong deed at the right moment, will inexorably be followed by results good or bad."[2] This idea of retribution as magic resembles at first glance the covenants of the OT which proffer rewards for obedience and punishment for disobedience. The blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28, for example, show how the faith of Israel reflects part of "the common theology of the ancient Near East"[3] with its belief in the principle of divine recompense for human behavior.

Israelite faith is nevertheless distinct in its cultural context for its denial that morality is primarily a transactional matter of seeking rewards and avoiding punishment.[4] Or stated in terms of comparative religion, the dynamism of relating to a personal God cannot be reduced to the impersonal notion of *karma*, here understood in its philosophical sense as the moral causality that "each person makes his own fate, and all suffering happens for a reason.

There is no arbitrary or meaningless suffering in the world."[5] The universal desire for justice in the face of evil and suffering means that the concept of retribution is part of every system of thought to varying degrees. Karma in this broader perspective is not unique to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, the three major Eastern religious systems that originated on the Indian subcontinent. What then are the differences between the OT's creational theology of sowing sins and reaping consequences (e.g., Hos 8:7; Prov 22:8), and the notion of karma as the universe's law of cause and effect?[6]

Malachi as a Missional Book

The prophetic book of Malachi addresses the mixture of magical and karmic ideas which infected Israel's theological understanding after the exile to Babylon. Yhwh had repeatedly warned that apostasy would lead to exile from the land, but the arrival of judgment in the sixth century BC still led to Israel's objection that this suffering was unjust for being the fault of their ancestors (e.g., Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2). Several rounds of disappointing returns to the land (cf. Neh 9:36–37) which fell short of the glorious restoration that the Prophets had foreseen (e.g., Isa 35; 55) only increased the stridency of Israel's protests that Yhwh had leveled an unfair curse against an innocent generation. This crisis of faith reached its apex during the fifth century BC in the disputations recorded by Malachi.

The escalating cycles of challenge and riposte in the book of Malachi are comprised of six disputations between Israel on the one hand, and Yhwh with his prophet on the other. At stake are the issues summarized by the pointed question that opens the fourth disputation (2:17–3:6): "Where is the God of justice?" (2:17). The trauma of being deported to Babylon had evidently raised doubts about the whereabouts of Yhwh's presence ("Where…?") and the fairness of his dealings with Israel ("Where is the God of justice?"). Since Israel had mistakenly believed that Yhwh abandoned his people even before Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonians (e.g., Ezek 8:12; cf. ch. 11), it is no surprise that magical concepts of Yhwh's presence or karmic accounts of his justice continued to find currency after the exile. Indeed, monotheistic faith in Yhwh among those who returned to Jerusalem was syncretistic at best—a confused blend of Yahwism and pagan practices such as intermarriage with worshipers of other gods (e.g., Ezra 9–10; Nehemiah 13).

The prevalence of syncretism in Israel after the exile suggests that the discipline of missiology can provide insight into the prophetic message of Malachi. This book uses the missional approaches of contextualization to communicate both *through* and *against* human culture as part of summoning its nominal audience to sincere faith and faithfulness. So along similar lines to George Hunsberger's pioneering work on missional hermeneutics,[7] this article will explore Malachi's message in three interrelated aspects of the *missio Dei*, that is, the mission of God to redeem his entire creation: 1) the missional interaction of Malachi with human culture in exposing its audience's syncretism of Yahwistic faith with magical and karmic concepts; 2) the missional thrust of Malachi in reestablishing the unique identities of YHWH and Israel among the nations; and 3) the missional place of Malachi within the larger biblical story of God's redemption, especially as one of the Twelve Minor Prophets who testifies of the coming Messiah. Each of these dimensions contributes to transforming Israel from those who dishonor YHWH's "name" among the nations (1:11, 14; 2:2) to a distinctive people whom "all the nations will call blessed" (3:12a; cf. Gen 12:3). Such a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises will also vindicate the reputation of Israel's God as "YHWH of hosts" (24x in Malachi)—the Sovereign whose incomparable presence and justice lie beyond the reach of magic and karma. As much as in biblical times, the missional response of Malachi to syncretism needs urgently to be heard in our generation when prosperity theologians frequently use Malachi 3:8–10 as a prooftext that material blessings from God will overflow in response to bringing tithes and offerings.[8]

Syncretism and Missional Response in Malachi's Six Disputations

First Disputation (Malachi 1:1–5) – Israel's Uniqueness among the Nations

The syncretism which plagued Israel after the exile becomes evident at the beginning of Malachi. The first disputation of the book (1:1–5) contains YHWH's address to a people who are all too ready to abandon the covenant relationship that was inaugurated in the exodus and consummated at Mount Sinai. In response, YHWH asserts that "I have loved you" (1:2a), a declaration that he chose Abraham and his descendants to be a channel of blessing to the whole world (Gen 12:2–3; Deut 7:7–8).[9] It is no accident that YHWH

retraces the story of Israel back to the patriarchal promises so as to preempt the question that arose naturally after the chastening of exile, "How have you loved us?" (1:2b). As will be confirmed in later disputations, this objection to divine justice represents a distortion of Deuteronomy's covenant theology into the principle of karmic retribution for sin.[10] The experience of Israel is unique among the nations, however, in that YHWH overturns conventional ancient Near Eastern wisdom—as epitomized by the "friends" of Job—that suffering is always a consequence of sin.[11] For Malachi to speak of YHWH's love from the beginning serves to reframe the exile as one chapter in a bigger covenantal story, rather than being the mechanistic operation of the universe's moral causality. Justice has indeed been served by suffering in Babylon, but not in the unfeeling and automatic manner imagined by Israel (cf. Isa 40:1–2, 27).

The special status of Israel as a people whom YHWH "loved" (Mal 1:2a, 2d; cf. Hos 11:1; Jer 31:20) is reinforced by a contrast with Esau whom he "hated" (Mal 1:3a). This statement of YHWH's affection for Jacob over Esau (cf. Gen 25:23) has sometimes been interpreted as "Damn-Edom theology,"[12] that is, the sort of ethnic favoritism that stands at odds with the *missio Dei*. In what follows, though, YHWH outlines the punishment that the nation of Edom has received for its own sins which has nothing to do with Esau being a less-favored ancestor (1:3b–4).[13] The transgressions in view are not named in this passage, but the book of Malachi follows on the heels of other OT prophetic traditions which make Edom's historical sins of pillaging Israel as it underwent exile into a typological symbol for every form of arrogance against God and his people.[14] By virtue of their similarity in Hebrew, "Edom" (*ʾĕdôm*) in the Book of the Twelve Prophets can serve as a cipher for "Adam" (*ʾādām*), the prototype for humanity's rebellion against God and the chaos in creation that resulted (e.g., Joel 3:19; Amos 9:11–12; Obad 15–21).[15] The universal and cosmic stakes in Israel's conflict with Edom are clear.

In the same vein, the stated desire of Edom to reverse its destruction and "build [*bnh*] again the ruins" (Mal 1:4c; cf. Gen 11:4) will be met by YHWH's determination to "tear down" (*hrs*; Mal 1:4d). The pairing of these two verbs in Mal 1:4 evokes Jeremiah's prophecies of global scope in describing a pattern of judgment followed by salvation for the nations, Israel first among them (Jer 1:10; 24:6; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4). In contrast to this pattern of ultimate redemption, though, Malachi asserts that the fate of Edom will move in the

opposite direction of other nations when its attempts to save itself (Mal 1:4c) will instead result in destruction (1:4d). Judgment against Edom furnishes the ultimate proof that YHWH's covenant with Israel remains efficacious with reference to deliverance in the future and not merely judgment in the past.

Malachi's first disputation concludes in vv. 4–5 by linking the vindication of Israel among the peoples to the reputation of "YHWH of hosts" (1:4d). Here is found a special epithet for Israel's God that denotes his uniqueness as "Lord of all powers" in both heaven and earth.[16] What had appeared to be the parochial question of Israel's status compared to Edom (1:2–3) actually has cross-cultural significance (1:4–5), because the God of Israel was wrongly thought by the nations to be either defeated or absent in his people's exile to Babylon (e.g., Joel 2:17; Ps 79:10; 115:2). In response, Malachi emphasizes the sovereignty of YHWH over all peoples, and not merely his own, in vv. 4–5 through repetition and wordplay on the Hebrew term *gĕbûl* ("territory, border"). On the one hand, YHWH's power surpasses the typical national deity who focuses on domestic affairs when Edom suffers shame on the international stage as "the wicked territory [*gĕbûl*] and the people with whom YHWH is angry forever" (1:4d–e).[17] On the other hand, this demonstration of power will transform Israel's self-loathing as an exiled people into the joyful recognition that "YHWH is great beyond the border [*gĕbûl*] of Israel" (1:5). YHWH has therefore done his part in upholding his covenantal obligations by vindicating Israel's unique place among the nations (cf. Deut 26:18–19). The next section of Malachi, however, will show that Israel has brought dishonor to YHWH's reputation through its syncretistic rituals.

Second Disputation (Malachi 1:6–2:9) – YHWH's Reputation among the Nations

The second disputation of Malachi begins by setting Israel's syncretism during the fifth century BC in a broader cultural context. When YHWH attacks Israel's priesthood for failing to esteem "my honor" and for "despising my name" (1:6), the accusation of having brought shame to YHWH reflects the ancient Near Eastern reality that "[h]onor is meant to be recognized and acknowledged; it is very much a public phenomenon."[18] The ways in which national deities were venerated by their people, such as YHWH by Israel and Chemosh by Moab, was a matter of public knowledge among neighboring

peoples. And just as the OT's prophetic oracles against the nations mock their gods using the very rituals associated with them (e.g., Isa 44:9–20), foreign emissaries to Israel had enough knowledge about worship in Israel to opine on how best to venerate Yhwh (e.g., 2 Kgs 18:22; Jer 40:2–3). The fact that Yhwh was known as the national god of Israel meant that his reputation among the nations rested to some extent on how faithfully his people displayed him as such.[19]

The exalted status of Yhwh over all powers is thereby presumed when Malachi explains the disrepute to his "name" (1:6) as the act of offering worthless sacrifices that violated Pentateuchal law (1:7–10, 12–13). The costliness of the sacrifices prescribed by Moses would have led to the ever-present temptation to use blemished rather than perfect offerings (e.g., Lev 22:17–33).[20] Such a gap between ideal and reality in cultic worship reflects the tension that every system of belief exhibits between the official character of "formal religion" and its expression at the popular level as "folk religion."[21] In this respect, missiologists and anthropologists have recognized that expressions of faith tend to become syncretistic when the institutionalized rituals of formal religion are modified by folk religionists into ways of solving ordinary problems such as illness, famine, or infertility.[22] The pragmatic bent of folk religion also means that rituals which lack power or effectiveness then become ripe candidates to be replaced by or blended with new ones through another round of syncretism. Further acts of devotion to a god of questionable utility may even be withheld until he grants what his worshipers seek from him.[23] In the time of Malachi, the syncretism of formal and folk religion is manifested in how the priests of that time continue to bring the sacrifices mandated by formal religion but reflect the priorities of folk religion in asserting that "the table of Yhwh is to be despised" (Mal 1:7).

Yhwh offers an ingenious, twofold response to Israel's capitulation to a magical worldview which seeks either to bend the divine will or at least mitigate its demands.[24] The first is that the shaming of Yhwh's "name" through worthless offerings (1:6–7) will not force his hand to act, but rather bring shame upon Israel when he rejects their mediocre gifts just as any human benefactor would (1:8–10).[25] Yhwh's *šēm* ("name") in the sense of his "reputation" among the nations remains vulnerable because he is known as the patron deity of his people, as noted above. Yet the shaming of Israel cannot ultimately diminish the holy character of his *šēm* (1:6) since his

transcendent nature stands above being tarnished by the sins of his people.[26] And in keeping with this balance between subjective and objective dimensions of the divine šēm, the second aspect of YHWH's missional rejoinder to syncretism is found in the irony that the rest of creation will attribute more honor to him than his own people (1:11–14). The three references to šēm in vv. 11–14 thus assert that his "status" as sovereign Creator will be known by all his creatures (v. 11a), that the nations will bring cultic offerings to his "name/presence" (v. 11b) even as his people do not recognize his worth (vv. 12–13), and that his "reputation" as a king who deserves the best offerings will be acknowledged among the nations (v. 14).[27]

This contrast between Israel and the nations in Malachi 1:11–14 dashes the concluding hope of the first disputation (1:1–5) that Israel might come to recognize YHWH's reputation as "great [*gdl*] beyond the border of Israel" (1:5). The failure of YHWH's people to honor him (1:6–10) leads instead to the irony that he will be recognized as "great [*gādôl*] among the nations" (1:11). In sum, Malachi 1:11–14 echoes the OT's tragic refrain that the nations have sometimes been more faithful than his own people in grasping the incomparability of YHWH (e.g., Jon 3:9). The apostate family of Abraham for whom YHWH promised to "make your name great" (Gen 12:2; cf. Deut 26:19; 2 Sam 7:9) must now face the ignominy of having their reputation severed from their God who also possesses a "great name" (Josh 7:9; Ps 99:3; Ezek 36:23). What hope remains for a people whose unique connection to YHWH should have empowered them to be agents of the *missio Dei* in the world?

Precisely this issue is addressed when the second disputation concludes by warning Israel's priests that this represents their final opportunity to repent. In Malachi 2:1–9, YHWH takes his audience back to Mount Sinai with a series of biting contrasts between Israel's priestly task for the world as first conceived and the priesthood's apostasy in the present. The urgency of the moment is underscored by YHWH's conditional statement, "If you do not listen and do not take it to heart to give honor to my name…" (2:2). This condition alludes to YHWH's invitation to a missional people, "If you will surely listen to my voice…" (Exod 19:5a). A positive response to YHWH in the course of Israel's history would have resulted in mediating his presence to the whole world as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). Yet the condition of obedience in Exodus 19:5a has gone unmet, so

the result has not been international blessing from the God who owns "the whole earth" (Exod 19:5d) but rather that he will "send the curse upon you and curse your blessings" (Mal 2:2d; cf. Lev 26:14–39). In the context of Malachi itself, this exchange of curses for blessings is leveled against the priests, but in its broader canonical horizon envisions the promise of Yhwh to Abraham and his progeny that "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse" (Gen 12:3; cf. 27:29; Num 22:6, 12; 24:9).

These allusions to the Abrahamic promises indicate that Malachi 2:2's warning is directed at Israel's priestly identity among the nations and not merely its official priesthood. Subsequent verses, however, specifically target the priests by taking up the cherished Aaronic blessing that they were to pronounce upon Israel (Num 6:24–26) and turning it against them.[28] Shockingly, their invocation that Yhwh would "shine his face [*pānîm*] upon you" (Num 6:25) becomes the threat that he would "spread offal on your faces [*pānîm*]" (Mal 2:3b); the hope that Yhwh would "lift [*nś'*] his countenance upon you" (Num 6:26a) becomes the accusation that "you are lifting [*nś'*] the countenance [i.e., showing favoritism in justice]" (Mal 2:9); the benediction that Yhwh would grant "peace [*šālôm*]" (Num 6:26b) becomes the charge that Levi's descendants have failed to guard "peace [*šālôm*]" (Mal 2:5); and the closing commission for the priests to "invoke [*śîm*] my name [*šĕmî*]" (Num 6:27) has its mirror image in the accusation that the priests do not "set [*śîm*] to heart to honor my name [*šĕmî*]" (Mal 2:2b). Thus the chapter's opening salvo against Israel's failure to give honor to Yhwh (2:1) finds its counterpart in the priests becoming "despised and abased before all the people" (2:9a).[29] The public shaming of the priests is also parallel to a priestly nation's shaming of Yhwh before the nations (1:11–14), again pointing to a symbiotic relationship between a priestly people and their official priesthood.

To summarize the logic of the second disputation, the corruption of Israel as a priestly people always works in concert with an immoral priesthood which abuses its position to enrich itself (cf. Isa 24:2; Jer 5:31; Hos 4:6, 9). But since a priestly ministry in general and its blessing in particular were ultimately intended by God for Israel to bless the nations (e.g., Exod 19:5–6; Ps 67),[30] Malachi's use of this invocation to condemn Israel and its priesthood marks a major setback in the missional storyline of the Bible. As will be asserted in the fourth disputation (2:17–3:6), the entwined failures

of Israel and its priests as "messenger of YHWH of hosts" (2:7) necessitates that YHWH will send "my messenger who will clear the way before me" (3:1)—a Messianic figure who fulfills the ultimate purpose of the Abrahamic covenant in blessing the nations.

Third Disputation (Malachi 2:10–16) – Syncretism in Divorce and Intermarriage

Before the arrival of the divine Messiah and the judgment he brings (2:17–3:5), however, the third disputation of Malachi (2:10–16) probes more deeply the syncretistic underpinnings for the sins mentioned in the first two disputations (1:1–5; 1:6–2:9). Speaking himself for the first time, the prophet confronts the repeated acts of "committing treachery, breaking trust" (*bgd*; 2:10, 11, 14, 15, 16) found in intermarriages with female worshipers of a foreign deity (2:11–12) and Israelite men divorcing their Yahwistic wives (2:14–16). Past approaches to this challenging passage have tended to dichotomize sharply between understanding Israel's faithlessness as figurative references to apostasy and as literal descriptions of divorce.[31] As missiologists and social scientists have shown, however, conversion from one religious system to another tends to involve changes in beliefs and ethics which are interdependent and not easily separated.[32] Likewise in Malachi's time, the faithlessness of Israel toward both divine and human spouses is driven by a pragmatic attraction to the magical and karmic ideas which claim to offer a better gateway to the supernatural. In short, Israel is being pulled between the competing worldviews of Yahwism and animism.[33]

The holistic scope of Malachi 2:10–16 is traced through numerous allusions to the first and second disputations in the book. In the opening question posed to Israel, "Do we not all have one father [*'āb*]?" (2:10), the prophet echoes the assertion of YHWH that he is Israel's "father" (*'āb*) who deserves honor and fear (1:6). And in the next verse's accusation of treachery, Malachi describes Israel's motive in marrying the female worshiper of a foreign deity as "love" (2:11), the same verbal root (*'hb*) which earlier described both YHWH's declaration of "love" for his people as well as Israel's objection that their God had failed to "love" them (1:2). These uses of kinship language indicate that Israel's skepticism about YHWH's loving care (1:1–5) and unparalleled worth among the gods (1:6–2:9) has

engendered two kinds of estrangement that are mutually reinforcing—both the family ties that bind YHWH to Israel as well as Israelite men to their wives (2:10–16).

The synergy of these two relationships is also evidenced in how the end of the divine-human covenant is described as Israel's retaliatory act of marrying "the daughter of a foreign god" (2:11).[34] This somewhat cryptic phrase describes Israel's conversion from Yahwistic faith to the syncretism of venerating one who "was neither foreign woman nor goddess; she was both at once. Those married to her were lured to her cult and her gods."[35] Such a connection between idolatry and sexual sin evokes the OT's other uses of the harlotry metaphor to condemn both spiritual and physical adultery, a theme summarized here in Malachi as the sin of "profaning the covenant of our fathers" (2:10).[36] Israel perceives that YHWH has not upheld his supposed promises to enforce the "piety-prosperity equation,"[37] so a disappointed people act in turn upon their misunderstanding of the Deuteronomic covenant as a karmic system by abandoning YHWH for a female deity (and her worshipers).

Why, then, is apostate Israel said to continue presenting "an offering to YHWH of hosts" (2:12)? While the coexistence of different religious practices may seem incoherent to modern Westerners who are typically influenced by secularism, missiologists have shown how eclecticism in rituals is typical of non-Western and/or animistic societies in which relationships with an assortment of supernatural powers are carefully balanced against one another so as to meet the felt needs of a people.[38] It is not until later in Malachi that these needs are named as Israel's desire for fertility in offspring (2:15) and land (3:11). Since the postexilic period was characterized by privation in the land (Hag 1:9–11; Neh 9:36–37) despite the OT's repeated claim that YHWH is superior to the fertility deities of Canaan (e.g., Hos 14:1–9), syncretism which venerated both YHWH as well as other gods would have appealed to practically minded Israel as a way to "cover all the bases" in seeking the restoration of fertility for its land and people. The fact that Israel's rituals are an expression of a magical worldview is confirmed by reappearance of the term "offering" (*minḥâ*; Mal 2:13) that was used earlier (1:10, 11, 13) to describe Israel's attempts to minimize the costs of sacrificing to YHWH while maximizing the benefits from him.

Syncretism in Israel is found not only in observing non-Yahwistic rituals

alongside Yahwistic ones. In a reference to Israel's old fascination with Baalistic practices, the latter half of Malachi's third disputation portrays Israel as a melodramatic people who "cover the altar of YHWH with tears, with weeping, and with groaning" (2:13). These attempts to force YHWH's hand using pagan practices of mourning (Hos 7:14; cf. Ezek 8:14) represent a continuation of the syncretism with Canaanite nature religion which dates back to the monarchical period.[39] Given the synergy of Baalistic practices and sexual immorality in Israel's past (e.g., Hos 4:13–14; Jer 3:1–2), it appears that Malachi condemns apostasy from YHWH and estrangement from a God-given wife in the same breath by joining them through a reference to "the wife of your covenant" (2:14). This parallel phrase to "covenant of your fathers" (2:10) emphasizes that the degree of intimacy in Israel's human marriages reflects directly on the Mosaic covenant as a marriage relationship (cf. Jer 31:32).[40] Or stated negatively, the act of divorcing an Israelite wife in favor of marrying a foreign one who worships another deity (2:15–16; cf. v. 11) is a consummate act of apostasy that encompasses both theological and ethical dimensions. For this reason YHWH cannot help but "hate" (*śn'*; 2:16) divorce among Malachi's hearers with the same intensity that he "hated" (*śn'*) Esau for its determination to rebel against him (1:3).

Fourth Disputation (Malachi 2:17–3:6) – The Non-Magical Arrival of YHWH's Non-Karmic Justice

To this point, the disputations of Malachi have taken aim at Israel's misunderstandings that retribution could be harnessed by rituals to placate a demanding deity (e.g., 1:7–8, 10; 2:13). But as Glazier-Macdonald observes, YHWH's comprehensive rebuttal of these errors in the preceding three disputations (1:1–5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10–16) has left his people without much of a framework to understand how divine justice ought to work: "Having lived with the almost magical assumption that good begets good and evil begets evil, they were standing on a precipice. They could find no evidence for the existence of a just judge of the world when they saw the wicked prosper and God showing no sign of intervention."[41] A people whose karmic worldview has imploded then protest that only two ways are left for them to understand the nature of divine justice—either the moral standards revealed in YHWH's covenant are nonsensical ("everyone who does evil is

good in Yhwh's sight"; 2:17c) or Yhwh himself is absent or apathetic to begin with ("Where is the God of justice?"; 2:17e). Each objection will be addressed in turn through Malachi's sixth (3:13–4:3[MT 3:21]) and fifth (3:7–12) disputations.

Yhwh provides a surprising third way, however, in response to Israel's complaints about his justice and presence. Although the question, "Where is the God of justice [*mišpāṭ*]?" (2:17e), had been directed against Yhwh as a lament or taunt (cf. Ps 42:3, 10; 79:10; 115:2), Malachi 3:1–5 asserts that Yhwh's presence will indeed arrive through the person of "my messenger" (3:1),[42] a Messianic figure who is also revealed to be Yhwh himself coming to his people in "judgment" (*mišpāṭ*; 3:5).[43] This wordplay on *mišpāṭ* indicates that Israel speaks better than it knows, for what the people had been demanding the presence of a magical deity whose justice would be expressed in karmic ways. What appeared to be a lack of "justice" on Yhwh's part, though, was in actuality a temporary relenting of "judgment" in the face of Israel's unrighteousness. Instantaneous judgment from Yhwh would only have reinforced Israel's cause-and-effect worldview, so Malachi first provides an alternative foundation for morality as the postponed, but still certain, arrival of a holy God.[44] This sort of antimony between the concepts of karma and grace—the former as impersonal and mechanistic punishment which contrasts to the latter as personal and restorative deliverance—has long been noted by philosophers and theologians.[45]

Between this wordplay on *mišpāṭ* which frames the passage, the intervening verses explain why Yhwh's apparent absence from his people was a gracious delay before the coming of his judgment. In an allusion to the "Day of Yhwh" tradition of Amos 5:18–20, Malachi 3:2–4 warns that those who long for the Day of Yhwh must know that its coming will bring chastening upon Israel rather than the vindication expected by the people. In particular, the same priesthood that defiled Yhwh's reputation among the nations (cf. 2:1–9) must undergo purification in order to present "offerings in righteousness" (3:3). Restoration of "righteousness" (*ṣĕdāqâ*), the virtue of faithful covenant relationship with Yhwh (cf. Isa 1:27; 33:5; Hos 10:12), will also restore Jerusalem as the place of pleasing worship to Yhwh (3:4). Jerusalem can then fulfill its intended purpose as "Zion" (e.g., Ps 48:1–2; 125:1–2), the seat of Yhwh's earthly rule where his "great name" (Mal 1:11, 14) is to be honored by all nations (cf. Zech 8:13).[46]

Yet before Jerusalem can reassume this missional role in which Israel is reappointed as worship leader for the world (e.g., Pss 48; 99), YHWH must purge every trace of impurity from his city so that his presence may dwell there. It is striking in this regard that Malachi 3:5 names the first sin to be condemned by YHWH's "judgment" (3:5a) as the syncretism of consulting "sorcerers" (3:5b). This term refers to practitioners of the occult and witchcraft whose activities were common in Israel before and throughout the exilic period (cf. Mic 5:12[11]; Isa 47:9, 12).[47] In light of these magical practices, the following verse's assertion that "I, YHWH, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (Mal 3:6), is best understood in this context as YHWH's declaration of unique steadfastness as compared to the fickle powers that Israel sought to manipulate through ritual. For if the God of Israel had truly arrived in the magical ways envisioned by his people, then the result would have been an impersonal act of destruction and being cast off rather than Malachi's characterization of YHWH as "*drawing near* for *judgment*" (3:5a). The coexistence of relationship in "drawing near" (*qrb*) and holiness in bringing "judgment" (*mišpāṭ*) exemplifies the uniqueness of the Deuteronomic principle of recompense against a cultural context of karma and magic. In the fifth and sixth disputations which follow, the distinctiveness of how rewards and punishment from YHWH should have been understood by Israel is outlined in detail.

Fifth Disputation (3:7–12) – The Retribution Principle after Syncretism, Part I

The next two disputations rework the concept of retribution in a polemic against Israel's syncretism with karmic and magical ideas. In this respect the fifth disputation is famous for an oft-misunderstood invitation from God: "Test me now in this—says YHWH of Hosts—if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows (3:10b). Since "this" refers to the preceding commands to bring tithes and stop robbing God (3:8–10a), Malachi has often been adduced by modern prosperity theologians as evidence that financial giving to God's servants will bring greater prosperity to the giver, as noted earlier.[48] It is deeply ironic, however, that Malachi's missional response to syncretism has often been misinterpreted as evidence for the very worldview of magic and karma that is being overthrown by the prophet.

The literary and canonical contexts of the fifth disputation (3:7–12) indicate that Yhwh's offer of "blessing" (*bĕrākâ*; 3:10; cf. 2:2) does not refer to extraordinary prosperity. What is instead in view is the restoration of everyday sustenance from the land as described in the book of Deuteronomy.[49] In Malachi 3:7, the prophet's audience is confronted using the covenantal language that Moses employed to warn a former generation of Israel against "turning aside" (*sûr*; Mal 3:7a; cf. Deut 4:9; 9:12, 16) rather than "keeping" (*šmr*; Mal 3:7b; cf. Deut 4:2; 5:1) the ways of Yhwh. Following the arrival of Deuteronomy 28's covenant curses in the various exiles of Israel, the call from Malachi to "repent" (*šûb*; 3:7c) also evokes Moses as one who foresees that "return/repentance" (*šûb*; Deut 30:8) on the part of Israel will invite Yhwh's "return" (*šûb*; Deut 30:9b). This act of restoration will not be a supernatural overflow, but rather the land's natural provision as attained through "all the work of your hand" (Deut 30:9a). Similarly, Malachi's explanation that true repentance entails bringing the "tithe" (*ma*ʿ*ăśēr*; Mal 3:8, 10) does not denote money, but the firstfruits of the land which Deuteronomy mandated as offerings. These were tithes intended for celebrating Yhwh's faithfulness in the harvest (e.g., Deut 12:6, 11) and as sustenance for disadvantaged members of the community, such as the Levitical priests who lacked a tribal inheritance (e.g., Deut 14:27–28; 26:12–13). Finally, an agricultural understanding of the "blessing" (Mal 3:10) as the land's normal yield accords with how Yhwh promises to remove the natural pests which sabotage the vine and prevent it from growing properly (3:11). The nations will recognize that Yhwh has blessed his people with the blessings of the covenant (3:12).[50]

The numerous allusions to the land's covenant blessings in Malachi 3:7–12 place the injunction for Israel to "test [*bhn*] me in this" (3:10b) in a quite different light than the neo-animistic view of prosperity theologians. Rather than a magical use of ritual to master natural forces, as is the norm in animistic systems,[51] the people of Israel are being summoned to enact the theological reality that life under Yhwh's covenant provided them with daily sustenance that they never deserved or earned. This means that "prosperity and blessing are more appropriately linked with the grace that initiated the covenant than they are with the idea of merit flowing from obedience to its demands."[52] So whether *retribution* is the right term to describe this sort of grace-motivated obedience to Yhwh, it is undeniable that Israel's system of rewards and

punishment contrasts starkly to karmic systems which focus on the merit of the giver or the giver's behavior.[53]

Sixth Disputation (3:13–4:6[MT 3:23]) – The Retribution Principle after Syncretism, Part II

The sixth disputation sharpens further these distinctions between proper and improper understandings of retribution by reusing several terms from the fifth disputation. In response to YHWH's invitation to "test" (*bhn*; 3:10) him, that is, to trust his faithfulness to fulfill his promises (3:11–12), the people of YHWH revert to the karmic understanding of immediate and mechanical recompense. They exclaim in frustration, "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept [*šmr*] his charge? … not only are evildoers built up but they also test [*bhn*] God and escape" (3:14, 15b–d). But like the *double entendre* in Israel's demand for a "God of justice" (2:17; cf. 3:5), the present objections that obedience lacks rewards (3:14) and disobedience avoids punishment (3:15) serve to highlight a series of ironies that are deeper than Israel understands. To begin with, the failure of Israel to "keep" the ways of YHWH (2:7, 9, 15), despite their present claim to the contrary (3:14), places them among "the evildoers" (3:15b) to whom they object so stridently. Their complaint about those who "test God and escape" (3:15c–d) similarly condemns themselves as rebels against YHWH who have thus far not received their just deserts. In this context the reappearance of the verb "test" (*bhn*) indicates that Israel has distorted the invitation to "test" YHWH's faithfulness (cf. 3:10) into an accusation that YHWH permits the evil to "test" his justice without consequences (3:15c). In sum, this people exhibits the telltale signs of nominal faith in misinterpreting YHWH's patience in dialoguing with them as an excuse for their own apathy in refusing to respond to him.

The seesaw dialogues of the fifth and sixth disputations show that Israel mistakenly seeks retribution when YHWH offers grace, whereas this divine gift which Israel has received in abundance is in turn misused by a syncretistic and ungrateful people to accuse their God of being unfair. In reality, however, the ability of Israel to lodge such complaints in the first place against YHWH's lack of karmic justice hinges upon the fact that the worldview of karma is not true. As YHWH refuses to play by the mechanistic rules of karma, this impersonal worldview then becomes its own downfall

since Israel is in effect complaining to a personal God that the universe is not a closed system of ethical retribution. The logic of Israel's syncretism refutes itself through the realization that human suffering cannot be explained as a karmic connection between cause and effect nor as the magical use of rituals to control the powers. Inadvertently, Israel arrives at the realization that Yhwh is a transcendent Creator who enforces the morality of the universe without being subject to the ancient Near Eastern dictates of karma and magic.

The collapse of syncretism leads to a change of heart for a missional people. Among those in Malachi's audience who now commit to giving Yhwh the "fear" (*yirē'*) that his "name" (*šēm*) deserves among the nations (3:16; cf. 1:11, 14), Yhwh promises that they will be reinstated as the same kind of "royal possession" (*sĕgullâ*; 3:17) among the world's peoples which he designed Israel to be at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:5). More urgently, the need for the rest of Malachi's audience to repent is reinforced by the fact that, for all of Yhwh's grace and patience, the covenant principle of reward and blessings remains operative in a modified way which differs from their former misunderstandings. Yhwh will still separate the righteous and wicked on a day of fiery judgment (3:18–4:1[MT 3:19]), while those who repent and heed Yhwh's summons for a missional people to "fear my name" (4:2[3:20]; cf. 1:11–14) will be among those who judge the wicked rather than themselves being judged (4:3[3:21]). And in a conclusion to not only Malachi but the entire Book of the Twelve and Latter Prophets, the better way of obedience to Moses (4:4[3:22]) will enable coming generations to avoid judgment on "the great and terrible day of Yhwh" (4:5[3:23]; cf. 3:2) and experience reconciliation with Yhwh, family, and the rest of creation (4:6[3:24]). In summary, the missional message of Malachi warns against syncretism's assumption that a delay in Yhwh's arrival means that this "God of justice" is unjust or will never come—the unavoidable conclusions of magical and karmic approaches to divine retribution.

Conclusion

The prophet Malachi speaks to God's people in every age who are prone to manipulate him like a magical power or diminish his justice into a karmic

force. Throughout the history of Israel but especially after the shattering event of exile, the experience of defeat or weakness among the nations led YHWH's people to seek ways of seizing control over their destiny instead of walking by faith with the God who promised to uphold his people. Sacrificial rituals designed to bring honor to YHWH as "great king" among the nations (e.g., 1:11, 14) became Israel's attempts to twist his arm into acting on their behalf. Such a magical approach went hand in hand with distorting the covenantal promise of rewards and punishment into the karmic principle of retribution from the ancient Near East. In essence, the distinctive identity of Israel as a people who would receive blessings from YHWH as long as they did not seek them for their own sake was compromised by the syncretism of using their God as a means to their selfish ends.

Against these errors that are animistic at their core, Malachi proclaims that the God of Israel is "YHWH of Hosts" who defies the usual laws of causality to which deities are usually subject (e.g., 1:5; 2:17; 3:6). YHWH answers the misshapen question of Israel, "Where is the [magical] God of [karmic] justice? (2:17)," with the countercultural truth that he will come to his people in gracious restoration even as he judges them (3:5). From such temporary chastening will reemerge a missional people of "my messenger" (3:1), the Messianic figure who succeeds where Israel and its priesthood failed to intercede between YHWH and the rest of creation as a priestly "messenger." The temporary task of the prophet Malachi—whose name means "my messenger" (1:1)—to bear YHWH's word to a syncretistic people will thus be superseded by the presence of a missional God himself whose presence is not magical (3:17) nor his justice karmic in nature (3:18).

The allure of syncretism is hardly unique to an ancient and/or Eastern cultural environment. For in the modern technological world, in both First World and Majority World contexts, the primal temptation to humanism remains present in the impulse to control one's destiny through science and other myths about self-actualization—what Lesslie Newbigin has labeled the Enlightenment's illusion to have become an autonomous possessor of "the secret of knowledge and therefore the secret of mastery over the world."[54] In this regard the book of Malachi stands equally against the animist's rituals to control the natural world and the technologist's quest to harness the scientific universe in the name of human progress. Responding to both kinds of syncretism which see creation as impersonal and materialist, the missional

God of Israel promises in Malachi to draw near with his unique blend of presence and justice as "Yhwh of Hosts" and so dethrone the presumption that human causation is the key that unlocks the Creator's domain.

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1 Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Bible and Literature Series; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1981), 196.

2 Ibid., 197–98.

3 As famously noted by Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 71 (1952): 135–47 (144–45).

4 Sigmund Mowinckel, *Religion and Cult: The Old Testament and the Phenomenology of Religion* (ed. K. C. Hanson; trans. John F. X. Sheehan; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 24–28.

5 Whitley R. P. Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," *Philosophy East & West* 55 (2005): 15–32 (18).

6 The need for clear differentiation of concepts is underscored by how the OT's creational theology often draws from the same metaphorical field of agriculture that is used to describe karma in Eastern religions. Unlike European languages in which "sowing" and "reaping" lack religious overtones, the same ideas in an Asian language like Chinese evoke the unbreakable link between cause and effect that is characteristic of Buddhism. In the Chinese New Version's rendering of Hos 8:7, for example, the verbs used for "sowing" (播种, *bo zhong*) and "reaping" (收成, *shou cheng*) are also employed in Buddhist Chinese literature to describe how the principle of karma operates.

7 George R. Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic: Mapping the Conversation," *Missiology: An International Review* 39 (2011): 309–21.

8 E.g., Jason Hale, *Your Prosperity Blueprint: How to Go From Where You Are to the Level of Success God Intended for You* (New York: Morgan James Publishing, 2012), 45–49; Young Hoon Lee, "The Case for Prosperity Theology," *ERT* 20 (1996): 26–39 (28); Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 8, 71.

9 J. G. McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 260.

10 Contra Shawna Dolansky, *Now You See It, Now You Don't: Biblical Perspectives on the Relationship between Magic and Religion* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 95–97, who argues that Deuteronomy's covenant theology of rewards and punishment is itself a form of magic.

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14 Andrew E. Hill, ed., *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25D; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 149.

15 Michael B. Shepherd, "Compositional Analysis of the Twelve," *ZAW* 120 (2008): 184–93 (187).

16 Danie F. O'Kennedy, "The Use of the Epithet *YHWH Seba'ot* In Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi," *JNSL* 33 (2007): 77–89 (83–84).

17 On the usual focus of a national deity on their own people and territory, see Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 82–84.

18 Saul M. Olyan, "Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environment," *JBL* 115 (1996): 201–18 (204).

19 Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 119–20.

20 L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (NSBT 37; Nottingham: Apollos, 2015), 126.

21 Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 73–92.

22 Ibid., 83–85.

23 Philip M. Steyne, *Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists* (Columbia, SC: Impact International Foundation, 1999), 97.

24 Cf. Eugene A. Nida and William A. Smalley, *Introducing Animism* (New York: Friendship Press, 1959), 21–30.

25 P. J. Botha, "Honour and Shame as Keys to the Interpretation of Malachi," *OTE* 14 (2001): 392–403 (396–97).

26 The complementary aspects of Hebrew šēm ("name") as the objective dimension of a person's "character" (e.g., Gen 27:36; Exod 34:5–7) and subjective "reputation" (e.g., Gen 12:2; 2 Sam 7:9) are well-discussed by Allen P. Ross, "šēm," *NIDOTTE* 4:148–50.

27 Cf. Innocent Himbaza, "'*YHWH Seba'ot* devient le grand roi'. Une interprétation de Ml 1,6–14 à la lumière du contexte perse," *VT* 62 (2012): 357–68 (364–65).

28 Michael Fishbane, "Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 115–21 (118–19).

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35 Beth Glazier-McDonald, "Intermarriage, Divorce, and *BAT-'ĒL-NĒKĀR*: Insights into Malachi 2:10–16," *JBL* 106 (1987): 603–11 (610).

36 Ming Him Ko, "Be Faithful to the Covenant: A Technical Translation of and Commentary on Malachi 2.10–16," *BT* 65 (2014): 34–48 (42).

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38 Kraft, *Understanding Spiritual Power*, 12–19; Steyne, *Gods of Power*, 73–86.

39 Ko, "Malachi 2.10–16," 44–45; John Day, "Hosea and the Baal Cult," in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*, 216.

40 Markus Zehnder, "A Fresh Look at Malachi II 13–16," *VT* 53 (2003): 224–59 (234–36).

41 Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, The Divine Messenger* (SBLDS 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 123.

42 The likelihood that the audience's objections are accurately quoted by Malachi but then infused with new, sometimes ironic, meaning is observed by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Giving a Voice to Malachi's Interlocutors," *SJOT* 19 (2005): 173–92.

43 Andrew S. Malone, "Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1?," *TynBul* 57 (2006): 215–28; Beth Glazier-McDonald, "*MAL'AK HABBĚRÎT*: The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1," *HAR* 11 (1987): 93–104.

44 Cf. James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 31.

45 E.g., Sung Wook Chung, "Other Religions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 363–64; Brian E. Kelly, "'Retribution' Revisited: Covenant, Grace, and Restoration," in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein* (ed. M. Patrick Graham, Steven L. McKenzie, and Gary N. Knoppers; LHBOTS 371; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 206–27.

46 Terence Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetical Books* (The Biblical Seminar 20; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 81; Glazier-McDonald, "Messenger of the Covenant," 101–03.

47 Hill, *Malachi*, 281.
48 See n. 8.
49 David T. Williams, "The Windows of Heaven," *OTE* 5 (1992): 402–13 (403–04).
50 Pamela J. Scalise, "Malachi 3:13–4:3—A Book of Remembrance for God-Fearers," *RevExp* 95 (1998): 571–81 (575–76).
51 Steyne, *Gods of Power*, 91–99; Nida and Smalley, *Introducing Animism*, 34–35.
52 J. Robert Vannoy, "Retribution: Theology of," *NIDOTTE* 4:1142–43.
53 Kelly, "'Retribution' Revisited," 213–14.
54 Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 23.

My Messenger, the LORD, and the Messenger of the Covenant: Malachi 3:1 Revisited

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Debate continues concerning the meaning and implications of Malachi 3:1. In this contested verse, YHWH responds to the complaints and accusations of his people by saying, "Behold, I am sending my messenger, and he will clear a way before me. And suddenly, he will come to his temple; the Lord whom you are seeking and the messenger of the covenant in whom you are delighting; behold, he is coming, says YHWH of hosts."[1] No scholarly consensus exists as to (1) the presence and significance of redactions in the text,[2] (2) the passage/s to which the author alludes, and (3) the number and nature of the person/s described in the verse. Each of these individual problems has elicited a variety of proposed solutions, resulting in a plethora of interpretations. In light of the current exegetical gridlock, I will argue that Malachi 3:1 (as it stands) refers to the sending of a priestly, prophetic messenger and the arrival of YHWH himself, depicted as a royal priest. I will make my case in three stages. First, I will provide a review of recent scholarship in the English-speaking world on Malachi 3:1. Next, I will "clear a way" by tackling the issues of redactions and allusions in relation to the text in question. Lastly, I will examine the verse in its context and build

on the preparatory work already accomplished in order to suggest a fresh interpretation of Malachi's prophecy.[3]

Review of Literature

Redactions and Malachi 3:1

Scholars disagree regarding the presence of editorial activity within Malachi 3:1.[4] Broadly speaking, three approaches are current in the literature: (1) taking 3:1b-4 as an editorial insertion, (2) taking 3:1a as an editorial insertion, and (3) denying signs of growth in 3:1.

Taking 3:1b-4 as an Editorial Insertion

Some scholars believe that 3:5 originally followed 3:1a as the answer to the accusation posed against YHWH in 2:17.[5] Those who make this argument typically point to the shift from the first person forms in 3:1a to the third persons forms in 3:1b-4 back to the first person forms in 3:5 in order to support their assertion that 3:1b-4 is unoriginal.[6] Despite agreeing that 3:1b-3:4 represents a later insertion, these scholars voice different explanations for the presence of this supposedly additional material. Bruce Malchow claims that the insertion reflects an early form of the expectation of a priestly messiah.[7] Paul Redditt on the other hand believes that 3:1b-4 was written by a dissident Levitical editor[8] as an encouragement to a group of disenfranchised Levites.[9] A third opinion comes from David Petersen, who argues that 3:1b-4 represents an eschatological commentary meant to expand on the identity of the messenger in 3:1a.[10] Thus, agreement regarding the redactional character of 3:1b-4 has not resulted in a unified perspective on the redactor or his intentions.

Taking 3:1a as an Editorial Insertion

Not all scholars who detect redactional activity in 3:1 agree that it is the latter half which represents the addition. S. D. Snyman argues in fact that 3:1b-4 is original, while 3:1a was inserted at a later time.[11] While he also uses the shift in persons to make his case, Snyman says that it is actually the first person form present in 3:1a that needs to be explained.[12] He also states that 3:1b-4 could easily function as the answer to the question of 2:17. Snyman theorizes that originally, the text promised the immediate arrival of YHWH

(who was described as "the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant") to purify the priesthood and to judge the wicked. When the promise tarried, a redactor responded by inserting a second figure into the text in order to account for the delay.[13] When YHWH still failed to come after a significant amount of time, a second redaction (3:22-24 MT) was added in order to push this expectation into the eschaton.[14]

No Signs of Growth in 3:1

Others are not convinced that 3:1 shows the marks of any editorial work. Glazier-McDonald, for example, argues forcefully that 2:17-3:5 be understood as original.[15] She notes that there are lexical and thematic links which forge the section together. She points out that shifts in person are not uncommon in poetic or prophetic language.[16] Finally, she claims that the 3:1-4 are "integral to the sense of the oracle unit."[17] Verhoef concludes that the evidence adduced for redactions in 3:1 are "so slight and so dependent on subjective factors that it is best to accept the text as it stands."[18] Hill likewise sees 2:17-3:5 as being authentic due to the chiastic structures, the rhetorical style, and the eschatological emphasis present in the section.[19] K.W. Weyde also dismisses the notion of editorial activity in Malachi 3:1 by arguing that the shift in person can be explained as "conventional language," and by observing that Malachi often elaborates on previous statements with clarifying phrases.[20] O'Brien critiques those scholars who detect editorial work in several verses in Malachi (including 3:1). She says that "the ascription of each of these verses to an editor is based solely upon a given scholar's opinion that its ideas do not comport well with the structure and theme of the work."[21] Watts believes that Malachi as a whole shows little signs of growth, stating that "The literary structure of the book is reasonably clear with little reason to think of earlier sources or much later redaction."[22] Thus a good number of scholars have not been persuaded of the presence of any editorial activity in Malachi 3:1.

Allusions and Malachi 3:1

Scholars also disagree regarding the presence and significance of allusions in Malachi 3:1. Many argue that a proper understanding of 3:1 depends upon recognizing an allusion to Exodus 23:20.[23] Petersen, for instance, argues on the basis of this connection that "my messenger" (מלאכי) must be a "covenant enforcer:"[24] a figure given the task of enabling the people to

obey the stipulations of the covenant, thereby allowing YHWH to come and visit his people.[25] Though she disputes Petersen's view, Glazier-McDonald also asserts that Malachi's pairing of "the Lord" (האדון) with "the messenger of the covenant" (מלאך הברית) "corresponds well with the Exodus passage where the roles of Yahweh and his messenger seem to merge."[26] Douglas Stuart remarks that Malachi borrows the language of Exodus at this point because both messengers precede a mighty act of victory which YHWH will accomplish for his people.[27] Pamela J. Scalise understands Malachi to be likening the first messenger to YHWH's angel in Exodus 23 because both "usher in a new age in the life of Israel in which divine blessings are offered to those who will abandon false worship and obey God."[28] Mark Boda contends that the connection to Exodus 23:20 means that "the earthly roles of prophet, king, and priest are possibly being likened to (or even assuming) the ancient role of the מלאך who led Israel into the conquest of the land, now with the purpose of cleansing the people."[29] Despite the popularity of this proposed intertextual relationship, others nevertheless downplay the significance of an allusion to Exodus 23:20. Weyde expresses uncertainty regarding the importance of this connection.[30] Andrew Malone questions the influence of Exodus 23:20 on Malachi 3:1 because he views the two texts as having significant differences.[31] Snyman also casts doubt on the alleged inter-biblical relationship because he believes Malachi's "messenger" is human while the figure in Exodus is angelic.[32]

Isaiah 40:3 is also often posited as the inspiration behind 3:1.[33] Those who make this connection typically claim that the background behind the Isaiah text is the ANE practice of sending messengers ahead of a visiting king in order to alert the people and to clear the path before him.[34] Thus, Glazier-McDonald understands Malachi to be depicting "the day when he (YHWH) was to appear" and when He would "become enthroned as king."[35] Hill goes further when he states, "Malachi employs the processional motif of Second Isaiah as a metaphor assuring the restoration community of Yahweh's eventual covenant presence in Jerusalem."[36] Some however are less enthused about the possible interpretative gains to be found by making this connection. Verhoef believes that the connection is present, but he warns that Isaiah 40 presents a "somewhat different context" from Malachi 3:1.[37] Malone expresses his thoughts on the matter by saying, "Mal 3:1 may also contain an allusion to Isa 40:3-5, *but this makes no additional impact on*

interpretation."[38]

The Number and Nature of the Figure/s

Perhaps the most notorious problem in the book of Malachi relates to the three figures depicted in 3:1. What did Malachi (or the later redactor) intend to communicate by the three titles "my messenger" (מלאכי), "the Lord" (האדון), and "the messenger of the covenant" (מלאך הברית)? Interpretations can be grouped into three major divisions (each with respective subdivisions): the one-person approach, the two-person approach, and the three-person approach.[39]

One-person Approach[40]

Though by no means the most popular treatment, some scholars believe that Malachi should be understood as referring to a single person assigned three different titles. C. D. Isbell defends this view, while arguing that this solitary messenger should be understood as a human noble.[41] William Dumbrell likewise posits a single individual when he says,

> the two nouns, 'my messenger' and 'messenger of the covenant' are to be identified. On any view, since the speaker of 3:1 is Yahweh, the 'Lord whom you seek' would appear to be distinguished from him, and may thus refer to the presence of the messenger whose presence will be fully representative.[42]

Two-person Approach

One popular approach involves distinguishing two persons in the text. Those who adopt this view divide as to which of the three titles refer to the same person. For instance, several scholars understand Malachi to be referring to two persons: "the Lord" (האדון)and a forerunner, identified as "my messenger" (מלאכי)and "the messenger of the covenant" (מ לאך הברית).[43] Malchow argues that "it is doubtful that the original author . . . means to identify 'the messenger of the covenant' with 'the Lord.'"[44] Weyde claims that the author refers to the "messenger of the covenant" in order to clarify the identity of "my messenger."[45] Scalise believes the two "messengers" should be identified based on a pattern of repetition which she detects in the text.[46] Nogalski also suggests that these two titles are referring to the same person, though without further comment.[47]

Others agree that Malachi refers to two persons, but they believe that it is better to identify "the Lord" with "the messenger of the covenant."[48] These argue that Malachi speaks of the sending of a messenger (מלאכי)and the coming of YHWH, who is called both "the Lord" (האדון)and "the messenger of the covenant" (מלאך הברית).[49] Some base their claims partly on a chiastic structure in the text that may suggest this identification.[50] Glazier-McDonald asserts that through this interpretation "the verse assumes unprecedented power."[51] Some of those who identify "the Lord" with the "messenger of the covenant" believe this figure to be messianic,[52] while others deny any reference to the Messiah.[53]

Three-person approach

Others understand Malachi to be referring to three separate individuals. This is the position taken by Hill.[54] He states, "it seems likely that both the original writer and the original audience most naturally would have understood 'my angel,' 'The Lord,' and 'the angel of the covenant' as titles for three separate divine beings." He then seeks to distinguish the three beings from one another. Hill identifies "my messenger" as the angel of YHWH, who is "the essence of Yahweh" manifest visibly in human form. He states that "the Lord" is clearly Yahweh himself. The third figure is then attributed to the influence of ANE processional mythology, in which "the deity enters his abode accompanied by angelic attendants." Thus, Hill suggests that the "messenger of the covenant" is another member of the divine assembly of YHWH accompanying "the Lord" as he proceeds to the temple.[55] Rashi also understands Malachi to be referring to three divine beings, though he would see "my messenger" as the angel of death, "the Lord" as YHWH, and "the messenger of the covenant" as the angel of the Lord.[56]

Clearing the Way: Redactions and Allusions in Malachi 3:1

The preceding review of literature demonstrates that no agreement currently exists with respect to the interpretation of Malachi 3:1. This in turn is due in large part to differing opinions regarding the presence (or absence) of redactions and allusions in the verse. Thus, before analyzing the text, it will be necessary to address these two issues.

Redactions in Malachi 3:1?

Many scholars today acknowledge the presence of redactions in the OT.[57] However, the field of redaction criticism (as well as source criticism and form criticism) remains problematic. No clear, objective, agreed upon method exists for recognizing an editor's fingerprints.[58] This is why Collins wrote over ten years ago (and his statement remains true today), "Unfortunately, the criteria for establishing authentic words are not very clear, which means there is very little agreement and even less certainty as to which words are authentic and which are not."[59] This problem is compounded by three features that are unfortunately common in the practice of redaction criticism: (1) a readiness to detect an editor's work on the basis of minor pieces of evidence, (2) a propensity for ingenious, yet unfounded, speculations regarding the motivations, social standing, and political agenda of alleged redactors, and (3) a deeper interest in solving puzzles behind the text rather than in examining the text as it stands.[60] Thus, the results of redaction criticism often fail to convince and often detract from the goal of understanding the final form of the text. The treatment of Malachi 3:1 in biblical scholarship serves as a case in point.

In my judgment, an examination of Malachi 3:1 reveals no persuasive reasons for positing an insertion.[61] First of all, there is no textual evidence for the existence of a different version of Mal 3:1. The few discrepancies that exist between the Hebrew textual witnesses of 3:1 can be explained without positing a separate Hebrew *Vorlage*.[62] The same can be said of the witness from the LXX.[63] This conclusion is supported by the fact that none of the scholars who posit a redaction in 3:1 do so on the basis of manuscript evidence. Second, the book of Malachi as a whole does not claim to use previously existing, written sources. This should at least caution scholars as they study the text. Third, the shift in person within 3:1-5 need not suggest editorial activity. As Glazier-McDonald has shown, this construction is attested elsewhere.[64] Furthermore, this literary technique could have been intentionally employed by the original author. So for instance, if Verhoef's interpretation of 2:17-3:5 is right,[65] then the shift in persons could be a structural marker indicating that 3:2-4 addresses the accusation of 2:17 while 3:5 addresses the question of 2:17. Another plausible explanation (which I prefer) is that 3:1b-5 describes a single event twice.[66] The shift in person functions to increase the dramatic tension of the section.[67] Lastly,

though Malachi 3:1 is difficult, the text is quite intelligible[68] without having to presuppose the existence of a redactor.[69] Thus, students of Malachi should focus their energies on understanding 3:1 as it stands instead of insisting on the presence of a mythical redactor.[70]

Allusions in Malachi 3:1?

Scholars note the difficulty of detecting a genuine allusion.[71] Various criteria have been proposed in order to guard interpreters against the ever-present dangers of eisegesis.[72] Benjamin Sommer, for example, warns against alleging an allusion solely on the basis of repeated vocabulary. He states,

> If two texts share vocabulary items that are commonplace in Biblical Hebrew, the parallel between them is most likely coincidental. If they share terms that often appear together in biblical or ancient Near Eastern texts, then there is a strong likelihood that they independently draw on traditional vocabulary clusters.[73]

According to Sommer, a cumulative case is required to demonstrate the presence of an allusion. This case must consist of evidence like the use of rare vocabulary clusters or the frequent repetition of particular ideas or themes which are clearly rooted in an older text.[74] Weyde agrees in large part with Sommer's assessment. He states, "Use of common terminology in two texts – catchwords – does not always seem to be a tenable criterion for claiming intertextuality."[75] He adds to that by saying, "A common motif is not necessarily a tenable criterion for suggesting a case of allusion."[76] According to Weyde, the occurrence of vocabulary repetition and common motifs are a necessary, yet not always sufficient, criteria for positing an allusion.[77] This in turn is similar to Derek Bass's criteria for allusions, though for him, "contextual awareness is *the critical criterion* for identifying, confirming, and analyzing quotation and allusion since two passages may share verbal parallels or other lexical links, yet contain no formal connection."[78] Taking these criteria together, in order to demonstrate the presence of a genuine allusion in Malachi 3:1, it must be shown both that (1) there are significant lexical links (rare words or uncommon word clusters) and (2) the two passages share a common context. Do either Exodus 23:20 or Isaiah 40:3 meet these criteria in relation to Malachi 3:1?

Exodus 23:20

Weyde rightly notes that the terminological similarities between Malachi 3:1 and Exodus 23:20 are indisputable.[79] Five roots are repeated between these two texts: הנה ("behold"), שלח ("to send") פנה ("face/before"), מלאך ("messenger") and דרך ("way"). Furthermore, these words occur together only in these texts, which indicates a rare vocabulary cluster. Though there are minor lexical and syntactical differences between the two texts, these cannot discount the possibility of an allusion; at most, they demonstrate that Malachi was not quoting the Exodus material. Thus, the lexical links should be viewed as evidence for an allusion to Exodus 23:20 in Malachi 3:1.

While the lexical evidence favors the presence of an allusion, a few commentators suggest that contextual differences between Malachi 3:1 to Exodus 23:20 weigh heavily against that conclusion.[80] An initial reading reveals noticeable differences. Malachi 3:1 is part of the fourth disputation between the prophet and the people.[81] The people were back in the land after exile and had been accusing God of delighting in evildoers and of being unjust.[82] YHWH responds with an eschatological depiction of His coming, which would be preceded by the coming of "my messenger."[83] The messenger's task was simply to "clear a way before" YHWH, after which YHWH Himself would come to purify and judge his people.[84] Exodus 23:20 on the other hand occurs towards the end of the Book of the Covenant, within which YHWH provides authoritative stipulations so that he might establish Israel as a "kingdom of priests" and as a "holy nation." Part of that covenant involves God bringing his people into Canaan and dispossessing its inhabitants. God therefore sends a messenger figure before Israel as their guardian on the way to the land of promise. The messenger's role would be "to guard" (לשמרך) God's people and "to bring" (להביאך) them to the place established by YHWH. There are no hints in the context that any of this is to be fulfilled in the eschaton.[85] Thus, a cursory examination of the verses in their context may lead readers to conclude that Malachi was not alluding to Exodus.

However, beneath these surface-level differences lies a deeper common contextual similarity: both Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 belong in sections that focus on YHWH's purpose to establish a holy priesthood and a holy nation. Thus, in predicting God's work of restoring the priesthood and sanctifying his people (3:2–5), Malachi may have been drawn to Exodus 23:20 because of the presence of a similar theme.[86] Furthermore, the differences

between texts could be explained as expressions of the same divine purpose manifesting itself in different redemptive-historical situations. So on the one hand, Exodus 19:1–24:11 describes a situation where the establishment of the priestly nation is still prospective: Israel may or may not fulfill God's intention of transforming them into a kingdom of priests. The messenger of Exodus 23:20 is then sent as a means of encouraging the nation's obedience so that YHWH's purpose might come to fruition. Malachi on the other hand must address a situation wherein the people and the priesthood have become completely corrupt.[87] The prophet is aware that God's original intent (Exod 19:4–6) has not come to fruition.[88] Since he is convinced of God's commitment to establishing a holy priesthood (Mal 1:6–14; 2:1–9) and a holy nation (Mal 2:10–16; 3:5–6), Malachi predicts that a second messenger will be dispatched. This messenger would not be instructed to guard Israel on the way to the promised land; instead, he would be sent to make preparations so that God himself might come to purify the sons of Levi and to destroy the wicked elements within Israel. Malachi 3:1 should then be understood as predicting the eschatological accomplishment of God's long-disclosed purpose of establishing a holy priesthood and a holy nation.[89] Thus, a similar contextual theme undergirds both Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1.[90] If Bass is right to claim that shared context is decisive in determining the presence of an allusion (and I think he is), then Malachi 3:1 probably does allude to Exodus 23:20.[91]

Isaiah 40:3

Isaiah 40:3 says, "A voice is crying out: In the wilderness, prepare (פנו) the way (דרך) of YHWH! Smoothen a highway in the desert-plain for our God!" Lexically speaking, the only similarities between the Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 are the two words פנה and דרך. In the *piel* stem, the root פנה is relatively infrequent,[92] while דרך is quite common.[93] However, the combination of the piel verb פנה with דרך as its direct object only occurs in four places: Isaiah 40:3, 57:14, 62:10, and Malachi 3:1. This should count as a rare verbal cluster and it therefore tilts the evidence in favor of a genuine allusion.

Contextually speaking, Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 have several things in common.[94] Both texts find themselves in eschatological sections of their respective works.[95] Both texts depict a figure given the role of clearing a path.[96] Both texts speak of a way being prepared so that YHWH Himself may tread

upon it in order to come to his people.[97] However, there are also important differences between the two passages.[98] Isaiah 40:3 depicts YHWH's arrival in a setting of consolation for the people; Malachi 3:1 depicts YHWH coming in order to purify and judge. Isaiah sees YHWH coming in order to accomplish a second exodus for his exiled people;[99] Malachi on the other hand does not depict the day of YHWH's coming as a second exodus. Does this decisively rule out an allusion to Isaiah 40:3? Not necessarily. Malachi may have been alluding to Isaiah 40:3 with a hint of irony.[100] The blaspheming community clamors for God to come and judge those they see as evil (2:17). Malachi responds with language reminiscent of Isaiah 40:3, assuring them that the King is in fact coming (Mal 3:1). The positive connotation of Isaiah 40:3 would seem initially encouraging, as would the refinement of "the sons of Levi" (Mal 3:2-4). But in the end, Malachi delivers the punchline: "Then I will draw near *to you* for judgment" (Mal 3:5). The allusion to Isaiah 40:3 then heightens the rhetorical impact of Malachi 3:1 and adds to the royal imagery. Furthermore, Malachi may be leading readers to understand "the voice" in Isaiah 40:3 in light of the messenger's voice in Exodus 23:20.[101] This may suggest that YHWH's messenger would prepare the way for God's coming (Mal 3:1) through a kind of proclamation (Isa 40:3) which could only be ignored at the cost of divine judgment (Exod 23:20). Thus, given the rare vocabulary cluster and the contextual similarities, readers should probably see an allusion to Isaiah 40:3 in Malachi 3:1.

Analyzing the Text: A Fresh Interpretation of Malachi 3:1

The Context

Having hopefully cleared the way, I now turn to the most difficult problem in Malachi 3:1, which is deciphering Malachi's intention.[102] What did Malachi mean when he said, "Behold, I am sending my messenger, and he will clear a way before me. And suddenly, he will come to his temple; the Lord whom you are seeking and the messenger of the covenant in whom you are delighting; Behold, he is coming, says YHWH of hosts"? As has already been mentioned, Mal 3:1 occurs in the fourth major section (2:17-3:6) of the book.[103] The section begins with a jarring accusation from the prophet: "You have worn YHWH out with your words." The prophet then anticipates the people's defensive response: "But you will say: How have we wearied

[Him]?"[104] Malachi then depicts the people's attitudes by putting words in their mouths that mirror the dispositions of their hearts: "When you say, 'All who do evil are good in the eyes of YHWH! And in them He delights!' or 'Where is the God of justice?'" The people harbored bitter thoughts towards YHWH, believing him to be perverse, unjust, and slow to act. YHWH however is none of these things, and in 3:1, Malachi begins to unpack just how YHWH will demonstrate his holy character once again.

My Messenger

The demonstration of God's character would begin with the sending of a messenger. But who or what is he? First, it must be repeated that Mal 3:1 shows no signs of redaction.[105] Thus, in pursuing an interpretation of this text, one should avoid distracting oneself with theories dependent on redaction criticism.[106] Second, though the allusions to Exodus and Isaiah should inform our understanding of "my messenger," they should not be seen as providing a one-to-one identification of the figure in Malachi 3:1.[107] Malachi's allusion to these texts may provide insight into the messenger's role and function without necessarily determining his nature. With these guidelines in mind, should the first messenger be understood as human or angelic?[108] While 3:1 by itself is not decisive, the book of Malachi hints towards a human messenger.[109] First, in Malachi 2:7, the prophet states, "For the lips of a priest guard knowledge and they will seek *torah* from his mouth; for *he is the messenger of YHWH of hosts*." The messenger (מלאך) of 2:7 is clearly human, and this would suggest that the messenger in 3:1 is human as well. Second, Malachi 3:23-24 (MT; 4:5-6 ET) probably alludes back to 3:1 and identifies the messenger with a human being: Elijah.[110] Third, the superscription which begins the book (1:1) indicates that it was delivered by the hand of "Malachi" (מלאכי), who was most likely a human being. Lastly, the phrase "and suddenly" (ופתאם) should be understood as marking a sharp distinction between the messenger and the figure/s that follow.[111] Thus, "my messenger" cannot be identified with "the Lord" (האדון) or "the messenger of the covenant (מלאך הברית), who perhaps may be non-human/s.[112]

The evidence then seems to suggest that the first messenger was a human being. But is that all we are meant to learn about him? I surmise that Malachi intends to portray the sent messenger as both prophet and priest.[113] A number of scholars have recognized a prophetic backdrop for "my messenger."[114]

These typically argue as follows: (1) the connection between Malachi 3:1 and 3:22-24 demonstrates that this figure is prophetic, (2) the OT refers to prophets as "messengers" (מ לאכים),[115] and (3) in the post-exilic era, prophets had replaced the role of the kings of the past, and thus, a prophet could take the eschatological role assigned to the Davidic monarch.[116] While I agree that Malachi's depiction of the messenger has prophetic overtones, I also believe that many scholars overlook the significance of the obvious: Malachi explicitly identifies the priest as the messenger of YHWH in 2:7.[117] It is worth repeating that in Malachi 2:7, the prophet states: "For the lips of a priest guard knowledge, and they will seek instruction from his mouth; *for he is the messenger of YHWH of hosts* () (כי מלאך יהוה־צבאות הוא)." Given such a clear statement, it seems strange that some do not believe it possible for "my messenger" (מלאכי)in 3:1 to be a priest.[118] Though there are connections to Malachi 3:22-24, the repetition of "messenger" (מלאך)forms a more apparent connection to 2:7. Thus, if it is appropriate to identify the first messenger on the basis of the Elijah prophesy, it should be even more apt to view this figure in light Malachi 2:7. While it is suggestive that the designation "messenger" is elsewhere used of prophets, the fact that Malachi practically defines his use of the term in 2:7 should shed considerable light on the occurrence of the same word in 3:1.

Three other hints corroborate this interpretation of the identity of "my messenger." First, there are multiple connections between 2:17-3:6 and 1:6-2:9.[119] Among the examples noted by Snyman are the following:[120] (1) the offerings mentioned in 1:10, 11, and 13 are brought up again in 3:3-4, (2) "*pure* offerings" (מנחה טהורה) are mentioned in 1:11 while in 3:3, YHWH sits to *purify* (מטהר and טהר) the sons of Levi,[121] (3) the רע root ("evil") is repeated in 1:8 and 2:17, (4) as I have noted, מלאך ("messenger") is common to 2:7 and 3:1, (5) priests turned from YHWH's *ways* (דרכי) in 2:9 while the messenger of 3:1 prepares a *way* (דרך) for YHWH,[122] and (6) Mal 2:5 says Levi *feared* (וייראני) YHWH while 3:5 says God's people did not *fear him* (ולא יראוני). Furthermore, the context between the two sections is related because both deal with judgment upon the priests. This would suggest a cultic backdrop for 3:1, which would increase the likelihood that Malachi intends his readers to view the messenger as a priest. Second, Malachi 3:22-24 (MT), which connects Elijah to the messenger of 3:1, is linked to the description of Levi in 2:6.[123] Both Levi and Elijah "turned"

(השיב) individuals: Levi turned many from iniquity and Elijah would turn the hearts of fathers towards sons and sons towards fathers.[124] Furthermore, the call to remember the *torah* (תורה) given in 3:22 would bring to mind 2:6-9, the only other place in the book where the word occurs. This would suggest that Elijah (who is identified with the messenger of 3:1) also fulfills a priestly role. Lastly, there are good reasons to think that Malachi (מלאכי) himself may have been a priest.[125] This could account for both his concern for and knowledge of priestly abuses (1:6-2:9, 3:1-4). This could also explain why he used the root מלאך ("messenger") to denote priests in 2:7. If Malachi the prophet was also a priest,[126] then 2:7 would function as a powerful play on words, reminding a corrupt priesthood that they too were called to be messengers of YHWH, just as Malachi had been.[127] If it is legitimate to view Malachi (מלאכי ; 1:1) as a priest, then the designation "my messenger" (מלאכי ; 3:1), which is identical in form to the name, would suggest that the sent messenger would be a priest.

The Lord and Messenger of the Covenant

So far, we have determined that YHWH would come to his people by sending a human prophet/priest to prepare his way. This then leaves us with two figures: "the Lord" (האדון) and "the messenger of the covenant" (מלאך הברית). How should we understand them? I believe an examination of the text leads to four conclusions.

First, the two should not be identified with "my messenger" (מלאכי) of 3:1. As mentioned earlier, the ופתאם construction ("and suddenly") serves to separate the person and activity of the first messenger (מלאכי) from the two figures that follow.[128] Furthermore, the nature of the first messenger's task in light of the ANE background leads to this interpretation. Messengers were not sent to prepare paths for themselves. They were sent ahead of their kings in order to clear the roads for their coming.[129] Therefore, it seems more likely that the sent messenger prepares the way for the coming of the Lord and the messenger of the covenant.

Second, "the Lord" should be understood to be YHWH.[130] I come to this conclusion for the following reasons: (1) the singular wordאדון ("Lord") with the definite article always refers to YHWH in the OT,[131] (2) the context, which includes the complaints of the people in 2:17 and the preparatory work of the messenger in 3:1, prepares readers to expect the coming of YHWH,

(3) the temple, which belongs to YHWH, is said to belong to "the Lord", and (4) the allusion to Isaiah 40:3 points in this direction because the path is being prepared for YHWH.

Third, the two titles ("the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant") refer to the same person.[132] Several observations lend credence to this claim. For starters, the author employed a chiastic structure in 3:1b, which suggests that he identified "the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant" with one another.[133] Also noteworthy, the relative clauses which state that the people were "seeking" the Lord and "desiring" the messenger of the covenant supports this interpretation. This is because the people in 2:17 were clamoring for the coming of "the God of justice," and there is no evidence in the text that they desired a second figure.[134] Most decisively perhaps, verses 2-4 do not depict the actions of a duo, but of a single figure. Malachi 3:2, for instance, states, "But who is going to endure the day of *his* coming, and who is going to stand when *he* appears? For *he* is like a refining fire and like a washing soap." The singular pronouns would be problematic if Malachi envisioned two distinct figures coming to refine the sons of Levi.

Fourth, Malachi 3:1 depicts YHWH as a coming king.[135] Several factors in Malachi 3:1 point to royal imagery. To start with, the preparatory work of the messenger and the allusion to Isa 40:3 imply that YHWH is coming to his people as a king. The use of the word היכל for temple also connotes YHWH's kingship,[136] as does the title האדון ("the Lord").[137] Additionally, YHWH's kingship is a theme emphasized forcefully elsewhere in the book.[138] These clues help readers to discern that Malachi intended to depict YHWH as a royal figure.

Lastly, there are a number of good reasons to believe that Malachi intended to portray YHWH's coming with priestly connotations.[139] These reasons would include: (1) the section (2:17-3:6) is filled with cultic terminology, which would make the presence of a priestly figure appropriate,[140] (2) the fact that the temple is YHWH's destination suggests this interpretation,[141] (3) YHWH's mission suits this interpretation, for he comes to refine and purify "the sons of Levi,"[142] (4) the title "messenger of the covenant" (מלאך הברית) given to YHWH strongly suggests this interpretation. This last point deserves to be unpacked.

I have already pointed out that Malachi practically defines the "messenger" (מלאך) as a priest in 2:7. It would be surprising if Malachi used the word just a few verses later without intending to draw readers back to his previous

usage. But what is even more significant is the use of "covenant" (ברית) in conjunction with "messenger" (מלאך). This combination almost undoubtedly alludes back to 2:4-7.[143] The lexical links Malachi created would immediately draw readers' attention back to the priest as the messenger of YHWH and to the covenant with Levi.[144] This becomes even more apparent when one considers the congruence between the two sections: in 2:4, YHWH expresses His desire to preserve the covenant with Levi and in 3:2-4, He comes to refine and purify of the "sons of Levi."[145] The accumulated evidence then provides good grounds for understanding, not only the forerunner, but also the coming Lord in priestly terms.[146]

Conclusion

After "preparing the way" and laboring in the text, I have come to three conclusions. First, Malachi 3:1 ought to be read as a whole and in light of the original author's intent, rather than that of a posited redactor. I have tried to demonstrate that there are no persuasive reasons for claiming the presence of editorial activity in the verse. Second, a study of vocabulary links and contextual similarity reveals that Malachi 3:1 alludes to Isaiah 40:3 and to Exodus 23:20. Lastly, Malachi 3:1 predicts the coming of a human prophetic priest who will prepare the way for the divine royal priest.

If this interpretation is correct, then Malachi 3:1 becomes quite significant in light of its use in the NT. First of all, the synoptic interpretation of Malachi 3:1 would seem to accord with the prophet's intentions.[147] When Mark (Mark 1:2), Matthew (Matt 11:10), and Luke (Luke 1:76, 7:27) claim that John the Baptist is the sent messenger of Malachi 3:1, the fact that John is both a prophet and a priest would add legitimacy to their interpretation.[148] Second, this reading of Malachi 3:1 may inform our reading of John's ministry. John's proclamation of repentance should be seen as the preparatory work prophesied in Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Furthermore, John is revealed to be the typological fulfillment of the messenger spoken of in Exodus 23:20, who now preaches repentance in order to guard God's people from eschatological judgment.[149] Lastly, this understanding of Malachi 3:1 sheds light on the identity of Christ as portrayed in the gospels. By depicting John the Baptist as the messenger of Malachi 3:1, the gospel writers present Jesus as "the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant." This means in turn that

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all identify Jesus with YHWH; they understand God's promise to visit his people as being fulfilled in Christ.[150] It would also suggest that they understood Jesus to be a royal priest, which would be consistent with the Messianic expectations of the OT.[151] Furthermore, these inner-biblical connections provide readers with hints that Jesus is the true Israel. God's desire to establish Israel as an obedient kingdom of priests is fulfilled in the Jesus, the perfect priest-king.[152] Altogether, Malachi 3:1 proves to be a marvelous passage which may prepare the way for a clearer vision of the glory of Christ.

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1 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. While this translation is slightly wooden, it preserves a chiastic structure which will be important for the interpretation presented later in the paper.

2 Terence Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetical Books* (vol. 20; The Biblical Seminar; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 15 defines Redaction Criticism when he says it is the discipline which "seeks to establish the way in which a body of literary material has been arranged, adapted, and shaped into a book." For various introductions to redaction criticism, see W. Rudolph Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation: An Essential Guide to Methods, Terms, and Concepts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 380–81; Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 116–19; Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (2nd ed; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 310; Reinhard Müller, Juha Pakkala, and Bas ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing: Growth and Change of Texts in the Hebrew Bible* (Resources for Biblical Study 75; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 1–17; John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 45–60. For discussions of redaction criticism in relation to the prophetic writings, see Walther Zimmerli, "From Prophetic Word to Prophetic Book," in *The Place Is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (ed. Robert P. Gordon; vol. 5, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 419–42; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Recent Currents in Research on the Prophetic Literature," *The Expository Times* 119, no. 4 (2007): 161–69.

3 Scholars are divided as to whether "Malachi" (מלאכי) should be understood as a title or a name. On the one hand, many believe that the term could refer to a title which was derived from the reference in Mal 3:1 to "my messenger" (See Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* [Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004], 287; Bruce V. Malchow, "The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 [1984]: 252; David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary* [London: SCM, 1995], 165–66; J. M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Malachi* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 19; Terry W. Eddinger, *Malachi: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012], 8). These typically argue that (1) the LXX translation points in this direction, (2) no one would have named their son "my messenger," (3) there are no other individuals in the OT who have that name, and (4) some Jewish and early Christian traditions believed that Ezra was the מלאכי. On the other hand, several scholars maintain that the word refers to the name of the prophet (See Walter C. Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984], 13; Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 25D, The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 15–18; Pamela J. Scalise, "Malachi," in *Minor Prophets II* (New International Biblical Commentary 18; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 320; Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1977), 249; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 28; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 226; Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* (SBL Dissertation Series 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 28-29; Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and*

Malachi (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 156. For evidence, they point out that (1) no other prophetic book has come to us anonymously, (2) there are Jewish traditions that take מלאכי as a name, (3) the name has analogies in other names in the OT, (4) מלאכי could be a name which means "messenger of YHWH" or "YHWH is my angel," and (5) none of the arguments against taking מלאכי as a personal name are decisive. Rex Mason, *Preaching the Tradition: Homily and Hermeneutics After the Exile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 236) on the other hand thinks the issue cannot be resolved, while Ralph Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 298 believes the discussion to be unimportant. While certainty is impossible, I tend towards understanding "Malachi" to be the prophet's name.

4 In 1987, J.D.W. Watts claimed that "the unity of the book [i.e. Malachi] has been rarely challenged except for the last three verses." If Watts was correct, then Malachi scholarship has changed in the past two decades. See Watts, "Introduction to the Book of Malachi," *Review & Expositor* 84, no. 3 (1987): 375.

5 Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 206–12; Malchow, "Messenger," 253; Paul L Redditt, "The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1994): 240–55; Mason, *Preaching and Tradition*, 249–50.

6 Other arguments are also used to make the case that 3:1b-4 was the work of a later redactor. Though Redditt ("Malachi in Its Social Setting," 247) also notes the shift in person, he says, "The real key is that a new audience was being addressed, one that had been seeking the Lord and that delighted in his messenger and his covenant." In addition to the shift in person, Mason (Mason, *Preaching and Tradition*, 249–50) also points to the "hopeless confusion" over the identity of the messenger and the "quite different emphasis on the purification of the priesthood rather than judgment of sinners" as signs of growth in the text.

7 He sees the redaction of Malachi 3:1b-4 as part of a trajectory which began with the prophecy regarding Zerubbabel and Joshua in Zech 4:11-14 and which ended with the expectation of a messiah from Levi represented in the Pseudepigrapha and the Qumran literature. See Malchow, "Messenger," 253–55.

8 Collins (*The Mantle of Elijah*, 20:32) suggests that the terms "redactor," "writer," and "editor" all be distinguished from one another. He designates the individual/s who collected literary material during "pre-book phase" the redactor/s. Writers on the other hand were those individual/s responsible for using the redacted materials to produce books. Finally, editors were those individual/s who produced revisions of those books, resulting in the final forms that remain today. Despite his proposal, I will be using editor and redactor synonymously for three reasons. First of all, few scholars have followed Collins' schema. Second, the attempt to delineate between the work of a "redactor" and an "editor" (using Collin's definitions) is too speculative to be helpful. Lastly, it is not altogether clear why a single individual could not be responsible for collecting the prophetic material, arranging it meaningfully into a book, and inserting editorial comments for theological and canonical purposes.

9 Redditt suspects that the original author was a Levitical reformer responsible for two collections of material. The first corrected the moral failures of the people while the second addressed the abuses of the Zadokite priests. Underlying this second critique was a desire to downplay the prevailing distinction between Zadokites and Levites. Redditt then argues that the redactor followed in the original author's footsteps, but broadened his critique to include the mainline Levitical party. Redditt believes the redactor represented a group of disenfranchised Levites who were ostracized for aligning themselves with the original reformer. This redactor then arranged the original material and added to it in order to assure his fellow dissidents that they would be elevated on the day of YHWH while the rest of the Levites would be judged. See "Malachi in Its Social Setting," 251-54.

10 Commenting on the character of the redactor, Petersen says, "This commentator is, therefore, not a utopian but a realist, one who could imagine a proper prior moment and one who could imagine Levites acting properly in the ritual ambit." See Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 211.

11 S. D. Snyman, "Once Again: Investigating the Identity of the Three Figures Mentioned in Malachi 3:1," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27, no. 3 (2006): 1032–33.

12 Since 3:4 contains no third person forms, Snyman argues that this verse is problematic for those who rely on the shift in person to claim 3:1b-4 as an editorial addition. See "Once Again," 1032–33.

13 See S. D. Snyman, *Malachi* (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 130–31. Though Snyman does not cite him as a source, his theory seems like an extension of Michael Fishbane's explanation for the inner biblical exegesis of the post-exilic period. Fishbane posits that the tension between the trust in the authority of past prophetic words and the failure of those words to materialize led to the re-appropriation and reinterpretation of those prior texts to fit the current historical situation. As he states regarding the use of earlier prophetic material by later redactors, "Reinterpretation is necessary precisely

because the original oracle-revelation was not yet – or not conclusively – actualized." And again, "As these … were believed to be God's words, and so testified to divine involvement in history, failed expectations were not abandoned but rather reinterpreted." See the discussion in Michael Fishbane, "Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 3 (1980): 354–59.

14 Snyman, "Once Again," 1041–43; In fact, Snyman believes 3:22 and 3:23–24 should be attributed to two separate redactors. See *Malachi*, 184.

15 Beth Glazier-McDonald, "Mal'ak Habberit: The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1," *Hebrew Annual Review* 11 (1987): 95–96.

16 She cites Isa 42:20, 54:14, 61:6, Deut 32:15, Job 16:7, and Lam 3:1.

17 Glazier-McDonald, "Mal'ak," 96.

18 Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 164. For a similar sentiment, see Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, 230.

19 Hill, *Malachi*, 25D: 260.

20 Karl William Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Prophets, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi* (vol. 288, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 290–91.

21 Julia M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* (SBL Dissertation Series 121; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 56. While O'Brien states this as a critique, it turns out that this is precisely the kind of "evidence" some Biblical scholars look for in order to identify redactions. See for instance Müller, Pakkala, and Romeny, *Evidence of Editing*, 221.

22 Watts, "Introduction," 375; he cites only Mal 3:22-24 (MT) as being potentially late.

23 Some of those who propose a connection with Exod 23:20 also suggest allusions to other passages. See for instance Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger,* 136-41; Scalise, "Malachi," 348–52; Hill, *Malachi*, 25D:266–67; Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 209.

24 David L. Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy: Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles* (vol. 23, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 43.

25 Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 210.

26 Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 131. Hill also seems to suggest that the connection allows us to identify "my messenger" (מלאכי) as the angel of the Lord. See Hill, *Malachi*, 25D: 265.

27 Douglas Stuart, "Malachi," in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 1350–52.

28 Pamela J. Scalise, "To Fear or Not to Fear: Questions of Reward and Punishment in Malachi 2:17-4:3," *Review & Expositor* 84, no. 3 (1987): 412. Interestingly however, Scalise does not cite Exod 23:20 in her later commentary, though she mentions a connection to Isa 40:3. See Scalise, "Malachi," 348–52.

29 Mark J. Boda, "Messengers of Hope in Haggai-Malachi," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 1 (2007): 129.

30 While Weyde says that lexical links between the two verses are undeniable, he seems to voice uncertainty regarding the presence of an actual allusion because of the differing circumstances behind both passages. See Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:288.

31 Andrew S. Malone, "Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (2006): 221.

32 Snyman, "Once Again," 1042.

33 See for instance Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 287; Scalise, "Malachi," 349; Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*, 80; Hill, *Malachi*, 25D: 266–67; Smith, *Malachi*, 62.

34 As Kaiser (*Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*, 80) states, "The situation was a familiar one in the ancient Orient, for whenever a king was about to arrive at a town or village, messengers were sent ahead in order to allow the town and villages to make the necessary preparations to receive their royal guest. Likewise, God would be announced by a promised forerunner." See also Snyman, *Malachi*, 132.

35 Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 138. She also claims that Ps 24 is important for interpreting Mal 3:1. She builds her case on the use of בוא ("to come") and מבקש ("seeking") in both texts. See *Malachi: The Divine Messenger,* 136-41.

36 Hill, *Malachi*, 25D:266.

37 Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 287.

38 Malone, "Messiah Announced," 221, fn 21; emphasis mine.

39 Hill (*Malachi,* 25D:286) categorizes the various viewpoints similarly. A few commentators sidestep the issue by claiming the verse is too confusing or that the problem is unimportant. See for instance Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 32:327–28; Smith, *Malachi*, 63; O'Brien, *Nahum-Malachi*, 305; Mason, *Preaching and Tradition*,

250.

40 For a brief overview of German scholars who hold this view, see Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:286–87. David M. Miller ("The Messenger, the Lord, and the Coming Judgment in the Reception History of Malachi 3," *New Testament Studies* 53, no. 1 [2007]: 4) depicts Petersen as a proponent of this view. While Miller may be right, Petersen's position is muddled. The difficulty stems from his insistence on a later redactor's work. See Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 211.

41 Charles D. Isbell, *Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 59.

42 William J. Dumbrell, "Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms," *Reformed Theological Review* 35 (1976): 48. It is unclear however whether Dumbrell views this figure as human or divine, especially since he later claims that this messenger "functions as the alter ego of the sovereign." See his comments in *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 239.

43 Malchow, "Messenger," 253; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:289–90; Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi*, 1049; Scalise, "Malachi," 350.

44 Malchow, "Messenger," 253.

45 See Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:289–90.

46 She believes that, in Mal 3:1-5, the author emphasizes the same scenario through repetition. Thus, the activity of "my messenger" corresponds with that of the "messenger of the covenant" (purifying the sons of Levi), while the activity of "the Lord" corresponds to the activity of YHWH (executing the judgment of the people).See Scalise, "Malachi," 350.

47 Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi*, 1049.

48 Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 128–34; Eddinger, *Malachi*, 78; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 220–25; Snyman, "Once Again," 1038–41. Verhoef (*The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 288–89) tries to nuance his view by seeing both an identification and a distinction being made between "the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant." Though it is not clear whether Petersen holds to the one-person approach or the two-person approach, he also identifies "the Lord" with "the messenger of the covenant." See Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 211.

49 Snyman nuances his view when he says, "Yahweh as the Lord and the angel/messenger of the covenant are then almost identical figures, but at the same time they must be distinguished from one another. The angel/messenger of the covenant is not the Lord, but in the angel/messenger of the covenant, the Lord himself is met." See *Malachi*, 134.

50 See Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 289; Snyman, "Once Again," 1040.

51 Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 131. However, she also makes the untenable assertion that the prophetic author intentionally used a deceptive double entendre when he referenced מלאכי. Glazier-McDonald believes that he used this particular title because the people would assume he was speaking about himself, when he was actually referring to the future Elijah. See *Malachi: The Divine Messenger,* 135.

52 See Stuart, "Minor Prophets," 1350–52; Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*, 81–84; Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 259–60.

53 Malone, "Messiah Announced"; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 289; Snyman, "Once Again," 1043.

54 The description of his position is taken from Hill, *Malachi*, 25D:288–89.

55 Hill however does state that it is possible for "my messenger" and "the messenger of the covenant" to be two titles for one divine person. See *Malachi*, 25D:289.

56 As cited in Hill, *Malachi*, 25D:287. Paul Redditt also seems holds to the three-person approach. He identifies "my messenger" as the original prophetical source of the bulk of the material and "the Lord" as YHWH. He then states that the identity of the third figure "is lost to us," though another redactor identified him as Elijah in Mal 3:23-24 (MT). See Redditt, "Malachi in Its Social Setting," 250.

57 This includes scholars from an evangelical standpoint. See for instance John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 200–6; Duane A. Garrett, "The Undead Hypothesis: Why the Documentary Hypothesis Is the Frankenstein of Biblical Studies," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 3 (2001): 39-40; Paul R. House, "The God Who Gives Rest in the Land: Joshua," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2, no. 3 (1998): 13–17.

58 Many who have written on the issue suggest that edited material can be detected by noticing (1) inconsistencies, (2) incoherent syntax, (3) changes in perspective, style, or topic, and (4) redundancy. (See for example Müller, Pakkala, and Romeny, *Evidence of Editing*, 221; Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 24; Marvin A. Sweeney, "Formation and Form in Prophetic Literature," in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future* (ed. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards; Nashville: Abingdon, 1995),

116; Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 118). These categories are unsatisfactory for several reasons. First of all, none of them necessitate the presence of a redactor's work because each allows for alternative explanations. Second, the first three categories are quite subjective, allowing someone to claim redactions almost anywhere in the text. Third, if a redactor's aim was to smoothen out a text and to make it cohere (as Barton claims; see *Reading the Old Testament,* 56-58), then the four criteria can only detect when an alleged redactor has done his job poorly. More work needs to be done therefore in order to provide satisfactory criteria for detecting redactions.

59 Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah*, 20:14.

60 This may seem like a strange description of redaction criticism, since the field originally arose as a means of treating the final forms of the texts and of going beyond the diachronic interests of source critics and form critics. However, redaction criticism still rests firmly on source critical and form critical conclusions, and many redaction critics focus most of their energies to differentiating between the ideology behind the original sources and that of the subsequent editors.

61 So also Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 164; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, 230; Karl William Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching,* 288: 290–91; O'Brien, *Priest and Levite*, 82; Glazier-McDonald, "Mal'ak," 96; Hill, *Malachi*, 25D: 260.

62 The witnesses to the MT (Aleppo codex and Leningrad codex) are identical. Four discrepancies exist between the MT and 4QXIIa. First, the MT spells the participle "sending" defectively (שלח) while the DSS scroll does not (שולח). The second is that 4QXIIa ends the verse with a הנה + pronominal suffix + participle construction (הנו בא) while the MT uses a הנה + participle construction (הנה בא) to communicate the same idea. The third is that 3:1 in 4QXIIa begins with "therefore" (לכן) which is absent in the MT. The fourth difference, and the only one that may impact the meaning, is that the DSS reads "they are coming" (יבאו) while the MT reads "he is coming" (יבוא). These differences can all be accounted for without positing the existence of different *Vorlagen*. The first difference is accounted for by the fact that the DSS often uses *waw* as a vowel letter (see Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* [Harvard Semitic Studies 29; Scholars Press: Atlanta, 1986], 17). The second difference is an example of a synonymous reading (see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* [3rd ed.; Fortress: Minneapolis, 2012], 257-58) while the third is likely a contextual changes due to "the copyists' wish to adapt the text to their own understanding or to an exegetical tradition known to them" (Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 263). The last difference may also be an example of a contextual change, or it may be a case of metathesis, which is the unintentional "transposition of two adjacent letters" (Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 232): in this case, switching the letters (יבוא) and (יבאו ו).

63 The LXX uses the word ἐπιβλέψεται ("he will look intently at") to translate the *piel weqatal* form ופנה ("he will prepare"). This seems to be a translation error rather than evidence of a different Hebrew *Vorlage.* The LXX translator renders several Hebrew words incorrectly (see Lars Kruse-Blinkenberg, "The Book of Malachi according to Codex Syro-Hexaplaris Ambrosianus," *Studia Theologica* 21 [1967], 72). Furthermore, if one translator was responsible for the Greek version of the Minor Prophets (as argued by H. J. Thackeray, "The Greek Translators of the Prophetical Books," *Journal of Theological Studies* 4 [1903]: 585; for a more recent treatment, see Takamitsu Muraoka, "In Defense of the Unity of the Septuagint Minor Prophets," *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 15 [1989]: 34), one will notice that he struggled with the verb פנה (see for instance LXX Zeph 3:15, Hos 3:1, Nah 2:9 and Zech 10:4). Thus, the difference between the MT and the LXX as this point is probably due to translation error. See also Hill, *Malachi,* 260.

64 Glazier-McDonald, "Mal'ak," 96; In fact, this shift from third to first person is a common feature in YHWH's speech. See for example, 2 Sam 7:5-16, 1 Chr 17:7-14, Isa 14:22-27, 22:15-25, Jer 23:16-22, etc.

65 Verhoef argues that 3:2-3:4 address the accusation against YHWH in 2:17 ("Everyone who does evil is good in the eyes of YHWH and in them He is pleased!") while 3:5 answers the question asked in 2:17 ("Where is the God of justice?"). See Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 283–87.

66 This is similar to Scalise's position ("Malachi," 350), though I disagree with her interpretation of the identities of the figures in 3:1. This is also an application of Weyde's observation that "elsewhere in Malachi we have found more than once that statements, of whatever form, are elaborated in the following context, in which the references of terms and phrases have been more closely defined. This appears to be a characteristic feature of the discourses in this book, and the previous analysis gave no reason to regard such elaborations as later insertions." See Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:290.

67 The people's complaints in 2:17 should probably be understood as being directed primarily (not exclusively) towards the abuses of the priests. The numerous lexical connections between 2:17-3:6 and 1:6-2:9 would support this interpretation (see Snyman, "Once Again," 1037–38). This reading also provides the basis for YHWH's response in 3:1-4, where He speaks of refining the "sons of Levi" (3:1-4). However, the end of the

section reveals that the people clamoring for God's justice failed to recognize their own culpability. Thus, the Lord's coming would bring judgment not only upon sinful priests, but upon those who were questioning YHWH while disregarding His covenant (3:5). The shift from the third person forms in 3:1b-4 to the first person form of 3:5 would then be functioning rhetorically to heighten the text's impact on initial readers, highlighting the fact that those who questioned God's justice would themselves experience that justice on the day of the Lord.

68 Contra Mason, *Preaching and Tradition*, 249–50. Redditt ("Malachi in Its Social Setting," 247) is also mistaken when he suggests that 3:1-5 is unintelligible as it stands. He makes this claim because he sees 3:1b as addressing a new audience. I will argue that 3:1-5 addresses the same audience: those who were blaspheming God by doubting His justice. The fact that they are "seeking" the Lord and "delighting" in His coming only highlights the irony of the situation. For similar interpretations, see Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 289–90; Scalise, "Malachi," 349; Scalise, "To Fear or Not to Fear," 413; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, 265; Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*, 79.

69 I would argue that it is more fruitful to assume the work of a single author unless there is decisive evidence to posit the work of a redactor. Evidence would include (1) clearly anachronistic statements in non-prophetic material, (2) statements in the text that acknowledge the use of other sources, (3) manuscript evidence which strongly suggests the existence of different *Vorlagen*, and (4) the survival of parallel texts whose similarity strongly suggests that one borrowed from the other or that both borrowed from the same sources.

70 In many ways, finding evidence for a redactor is like trying to find evidence for the existence of Bigfoot: once one is convinced that he exists, evidence for his existence begins to abound.

71 Vanhoozer defines allusions when he says, "To allude is to refer to something— a person, place, event, or other text— indirectly." See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 256.

72 Perhaps most famously, Hays proposed seven criteria for detecting the presence of an allusion. See Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 29–32; Beale builds on Hays, while also critiquing his work. See G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 31–35.

73 Benjamin D. Sommer, "Exegesis, Allusion and Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Lyle Eslinger," *Vetus Testamentum* 46 (1996): 484.

74 Sommer, "Exegesis, Allusion, and Intertextuality," 484–85.

75 Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:51.

76 Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:52.

77 Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:52.

78 Derek Bass, "Hosea's Use of Scripture: An Analysis of His Hermeneutics" (Ph.D. diss, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 100; emphasis original.

79 Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:288. Even those who argue against an allusion do not do so on the basis of lexical differences between the texts.

80 Snyman, "Once Again," 1042; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 221; Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, "Covenant Themes in Malachi," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1983): 553-54.

81 Most commentators agree on the divisions of the book, though there is still much discussion on form criticism in relation to the book of Malachi. For a thorough discussion of the forms (*Gattungen*) found in Malachi, see Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:14–48.

82 With respect to the reported words of the people, I agree with Weyde when he says, "The words of the addressees, though they might be real citations in some cases, are probably fictitious; the prophet interprets their opinion and incorporates it in his message." See Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:12.

83 For commentators who take Mal 3:1-5 to be eschatological, see Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 169; Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 32:326; Mason, *Preaching and Tradition*, 250; Scalise, "Malachi," 349; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 294; James N. Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary of Malachi* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998), 126.

84 If Mal 3:23-24 (MT) describes the same messenger, then his preparatory work would consist of turning the hearts of fathers to their sons and sons to their fathers. This too is dissimilar from the role of the messenger in Exod 23:20. See Exod 23:20-33

85 See Exod 23:20-33.

86 Exodus 19:4-6 reveals the importance of the priesthood and the nation for understanding Exod 19:1–24:11. There are at least two reasons that this is so. First, Exod 19:4–6 disclose the Lord's purpose for the

establishment of the covenant unpacked in Exod 20–24 (in fact, Gentry refers to the verses as a climax of the section; see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2012], 309–15). It only makes sense that Moses intended for readers to keep this purpose in mind as they read the entire section. Second, Exod 19:4–6 reveals that the nation and the priesthood were meant to be coterminous. Thus, when Moses addresses the nation of Israel throughout Exod 19–24, he is speaking to those who were also called to be priests.

87 Other differing circumstances would include the facts that (1) a priestly class *within* the nation of Israel had been previously established, (2) the people were not on the way to the promised land but were currently inhabiting it, and (3) the covenant established at Sinai had already been broken (Mal 3:5).

88 Given the strong lexical links between Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20, it may also be significant that "treasured possession" (סגלה) is found in both Mal 3:17 and Exod 19:5. The root is rare, only occurring eight times. And it is only used of God's people six times (Exod 19:5, Deut 7:6, 14:2, 26:18, Ps 135:4, and Mal 3:17). Given that (1) Malachi already alludes to the book of the covenant and (2) Exod 19:5 probably provides the impetus for the later descriptions of Israel as God's "treasured possession," there is a strong likelihood that Mal 3:17 displays an awareness of Exod 19:5. This in turn provides more reason to see its influence in Mal 3:1.

89 While it is true that Exod 23:20 does not occur in an eschatological section, this by itself does not weaken the case for an inner-biblical relationship between it and Mal 3:1. This is because Mal 3:1 may be predicting a figure who will share a typological relationship with the messenger of Exodus. For a similar interpretation, see Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 40. For discussions on the nature of typology, see Douglas J. Moo, "The Problem of Sensus Plenoir" in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1986), 196; Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical* τύπος *Structures* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981); Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 94; Davidson, *Typology*, 420–21; Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, "The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament" in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 725–30; Francis Foulkes, "The Acts of God: A Study of the Basis of Typology in the Old Testament," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (ed. G. K. Beale; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 365.

90 Other contextual features have been put forth in order to argue for an allusion from Mal 3:1 to Exod 23:20. Stuart ("Minor Prophets," 1350–52) claims that both texts describe a mighty act of victory won by YHWH for Israel. Petersen (Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 210) believes that the messenger figure in both texts enables the people of Israel to keep the covenant stipulations. O'Brien (*Priest and Levite*, 74) states that the two messenger figures are linked because "both in covenant making and covenant lawsuit, the figure of the messenger is central." Rikk E. Watts posits that Malachi's use of Exod 23:20 is "an ironic recapitulation of the first [Exodus]" (see "Mark" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 118).

91 This represents a change in my views since the initial presentation of this paper at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. My thanks go to Dr. Jim Hamilton and to those who took part in his seminar entitled "Methods in Biblical Theology," which met in the Spring of 2015. Their feedback was instrumental in leading me to rethink my conclusions.

92 An Accordance search reveals eight occurrences: Gen 24:31, Lev 14:36, Isa 40:3, 57:14, 60:12, Zeph 3:15, Mal 3:1, and Ps 80:10.

93 An Accordance search reveals that דרך occurs 706 times.

94 The reason that an allusion to Isa 57 or 62 should not be posited is because the contexts differ significantly. In both Isa 57:14 and 62:10, the way which is being prepared is for the people, not for YHWH.

95 On the nature of OT eschatology, see Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 272–73.

96 In Isaiah, the figure is simply described as a voice crying in the wilderness (קול קורא במדבר). This figure seems to be working to prepare a way for YHWH by calling for that path to be made clear.

97 For this interpretation of Isa 40:3, see John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (rev. ed., vol. 25; Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 609; J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 20; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 276; James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 202.

98 Verhoef notes this as well. See Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 287.

99 So Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 338; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 176; William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 116. Contra Motyer, *Isaiah*, 20:276.

100 Irony explains why Malachi refers to the blasphemers of 2:17 as those who are "seeking the Lord" and "desiring the messenger of the covenant" in 3:1. The prophet also answers the people's demand in an ironic manner. For a similar interpretation, see McKenzie and Wallace, "Covenant Themes in Malachi," 553; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 289–90; Scalise, "Malachi," 349; Scalise, "To Fear or Not to Fear," 413; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, 265; Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*, 79.

101 While there are not enough lexical similarities to make a strong case for an allusion between Isa 40:3 and Exod 23:20, there are some intriguing contextual similarities. Exodus 23:20 states that the people must pay attention to the messenger and "obey his voice"; Isa 40:3 informs us of a "voice" instructing God's people. Furthermore, the messenger of Exodus will lead God's people through the wilderness into the promised land; the voice in Isaiah demands that a highway be built in the wilderness so God may return to his people.

102 I am in wholehearted agreement with Vanhoozer when he says, "The reality to which interpreters are accountable and to which their descriptions must correspond if they seek to be true is grounded in the authors embodied and enacted intention." See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 253.

103 There is some debate as to whether this section ends with 3:5 or with 3:6. Most commentators suggest that it ends with 3:5. I however tend to see 3:6 as the proper close of the section (see also Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:317–18). The כי ("for") connects 3:6 to 3:5 and functions in a causal sense, depicting YHWH's unchangeableness as the reason for the judgment. This reading is also is appropriate in light of the charges leveled against YHWH in 2:17 which began the section; Mal 3:6 serves to identify those who are responsible for the blasphemy of 2:17.

104 The MT lacks a direct object (ואמרתם במה הוגענו) while the LXX makes the direct object explicit (καὶ εἴπατε Ἐν τίνι παρωξύναμεν αὐτόν;). In both cases, the context makes clear that YHWH is the direct object. The *weqatal* form is functioning to indicate a consequent situation in future time. See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §32.2.3a.

105 So also Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 164; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, 230; Karl William Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching,* 288:290–91; O'Brien, *Priest and Levite*, 82; Glazier-McDonald, "Mal'ak," 96; Hill, *Malachi*, 25D:260.

106 This is not to say that redaction criticism is always unhelpful. However, I believe it should be practiced only when there is strong evidence of editorial activity. For types of evidence, see footnote 70.

107 Thus, it is at least not necessary to conclude that "my messenger" is the angel of the Lord of Exod 23:20. So also Snyman, "Once Again," 1042; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 221; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:288.

108 As is commonly acknowledged, the word מלאך can be used for both humans and angels. See entry for מלאך in Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (13th ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010).

109 Snyman, "Once Again," 1041-43; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 223; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:288; Malchow, "Messenger," 253–54; Stuart, "Minor Prophets," 1350–52; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 288; Redditt, "Malachi in Its Social Setting," 250; Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*, 80. Contra Hill, *Malachi*, 25D: 288; Dumbrell, "Malachi," 48.

110 Elie Assis ("Moses, Elijah, and the Messianic Hope: A New Reading of Malachi 3,22-24," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 123, no. 2 [2011]: 214–15) makes the following points of connection between 3:1 and 3:22-24: (1) there is a similarity in presentation, (2) there is a similarity in key words, (3) in both cases God is speaking and sending His emissary, (4) both the "messenger" and Elijah are coming before God, and (5) both figures are tied to covenant renewal. See also Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi*, 1069; Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 210; Malchow, "Messenger," 252; Miller, "Messenger," 3; Hill, *Malachi*, 25D:383; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 340; Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 263–64.

111 See Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 139; Hill, *Malachi*, 25D:267.

112 This would also eliminate the one-person approach to Mal 3:1 as an exegetical option.

113 Scalise also blends both the prophetic and the priestly in her description of the messenger. See Scalise, "Malachi," 350.

114 Assis, "Moses, Elijah, Messianic Hope," 214–15; Snyman, "Once Again," 1041–43; Malone, "Messiah

Announced," 223; Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 210; Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi*, 1049; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 288; Redditt, "Malachi in Its Social Setting," 250.

115 Isa 42:19, 44:26, Hag 1:13, 2 Chr 36:15-16; However, Weyde claims that Eccl 5:5 uses מלאך to refer to a priest. See Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:197.

116 Assis, "Moses, Elijah, Messianic Hope," 218–19.

117 Though in my opinion, Malchow wrongly sees 3:1b-4 as a later interpolation and he errs in his explanation for the origin of the priestly terminology in Mal 3, he is right to give due respect to the influence that Malachi 2:7 should have on interpretations of 3:1. See Malchow, "Messenger." See also Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:289.

118 Verhoef (*The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 288) argues against a priestly identification by saying, "The fact that the messenger of 3:1 is sent indicates that he may not be identified with the priests who are also called 'messengers of the Lord' in 2:7." It is difficult to understand how the sending in 3:1 militates against a priestly identification. Snyman ("Once Again," 1041) claims that the messenger cannot be a priest because 2:1-9 utters a scathing critique and a curse against the priesthood. However, he fails to recognize that YHWH's desire is to preserve the covenant with Levi (2:4), that God's plan is to refine (not destroy) the priesthood, and that YHWH's critique and curse fall on unfaithful priests and not the priesthood in and of itself.

119 Snyman ("Once Again," 1037) rightly says, "When Malachi 1:6-2:9 and 2:17-3:7a are examined a surprisingly close connection between these two units is found."

120 Snyman, "Once Again," 1037-38.

121 In Malachi, roots related to טהר occur only in 1:11 and 3:3.

122 In Malachi, דרך only occurs in 2:8 and 3:1.

123 The use of השיב ("he turned back") and תורה ("torah") connect Mal 2:6 to Mal 3:22-24. The former word occurs in Malachi only in 2:6 and 3:24, while the second occurs only in 2:6-9 and 3:22.

124 So also Assis, "Moses, Elijah, Messianic Hope," 209.

125 So also Daniel I. Block, "Reviving God's Covenant: Reflections on Malachi 2:1-9," *Reformation and Revival* 4, no. 3 (1995): 128; Hill, *Malachi*, 2SD: 213; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, 256; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:47, 64–68.

126 This was not unheard of in Israel's history, for both Jeremiah (Jer 1:1) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:3) were of priestly descent.

127 See Hill, *Malachi*, 2SD: 213; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, 256.

128 The *waw* would be functioning as a disjunctive indicating a shift in scene and in participants. See Waltke and O'Connor, *IBHS*, §39.2.3a.

129 John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 810.

130 Snyman, "Once Again," 1038–39; Greg Goswell, "The Eschatology of Malachi After Zechariah 14," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 3 (2013): 635; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 219; Malchow, "Messenger," 253; Glazier-McDonald, "Mal'ak," 98; Stuart, "Minor Prophets," 1350–52; Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi*, 1049; Smith, *Malachi*, 63; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 288; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:290; Hill, *Malachi*, 2SD:268; Redditt, "Malachi in Its Social Setting," 250.

131 An Accordance search reveals nine occurrences: Exod 23:17, 34:23, Deut 10:17, Isa 1:24, 3:1, 10:16, 33, 19:4, and Mal 3:1.

132 Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 128–34; Eddinger, *Malachi*, 78; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 220–25; Snyman, "Once Again," 1038–41. Verhoef (*The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 288–89) tries to nuance his view by seeing both an identification and a distinction being made between "the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant." Though it is not clear whether Petersen holds to the one-person approach or the two-person approach, he also identifies "the Lord" with "the messenger of the covenant." See Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 211.

133 The chiastic structure works as follows: (A) "And suddenly He will come to His temple, (B) the Lord whom you are seeking, (B') and the messenger of the covenant in whom you are delighting, (A') Behold, He is coming." For similar arguments based on the structure, see Snyman, "Once Again," 1040; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 219; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 288–89.

134 Commentators who do not see the Lord and the messenger of the covenant as one person often flounder in attempting to account for the people's desire for the messenger. Malchow ("Messenger," 254–55) posits that their desire is to be explained by a growing expectation for a priestly Messiah. But his hypothesis is based on his presupposition of editorial activity in 3:1. Weyde (*Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:289–90) agrees with Malchow regarding the desire for a priestly messenger (although he disputes Malchow's claims of

redactions and a late date). But in order to do this, he must take the unlikely position that those addressed in 3:1 are presented positively. Hill (*Malachi*, 25D: 270–71) fails to comment on the issue at all.

135 See also Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 139–42.

136 BDB for instance claims that this root is used "of (the) palace of God considered as king."

137 So Glazier-McDonald (*Malachi: The Divine Messenger,* 142) states, "The use of אדון in Mal 3:1 aptly continues the יום יהוה imagery. On his day Yahweh becomes king, 'the world-ruler who uses all nations and kingdoms as his instruments.'"

138 See especially Mal 1:14.

139 Though perhaps not a common occurrence, God is in fact described in priestly terminology elsewhere in the OT. So for instance, in a similarly eschatological setting, Isaiah describes YHWH's day of judgment in cultic terms. Isaiah 34:6 (ESV) says, "The LORD has a sword; it is sated with blood; it is gorged with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom."

140 These terms include "temple" (היכל), "purifying" (מטהר), "purify" (טהר), "sons of Levi" (בני לוי), "offering" (מגישי), "pleasing" (ערב), and "gift" (מנחה), which occurs twice.

141 By referring to God's house as a "temple" (היכל), Malachi nicely ties both the priestly theme and the kingly theme together. This in turn hearkens back to 1:14, which speaks to a coming day when God will be recognized as king over the nations.

142 Malchow ("Messenger", 254) makes the same point when he says, "It is consistent that the purifier of the Levites should Himself arise from the same group."

143 So also Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:289; Snyman, "Once Again," 1041; Malchow, "Messenger," 253–54.

144 For this reason, I believe that the covenant referred to in the phrase "messenger of the covenant" is the covenant with Levi. However, if Williamson is correct when he states, "Thus the Priestly and Mosaic covenants, while remaining distinct, run in parallel with one another, and are closely related in purpose; namely, maintaining the relationship between God and Israel," then perhaps one can assume that the Sinai covenant is in view as well. See Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (vol. 23, New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 105–6.

145 The purification of the "sons of Levi" presents difficulties for Christian interpreters. Does Malachi envision actual descendants of Levi being restored to the priesthood in the eschatological age? And if he does, was he mistaken? Though more work needs to be done on this issue, there are at least three possible ways forward in my estimation. First, it is possible that Malachi was not using the phrase "sons of Levi" in a strict manner. O'Brien (*Priest and Levite,* 143–44) has demonstrated quite convincingly that Malachi used the designation "sons of Levi" synonymously with the term "priest." Garrett (*Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* [Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000], 233) has also made the case that the OT can use the term "Levite" as a "loose synonym" for priest. This seems to be the case in Isa 66:21 when YHWH says of non-Israelites, "And I will even take some among them as priests and as Levites." Thus, it may be possible that Malachi was simply saying that YHWH would work in the coming age to produce a pure priesthood. This would then be consistent with the NT perspective and with Malachi's own vision in 1:11. Second, it is possible that the prophet used the expression "sons of Levi" to refer specifically to the ethnic group, though the NT fulfilled this prediction through the establishment of a universal priesthood. Third, it is possible that Malachi refers specifically to the descendants of Levi, and the fulfillment of this promise is still future. If Rom 11:25 refers to a future ingathering of ethnic Israel, it is plausible that the refinement of the sons of Levi will be included in that act of God.

146 These considerations also conflict with the view that Malachi is predicting the coming of the Messiah. Instead, the prophet is envisioning the arrival of God Himself. The NT fulfillment is consistent with Malachi's expectations however, because God did come to His people in the person of Jesus, the Christ. See also Malone, "Messiah Announced," 228.

147 Discussions on the NT use of the OT continue to abound. For a brief introduction to the issues, see Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction* (2nd ed., London: T&T Clark, 2015).

148 Perhaps then it is no coincidence that Luke points out John's priestly ancestry; see Luke 1:8-25.

149 Thus Rikk E. Watts says, "Because John clearly functions as Malachi's Elijah, Israel must listen to him if they are to avoid the curse that Yahweh s coming might occasion" (see "Mark" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 119). The severe warning provided by John the Baptist in Matt 3:7–12 is in fact reminiscent of the tone of Exod 23:20–21. For an argument in favor of seeing John the Baptist as the antitype of Exod 23:20, see

Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew," 40.

150 See also Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 244.

151 The OT speaks repeatedly of a coming king in the line of David (see for instance Isa 9:6 [ET 9:7], 16:5, 22:22, Jer 23:5, 30:9, Ezek 34:23). God also promises to raise up a "faithful priest," for whom YHWH would build a "sure house" (1 Sam 2:35). Furthermore, there are hints in the OT that these two offices would come together in a single person (see Ps 110:2-4; Zech 6:13).

152 Matthew especially presents Jesus as the true Israel (see Matt 2:13–15, 4:1–11, 11:10, 12:15–21). As Hamilton (*God's Glory,* 364) notes, the evangelist "presents Jesus as recapitulating the history of Israel." See also Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 439; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 105–6; Blomberg, "Matthew," 8 & 18.

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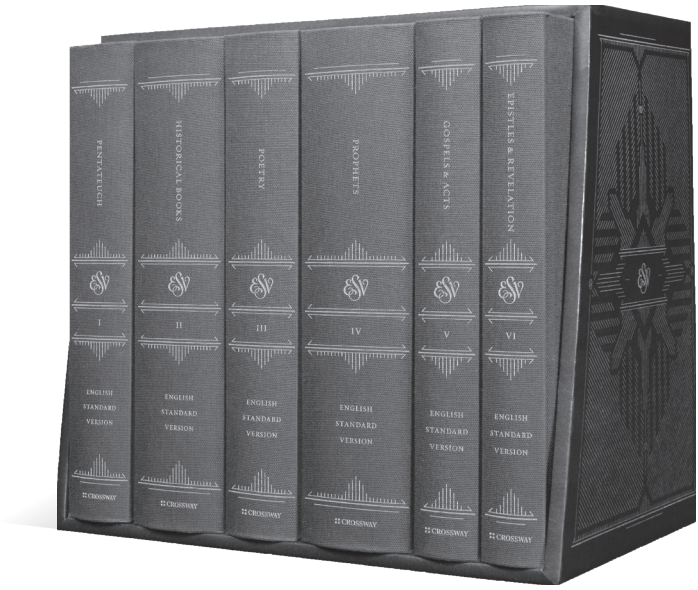

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Pastoral Advice on Marital Strife: Wisdom from Two Millennia of Christian Thinkers[1]

Robert L. Plummer & Matthew D. Haste

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Introduction

Most modern evangelical books on marriage are like meteors—they flash brilliantly out of the dark heavens for a brief moment—only to be swallowed up by the black canvass of forgetfulness as we await the next shooting star of

the Christian publishing industry. The fact is, evangelical advice on marriage is often trendy, trite, and thus, after a few years, out-of-print.

As a pastor, as well as professor, I (Robert) have been struck by the high percentage of Christian marriages that struggle to maintain unity, love, and commitment. Yet, should I be surprised? If I am honest about my own marriage, I can think of many struggles, disappointments, and conflicts that my wife and I have faced. As one prominent Christian pastor once remarked to me about the marriages described in the Bible, "Every one of them is dysfunctional."

As I have counseled married couples both at my seminary and at my local church, one common theme that encourages struggling couples is to learn of the marital struggles of others. Ironically, it is life-giving to know that disagreement and disappointment in marriage are both normal and expected (though not without sin). In my memory, I can see the look of relief on young couples' faces as I said to them, "My wife and I have had similar challenges in our marriage." How comforting I found it to read books like that of John Piper's or Tim Keller's and discover that such modern spiritual giants are also fallible husbands.

It was these experiences, I believe, that first led me to consider not just seeking one pastor's advice, or several influential modern Christians' testimonies about marriage, but two-thousand years of the church witnessing to the struggles, joys, and purposes of marriage. Ultimately, Matthew Haste partnered with me in this endeavor to produce a devotional entitled *Held in Honor: Wisdom for Your Marriage from Voices of the Past*.[2]

The book contains fifty poignant instructions about marriage spread evenly throughout Church History—from the Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, Puritan, and Modern Evangelical eras—including the likes of Ignatius to Augustine, Martin Luther to Richard Baxter, Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Elisabeth Elliott. Though sometimes less clearly (e.g., the Medieval period), the church has always born witness to the holy and good purposes of God in marriage—particularly, as a picture of Christ's unwavering love for the church and the church's commitment to Christ. And, the church always bore witness to the struggles of marriage—for when two sinners are wed (which includes every marriage) there is sure to be difficulty, conflict, disappointment, and sin.

This article will focus on some of the specific advice that Christian theologians have given throughout church history on marital strife—that is, on

the conflict between man and woman in marriage. Indeed, G. K. Chesterton said memorably:

> The differences between a man and a woman are at the best so obstinate and exasperating that they practically cannot be got over unless there is an atmosphere of exaggerated tenderness and mutual interest. To put the matter in one metaphor, the sexes are two stubborn pieces of iron; if they are to be welded together, it must be while they are red hot. Every woman has to find out that her husband is a selfish beast, because every man is a selfish beast by the standard of a woman. But let her find out the beast while they are both still in the story of "Beauty and the Beast." Every man has to find out that his wife is cross—that is to say, sensitive to the point of madness; for every woman is mad by the masculine standard. But let him find out that she is mad while her madness is more worth considering than anyone else's sanity.[3]

We will consider the instructions of five historical figures about marital conflict selected from the fifty quotes in our book. The benefit of this historical survey is threefold: (1) the survey poignantly reminds us that marriages will always struggle in this broken world; (2) the survey shows us that the church has consistently spoken with clarity, boldness, and pastoral sensitivity to preserve and strengthen marriages; (3) the five particular quotes stress similar issues in marriage and thus provide a reliable starting point for providing pastoral counsel that is neither trite nor trendy.

Opus Imperfectum (c. 400)

Opus Imperfectum is the Latin name given to an incomplete commentary on the book of Matthew that was formerly attributed to John Chrysostom (347-407). Scholars have rejected Chrysostom's authorship since the sixteenth century and now consider the book to be the work of an unidentified fifth-century church leader. Although the commentary is incomplete (addressing only about two-thirds of the Gospel) and bears some marks of aberrant theological influences, it provides helpful insights on particular passages. The quote below, taken from the author's comments on Matthew 5:32, illustrates his desire to prevent couples from pursuing divorce.[4]

> But you say, "My wife has many faults." What? You yourself are without fault?

> If we ought to bear with the imperfections of those outside our family, as the apostle says, "Bear with one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" [Gal 6:2], how much more ought we to bear the imperfections of our wives?[5]

As broken and sin-stained humans, we are creative at justifying our transgressions. We reinterpret God's Word so as to make it less uncomfortable for us. For example, a consistent teaching of Scripture is that we are to bear the inconvenience of others' failings and demands—"bear one another's burdens"—so that we might live as Christ's Spirit-led people—"and so fulfill the law of Christ" [Gal 6:2]. Yet, we somehow think it is acceptable to grumble over the burdens we must bear from our spouses. In this quote, the author of the *Opus Imperfectum* gives a reminder that for every fault you find in your spouse, he or she could rightly point out a flaw in you!

The gospel of Jesus Christ challenges this kind of sinful scorekeeping. As God has extended His undeserved grace towards us in Christ, so we are to extend it to others (Eph 4:32). To not offer forgiveness to those who have offended us is to call into question whether we truly know the forgiveness of the Heavenly Father (1 John 3:14-15). We readily counsel our children about forgiving the classmate who is teasing them. We expect our pastor not to lash out at difficult people at the congregational meeting. We sit in silent disapproval towards the bitter aunt who complains about her daughter. Yet, we ignore our own lack of love, grace, and forgiveness towards the husband or wife God has given us as our most intimate companion. Forgive others seventy-seven times? Of course! But, concerning our husband or wife, we think, "Here we go again … Do that one more time, and I'll…".

We see in the *Opus Imperfectum* that sinful husbands and wives struggled with critical spirits towards their spouses in the 5th century, just as married couples struggle through the same issue today. One effective pastoral strategy for developing compassion, forgiveness, and empathy towards others is understanding how much forgiveness we ourselves have received (from God and others) and need to receive daily.

I need the *Opus Imperfectum* to remind me that I personally *am* an *opus imperfectum*. And, if I've experienced the grace of God in my imperfections—and if I inflict my imperfections upon others daily—how I cannot likewise bear in love the imperfections they have, especially that most intimate companion of a spouse?

Gregory the Great (540–604)

Born into a wealthy family, Gregory the Great left a promising career in politics to become a monk.[6] After several years of the monastic life, he was elected pope. Although he was at first reluctant to take the position, he eventually transformed the office and cast a long shadow over the papacy throughout the Middle Ages. The following excerpt is taken from his *Book of Pastoral Rule* (c. 590), which was written to guide bishops in their personal conduct and to instruct them in their ministry to others.

> Husbands and wives are to be admonished, that those things wherein they sometimes displease one another they bear with mutual patience, and by mutual exhortations remedy. For it is written, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). For the law of Christ is charity; since it has from Him bountifully bestowed on us its good things, and has patiently borne our evil things. We, therefore, then fulfill by imitation the law of Christ, when we both kindly bestow our good things, and piously endure the evil things of our friends. They are also to be admonished to give heed, each of them, not so much to what they have to bear from the other as to what the other has to bear from them. For, if one considers what is borne from one's self, one bears more lightly what one endures from another.[7]

Like the *Opus Imperfectum*, Gregory the Great reminds us that a successful, happy marriage is partly found in embracing your Christian duty to bear with the burdens your spouse causes you. The last part of Gregory's instructions are, in essence, an application of Jesus' command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 19:19).

A wife might respond, "How can I love my husband when he won't change? Everyday it's the same annoying habits. I wonder if the children will grow up to be losers like him." A husband might reply, "How can I love her when she is so infuriating? She's an emotional train wreck, constantly sapping my energy and time. Think about the success I could be in work or ministry if it weren't for my wife!"

So, you cannot love your spouse because he/she is so undeserving? Well, look to the way you love yourself as a model. In Jesus' command to love one's neighbor, He assumes we love ourselves and then commands us to

love others in that same pattern. Or, as Gregory the Great points out, we are constantly offending and sinning against others. How grateful we are that they bear with us and do not lash out in anger or resentment. We are glad they give us a second chance—and if they do not, we think they should.

We are called to love others in the same way we love ourselves. Most people really do love themselves. Think about it: when given the chance, you choose what you consider to be best for yourself. You hope the best for yourself, and even though you are not what you want to be, you give yourself a second chance … and then a third chance … fourth chance … and so on.

C. S. Lewis pointed out this tendency in his classic work, *Mere Christianity*. On the old saying, "hate the sin but not the sinner," Lewis writes, "For a long time I used to think this a silly, straw-splitting distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the man? But years later it occurred to me that there was one man to whom I had been doing this all my life—namely myself."[8] In some marriage counseling situations, it could be helpful, like Gregory, to point out that many spouses are failing to extend to each other the most basic Christian love.

Let's make it personal: What if you extended true neighbor love to *your* spouse? Perhaps your spouse is so conditioned to your disapproval that it will take some time to convince him/her that you are sincere. Your negative attitude may really be the main problem. Do you stew about the "speck" in your spouse's eye while you have a log sticking out of your own eye (Matt 7:3-5)?

Gregory reminds us: (1) as sinful spouses our tendency is to nitpick; (2) Christ empowers and calls us to bear and forgive; and (3) failure to love as God commands is at the root of most, if not all, marital disputes. When the disciples of Jesus love others, the light of the new age shines in the darkness (1 John 2:8). What of your own words and actions today will reveal the light of the coming age shining through your marriage and home?

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

We turn now to the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus.[9] While his 1516 print edition of the Greek New Testament is his most well-known contribution to the church, he was also appreciated in his own day for his wisdom

and wit in practical theology. The following conversation is excerpted from a fictional dialogue between two troubled women discussing how to navigate a difficult marriage. According to the older of the two, a woman ought to weigh a man's faults before she marries him, but once married, it is "time for improving him, not blaming him." This dialogue provides a helpful representation of how Erasmus might have counseled women in a troubled marriage.

Eulalia: Greetings, Xanthippe! I've been dying to see you.
Xanthippe: Same to you, my dearest Eulalia. You look lovelier than ever.
Eulalia: So you greet me by making fun of me right away?
Xanthippe: Not at all. I mean it.
Eulalia: Maybe this new dress flatters my figure.
Xanthippe: Of course it does. I haven't seen anything prettier for a long time. British cloth, I suppose?
Eulalia: British wool with Venetian dye.
Xanthippe: Softer than satin: What a charming shade of purple! Where did you get such a marvelous gift?
Eulalia: Where should honest wives get them except from their husbands?
Xanthippe: Lucky you to have such a husband! As for me—I might as well have married a mushroom when I married my Nicholas … [Xanthippe goes on to complain about her husband.]
Eulalia: Hush! You bring reproach on yourself when you reproach your husband.
Xanthippe: Hope to die if I wouldn't rather sleep with a brood sow than with such a husband!
Eulalia: Don't you welcome him with abuse then?
Xanthippe: Yes—as he deserves. He finds I'm no mute!
Eulalia: What does he do to counter you?
Xanthippe: At first he used to talk back most ferociously, thinking he'd drive me away with harsh words.
Eulalia: The bickering never came to actual blows?
Xanthippe: Once, at least, the argument grew so hot on both sides that it very nearly ended in a fight.
Eulalia: You don't say so!
Xanthippe: He was swinging a club, yelling savagely all the while and threatening terrible deeds.
Eulalia: Weren't you scared at that?

Xanthippe: Oh, no. When it came my turn, I grabbed a stool. Had he laid a finger on me, he'd have found I didn't lack arms … If he won't treat me as a wife, I won't treat him as a husband.

Eulalia: But Paul teaches that wives should be obedient to their husbands in all subjection. And Peter sets before us the example of Sarah, who would call her husband Abraham, "lord."

Xanthippe: So I've heard. But this same Paul teaches that husbands should cherish their wives as Christ has cherished his spouse the Church. Let him remember his duty and I'll remember mine.

Eulalia: All the same, when things have come to such a pass that one person must yield to the other, the wife should give way to the husband.

Xanthippe: Provided he deserves to be called husband. He treats me like a servant.

Eulalia: But tell me, my dear Xanthippe, did he stop threatening to beat you after that?

Xanthippe: Yes—and he was wise to do so or he'd have got a cudgeling.

Eulalia: But haven't you stopped brawling with him?

Xanthippe: No, and I won't stop.

Eulalia: What does he do all the time?

Xanthippe: Do? Sometimes he sleeps, the lazy loafer. Occasionally he just laughs; and at other times grabs his guitar, which has hardly three strings, and plays it as loud as he can to drown out my screaming.

Eulalia: That infuriates you?

Xanthippe: More than I could say. At times I can hardly keep my hands off him.

Eulalia: Xanthippe, my dear, may I speak rather frankly with you?

Xanthippe: You may…

Eulalia: Whatever your husband's like, bear in mind that there's no exchanging him for another … There's nothing left now but to try to live in harmony by adjusting yourselves to each other's habits and personalities.

Xanthippe: Can I reform him?

Eulalia: What sort of men husbands are depends not a little on their wives.

Xanthippe: Do you get along well with your husband?

Eulalia: Everything's peaceful now.

Xanthippe: There was some turmoil at first, then?

Eulalia: Never a storm, but slight clouds appeared occasionally; the usual human experience. They could have caused a storm had they not been met with forbearance. Each of us has his own ways and opinions, and—to tell the truth—his own

peculiar faults. If there's any place where one has a duty to recognize these, not resent them, surely it's in marriage.

Xanthippe: Good advice.

Eulalia: It frequently happens, however, that good will between husband and wife breaks down before they know each other well enough. This above all is to be avoided, for once contention arises love is not easily recovered, especially if the affair reaches the point of harsh abuse. Things glued together are easily separated if you shake them immediately, but once the glue has dried they stick together as firmly as anything. Hence at the very outset no pains should be spared to establish and cement good will between husband and wife. This is accomplished mainly by submissiveness and courtesy, for goodwill won merely by beauty of person is usually short-lived.

Xanthippe: But tell me, please, by what arts you draw your husband to your ways.

Eulalia: I'll tell you in order that you may imitate them … My first concern was to be agreeable to my husband in every respect, so as not to cause him any annoyance. I noted his mood and feeling; I noted the circumstances too, and what soothed and irritated him … When he's at leisure and not disturbed, worried, or tipsy … admonish him politely, or rather entreat him—in private—to take better care of his property, reputation, or health in one respect or another. And this very admonition should be seasoned with wit and pleasantries … After reproving him as I intended, I'd break off that talk and turn to other, more cheerful topics. For as a rule, my dear Xanthippe, our mistake is that once we've started to talk we can't stop.

Xanthippe: So they say.

Eulalia: Above all I was careful not to scold my husband in the presence of others or to carry any complaint farther than the front door. Trouble's sooner mended if it's limited to two. But if something of this sort does prove intolerable, or can't be cured by the wife's reproof, it's more polite for her to take her complaint to her husband's parents and relatives than to her own, and to state her case with such restraint that she won't seem to hate her husband but his fault instead. She should refrain from blurting out everything, though, so that her husband may tacitly acknowledge and admire his wife's courtesy.

Xanthippe: Whoever could do all this must be a philosopher.

Eulalia: Oh, no. By such practices we'll entice our husbands to similar courtesy.

[Eulalia begins to share examples of when this has worked.]

Eulalia: I know you're acquainted with Gilbert the Dutchman.

Xanthippe: I know him.
Eulalia: As you're aware, when he was in the prime of life he married a woman already in her declining years.
Xanthippe: Perhaps he married the dowry, not the wife.
Eulalia: Yes. Despising his wife, he doted on a mistress with whom he would often enjoy himself away from home. He seldom lunched or dined at home. What would you have done in this situation?
Xanthippe: What? I'd have flown at his sweetheart's hair; and when my husband was going to her, I'd have emptied the chamber pot on him, so he'd be perfumed for his party.
Eulalia: But how much more sensible this woman was! She invited the girl to her home and received her cordially. Thus she enticed her husband home too, without sorcery. And whenever he went out to dinner at the girl's, she sent over some fancy dish, bidding them have a good time.
Xanthippe: I'd rather die than be bawd to my husband.
Eulalia: But consider the case. Wasn't this far better than if she had simply alienated her husband by her fury and spent her whole time in brawling? [After another example, Xanthippe is ready for some advice.]
Xanthippe: What would you have me to do, then?
Eulalia: First of all, keep to yourself any wrong your husband does you and win him over gradually by favors, cheerfulness, gentleness. Either you'll triumph at last or certainly you'll find him much more affable than you do now.
Xanthippe: He's too savage to soften under any favors.
Eulalia: Oh, don't say that. No creature's so fierce he can't be tamed. Don't despair of the man. Try for several months; blame me if you don't find this advice has helped you. There are even some failings you ought to wink at. Above all, in my judgment, you must be careful not to start an argument in the bedroom or in bed, but try to see that everything there is pleasant and agreeable. If that place, which is dedicated to dispelling grudges and renewing love, is profaned by any contention or bitterness, every means of recovering goodwill is clean gone … [In doing so,] you spoil the very medicine that could have cured [your husband's] ills. [After some additional advice about the importance of maintaining healthy intimacy, Eulalia concludes her advice as follows.]
Eulalia: He's yours whether you like it or not; that's settled. The better you make him, the better off you'll be. You have eyes only for his failings. These intensify your disgust, and with this handle you're simply catching him where he can't

be held. Mark the good in him, rather, and by this means take him where he can be held. The time to weigh his faults was before you married him, since a husband should be chosen not only with eyes, but with ears too. Now's the time for improving him, not blaming him.[10]

Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

We turn now to the pastoral counsel of a Puritan. For almost twenty years, Richard Baxter pastored a Nonconformist congregation in Kidderminster, England, where his ministry was instrumental in transforming the town.[11] His classic work *Christian Directory* (1654) addressed a host of practical topics related to piety, including the following tips for helping Christian couples avoid dissension.

1. Keep up your conjugal love in a constant heat and vigour.
2. Both husband and wife must mortify their pride and passion, which are the causes of impatience; and must pray and labour for a humble, meek, and quiet spirit.
3. Remember still that you are both diseased persons, full of infirmities; and therefore expect the fruit of those infirmities in each other.
4. Remember still that you are one flesh; and therefore be no more offended with the words or failings of each other, than you would be if they were your own.
5. Agree together beforehand, that when one is in the diseased, angry fit, the other shall silently and gently bear, till it be past and you are come to yourselves again.
6. Look before you, and remember that you must live together until death.
7. As far as you are able, avoid all occasions of wrath and falling out, about the matters of your families.
8. If you cannot quickly quench your passion, yet at least refrain your tongues.
9. Let the sober party condescend to speak fairly and to entreat the other.
10. Confess your fault to one another, when passion has prevailed against you; and ask forgiveness of each other, and join in prayer to God for pardon.[12]

The Bible is full of practical instruction about how to live together in unity, love and wisdom with other humans—despite being a sinner living in a broken world. Richard Baxter's advice provides a nice synthesis of several practical biblical teachings on relationships and reiterates some of the central

themes mentioned in the previous quotes.

Like the other theologians we have looked at, Baxter encourages his readers to assume that conflict will arise in the context of marriage. He reminds them that pride is the root of conflict rather than the specific circumstances in which they find themselves. Pride is not provoked by others but is the overflow of what Baxter calls "the diseased temper of the heart."[13]

Wise couples will recognize that they have married a fellow sinner and commit to bear with one another in love. Baxter compares our spiritual infirmities to physical handicaps and asks, "If you had married one that is lame, would you be angry with her for halting?"[14] Likewise, Christians must commit to bear with sinning spouses and show mercy as ones who are guilty as well.

One unique contribution that Baxter makes to this brief survey is his advice that deals specifically with our words. Baxter recognizes that the sinful heart is the cause of conflict but that much strife will manifest itself in the form of sinful speech. As the Proverbs remind us, "Where words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise" (Prov 10:19, NIV). This is an especially dangerous warning for married couples because you inevitably spend so much time talking to one another.

Richard Baxter reminds us that perhaps one of the healthiest things we can do for our marriages is to ask for God's grace to speak less. Though our hearts continue to think of hurtful things (and the devil may whisper such thoughts in our ears), we are called to resist the temptation to tear one another down with our words. As the Puritan divine put it, "If you cannot quickly quench your passion, yet at least refrain your tongues."[15] Such advice would go a long way in helping us all to avoid strife in our marriages. It is consistent with Paul's admonition to the Ephesians, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph 4:29, ESV). Let us pray for such restraint in our words and labor toward an awareness of our own selfish pride.

Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015)

Our final quote comes from Elisabeth Elliot, the beloved twentieth-century author and missionary who passed away this summer. In the quote below,

Elliot speaks frankly about the realities of married life and warns of the dangers that young couples face beyond the honeymoon.

> A honeymooning couple may be so dazzled with love that they fail to notice peculiarities which will soon surprise them. The return from the honeymoon begins the knotty matters of the four B's: bedroom, bathroom, breakfast and budget. They may be in for a painful jolt when they find that patience must do its perfect work. He wants the windows open at night, she wants them closed. He fires his towel over the rack from the other side of the bathroom. She wants towels neatly folded to show the monograms. He shoulders his way to the mirror to shave, can't fathom how she can take such ages with her hair. Alas. What revelations begin to surface! He's used to stretching his frame diagonally across the bed, which consigns her to a triangle. But, bless his heart, the next morning he helps her make the bed—his mother told him it's easy with two. Suppose he showers and she bathes—will there be enough hot water for both? Somebody must make the coffee. Will he/she make it "right?" He expects country ham, two eggs, grits and hot biscuits, while she somehow manages on a piece of dry toast. Then, within a short time, one of them discovers that the other has no idea whatsoever about the use of money, a major setback … A bridegroom chooses to marry a woman because he loves her. Now he must choose to *love* her because he *married* her. He ought to cherish this responsibility and thank God daily for His gift.[16]

Hardly anyone realizes the depth of what they are promising on their wedding day. In our modern world, few consider the weightiness of marriage—even in the church. If we are to be true to the Scriptures and truly helpful to the world though, we must do more than simply fight for the proper definition of marriage. We must preserve the sacredness of marriage by acknowledging the strength it yields.

In marriage, we make lifelong commitments to one another. There are times when our zeal for each other and red-hot affection will make those promises seem easy to keep. At other times, our vows keep us. We lean on them in a gritty, almost unromantic kind of way, recognizing that we must go on—not because we want to or feel like it in the moment but because we said we would.

Feelings, however, often follow deeds. If, by the power of God's Spirit, you act lovingly toward your spouse, you may be surprised to wake up one day

and discover accompanying emotions. Similarly, if you indulge in spiteful reactions, you will find yourself sinking into a cesspool of negativity.

Elisabeth Elliot points us toward the sacredness of marriage and its life-giving power. "A bridegroom chooses to marry a woman because he loves her. Now he must choose to *love* her because he *married* her." Our vows are not empty promises. They are the firm foundation upon which, by God's grace, two people build their future together despite their differences.

Conclusion

In this brief survey, we have examined a chorus of voices, individually drawn from historical periods hundreds of years apart and yet in relative harmony, melodiously testifying to the mysterious purposes of God in marriage. One thinks of the words of Agur, recorded in Proverbs 30, "There are three things that are too wonderful for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship in the sea, *and the way of a man with a woman.*" (Prov 30:18-19, NET)

Indeed, how mysterious and wonderful is the way of a man with a woman in holy matrimony. Even as the journey of marriage can bring one through dark valleys of difficulty, it remains a sacred commitment, defined by God and central to His purposes in the world.

We noted three benefits of this survey at the outset of this article: (1) These quotes poignantly remind us that marriages will always struggle in this broken world; (2) The theologians we heard from demonstrate that the church has consistently spoken with clarity, boldness, and pastoral sensitivity to preserve and strengthen marriages; and finally, (3) These five particular quotes stress similar issues in marriage, thus providing a reliable starting point for pastoral counsel that is neither trite nor trendy. All five theologians recognized the inevitability of conflict in marriage, the call to bear with one another, and pointed to the permanency of marriage as grounds for faithfulness. Each counseled couples in conflict toward showing grace to each other, reminding them of their common sinful natures and their calling to maintain the marriage covenant. This begs several questions for pastors and Christian leaders to reflect upon in closing.

Are you holding up the sacred commitments of marriage in your own sermons and lectures? Do you ever undermine these commitments with

subtle jokes and ill-advised humor? Does your counseling provide the same depth of instruction and conviction as your forbearers? Do you prepare young husbands and wives for conflict and equip them to forgive one another? In your own home, are you living out each day with your spouse as if more than just your own reputation is on the line? May we learn from the wisdom of the past and may our marriages be strengthened today that this sacred institution would be held in honor for generations to come.

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1 The following article was originally presented at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society.

2 Robert L. Plummer and Matthew D. Haste, *Held in Honor: Wisdom for Your Marriage from Voices of the Past* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2015).

3 G. K. Chesterton, *The Common Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950), 142–143.

4 In Matthew 5:32, Jesus said, "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

5 "The Twelfth Homily: On Matthew 5," in *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew (Opus Imperfectum)* (James A. Kellerman, trans.; Ancient Christian Texts, Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray, eds.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 104. The InterVarsity Press volume was the first translation of *Opus Imperfectum* into English and includes a helpful introduction to the work.

6 For an introduction to Gregory, see John Moorhead, *Gregory the Great* (London: Routledge, 2005).

7 Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule 2.26* (James Barmby, trans.; Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1889, repr. 2004), 12:56–57.

8 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 117.

9 For more on Erasmus, Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969).

10 Erasmus, "The Wife Blaming Her Marriage" in *The Colloquies* (1518). Translation taken from Dana Mack and David Blankenhorn, ed., *The Book of Marriage. The Wisest Answers to the Toughest Questions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 99-106.

11 For a brief introduction to the life and ministry of Richard Baxter, see N. H. Keeble, "Baxter, Richard (1615–1691)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 4:418–33.

12 Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (1846; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2008), 1:433-34. Each of Baxter's ten directives have been annotated.

13 Ibid., 1:433.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 1:434.

16 Elisabeth Elliot, *Marriage: A Revolution and Revelation. An unfinished, unedited, and previously unpublished draft.* Available at http://www.elisabethelliot.org/Draft.pdf.

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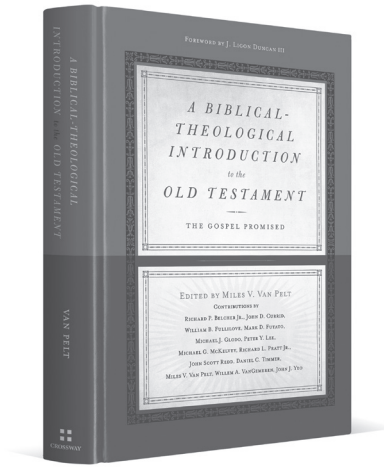

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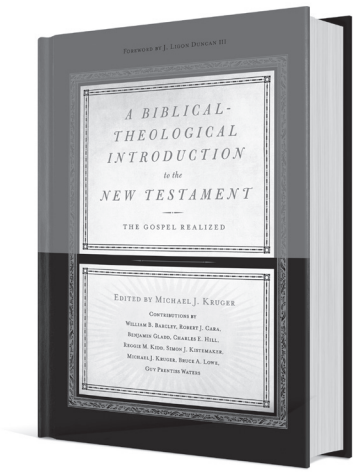

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Book Reviews

David E. Garland. *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God*. **Biblical Theology of the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 651 pp., $44.99 Hardcover.**

The Gospel of Mark received little attention from those in early Christianity, especially compared to the Gospels of Matthew and John. Opinion on Mark underwent a polarized shift in attentiveness within modern scholarship—but generally related to the Synoptic problem and historical Jesus research. Thus, a theological reading of the Gospel of Mark is readily welcomed and David Garland has provided a tremendous service to scholarship. In *A Theology of Mark's Gospel*, Garland opines 500+ pages on a theological and literary reading of the Gospel of Mark.

Garland begins *A Theology of Mark's Gospel* with a host of historical observations and questions. He attends to historical and background questions in "Orientation and Historical Framework" (chapter 1). With a detailed authorship discussion (47–67)—both ancient testimony and modern assimilation—Garland opts for Mark "to be credited with organizing the wealth of previously unrelated stories from Peter into a historical narrative that also has a distinctive point of view" (67). Also, Garland remains unpersuaded of Gospel genre debates and sides with Claude Pavur that "Mark presumes that his gospel will be read with the same expectations that his audience brought to their reading of Scripture" (88) instead of *sui generis* or Graeco-Roman biography (85–88).

Following, then, is a "Literary and Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel" (chapter 2). Here, Garland offers a literary reading of Mark and a literary outline in a way "Mark intended for the story to be experienced" (44). Noting how the Gospel lends oral components, he favors a three-fold literary division: (1) 1:14–8:21 Jesus's Ministry in Galilee and Surrounding Areas; (2) 8:22–10:52 Jesus on the Way to Jerusalem; (3) 11:1–16:8 Jesus in Jerusalem: The Temple, the Cross, and the Resurrection (99–100). The remaining theological and literary analysis is quite helpful (100–78), but I have one remaining question for this section. If the Gospel of Mark is

coalesced by means of oral features (99) and the chapter offers a "literary and theological reading," then why does Garland offer an "outside of the text" reading of Mark that follows *a* chronology of the Life of Jesus? In other words, if Mark is structured through Mark's redaction (67), then would the literary outline not be more thematically organized?

The remainder of the work flows quite remarkably and addresses major Markan theological motifs. Chapters 3–5 address Markan Christological motifs: Mark 1:1–13 as a cue for Jesus's identity, Christological titles, and "Enacted Christology." The "Messianic Secret" is addressed later in chapter 8, whereby he concludes, "the only ones who can understand the so-called 'messianic secret' are those who faithfully follow Jesus as the Son of God who was crucified and raised" (387). Chapters 6–7 focus on the portrayal of God and his kingdom. Garland helpfully summarizes four multi-dimensional components of the kingdom of God: (1) temporal dimensions; (2) spatial dimensions; (3) communal dimensions; and, (4) supernatural spiritual dimensions (337).

The second half of Garland's analysis addresses non-divine categories in Mark's gospel. With the prevalent motif of discipleship, chapter 9 addresses Mark's theology of discipleship, followed by the requirements, costs, and rewards of discipleship (chapter 10). The subsequent three chapters discuss the concept of "mission" (chapter 11), atonement and soteriology (chapter 12), and eschatology (chapter 13). Although chapter 14 readdresses critical questions surrounding Mark 16, Garland opts for the shorter ending, and then offers literary readings of Mark 16:1–8 and theological implications with Mark 16:8 as an intended ending (549–59).

Many helpful features readily emerge in this book. First, Garland truly offers readers a repository of primary and bibliographic texts. Even if some topics are overlooked or briefly mentioned, one is bound to find at least a small discussion or collection of secondary texts for further research. Because of this, Garland demonstrates adequate awareness of prominent Markan issues and relevant text material to help readers and researchers.

Second, albeit I did raise a question above, Garland attempts to offer a literary reading of the Gospel of Mark. A number of options to outline the Gospel typically incorporate "outside the text" features, such as external chronology, geographical placement, or a broad "Life of Christ" outline. Although I believe Garland has utilized an "outside the text" model to outline

the Gospel, he is highly attuned to the literary and theological elements within Mark. Even in the lengthy chapter 2, Garland offers a broad literary and theological reading of Mark so as to make sense of the Gospel's structure.

Especially in Gospel studies, it remains relatively difficult to maintain total silence on historical questions. This leads to a third helpful feature of the book: Garland strikes an even keeled balance between historical and literary questions. With *A Theology of Mark's Gospel* predominantly addressing biblical theological and literary questions, Garland addresses *enough* historical questions to situate and helpfully frame the theological discussions.

I do have two observations by way of critique. With the amount of information given on Mark and detailing selected Markan debates among scholarship, I was anticipating broader hermeneutical approaches to reading Gospel literature. He notes the superficial readings of recent reader-oriented approaches—especially how they miss the Jewish context of the life of Jesus (43). Garland, himself, notes his particular hermeneutical pre-disposition: "my work begins with an investigation of the historical framework for Mark's theology in the conviction that *history and theology cannot be divorced*" (43). Yet, no philosophical discourse or debates are mentioned regarding the *types* of approaches to Mark—including his own *vertical* reading of the Gospel of Mark.

A second, and admittedly nit-picky, observation is assistance in the processing and organizing the information. For example, the comprehensive bibliography and chapter-related readings are quite helpful to students and Gospel scholars. However, it could be beneficial to help synthesize these extended bibliographies by providing "Garlarnd's Go-To's" or some form of bibliographic tier-structure that range works in terms of difficulty from beginner/starters–advanced/experts.

Outside of commentaries reflecting on the *theology* of Mark or selected topics on Mark, very few volumes exist on the topic of evaluating the *whole* theology of Mark. All in all, Garland's text shall become a new *go-to* that does surpass books of its *kind*—both in terms of content, primary text readings, and use of secondary source material. Without reservation, this book will prod future substantive theological readings of the Gospel of Mark. Ideal for special topics in advanced collegiate or masters level courses, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel* will serve theological students in positive ways. Pedagogically, this volume will serve to supplement lectures and offer helpful outlines to

consider.

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N.T. Wright. ***The Paul Debate: Critical Questions for Understanding the Apostle.***
Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015. xi + 110 pp., $34.95 Hardback.

In the past year and a half, many have read, reviewed, discussed, dismissed, accepted, and acquitted N.T. Wright's *Paul and Faithfulness of God*. In this new book, Wright seeks to answer sixteen selected critics and five major objections that emerge from these critics. In *The Paul Debate*, New Testament and Pauline scholars will find a brief repository of Pauline theology that should serve their understanding of Paul and his world in five central areas.

It is important to take note of the Preface in this book. It functions not only as a typical book preface, but as an introduction as well. Wright details the reasons and method for his proceeding argument within the book. In the past year and a half, many book reviews have been written on Wright's larger Pauline work, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (hereafter *PFG*). Thus, Wright seeks generally to respond to sixteen critical reviews from prominent Pauline and New Testament Scholars—including, John Barclay, Douglas Campbell, James Dunn, Simon Gathercole, Michael Gorman, Douglas Moo, Thomas Schreiner, and more. This five-chapter book "represents a response to the five most questioned elements in my book. In fact, nearly all the reviewers I have listed above have lingered on most or all of these points, even if there were other specific points of disagreement as well" (ix).

With this aim, Wright devotes five individual chapters to the top criticisms of *PFG*. In chapter one, "Paul and the Messiah," Wright seeks to observe the theological coherence about the story of Israel as it intersects with beliefs about Jesus. In his view, then, the Messiah restarts a new world (7, 9)—similar to new creation and new exodus motifs—and transforms a new-creation people of God (19). Essentially, Wright identifies Paul as a coherent Jewish thinker, even after spiritual conversion (11). Second, in "How to Begin with

Jesus," Wright centralizes his discussion around questions of Christological unity and disunity. Are Paul's belief of Christology new and a development of early Christianity? Or was Jesus as Messiah continuous with extant Jewish literature (21–22)? Wright affirms the latter and identifies the resurrection as a pivotal event for recognizing the divinity of Jesus (29–39).

In the third chapter, "Apocalyptic," Wright interacts with some of the apocalyptic views of Paul. He does not affirm the *apocalyptic* version of Paul; any form of apocalypticism is in literary form *only*, not a worldview (42, 52–53). Next, in "The Justified People of God," Wright engages various perspectives on Paul (Old and New) and the affect of justification on the people of God. He notes that justification fits within the larger schema of union and participation motifs (71–72, 76–77). Furthermore, justification and union, then, becomes a sociological implication due to the prevalence of these motifs surrounding Jew and Gentile table fellowship in Gal 2 (75–76). Wright goes to great lengths to clarify what is meant in the intersection of union, justification, and new membership: "'In the Messiah,' then, they become a single family, whose one and only badge of membership was *pistis*, their faithful allegiance to the one God of Israel who had revealed himself as the God who raised Jesus from the dead and appointed him as Lord of the whole world. It was scandalous then. For some, it is still scandalous still" (91). Finally, Wright finishes his response by detailing the mission of Paul in "Theology, Mission, and Method."

In *The Paul Debate*, Wright, once more, provides a gift to New Testament thinkers, in general, and Pauline scholarship, in particular. This book deserves high praise for a number of general reasons. To begin, another Wright book emerges to influence Pauline scholarship. It is beside the point if one agrees or disagrees with his conclusions. Wright devotes countless hours of attention to a Pauline worldview that he attempts to situate within Second Temple Judaism.

Scholars and Bible interpreters are afforded a small, readable text as an interlocutor. Pauline scholarship in the 21st century is unable to advance without positive or negative interaction with Wright. Second, this text is a model for scholarship in dialogue. Sixteen critical reviews are in Wright's mind as he writes this book. He notes, "I wish to express my thanks to them all, even if in some cases their reviews have been unflattering" (vii). And again, "If I say that I am dedicating this book to my reviewers, as seems only right, I

hope they will not be offended by the honour. We are engaged in a common task" (xi). This is a wonderful lesson for all. Have concern for the greater discovery of truth, recognize the common goal of clearer communication, and take great efforts to give honor to critics.

A third helpful feature of this book is the opportunity for further clarity. As one reads *PFG*, it is very easy to lose the argument because of the length of the sections. It is so big in some portions that a given chapter could be a book in and of itself. Although this present book is not a distillation of *PFG*, Wright utilizes brief chapters to clarify research questions—which begin each chapter—and colloquially responds to broad criticisms of *PFG*.

The book, even still, is not without some criticisms. First, I doubt that each critic of Paul will be satisfied by Wright's responses. While reading *The Paul Debate*, no footnotes, quotations, or actual references to his critics emerge. Wright vaguely responds to five central critiques. The systemic problem undergirding this method of response is, at least, two-fold. It lumps together critics in broad categories that they themselves might not self-identify. Next, no specific response is given to particular criticisms. "Responding to these reviews," as Wright notes, "not line by line but in outline, is the purpose of the present little book" (ix). Thus, informed readers will only be able to identify these major critics and their criticisms: "Those who have ears will hear my critics and their specific criticism on every single page that follows" (ix).

A second criticism is overt bifurcation of ideas for the sake of simplicity. For example, in the apocalyptic chapter, Wright only identifies two possibilities. Either Paul evokes an "apocalyptic worldview" that negates a "covenantal narrative," or apocalypticism is a literary form that does not determine a particular worldview (41–42). It is obvious to Pauline scholars that Wright is responding to Douglas Campbell and other "apocalyptic Pauline" advocates. But is this bifurcation helpful to the discussion? The issue is not simplified to these two positions and it doesn't totally cohere with apocalyptic Pauline scholars. So, Wright creates two binary possibilities that straw-man opponents so that his view appears the *most* obvious. I find Wright creating a *word*-based fallacy, in that because *apokalypsis* is not a word frequently used by Paul, he cannot be an apocalyptic thinker (48–49). Paul does not need to use *apokalypsis* in his literature to note, discuss, or affirm basic apocalyptic views.

The Paul Debate will not be one of its kind. This is a shorthand text that

affords Wright to respond to a number of critics over the past year and a half. In the forthcoming future, however, Wright will be asked to do something likewise. Scheduled to release in late 2015, *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N. T. Wright* will appear in the WUNT Mohr Siebeck series. In like fashion, *The Paul Debate* is a far more accessible version of what will later appear in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul*.

To conclude, *The Paul Debate* is a helpful book to engage emerging Pauline scholarship. It affords scholars immediate and accessible access—more of a front row seat—between premier Pauline scholars. This text must not be confused as an abbreviated form of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*—and assumes some knowledge of its contents. I readily encourage Pauline thinkers and scholars to acquire this text in order to garner quick access to five key topics in Pauline thought.

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Systematic Theology. **By Anthony C. Thiselton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 467 pp., $40.00 Hardback.**

Anthony C. Thiselton is professor emeritus of Christian Theology at the University of Nottingham and a priest in the Anglican Church. In this work, Thiselton presents a concise systematic theology. He acknowledges the expansive nature of many systematic theologies, some of which contain multiple volumes. He desires that his systematic theology would be affordable, and he consistently suggests practical application. He structures each chapter in a similar format. He divides each chapter into five sections that address issues within a theological discipline, and the length of each chapter averages 25-30 pages.

Thiselton discusses his theological method in chapter one. He argues that systematic theology by nature should not be an abstract or static discipline, but vibrant and practically relevant. He regards the use of philosophy as an important aspect of theology: "Theological inquiry is a mind-expanding activity. Even philosophical reflection within theology can honor God no

less than biblical studies in the quest for truth and hermeneutical resources" (11-12). However, Thiselton's theology is not grounded in philosophy, but in Scripture. He emphasizes the importance of biblical exegesis in the historical context of each passage: "Systematic theology, however, cannot be true to its biblical foundations unless it takes with utter seriousness both exegesis of specific passages and the historical context and conditioning of most biblical utterances. Biblical material has usually been spoken by a particular biblical author and directed to a particular audience" (13). He also highlights the importance of concept clarity (or conceptual elucidation) in the formation of Christian doctrine. He usually applies this principle through his presentation of word studies of theological terms. Thiselton also favors the use of speech-act theory, hermeneutic insights, literary theory, and sociological insights as features of his theological method; the result of these additional aspects of his theological method, he contends, would add vitality and relevance to the study of Christian doctrine.

Thiselton addresses God's personhood, Trinitarian nature, and his attributes of grace and love in chapter two. His primary answer to the question of God's personhood is that God is suprapersonal. He contends that God's mind, knowledge, will, and relational qualities demonstrate that he is the standard of personhood. Thiselton's Trinitarian doctrine emphasizes the relations between the Father, Son, and Spirit that are revealed through redemptive history. He argues that God's Trinitarian nature become evident in the narrative that displays Jesus' works; God the Father sent Jesus on his messianic mission by the power of the Spirit. Jesus' baptism, temptation, and the resurrection point to this Trinitarian emphasis. Thiselton prefers a description of God as the "living God," which communicates his redemptive activity, rather than "theism" which he argues presents a static and theoretical depiction of God. He proposes that God displays his love by giving of himself and by his act of creation allowing room for the created order. God's expression of his love to humankind is his grace.

Thiselton continues his study of theology proper in chapter three. He explains the problem of evil and its philosophical origins, and he surveys potential solutions. He argues that the problem of evil does not present a *logical* contradiction and he emphasizes the practical comfort that must be offered to those who are suffering. He also critiques the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments for God's existence while highlighting God's

attributes of transcendence, immanence, power (using the term Almighty), omnipresence, and omniscience.

Chapter four of Thiselton's systematic theology addresses alternatives to theism. He presents a brief history of atheism and opposes a materialistic worldview, while advocating God's gift of rationality. He evaluates the philosophies of Ludwig Feuerbach, Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Karl Marx. He demonstrates that each of these approaches with their differing emphases arise from a materialistic worldview. Thiselton explains that the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment attack on divine revelation was driven by the philosophical movement toward rationalism. In the last portion of this chapter, he describes and evaluates pantheism, deism, and agnosticism.

Thiselton presents his study on nonhuman creation and human institutions in chapter five. In the first three sections of this chapter, he focuses on nonhuman creation while arguing that God's creative purposes are not anthropocentric. He surveys the Old Testament, intertestamental literature, and New Testament passages concerning angels and he provides a brief historical theology of angels. He contends that the biblical mandate of human "dominion" involves humanity's loving care of the environment and animals, not exploitation. This faithful stewardship of the created order is consistent with Thiselton's doctrine of the *imago dei*, which he explains in chapter six. He also explores the connection of the state/government and justice, and he describes the historical views of submission and opposition to government authority.

Thiselton presents his theological anthropology and his doctrine of sin in chapters 6-7. In chapter 6 he provides his theology of the image of God, human constitution, and his biblical analysis of the terms for "sin." He argues that only redeemed humanity bears the image of God. He states that the image "certainly *includes rationality, sovereignty* or stewardship, *freedom*, and *above all relationality*. But it is, beyond all this, *a vocation to represent God to the world*, to present those qualities that characterize God in a *visible* way. That is why *Christ alone* is so clearly the perfect image of God, and thereby expresses human potentiality" (140).

Thiselton contends that humanity is a psychosomatic unity of soul and body. He also explores the terms of heart, conscience and mind. In the last sections of this chapter, he discusses his theology of sin. He surveys

the biblical vocabulary for "sin" and its synonyms to argue that sin is not merely individual acts that violate God's standards, nor is it an attitude of "do no harm," but sin is an attitude of the heart. He summarizes: "The biblical vocabulary, especially the theology of Paul and some other biblical authors, provides rich and complex concepts of sin, which stand both in continuity and in contrast with many concepts today. Sin is not 'do no one any harm; but a self-destructive breach of fellowship with God and consequent alienation from God" (153). He also characterizes sin as misdirected desire. He then compiles a brief but comprehensive historical theology of sin in chapter seven. The purpose of the historical survey is to demonstrate that the historical definitions of sin are not consistent with the prevailing notion of "do no one any harm" that exists today, and a proper definition of sin highlights the importance of the gospel.

Thiselton outlines his Christology in chapters 8-10. He presents his atonement theology in chapter eight. He shows that the center of Christian theology is the death of Christ, and perhaps his primary argument is that God the Father initiates the atonement: "Thus *all the initiative for the work of Christ* came from *the grace of God*, who gave *himself* in giving Christ. This embraces the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection of Christ" (183). Thiselton demonstrates through several word studies that the Hebrew and Greek terms for "redemption," "salvation," and "mediation, mediator" are transparent and intelligible for modern Christians. The Hebrew and Greek terms and concept of "sacrifice" is less clear because of the variety of Old Testament sacrifices. Yet he contends that the concept of substitution is certainly transparent, particularly in light of the Old Testament imagery of the scapegoat banishment on the Day of Atonement. He argues that these biblical terms clarify the New Testament doctrine of atonement.

Thiselton recounts the various atonement images, particularly in Paul and John's writings, to show that these images make atonement theology understandable. In the last section of the chapter, he explores the debate over the translation of *hilastērion* and concludes that the term must include both connotations of "propitiation" and "expiation." He also examines Paul's doctrine of reconciliation and he argues that humans are reconciled only through Christ, that reconciliation reverses the alienation of humankind with God, and Paul's doctrine of reconciliation is hermeneutically helpful. In chapter nine, Thiselton provides a historical theology of the atonement.

He argues that atonement theories or pictures are complementary but not comprehensive. In regard to Anselm's theory and penal substitution, he acknowledges that they may be an essential aspect of atonement doctrine, but they are not comprehensive.

Thiselton examines Christology regarding the person of Christ in chapter ten. He opposes many modern theologians who contend that the doctrine of the person of Christ is logically incompatible; they argue against the contention of one person who is fully human and fully divine. He describes the prophetic tradition as focusing on Jesus' humanity, while the apocalyptic tradition emphasizes Jesus' deity; he concludes that a biblical Christology must interpret Christology "from below" in light of Christology "from above," particularly in light of the resurrection. He surveys the synoptic gospels and their narrative regarding Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom and he argues that these narratives frequently display Jesus' humanity. He observes that the quests for the historical Jesus "confirms aspects of *historical* inquiry and *continuity with the OT*, but also that it underlies the *full humanness* of Jesus of Nazareth" (246). He then surveys Paul's and John's writings, Acts, and Hebrews to demonstrate that there the Scriptures attest to Jesus' two natures as fully divine and fully human. He concludes the chapter with a review of ancient and modern Christologies and he argues that many modern theologians continue to affirm Christ's deity and humanity.

Thiselton explores pneumatology in chapters 11-12. In chapter eleven, he presents a biblical analysis from the Old Testament to the New Testament regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He first opposes two generalizations. The first generalization is that the Holy Spirit is given to individuals in the Old Testament and to the community in the New Testament; he responds that the Spirit is given to individuals in the Old Testament in the context of the community and for the benefit of Israel.

Another generalization is that the Spirit is not a person, and Thiselton contends that the Spirit is *suprapersonal*, and believers should not refer to the Holy Spirit as an "it." He explains that the Spirit in the Old Testament and in Jewish intertestamental literature "constitutes an extension of God himself; and we have the beginnings of a personal understanding of the Spirit" (270). Through his study in gospels and in Acts, he shows that the Spirit anoints Jesus for the messianic mission, works with the Father and the Son in Jesus ministry, and after Jesus' ascension he works corporately in the church to

empower his people for mission. In Paul's writings, the Holy Spirit causes the Christian confession and empowers the believer to witness; the Spirit is the promise of God's eschatological work in the believer, gives spiritual gifts to believers for the benefit of the church, sanctifies the believer for holy living, and Paul's theology of the Spirit is implicitly Trinitarian. Thiselton also examines the Spirit in John's writings, 1 Peter and Hebrews.

In chapter twelve, he presents the history and an assessment of the Pentecostal movement and their theology. He also demonstrates that the early Church Fathers repeated apostolic doctrine; the Post Nicene Fathers (Athanasius, Basil, Ambrose, Hilary, and Augustine) defended the personhood of the Holy Spirit; the reformers explained the Spirit's work in revelation and sanctification, and modern theologians departed from these traditions. Thiselton next deals with ecclesiological issues in chapter thirteen. He contends that modern individualism has departed from a biblical emphasis on the church's communal nature. He helpfully shows that membership in a church is not analogous to becoming a member of an organization, but is much more like being a part of an organism, like a limb is a part of the body. His communal emphasis is displayed in his proposal of a collaborative vision for church leadership; pastors, deacons, and laypersons should bring a collaborative approach to leadership and the work of the ministry. He also explores some ecclesiological issues, which includes church polity, apostolic succession, and the marks of the church. He concludes the chapter by examining the doctrines of sacrament, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

Chapter fourteen highlights theological approaches regarding death, the millennium, the return of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the resurrection of the dead. Thiselton recognizes that in Scripture death is a tragedy, and he proposes that sin and death are connected because sin alienates humanity from God, who is the source of life. He opposes the doctrine of purgatory and after examining each millennial view, opposes premillenialism. Thiselton also considers the theology of Christ's return. He claims that the nature of his return will be visible and public. He argues, against those who contend that biblical descriptions of Christ's return are merely symbolic, that "eschatological language often allows for an 'interweaving' of historical and symbolic language" (349).

Regarding the timing of Christ's return, he states that Christ's return could be at any time, which is over and against some who interpret Paul's and Jesus'

statement that the Parousia would occur within the first generation of the church. Thiselton also argues that the term "readiness" helpfully explains the prepared disposition of believers and does not have the baggage that comes with the term "expectancy." He explores resurrection theology in the final portions of this chapter. He states that God the Father resurrected Jesus and thereby vindicated him, and Jesus' body was a visible, physical body that was displayed publically. He also demonstrates that because Jesus rose from the dead as the first fruits, Christians will be resurrected because they "stand in corporate solidarity with the raised Christ" (359). He points out that the Holy Spirit animates and sustains the resurrection body, as described in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

Thiselton explores the theology of judgment, eternal life, the New Jerusalem, and the restoration of all things in chapter fifteen. He argues that the judgment of believers should not invite dread, but God will vindicate them. The last judgment also reveals the exalted state of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Thiselton then analyzes judgment and wrath, and he states that the biblical emphasis on wrath is that believers will escape it, and he explores the remedial effect of God's wrath. Thiselton reflects on the phrase "eternal life" by proposing that eternal life is more than an infinite duration of time. He attacks the notion that God is timeless, and argues that we must appeal to a conception of time "that will be appropriate for the eschatological postresurrection mode of existence" (376). He demonstrates that the New Jerusalem is the place where God dwells, the language of jewelry express its splendor, and its inhabitants are free from fear or sin. He concludes the chapter by exploring the meaning of the restoration of all things. Specifically, he surveys the theologies of eternal torment, conditional immortality, and universalism regarding the eternal destiny of unredeemed humanity.

Thiselton's systematic theology has several strengths. It is heavily grounded in Scripture and is saturated with a significant amount of word studies. This aspect of his theology is perhaps his greatest strength. In Chapter 11, he presents a full biblical study on the Holy Spirit; he examines scriptures dealing with the Spirit in the Old Testament, the Spirit in the intertestamental literature, and he presents a detailed account of the Spirit in the New Testament. He consistently appeals to Scripture in chapter 6 as he presents his doctrine of sin, and this method is pervasive throughout his book. He also presents numerous word studies to clarify biblical and theological terms. One prime

example of his approach is in chapter 7; his word studies of redemption, salvation, mediator, and sacrifice strengthen his case that these terms are transparent to the modern reader.

A second strength of his systematic theology is his robust interaction with historical and contemporary theologians. He devotes three chapters toward brief but comprehensive historical theologies on sin, atonement theology, and pneumatology. He traces a particular doctrine from the apostolic fathers, the anti-Nicene and post-Nicene theologians, medieval, reformation, and modern theologians in these chapters. His historical theology of the atonement in chapter nine displays this method, and he describes the atonement theology of twenty-nine theologians. He also interacts with many contemporary scholars, especially with Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg. In those chapters that are not solely devoted to a historical analysis, he permeates his theology with a historical perspective in each theological loci. For example, he presents angelology for post-canonical Judaism, and he interacts with Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Karl Barth in chapter five. These interactions with historical and contemporary theologians deepen and enrich his theological study.

A third strength is his consistent theological method throughout his book. In addition to his method of biblical citation and exposition noted above, he applies his method as summarized in chapter one. Where appropriate, he considers hermeneutical issues, discipleship application, literary and linguistic analysis, and the role of speech-act theory. Thiselton expresses the value of hermeneutics at the end of chapter nine concerning the historical theological survey of atonement doctrine: "But the purpose of this historical discussion is limited: to explore what hermeneutical bridges, or ways of understanding, have been made more explicit. In modern times, Aulen has underlined the cross as a redemptive act of *liberation and victory*; Gunton has explored the power of *metaphor* in the traditional *complementary imagery*; Moltmann has asked us to consider what *atonement means, not only to us, but also to God*. Pannenberg has shown that none of the biblical imagery is dispensable or optional, and that Christ's work must be seen as *a whole, together with his sacrifice and resurrection*.

Rahner and Kung have sown that the cross impinges on *cosmic realities*, with some suggestive comments from Hegel about the finite becoming subsumed in the infinite. All these serve not to *add* in substance to biblical

material, but to *draw out* some of its hermeneutical implications. The net result is to demonstrate the immense and varied potential impact on everyday life generated by reflection on the atoning work of Christ" (230). Thiselton also demonstrates that practical application is a primary focus of his theology. He presents such an application when he considers the ontological argument for God's existence. He does not regard the argument as proof per se, but he argues that the argument shows that belief in God's existence is reasonable.

His practical application is helpful: "The God whom Christians worship is the basis and presupposition of all that is, whether within or beyond the world. He is our transcendent Creator, who evokes wonder, worship, and awe. But this does not mean that belief in God is unreasonable, even if this lies beyond the proofs of logic. To know such a God requires revelation and grace, to which rational reflection, worship, and obedience are appropriate responses" (75). One helpful point in his theology of the Lord's Supper is that he regards it as a speech-act. If the act confers grace from God, then Thiselton argues that the act constitutes a promise. He also states that the Lord's Supper is a two way speech act: "God pledges grace and assurance, Christian believers pledge trust, loyalty, and obedience." Thus, Thiselton's theological method is consistent throughout his systematic theology.

Thiselton's *Systematic Theology* has some weaknesses. One of the most glaring weaknesses is that he does not include a chapter concerning the theology of Scripture. Positively, he affirms a correct method of biblical exegesis within the text's historical context. He uses scripture as a basis for his theological doctrine. He states that "the bible constitutes the primary source of Christian theology" (12). Yet this lack of a theology of scripture raises the question if the Bible is merely a primary source. Despite his comment in this section that he could not offer a full explanation of the authority of the Bible, this issue should be extensively addressed in some manner. If Scripture is his primary source, an explanation regarding the nature of that source would be appropriate. Without an exploration of Scripture's inspiration, inerrancy, authority, or sufficiency, his view of Scripture itself remains somewhat unclear.

Thiselton's chapter thirteen on ecclesiology is his weakest chapter. Thiselton's attempt at brevity in his theology is commendable, but in this chapter he attempts too much. Section two is a prime example in which he discusses the controversies in ecclesiology. He presents one paragraph with little

scriptural support or historical attestation regarding the marks of the church and apostolic succession. In his discussion about the marks of the church concerning the ancient formula of one holy catholic apostolic church, he neglects to mention Calvin's marks of the church. This chapter needs further development for a study that is comparable to his other chapters.

A third weakness is that Thiselton does not address some relevant issues in some theological disciplines. This weakness is perhaps to be expected given the brevity of his systematic theology. This weakness is displayed in his interaction with theologians and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. One neglected aspect of the doctrine was the current debates regarding an inclusivist approach to salvation from the pneumatology perspective, which proposes that salvation is available through the Spirit without a conscious belief in Christ. He should also address the pneumatological theology of religions, which advocates a pluralistic approach on the basis of the Spirit's work in other religions. However, he readily acknowledges this shortcoming of his survey due to space. A second example that is neglected is the definition of sin as a violation of the law. Though his definition of sin includes this aspect, it would be strengthened with some detailed discussion on this dimension of sin. Sin certainly does cause a breach in fellowship with God, but Thiselton overemphasizes this dimension of sin and underemphasizes the law-breaking aspect. One other area warranting further discussion is his view of wrath and retributive justice. He refrains from a discussion regarding retributive justice or the dimension of God's wrath as punitive. Discussion of these areas would further enhance his theology.

Finally, his unclear position on certain aspects of theology. His approach to two topics on eschatology displays this weakness. One example is his discussion regarding the fate of the unredeemed. He advocates that all things will be reconciled to God, and he gives a brief historical account of the three most prominent positions regarding the eternal fate of the unredeemed: eternal conscious punishment, conditional immortality (or annihilationism), and universalism. While he indicates that all three approaches deserve consideration because they have a place in church history, he never clearly advocates a specific view. He is also unclear regarding his millennial views. While he heavily critiques the premillennial view, he does not offer a clear position of his view.

Despite its weaknesses, Thiselton's *Systematic Theology* is a helpful addition

to theological scholarship. It is to be recommended for any student or scholar of systematic theology, particularly because the depth of his interactions with historical and contemporary theologians, and his use of Scripture as the primary source of his theology. He certainly proposes some insights that are worthy of discussion among theologians. Thiselton also provides many helpful theological implications for practical ministry and Christian discipleship throughout his study.

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Theodore Beza: The Man and the Myth. **By Shawn D. Wright. Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2015, 256 pp., £8.99 Paper.**

Theodore Beza? Who is he? And why should Christians care about him today? Shawn Wright answers these questions in this introduction to Beza the man and his thought. Wright argues against the prevailing myths surrounding Beza—that he was cold, scholastic, obsessed with reprobation, and that he deviated from the theology of John Calvin, to name a few—by painting a picture of a pastor whose "goal was to know God and serve God's people on the path to eternity" (256). Wright's efforts in bringing Beza to light are largely motivated by his conviction that Beza can continue to serve God's people today.

Chapter 2 provides a window into Beza's life and context. Wright's highlighting of Beza's biography and times functions as a foundation for understanding his theology and the fact that he was a real human being. Beza was a Frenchman, born in 1519 and educated in law. A brush with death when he contracted the plague became a conversion-type experience. Beza began teaching theology in Lausanne, at which time his relationship with Calvin grew, blossoming into an invitation to Geneva in 1558. Beza took over for Calvin at his death and held his leadership position as primary reformer in the city until his own death in 1605.

Chapter 3 analyzes Beza's overarching theological vision. Wright describes the pastoral, or eschatological, vision that drove Beza in these terms: "the

realities of Satan, of a raging spiritual battle, of hell, and of heaven necessitated an omnipotent hand to preserve and guide Christians through their earthly pilgrimage" (50). In short, God's sovereignty is vital for believers. Chapters 2 and 3 are largely derived from Wright's published doctoral dissertation, but this book is much more than a popularization of his original thesis.

Wright identifies chapters 4 through 8 as the main chapters of the book. Here he examines five of Beza's treatises that display his pastoral vision, all of which are available in English translation. They cover Beza's summary of the Christian faith and the topics of predestination, suffering, assurance, and prayer. Wright sets each of the treatises in their historical context, surveys the content, and then concludes by reflecting on application for the Christian life. He then appends a section to each chapter identifying where Beza's treatise can be accessed and listing questions for discussion and personal edification in correspondence with the work. In this process, Wright relentlessly challenges the myths concerning Beza. Beza wrote his confession out of an overwhelming concern for the eternal wellbeing of people. His *Tabula praedestinationis* is biblical and practical. His discussion of the plague and whether a Christian can flee it is pastoral. His teaching on assurance is nuanced and sensitive. Lastly, his prayers reveal a man of warm-hearted piety. What emerges is a portrait of Beza as he really was.

Wright's labor to speak not only into the Calvin versus the Calvinists debate, but also to contemporary theological concerns is one of this work's strengths. He draws the readers' attention to present-day and perennial issues to which Beza speaks. These include Arminain caricatures of double predestination, charges that equate the Reformed view of God with fatalism, and the false choice between predestination and the possibility of assurance. Further, Beza is offered as a worthy example of faithful prayer, a spiritual discipline so often neglected.

Another strength of this work is that it teaches the reader how to do responsible historical theology; it models good history. This is perhaps most obvious in Wright's attention to historical context when he approaches primary sources. Reading texts, especially theological works, without any thought to the authors' situatedness and how the intended audience would interpret, as if they were written in a vacuum, is a universal human temptation, whether handling the words of perceived friends or foes. Wright does not let such lazy, dangerous reading pass. One example of the benefit of historical

context is the evaluation of the infamous *Tabula*. This is often viewed as a deviation from Calvin's theology, but the fact that it was published three years before Calvin invited Beza to Geneva and began grooming him as his successor is difficult to reconcile with this construal. Wright consistently interprets Beza in context and is a model for those who would use history in the theological enterprise.

Wright's work is a welcome addition to our understanding of a complex and significant figure in church history. It is written for the church, with pastors and interested Christians in mind. Its purpose is to accessibly introduce Beza and the larger themes of his theology and defend him against assaults on his character and motivations. It proves successful. Wright offers a readable, cogent, and accurate depiction of Theodore Beza.

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William Perkins. **Bitesize Biographies. By Joel R. Beeke and J. Stephen Yuille. Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2015, 117 pp., $8.99 Paper.**

The Elizabethan Puritan William Perkins was internationally known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was one of the most influential figures in post-Reformation England. He is becoming well known today, in no small part because of the efforts of Joel Beeke and Stephen Yuille. These two pair up in this short biography to argue that Perkins's contemporaries and the Puritan movement viewed him as significant and rightfully so. They execute this aim with a thematic approach, acknowledging that the biographical details are scarce and therefore drawing "ten sketches of Perkins" based largely on his published works (16).

After briefly introducing the reader to Perkins's historical context, Beeke and Yuille describe Perkins the convert. They recount the anecdote of Perkins's prodigal student days and the conviction that came when he overheard a women tell her child to behave "or I will give you to drunken Perkins yonder" (18). The change in Perkins's life was palpable, an experience that influenced his later preaching and work on conversion.

The next three sketches are Perkins as theologian, reformer, and polemicist. Admittedly, these are fluid categories, yet the authors' choice of content in these chapters is surprising at times. *A Golden Chain* and *A Treatise of Predestination* are addressed in the discussion of Perkins as a polemicist, Perkins's view of Scripture and his understanding of blessedness in the chapter on Perkins as theologian, and his writings against the Church of Rome in the portrait of Perkins as reformer. Questions of genre aside, Perkins's stature as a theologian, efforts as a reformer, and intensity as a polemicist are highlighted.

Perkins was a faithful churchman. He never openly allied himself with the Puritans against the established Church of England and dismissed separation entirely. The times he was called before the vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge and the Star Chamber for potential non-conformity he convincingly proved his loyalty. He was concerned more with internal deficiencies in the people than external forms. His position as fellow at the University of Cambridge allowed him an avenue to remedy such internal deficiencies. Perkins trained pastors through teaching and example to go out and convert and reform the people. This lead to the publication of his preaching manual, *The Art of Prophesying*, which, coupled with his preaching ministry as lecturer at Great St. Andrew's, brought him considerable renown. Preaching for Perkins was God's means of preparation and working faith in the lost. Application was central to the process. As a pastor Perkins was in touch with the daily needs of parishioners, and so he addressed issues of household, vocation, and, most prominently, assurance in his sermons and books. As a keeper of the Sabbath, Perkins shaped views on the Sabbath in England and strove to ensure implementation of the biblical guidelines for the ordinary means of grace.

The last sketch is Perkins as a Puritan. This is significant, as it speaks to the debate about whether Perkins was indeed a Puritan and more importantly the larger discussion about the definition of Puritanism. Perkins would never have used the label Puritan for himself, but he earned the label with his experimental piety. Perkins preached the sovereign grace of God, but also emphasized its manifestation in human experience. This experience was humiliation, faith, repentance, and new obedience, which naturally lead to the topic of assurance. Perkins understood assurance as based on the covenant of grace. The object of faith was Christ alone, but there were secondary means of gaining the assurance of faith as well, namely, evaluating

the fruit of faith with the practical syllogism. Those who try to smear Perkins and other Puritans for replacing Christ with works do not allow these men to speak for themselves.

Beeke and Yuille make a helpful contribution to the field of Puritan studies, as well as provide an accessible introduction to one affectionately labeled the "Father of Puritanism." Theirs is the first stand-alone biography of Perkins and their thematic approach gives the reader a window into his theology. The absence of footnotes can be frustrating to scholars interested in benefiting from the authors' efforts in locating fragmentary biographical evidence from Perkins's contemporaries. Such evidence is indeed sparse and the authors creatively get a lot out of a little by mining Perkins's works for themes merely referenced in the biographical details. Overall, the book is well written, engaging, and successfully provides an accurate picture of William Perkins.

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Sermon on the Mount. **The Story of God Bible Commentary. By Scot McKnight. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013, 300 pp., $29.99 Hardback.**

Insightful and challenging sum up Scot McKnight's *Sermon on the Mount*. McKnight, professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary, brings to this book his extensive experience as a scholar of Jesus and early Christianity, commentary writer, and popular teacher. This commentary follows the three-part outline of The Story of God Bible Commentary series, of which it is a part, focusing on three levels: 1) understanding the text at hand in light of the larger story of the Bible, 2) explaining the text in terms of its immediate historical context, and 3) considering how the text compels God's people to live in the world so that their story lines up with the Bible's story. In accordance with the goals of this commentary, scholarly issues are kept to a minimum and a few references to the Greek text. McKnight provides adequate footnotes for the reader with the inclination to follow the scholarly discussions regarding the text and to see where in the broader discussions of the Sermon this commentary fits.

McKnight's contention that Jesus' teaching in the Sermon is meant to be taken at face value pulses through this commentary. Jesus' ethical vision in the Sermon is a combination and recasting of the three key Old Testament ethical categories: revealed law, prophetic teaching, and wisdom. In the Sermon, Jesus places himself as the central reference point for righteousness. This is what McKnight calls Jesus' Messianic Ethic, and it is key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount. He writes: "Only in association with Jesus does the Sermon make sense…he offers himself to his disciples, or, put differently, he summons them to himself and in participation with Jesus and his vision the disciples are transformed into the fullness of a kingdom moral vision" (14). That is, Jesus gives an ethical vision that is meant to be followed which is more than a "new Torah" to keep. Instead, Jesus' teaching is a vision of how life in the coming kingdom will be and a command/invitation to live that life now in obedience to Jesus' words and in recognition that it is in connection with the life and purpose of the Sermon-Giver that the vision of this Sermon makes sense.

McKnight's default interpretation of the Sermon is to push for understanding Jesus' words literally. He writes: "There is something vital—and this is a central theme in this commentary—in letting the demand of Jesus, expressed over and over in the Sermon as imperatives or commands, stand in its rhetorical ruggedness. Only as demand do we hear this Sermon as he meant it to be heard: as the claim of Jesus upon our whole being" (3). McKnight's exegesis is devoted to removing the landscaping which many commentators have placed on the Sermon to make it appear attractive, so that the reader can be struck again by the stark ruggedness in Jesus' words.

While probing the demands of Jesus, the attentive reader of McKnight, and ultimately of the Sermon, must wrestle with a nagging question: what in the Sermon is meant to be taken literally and what is meant as "exaggeration for rhetorical impact" (259)—a category to which McKnight appeals on occasion? Some readers may find McKnight's conclusion jarring that Jesus calls his followers to pacifism as the ultimate outworking of his ethic of love towards enemies instead of retribution (Matt 5:38-42): "A person shaped by the Jesus Creed [love God and love others] responds to injustice not with retaliation and vengeance but with grace, compassion, and abundant mercy in such a way that it reverses injustice" (125). The question may, and has been raised, whether this particular ethical stricture of Jesus applies unilaterally,

or are there extenuating circumstances. Asking questions like this is necessary when integrating the Sermon into a biblical theology, but asking them as the first move in reading the Sermon can blind the reader to the force of Jesus' words as they would have struck his first hearers. McKnight's exegesis focuses on freeing Jesus to be a shock to the system in his teaching. Again and again McKnight argues that Jesus confronts his hearers with a vision of the Kingdom of God that will be, and invites, rather, commands them to live as citizens of that kingdom now.

Given the centrality of a vision of the Kingdom of God and a Kingdom ethic (11) in McKnight's understanding and application of the Sermon, it is surprising that this concept is never systematically discussed. The reader is nearly 200 pages into the work before the first robust, though short of holistic, discussion of the concept of the Kingdom of God is met. A distinct discussion concerning what the nature of the Kingdom of God is and how it relates to Jesus' person and ministry would be helpful for the reader in order to more clearly follow McKnight's train of thought.

As McKnight says, "The contrast between Jesus' vision and our life bothers many of us" (1). McKnight guides the reader into the heart of the Sermon to be confronted by who Jesus is and what he demands, and to find that these are, in the end, inseparable. The Sermon stands before its readers in its rugged beauty and McKnight's commentary helps the reader to be pierced by that beauty, with all of its rough edges. This is an admirable accomplishment. While there will always be room to debate the particulars—and there are certainly more debates about the Sermon than could even be chronicled in this short commentary—McKight wisely and deftly makes central what is central: "The fundamental aim of the Sermon is to present Jesus and his kingdom vision for his kingdom people, and the only acceptable response to this Sermon is to embrace him, to accept the challenge; that means *to do what he says*" (276).

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