

DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER:
READING MALACHI IN LIGHT OF ANCIENT PERSIAN ROYAL
MESSENGERS IN THE TIME OF XERXES

by

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Dedicated to

Rachel Fox, my loving wife.

Your creativity inspires me.

Your selflessness humbles me.

Your faith strengthens me.

Thank you.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , ed. David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
Anab.	<i>Anabasis</i> (Xenophon)
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3 rd ed. J. B. Pritchard. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955.
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASV	American Standard Version
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BAT	Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . 7 th Printing. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003. Reprinted from Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1906.
BHNB	Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , 5 th ed., ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BMW	Bible in the Modern World
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	The Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ChrLit	<i>Christianity and Literature</i>
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> , eds. William H. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
COT	Commentar op het Oude Testament
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
Cyr.	<i>Cyropaedia</i> (Xenophon)
EDB	<i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i> , ed. David N. Freedman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
EI	<i>Eretz Israel</i>
ESHM	European Seminar in Historical Methodology
ESV	English Standard Version

ET	English Text
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
HALOT	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , Study Edition, eds. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. Revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm. Trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson. 2 vols. Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2001.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HB	Hebrew Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>The Histories</i> (Herodotus)
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HZAG</i>	<i>Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte</i>
HZM	Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi
ICC	The International Critical Commentary of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
Int	Interpretation
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITL	International Theological Library
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> , eds. George A. Buttrick et al. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , rev. ed., eds. Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KHCAT	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KJV	King James Version
LIA	Life in Ancient Israel
LXX	Septuagint
<i>MGWJ</i>	<i>Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
<i>MJT</i>	<i>Midwestern Journal of Theology</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Version
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NET	New English Translation
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament

<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , ed. Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>Oec.</i>	<i>Oeconomicus</i> (Xenophon)
OT	Old Testament
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTR	Old Testament Readings
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestinian Exploration Quarterly</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SBB	Soncino Books of the Bible
SBLAB	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLABS	Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
<i>Strat.</i>	<i>Stratagemata</i> (Polyaenus)
<i>SWJT</i>	<i>Southwestern Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TMSJ</i>	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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Here is what has come to the surface after so many throes and convulsions.

—Walt Whitman, “Starting from Paumanok”

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INTRODUCTION

Begin at the beginning . . . and go on until you come to the end. And then stop.

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

The essential question that spawned this investigation was a simple one: Why is there so much messenger language in Malachi? This question generated a host of others. Are there less obvious instances of this language? What insights has previous scholarship offered on this topic? How would one go about looking for more messenger language? What historical context would this language best fit? How does it impact interpretation of the book? This project is essentially an exercise in answering these and ensuing questions.

Chapter 1 situates this investigation in the history of critical scholarship. The primary perspective on Malachi is that it is unimpressive and very simplistic literature. There is also no consensus regarding its specific historical context, only a general agreement that the book comes from the Persian era. There are, however, only precious few acknowledgements of Malachi's messenger language, and even these are brief asides that reference only its most obvious messenger vocabulary. There is need for a project that makes this concept the primary focus of investigation. The thesis here is that there is a root messenger metaphor in Malachi that fits best in the time of Xerxes. This model has the potential to challenge long-standing, negative assertions about Malachi's quality while providing a new level of specificity for its historical context.

Chapter 2 presents the methodology of this investigation. Since the central idea is that messenger imagery, concepts, and vocabulary permeate the entire book, there is need for a method that deals with interrelated metaphors. Michael Ward provides such a method in *Planet Narnia*, a work that demonstrates that each of the seven books of C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* draws from a root metaphor having to do with one of the seven

Medieval planets. This project adapts Ward's methodology for discovering and presenting Malachi's interrelated messenger metaphors.

Chapter 3 constructs a lens for investigating Malachi's root messenger metaphor. Just as Ward reconstructs a specific Medieval planet as a lens for reading each *Chronicle*, this chapter uses primary sources to reconstruct (A) a portrait of Persian royal messengers in the time of Xerxes and (B) a portrait of ancient Hebrew prophets as being conceptually similar to ANE messengers in general. Methodologically, this exercise provides a lens for reading Malachi and detecting messenger language, a lens that takes into account both Malachi's cultural *milieu* and prophetic heritage.

Chapter 4 is the exercise of using the messenger lens for reading Malachi. Just as Ward reads a *Chronicle* and highlights its planetary decorations, this chapter details the messenger metaphors present in each of Malachi's pericopae. The end result is a robust list that demonstrates the point that messenger metaphors decorate the text with varying degrees of visibility: Some are brilliant, others bright, and still others subtle.

Chapter 5 explains the impact of Malachi's root messenger metaphor for reading the text, constructing theology, and reevaluating long-standing positions in critical scholarship. What emerges is a new classification of Malachi as a royal message. This new way of reading the text reveals not only that Malachi possesses more artistic merit than scholars have previously acknowledged, but also that the book's theological message is more robust and imaginative than its critical readers have suggested. This final chapter also concludes this study with a look at two specific ways in which Ward's methodology, as adapted here, might be useful and fruitful in future biblical studies.

Soli Deo Gloria

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF RESEARCH: ENTRENCHED TRAJECTORIES AND A NEW DIRECTION

Our waking life's desire to shape the world to our convenience invites all manner of paradox and difficulty.

—Cormac McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain*

This chapter first explains how critical discussions of Malachi as literature came to focus primarily on its type—poetry or prose?—and its classification as a series of disputations. It is evident that Malachi's overall form receives little discussion. Next, this chapter surveys common views regarding Malachi's historical setting. Although I conclude that Andrew Hill's thesis is the most convincing, there is still room to slightly alter his historical model. Finally, from the discussions of Malachi's literary character and historical setting emerges the prospect of a new paradigm and the present thesis.

MALACHI AS LITERATURE

Malachi as Unimpressive Literature

Nineteenth century scholar Wilhelm De Wette ends his brief discussion of Malachi with a characterization of the book that suggests he found it lacking: “In style, rhythm, and energy, Malachi imitates the old prophets, and not without success. Yet we are continually sensible to the dull, exhausted spirit, which attempts, but cannot perform, for the thought is not sufficiently vigorous.”¹ Moreover, considering that he devoted roughly three paragraphs to Malachi in his massive introduction, it is safe to assume that De Wette did not find it the most impressive book.

Writing a generation later, albeit more reverent in tone, C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch also imply that Malachi does not measure up to prior prophetic writings. In contrast to De

¹ Wilhelm M. L. De Wette, *A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., trans. Theodore Parker (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1843), 2:482–83.

Wette, however, they felt the need to defend what they perceived as Malachi's lack of artistic qualities:

[Malachi's] style is distinguished from the oratorical mode of address adopted by the earlier prophets, and not unfrequently rises into a lyrico-dramatical diction, by the predominance of the conversational form of instruction . . . In this mode of developing the thought, we can hardly fail to perceive the influence of the scholastic discourses concerning the law which were introduced by Ezra; *only we must not look upon this conversational mode of instruction as a sign of the defunct spirit of prophecy*, since it corresponded exactly to the practical wants of the time, and prophecy did not die of spiritual exhaustion, but was extinguished in accordance with the will and counsel of God, as soon as its mission had been fulfilled [emphasis mine].²

Essentially, they regard Malachi inferior to earlier prophets whose messages were more sermonic, or "oratorical." We must not, however, deem it the lesser. It is what the audience needed. It was right for its time and purpose. It was the inartistic necessity in the "will and counsel of God." Actually, it could have been worse: "Malachi's language, *considering the late period in which he lived and laboured*, is still vigorous, pure, and beautiful."³ Clearly Keil and Delitzsch saw Malachi as inferior prophetic literature; but, part of their perceived task was explaining to readers that this degradation was unavoidable since it was from the "late period" (i.e., postexilic period).

Moving forward to the early twentieth century, John M. P. Smith produced what proves to be the seminal critical investigation of Malachi. His commentary presents many views still evident in Malachi scholarship more than a century later. Not least of these concepts is his overall characterization of its literary quality:

The style of Malachi is clear and simple. It is at the same time direct and forceful. It makes but little demand upon the imagination of the reader. The element of beauty is almost wholly lacking, there being but slight attempt at ornamentation of any kind.

² C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Twelve Minor Prophets: Vol. II*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 428–29. The original German version appeared first in 1861. Their defense of the book sounds suspiciously like they had De Wette's criticism in mind, though one cannot be sure since they do not specifically cite his work.

³ *Ibid.*, 429, emphasis mine.

The figurative element is very limited; but such figures as are employed are fresh and suggestive.⁴

His description gets to the point. The book is straightforward, unimaginative, and “simple.” Smith tries to save the book from itself—at least its few “figures” are “fresh and suggestive.”

Perhaps it was inevitable that early critical works would view Malachi so negatively. After all, the operating model for Israelite religion and literature that emerged from critical scholarship in the 1800s assumed (A) the best elements of ancient Israel were not Israelite at all, but derived from Babylonian religion during the exile; and (B) ancient Israel’s postexilic literature, history, and religion were inferior to earlier Israelite religion and traditions. The precise political nature of this model is perhaps most evident in Friedrich Delitzsch’s German national lectures on the subject, which began in 1903 with “Babel und Bibel,” at which even Kaiser Wilhelm II was in attendance. The anti-Semitic tone and terminology of these lectures is well documented.⁵ Just two decades later, Adolf von Harnack would go further and describe Protestantism’s reluctance to discard the HB/OT from its canon as religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.⁶ This is the climate, the *milieu*, from which sprang these negative opinions of Malachi. Postexilic, Jewish literature drops off in quality without the influence of Babylonian religion as a guide and model.

The implication here is that early, disparaging remarks about Malachi as literature—even when done so with a hint of apology—reflect their period of origin. That is *not* to say

⁴ John M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Malachi* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 4. See also, e.g., C. C. Torrey, “The Prophet Malachi,” *JBL* 17 (1898): 1–15. Torrey proposed that scholarship should focus more on reconstructing Malachi’s historical situation than actually working through the text.

⁵ For a comprehensive treatment of this matter, see Bill T. Arnold and David B. Weisberg, “A Centennial Review of Friedrich Delitzsch’s ‘Babel und Bibel’ Lectures,” *JBL* 121.3 (2002): 441–57. It is worth noting that Keil and Delitzsch’s work, despite giving evidence of seeing the postexilic literature as inferior, does not have an overtly anti-Semitic tone. In fact, Franz Delitzsch (father of Friedrich Delitzsch) publically defended the Jewish community in Germany against anti-Semitic attacks and even translated the NT into Hebrew. I do not think it is unfair, though, to point out some latent and unintentional prejudices in their discussions and descriptions of postexilic literature, in this case Malachi.

⁶ Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche*, rev. and enlarged ed. (TU 45; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924), 217. Arnold and Weisburg, “A Centennial Review,” 451–56, consider much of this scholarship not only anti-Semitic but also “anti-Christian” at times because of its anti-ecclesial rhetoric.

that all negative critiques are intentionally anti-Semitic. For our purposes, however, it is important to understand whence these critiques came in the first place in order to make the point that these early characterizations were not without inherent biases, even if they were unconscious ones. They perpetuated deeply-rooted, unfavorable views about postexilic literature. Even a generation after Smith's commentary appeared, Gerhard von Rad writes of the postexilic prophets, "There is, especially in Malachi, an impression that prophecy was flagging,"⁷ while Erling Hammershaimb opines that Malachi's ethical admonitions "sound like clichés merely, pale reminiscences of the older prophets of doom."⁸

Not all readers of Malachi share these sentiments. Julius Bewer sees "a freshness in the lively debates of the little book that make it interesting reading."⁹ Joyce Baldwin concedes a haphazard arrangement, but proceeds with the thesis that there is a general progression from election to responsibility, one she views favorably.¹⁰ One of the most positive assessments of Malachi's literary quality is that of Pieter Verhoef, though he also concedes, "It is true that Malachi does not employ any particular literary structure in order to convey his meaning."¹¹ He believes Malachi's units in their totality successfully reflect elements/concepts from older ANE (and HB) covenants.¹² He also believes the book's rhetorical questions (e.g., Mal 1:8; 2:10) are effective literary devices, as are its occasional instances of figurative language (e.g., the father/son comparison, 1:6; spreading refuse on the priests' faces, 2:3). Finally, Andrew E. Hill provides a list of twenty-five literary devices

⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 264. Considering that von Rad's classic study devotes roughly half a page to Malachi (pp. 254–55), it seems fair to question whether or not he began with this perspective instead of arriving at it.

⁸ Erling Hammershaimb, *Some Aspects of Old Testament Prophecy from Isaiah to Malachi* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1966), 109. See also Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 614: "Like the Book of Haggai, the Book of Malachi is of slight religious and literary importance . . ."

⁹ Julius A. Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament in Its Historical Development*, rev. ed. (Record of Civilization Sources and Studies; ed. James T. Shotwell; New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 258.

¹⁰ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1972), *passim*.

¹¹ Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 167 (see esp. pp. 164–68 on Malachi's literary style). As we shall see below, not everyone agrees that there is not a clear literary structure.

¹² *Ibid.* There is more on this concept in what follows in this chapter.

present in Malachi (e.g., alliteration; foil; irony), which “demonstrate that Malachi’s prophecy is a literary work of considerable artistic merit.”¹³

More often, however, discussions of early, negative characterizations of Malachi as literature are simply omitted and/or presumed without further discussion. Beth Glazier-McDonald (rightly) says,

[I]n the plethora of commentaries and articles that have appeared . . . old material was simply garbled in new language with few insights offered. Indeed, in this case, scholarly unanimity reveals not primary exegetical excellence, but indifference. Exactly why commentators had, and continue to have, a low view of the substance and style of Malachi’s message cannot be stated unequivocally.¹⁴

The most damning voice, then, is the silent one. Most scholarly treatments of the prophets do not forthrightly speak negatively of the postexilic ones; they simply ignore or minimize them, especially Malachi, in favor of their “classical” predecessors.¹⁵ The silence on this issue in commentaries suggests the negative characterizations are more or less assumed. This may explain why discussions of Malachi as literature perpetually and predictably focus time and again on two issues: its type (poetry or prose) and classification of its units (disputations).

Malachi as Either Poetry or Prose

If Malachi’s lack of good style is generally assumed without comment, then what do scholars discuss? One of the primary topics in critical study has always been its type—is it poetry or

¹³ Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi* (AB 25D; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 38–40 (quote from p. 40). Although Hill briefly expresses his own favorable perspective, he does not detail or engage the pervasive negative views of Malachi. He is content to make the brief point that he will proceed with a positive view, but the non-specialist is left ignorant of why that may be important.

¹⁴ Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* (SBLDS 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 1. She goes on to say that a scholarly prejudice against postexilic literature is partly to blame, with which I am in obvious agreement.

¹⁵ See, e.g., von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*; J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962), who briefly looks at Malachi primarily for talking about the “collector” of the Twelve (p. 274); R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition* (Growing Points in Theology; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), who, as far as I can detect, never cites or refers to Malachi; Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), who never references Malachi; James M. Ward, *Thus Says the Lord: The Message of the Prophets* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991); Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, rev. and enlarged ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996). Somewhat surprisingly, the postexilic prophets, esp. Malachi, get little to no treatment in Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). Notable exceptions are C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), who provides thorough treatments of each postexilic prophet; and, to a lesser extent, James D. Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984).

prose? Another one of J. M. P. Smith's influential views is that Malachi is clearly prose and not poetry:

In distinction from most of the prophetic books, Malachi must be classified as prose. Neither in spirit, thought, nor form, has it the characteristics of poetry. Certainly, there is an occasional flash of poetic insight and imagination, or a few lines which move to a poetic rhythm. But only by the loosest use of terms could we call the prophecy as a whole poetry. . . . If Malachi is to be regarded as poetical either in form or content, distinctions between poetry and prose must be abandoned.¹⁶

Smith's rigid certainty, coupled with Hermann Gunkel's influential division of all the HB's literature into broad categories of poetry or prose,¹⁷ ensured that Malachi's basic type would become a central topic of discussion in Malachi scholarship.

German investigations have typically approached Malachi as poetry. Karl Marti sees a discourse quality in the book, but a poetic one, not some dry school lecture (*trockenen Schulvortrags*) or mere rabbinical-school dispute (*blossen rabbinischen Schulstreits*).¹⁸ Wilhelm Nowack sees Malachi as carrying on the poetry of preexilic prophets, which were "voll poetischen Schwunges und meist auch in dichterischer Darstellung" (full of poetic swings and mostly in poetic representation), although Malachi fails to match their artistry and offers a much more prosaic representation (*prosaische Darstellung*).¹⁹ Other German scholars offer similar views,²⁰ but the clearest illustration of this perspective is the forced and awkward attempt at a poetic arrangement of the MT found in the *BHS*. One of the few North American studies to treat Malachi as poetry is that of Glazier-McDonald, who admittedly

¹⁶ J. M. P. Smith, *Book of Malachi*, 4–5.

¹⁷ See esp. Hermann Gunkel, *What Remains of the Old Testament?*, trans. A. K. Dallas (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928).

¹⁸ D. Karl Marti, *Das Dodekapropheten* (KHCAT 8; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1904), 459.

¹⁹ Wilhelm Nowack, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 3rd ed. (HKAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), 392.

²⁰ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 166, makes this point without naming any specific examples, but I have found that it holds true, as in, e.g., Karl Elliger, *Das Buch der Zwölf Kleinen Propheten II: Die Propheten* (Das Alte Testament Deutsch; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950), 177–78; Friedrich Horst, *Die zwölf kleinen Propheten*, vol. 2, *Nahum bis Maleachi*, 3rd ed. (HAT 14; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1964), 264–74; H. Frey, *Das Buch der Kirche in der Weltwende: Die kleinen nachexilischen Propheten*, 5th ed. (BAT 24; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1963), 140–80.

works with a rather loose definition of poetry,²¹ but nonetheless highlights instances of parallelism, repetition, alliteration, chiasm, and other literary characteristics as she vigorously defends a poetic classification of the book.²²

British and North American investigations of Malachi typically follow J. M. P. Smith's lead and approach it as prose; and, many further follow him and find its prose rather bland,²³ while a few express more positive assessments of Malachi's quick and terse style, especially Verhoef (though note that Verhoef was a South African scholar).²⁴ None defends its prose classification in greater detail than Hill, who adapts the method set forth by Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman for counting prose particles to classify HB texts.²⁵ Malachi has a frequency of such particles at a rate of sixteen percent, which is comparable to the fifteen percent one usually finds in HB prose material rather than the mere five percent found in HB poetry.²⁶ Hill also draws attention to a previous study by Jacob Hoftijzer, who extensively investigates a variety of syntactical and vocabulary combinations utilizing the direct object marker (תא).²⁷ Hoftijzer finds Malachi's use of this particle comparable to other prose texts in the HB.²⁸

The position here is that a rigid distinction can be misleading and somewhat superficial. Hill's prose-counting statistics and Hoftijzer's study do make convincing cases

²¹ Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, *passim*.

²³ E.g., S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (ITL; New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1922), 358, who says Malachi is "more prosaic" than the other prophets; R. Pfeiffer, *Introduction*, 614; and William Neil, "Malachi," *IDB* 3:228–32, who says, "[Malachi] does not share the profound and original insights into the nature and purpose of God" (p. 231) with previous prophets, and that the "limitations of Malachi's thought" are obvious (p. 232).

²⁴ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 164–68. See also, e.g., Bewer, *Literature*, 258; Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco, TX: Word, 1984), *passim*; and Hill, *Malachi*, 23–26, 38–41.

²⁵ Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea* (AB 24; New York: Doubleday, 1980), esp. 57–66. Andersen and Freedman argue that Hebrew prose is characterized by a higher concentration of "prose particles" than poetry. These prose particles include the relative pronoun (אשר), the definite article (ה), and the direct object marker (תא).

²⁶ Andrew Hill, "Malachi, the Book of," *ABD* 4:75–85, esp. 79–80. See also Hill, *Malachi*, 23–24.

²⁷ Jacob Hoftijzer, "Remarks Concerning the Use of the Particle 't in Classical Hebrew," *OtSt* 14 (1965): 1–99.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 76–77.

that Malachi is prose; and, it is noteworthy that Glazier-McDonald fails to engage their research on this matter. Prose, however, can be quite poetic at times. Bewer thought this to be the case with Malachi: “It is written in prose which sometimes has the rhythmic swing of poetry.”²⁹ Even Verhoef and Hill highlight several poetic devices in the book, though still maintaining a prose designation. Malachi is, in a general sense, poetic prose.³⁰

For the purposes here, there is another important observation. Critical scholarship has perpetuated this discussion about Malachi, but it has yet to build on it and go further. Does it really matter if Malachi is poetry or prose? It seems this discussion has helped readers talk about the book’s type, but it stops short of answering the question, “What is Malachi?” Whether poetry or prose, what is its overall form? Does it have one?

Malachi as Several Disputations

A primary model has emerged for reading Malachi that designates each of its pericopae as disputations. Here one can observe the influence of Claus Westermann. In his classic study of forms in the prophetic books, Westermann broadly classifies a substantial amount of prophetic material as legal/judicial material. One of the legal forms he observes is the disputation (*Streitgespräch*), in which a prophet constructs a rhetorical, back-and-forth dialog with opponents, essentially placing erroneous words in their mouths and then blasting those ideas with polemical speech and judicial accusations.³¹ Also, and as noted by Westermann, Hermann Gunkel had earlier observed this form, though he feels it is not necessarily judicial.³²

²⁹ Bewer, *Literature*, 258.

³⁰ Terry W. Eddinger, *Malachi: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (BHHB; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 3, says, “The text is a true hybrid, perhaps the best example of such in the Hebrew Bible.” I find this position generally well stated, though I believe all Hebrew prose to be quite poetic, esp. in the wake of Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

³¹ Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 201. He lists Mic 2:6–11 and Isa 28:23–29 as clear examples. However, cf. Hill, *Malachi*, 37, footnote 4, which notes that Westermann elsewhere expresses some uncertainty about disputation speech as an actual genre. Westermann felt more comfortable simply designating it a “speech form.”

³² See, e.g., Hermann Gunkel, *Die Israelitische Literatur* (1925; reprint; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 37, where he lists the disputation (*Streitgespräch*).

Egon Pfeiffer demarcates Malachi into six primary units/speeches—Mal 1:2–5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10–16; 2:17–3:5; 3:6–12; 3:13–21—and designates them “disputations” (*Disputationsworte*). He further argues that each disputation contains the three basic parts of that form: an opening statement (*Behauptung*); an objection (*Einrede*); and a summary explanation (*Begründung*).³³ Although some see seven units,³⁴ the majority still subscribe to Pfeiffer’s basic outline³⁵ as well as his designation of the main units as disputations.³⁶

Some attempts at refinement have emerged. The earliest was that of Hans-Jochen Boecker, who prefers to label the speech-units “discussions” (*Diskussionsworte*) in order to highlight their discourse nature and remove the judicial connotations of “disputation.”³⁷ Ray Clendenen highlights rhetorical features in the text (e.g., motivation, problem, command) to emphasize Malachi’s hortatory nature.³⁸ David Petersen sees Malachi as “diatribe-like discourse” whose units address a diverse array of topics.³⁹ Although these studies move away from the label “disputation,” they still agree that Malachi’s units are patterned after speech.

³³ Egon Pfeiffer, “Die Disputationsworte im Buche Maleachi: Ein Beitrag zur formgeschichtlichen Struktur,” *EvT* 19 (1959): 546–68.

³⁴ E.g., Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 162; Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The History of the Religion of Israel*, vol. 4, *From the Babylonian Captivity to the End of Prophecy* (New York: KTAV, 1977), 437; and Matthias Krieg, *Mutmaßungen über Maleachi: Eine Monographie*. (Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 80; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993), who sees seven units—“seven-words” (*Siebenwortes*)—in the text. Also, cf. Walter C. Kaiser, *Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), esp. 17, who sees only five disputations.

³⁵ E.g., Newsome, *The Hebrew Prophets*, 190; Glazier-McDonald, *The Divine Messenger*; Hill, *Malachi*; Bullock, *Prophetic Books*, 406; D. F. Murray, “The Rhetoric of Disputation: Re-Examination of a Prophetic Genre,” *JSOT* 38 (1987): 95–121; David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Rainer Kessler, *Maleachi* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2011).

³⁶ It is important to note that the English “disputation” can hide the fact that multiple German words are used for this form, each with their own nuance. The differences are important in the secondary literature. That said, most scholars follow E. Pfeiffer and treat Malachi as a collection of disputations, e.g., Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 213–14; R. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 300; Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 20–21; Murray, “Rhetoric,” 111–12; Hill, *Malachi*, 37; Eddinger, *Malachi*, 3–4; Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 489; Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 152–55.

³⁷ Hans-Jochen Boecker, “Bemerkungen zur formgeschichtlichen Terminologie des Buches Maleachi,” *ZAW* 78 (1966): 78–81. Kessler, *Maleachi*, esp. 41, is a recent commentary that maintains this language. Going a bit further, T. Lescow, “Dialogische Strukturen in den Streitreten des Buches Maleachi,” *ZAW* 102 (1990): 194–212, characterizes these units as “prophetic instructional discussions” (*prophetische Lehrgespräche*) that lead the audience to answers focusing on the Torah.

³⁸ E. Ray Clendenen, “The Structure of Malachi: A Textlinguistic Study,” *CTR* 2.1 (1987): 3–17. Although he sees three large “movements” in Malachi, Clendenen’s outline for the most part still preserves the six distinct units observed by E. Pfeiffer and others.

³⁹ Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 31–34.

Furthermore, these scholars theorize about what one can find *within* Malachi without explaining what Malachi actually *is*. Calling Malachi a series of disputations, discussions, diatribes, and so forth ultimately deals with the parts, but not the whole. The quest to explain what Malachi *is* only manages to explain what it contains.

Characteristically, then, critical readers of Malachi discuss its parts but not the whole. Julia O'Brien observes, "These scholarly treatments of Malachi, it seems, have drawn little distinction between a book's form (genre) and its style or rhetorical devices."⁴⁰ She tried but failed to push scholarship further on this issue. Building on previous but quite brief observations by Julien Harvey,⁴¹ O'Brien proposes that Malachi as a whole is a large covenant lawsuit (רִיב) that consists of several smaller ones.

Julia O'Brien's Thesis that Malachi is a Covenant Lawsuit

O'Brien is not the first reader of Malachi to discuss its covenantal concerns. Baldwin believes the covenant concept is essential to the book, with other themes such as election, privilege, and responsibility all deriving from it.⁴² Verhoef sees elements of ANE covenants (particularly the Mosaic Covenant) reflected throughout Malachi.⁴³ R. J. Coggins believes the question-and-answer format "indicates that a large part of the message will be one of condemnation," and that Mal 1:6—2:9 manifests some elements in common with a covenant lawsuit, "but it would be impossible to reconstruct anything like a complete 'lawsuit' from Malachi."⁴⁴ Elizabeth Achtemeier goes further and says that "Malachi has been cast by its anonymous prophet in the form of a court case, tried before the priest in the temple, with the

⁴⁰ Julia M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* (SBLDS 121; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 59.

⁴¹ Julien Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance* (Scholasticat de l'Immaculée Conception; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967), 66.

⁴² Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 214–16.

⁴³ To be clear, Verhoef is *not* saying that Malachi is organized as a treaty/covenant. Rather, he sees elements of covenants throughout Malachi, e.g. the glory of the "Great King," retrospective pericopae reminiscent of historical prologues, and references to covenant stipulations. See Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 178–84.

⁴⁴ R. J. Coggins, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 77.

prophet playing the role of priest in his imagination.”⁴⁵ However, as detailed by others,⁴⁶ her outline in no way matches the covenant lawsuit form and is essentially a rhetorical format for her commentary.

In taking all of Malachi as a covenant lawsuit, O’Brien goes the furthest in pressing the model. Harvey deals specifically with Mal 1:6—2:9; but, unlike Coggins, he claims that this unit is indeed a ריב—though an *incomplete* one—instead of saying it merely has elements of a ריב. O’Brien expands Harvey’s analysis of Mal 1:6—2:9 for the entire book:

- I. Prologue: (1:2–5)
- II. Accusations
 - A. First Accusation (1:6—2:9a)
 - 1. Preliminaries (1:6a)
 - 2. Interrogation (1:6b)
 - 3. Indictment (1:7–10a)
 - 4. Declaration of guilt (1:10b–14)
 - 5. Ultimatum/Punishment (2:1–9)
 - B. Second Accusation (2:10–16)
 - 1. Preliminaries (2:10a)
 - 2. Interrogation (2:10b)
 - 3. Indictment (2:11)
 - 4. Declaration of guilt (2:12)
 - 5. Further indictment (2:13–14)
 - 6. Ultimatum/Warning (2:15–16)
 - C. Third Accusation (2:17—3:5)
 - 1. Indictment (2:17)
 - 2. Ultimatum/Promise (3:1–5)
 - D. Fourth Accusation (3:6–12)
 - 1. Preliminaries (3:6)
 - 2. Indictment (3:7a)
 - 3. Ultimatum/Promise (3:7b)
 - 4. Indictment (3:8–9)
 - 5. Promise (3:10–12)
 - E. Fifth Accusation (3:13–21)
 - 1. Indictment (3:13–15)
 - 2. Historical Account (3:16–18)
 - 3. Ultimatum/Promise (3:19–21)
- III. Final Admonition (3:22)
- IV. Final Ultimatum (3:23–24)

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi* (Int; Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 172.

⁴⁶ Cf. esp. Hill, *Malachi*, 30.

She states plainly, “The entire Book of Malachi, indeed, employs the form of the covenant lawsuit. The elements that Harvey traces in 1:6—2:9 resound throughout the book . . .”⁴⁷

In retrospect, her model supports those readings that view Malachi’s question-and-answer schema as legal or judicial (disputations), *contra* readings that view it as merely conversational (e.g., Boecker, *diskussionworte*; Petersen, diatribe-like discourses). However, there is simply too much missing in Malachi to call it a ריב. It does not contain any calls to “hear.” It never appeals to natural elements as witnesses, such as the heavens and the earth. Hill gives the most convincing piece of evidence: Malachi does not “address the basic issue of the covenant lawsuit—namely idolatry.”⁴⁸ Finally, her outline simply lacks uniformity. That is, if the author/redactor put together several units of the same form, why are they so divergent in size, arrangement, content, and subject matter? It seems Terry Eddinger’s restraint is appropriate: “The prophet places strong emphasis upon and draws authority from the Mosaic covenant. Therefore, the translator should pay attention to the writer’s use of covenant language, which is prevalent throughout the book.”⁴⁹

O’Brien is correct, however, that scholars avoid the question of Malachi’s overall form. Though I do not agree with her conclusion that it is a covenant lawsuit, I find it surprising that no one has subsequently proposed an alternative model that takes her insights seriously. Oddly—yet in many ways telling—some scholars scold her for even attempting a new model. Baruch Schwartz dismisses her simply for trying: “[S]cholars never seem to tire

⁴⁷ O’Brien, *Priest and Levite*, 63 (outline from pp. 63–64).

⁴⁸ Hill, *Malachi*, 32 (see pp. 30–33 for more on this matter). For more on the covenant lawsuit form in the HB, see esp. Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets,” *JBL* 78 (1959): 285–95; John S. Holladay, “Assyrian Statescraft and the Prophets of Israel,” *HTR* 63 (1970): 29–51; Moshe Weinfeld, “Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature,” *VT* 27.2 (1977): 178–95; Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge* (JSOTSup 9; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), esp. 74–83; J. Carl Laney, “The Role of God’s Prophets in God’s Case against Israel,” *BSac* 138.552 (1981): 313–25; Arvid S. Kapelrud, “The Prophets and the Covenant,” in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlstrom*, eds. W. B. Barrick and J. R. Spencer (JSOTSup 31; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 175–83.

⁴⁹ Eddinger, *Malachi*, 4. See also Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 549–63.

of searching for the *Gattung* and its *Sitz im Leben*.⁵⁰ Of course, there is also the fact that O'Brien's theory is tucked away as a secondary issue in a monograph about priests and Levites in Malachi. Thus Dan Kent, like many reviewers, discusses the book without even mentioning her section on form.⁵¹ A quarter of a century after O'Brien's monograph, commentaries are still debating whether Malachi is poetry or prose while discussing its parts—usually taken as disputations—but not the whole.

MALACHI'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT: PRIMARY PERSPECTIVES

The Consensus: Malachi is Postexilic/Persian Era

There is a strong consensus in critical scholarship that Malachi is a postexilic, Persian era text. Some major clues lead to this conclusion. First, Mal 1:2–5 assumes that Edom is in ruins. In the biblical material, Obadiah condemns Edom for pillaging Jerusalem and brutalizing Israelites after the Neo-Babylonian destruction, of which the apex was in 587 BCE (cf. Isa 63:1–6; Ezek 35:10–12; 36:1–5). In other words, Edom was not yet in ruins at the start of the exile, so it would be problematic to try and place Malachi before the exile. A long-standing view sees Mal 1:2–5 reflecting a Nabatean invasion of Edom some time in the late 6th or early 5th centuries BCE,⁵² while others push the devastation of the Edomites back

⁵⁰ Baruch J. Schwartz, review of *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, by Julia M. O'Brien, *AJS Review* 18.2 (1993): 288–91.

⁵¹ Dan G. Kent, review of *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, by Julia M. O'Brien, *SWJT* 35.2 (1993), 46. Paul L. Redditt's review, in *CBQ* 54.4 (1992): 761–62, provides a more logical refutation, pointing out that the smaller units contain too few covenant lawsuit elements on their own to merit that classification and that O'Brien's label for Mal 1:2–5, "prologue," is not something one would expect to find in a covenant lawsuit. An exception to these dismissals is Beth Glazier-McDonald's review in *JBL* 111.2 (1992): 327–29, where she calls O'Brien's form-critical analysis the "strength of O'Brien's work" and "her most significant contribution." Glazier-McDonald says O'Brien's classification "accounts well for the covenant theology and themes" in the book, as well as its reading of the "messenger of the covenant" as a covenant enforcer. Other scholars do not share her enthusiasm. I personally think Malachi's late entry to the prophetic tradition ensured that it would reflect the prophetic lawsuits of its predecessors; but, it can do so without being a formal covenant lawsuit.

⁵² See, e.g., H. Grätz, "Die Anfänge der Nabataërherrschaft," *MGWJ* 24 (1875): 49–67; Julius Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1892), 214; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 344, 377; Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 129–32; R. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 298; Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 204; Hill, *Malachi*, 201. Note, however, that a few scholars posit a similar date for Edom's destruction, but by a different group of Arab invaders, e.g., John D. W. Watts, *Obadiah: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (1969; reprint: Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1981), 17–18, who posits the Lihjans. It is also noteworthy that classical sources firmly put the Nabateans in the region by 312, so a theory making them responsible for an earlier invasion is only conjectural (though not out of the question).

to the earlier Neo-Babylonian invasions of the Levant, usually during the campaigns of Nabonidus.⁵³ Since Nabonidus succeeded Nebuchadnezzar and ruled after the destruction of Jerusalem, that period is certainly plausible.⁵⁴ Regardless, the reference to Edom being in ruins suggests that Malachi emerged after the fall of Jerusalem in 587.

Another important clue is that Malachi assumes a functioning temple (esp. in Mal 1:6—2:9). Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first Jerusalem temple in 587 BCE, but the prophets Haggai and Zechariah instigated its rebuilding during their postexilic ministries (520–18). This second temple saw completion in 515 (cf. Ezra 5–6), and it stands to reason that Malachi must come after this event, squarely in the Persian era. Furthermore, the observation that any enthusiasm generated by Haggai and Zechariah and the reinstitution and rededication of the new temple grew cold before Malachi’s time (cf. Mal 1:12–13; 2:17; 3:14) suggests the historical context of Malachi is at least a decade or so after 515.⁵⁵ So, the reference to a functioning temple further suggests a postexilic, Persian-era context.

Finally, Mal 1:8 refers to the audience’s “governor” (פֶּחָה). Although this term occurs in HB texts prior to the Persian era (e.g., 1 Kgs 10:15; Isa 36:9), most of its twenty-eight occurrences are in books from that period.⁵⁶ More specifically, the way that Malachi uses the term—as a dignitary who received offerings from the community—suggests a Persian ruler

⁵³ E.g., J. R. Bartlett, “The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Edom,” *PEQ* 104 (1972): 53–66; Bartlett, “From Edomites to Nabateans: A Study of Continuity,” *PEQ* 111 (1979): 26–37; John Lindsay, “The Babylonian Kings and Edom,” *PEQ* 108 (1976): 23–39; Crystal Bennett, “Excavations at Buseirah (Biblical Bozrah),” in *Midian, Moab and Edom: The History and Archaeology of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Jordan and Northwest Arabia*, eds. John Sawyer and David Clines (JSOTSup 24; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983), 9–17. Cf. J. M. Myers, “Edom and Judah in the Sixth-Fifth Centuries B.C.,” in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of W. F. Albright*, ed. Hans Goedicke (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1971), 377–92, esp. 389–80; and Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 171, footnote 14.

⁵⁴ I find the general statement in O’Brien, *Priest and Levite*, 117, an acceptable hypothesis: “[A]rchaeological and literary evidence does suggest that the Babylonian armies destroyed Edom. This evidence therefore links Edom’s fall to a date between 605 and 550 rather than to a fifth-century time frame.” Obviously I further think that Obadiah suggests that Edom fell after the exile of 587.

⁵⁵ On the dates for the new temple, see Bright, *A History of Israel*, 368–72; Edwin Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 155–59; Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 23–36.

⁵⁶ See 2 Chr 9:14; Ezra 8:36; Neh 2:7, 9; 3:7; 5:14 (twice), 15, 18; 12:26; Esth 3:12; 8:9; 9:3; Hag 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21; Mal 1:8.

of a province or satrapy and not some general authority figure.⁵⁷ The use of the term “governor” is another clue that Malachi is from the postexilic, Persian era.

Alone, perhaps none of these clues is weighty enough to be conclusive. Together, however, they lead to a virtual consensus that Malachi is a postexilic, Persian era text. For a more precise date, however, no such consensus exists. In fact, some scholars believe further precision is simply unachievable. Coggins says bluntly, “Malachi is to be placed within the Persian period, some time between 515 and 330 BC; but greater precision than that is scarcely available.”⁵⁸ James Ward echoes this sentiment, finding the matter somewhat unimportant: “For our purposes, it is enough to place the book in the period of the Second Temple.”⁵⁹ Most Malachi scholars, however, are not content to be that unspecific.

Malachi as a Contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah

J. M. P. Smith directs attention to the fact that the abuses which Malachi attacks—cultic deficiencies, careless priests, a lapse in tithes, and an (ambiguous) issue of marriage to foreign wives—all appear in Ezra-Nehemiah; thus, “The Book of Malachi fits the situation amid which Nehemiah worked as snugly as a bone fits a socket.”⁶⁰ Following Smith, and considering that Nehemiah would not accept tribute or gifts when he was governor (Neh 5:1–8; cf. Mal 1:8), Verhoef posits that Malachi occurs in the short period between Nehemiah’s two visits (i.e., shortly after 433 BCE). He believes Malachi’s insistence on bringing tithes and suitable offerings would have been effective *after* the renewal of the covenant in Neh 10, in which the people accepted their responsibility for providing for temple worship and maintenance. In turn, Nehemiah addressed issues raised by the prophet during his second

⁵⁷ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 157 adds, “Before the Exile Judah was not administered by a [פחה], which leaves us with the conclusion that the ‘governor’ of Mal. 1:8 must have been a Persian dignitary.” See also Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 213; R. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 298; Coggins, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 74. However, cf. O’Brien, *Priest and Levite*, 118–20, on why this perspective is not without some problems.

⁵⁸ Coggins, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 75.

⁵⁹ Ward, *Thus Says the Lord*, 269. Second Temple Judaism—ranging from 515 BCE to 70 CE—is broad enough that it avoids the issue and is not helpful.

⁶⁰ J. M. P. Smith, *Book of Malachi*, 7.

visit (cf. esp. Neh 13).⁶¹ Still others who accept a traditional date for Ezra (ca. 458; cf. Ezra 7:7–8) believe the two worked directly together.⁶²

Malachi as Shortly Before Ezra and Nehemiah

More prevalent, however, is the view that Malachi is to be placed shortly before Ezra and Nehemiah, ca. 470–460 BCE. After all, the book never names those two influential figures, which is quite different than Haggai and Zechariah with their forthright references to Zerubbabel and the high priest, Joshua. Also, Malachi does not discuss the legislations set forth by Ezra and Nehemiah (e.g., Ezra 10:3; Neh 13). Ignoring these actions seems counter-intuitive since they would have helped the prophet's cause. Scholars who hold the position that Malachi is to be placed shortly before Ezra and Nehemiah suggest that it more or less addresses specific concerns that paved the way for the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah that followed. The preaching of the prophet (though the text may have emerged later) reinvigorated the sensitivity of the people to basic covenant issues, ones that Ezra and Nehemiah would also address. Thanks in part to Malachi's ministry just prior to their own, Ezra and Nehemiah experienced a high level of success.⁶³

There is one highly problematic detail with this position (as well as the position that Malachi was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah). Although Malachi's concerns were shared by Ezra and Nehemiah, one of their most important concerns does not appear in Malachi: honoring the Sabbath. There is an acute urgency over Sabbath violations in

⁶¹ Pieter A Verhoef, *Maleachi* (COT; Kampen: Kok, 1972), 16–31; cf. Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 156–60. However, Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 15–16, challenges this view.

⁶² Gunther Wanke, "Prophecy and Psalms of the Persian Period," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 1, *Introduction; The Persian Period*, eds. W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 173 suggests that Malachi, a contemporary of Ezra, prepared the way for Ezra's missions. Going further, A. von Bulmeriq, *Der Prophet Maleachi*, 2 vols. (Tartu: J. G. Krüger, 1926–32), 2:336, considers Malachi one of Ezra's personal assistants.

⁶³ The majority of scholars hold some version of this view, e.g., H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament* (Hutchinson's University Library 45; ed. E. O. James; London: Hutchinson House, 1950), 123–24; William J. Dumbrell, "Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms," *RTR* 35 (1976): 42–52; Paul Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 295; Marti, *Das Dodekapropheten*, 457–59; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 213; R. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 298; Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 14–18; Bullock, *Prophetic Books*, 407–8.

Nehemiah (Neh 9:14; 10:32–34; 13:15–22). It is a central concern. Therefore placing Malachi shortly before or as a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah requires one to believe that either (A) a prophet highly concerned with Israel’s cultic life (cf. Mal 1:6–2:9; 3:1–7) somehow forgot to deal with Sabbath issues, or (B) Sabbath observance was fine when Malachi preached but suffered a rapid degradation in a few short years before Ezra and Nehemiah arrived. Either of these options seems highly unlikely.

Andrew Hill’s View: Malachi during the Reign of Darius the Great

Hill devotes a considerable amount of attention to historical details relevant to Malachi, giving an overview of Darius the Great’s reign and thoroughly discussing topics such as Darius’s reorganization of the Persian satrapy system, historical issues concerning early generations of Israelites who returned to the Levant after Cyrus’s decree, particular issues faced by inhabitants of the Persian province of Yehud, the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, typological affinities between Malachi and the books of Haggai and Zechariah, and so forth.⁶⁴ From this intensive study and presentation, Hill offers the most specific and researched position on Malachi’s historical context.

Hill believes the best date for Malachi is shortly after Darius and the Persians suffered defeat by the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon in 490. In this model, Malachi (and others) knew of and was looking out for the “shaking of the nations” recently prophesied by Haggai (Hag 2:7, 22; cf. Joel 3:9–12). Although the people of Yehud quickly realized that Persian religious tolerance was an issue of pragmatism and slipped into apathy and despair (attitudes addressed in Malachi), the Persian defeat provided the opportunity to preach YHWH’s glory among the nations. In this task, Malachi uses language for YHWH (Mal 1:11, 14) that would have been associated with the defeated king, Darius, who was known as “King in this great earth far and wide.”⁶⁵ For Hill, this model explains why Malachi’s primary targets are “those

⁶⁴ Hill, *Malachi*, 51–84.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

who should have readily recognized God's activity in human history on behalf of Israel—the priests.⁶⁶ With YHWH about to act, it makes sense that Malachi would so forcefully call the people to repentance.

Hill's proposal is much more substantial than others. His thorough treatment of Persian history and points of contact between Darius's reign and Malachi is unmatched. Moreover, his model satisfies the Sabbath issue. Placing Malachi shortly after 490 and the Battle of Marathon allows enough time for such drastic degradations of Sabbath observance that are evident in Ezra–Nehemiah.

Fine-Tuning Hill's Thesis: Xerxes's Reign as the Best Fit for Malachi

Hill's is by far the most convincing position, and I find it satisfying except for one issue. As Hill points out, Darius's contribution to the great Persian communication system was that he linked all the satrapies to the central government, meaning that news would spread quickly.⁶⁷ Thus, news of Darius's defeat at Marathon would have traveled swiftly throughout the empire. The people of Yehud would have heard of this event and known that Persia lost a major battle. Significant changes were imminent.

With this in mind, it is highly unlikely that the prophet would have encountered the apathy found in Malachi in the immediate aftermath of Darius's defeat. It seems the opposite would be true. This news would have created widespread alarm and concern and garnered a high level of interest, not apathy. It would have had people thinking and talking about Haggai's prediction. It seems more likely that this news would have renewed participation and reverence in cultic activity; after all, YHWH was acting in history, treading the nations like grapes in the winepress (Joel 3:13). Contrary to Hill's view, it is more likely that there would have been an air of excitement and curiosity when Darius lost at Marathon. Was YHWH about to raise up the covenant people above the nations?

⁶⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 52.

There is, however, a subsequent turn of events that would have squashed this hope and generated widespread apathy. Although he intended to reconstitute his army with more bodies and resources, Darius died in 486 before getting his chance. His son and successor, Xerxes I, spent the next few years stamping out fires in the empire. He squelched the attempt of Ariamenes, his brother, to grab the throne before exterminating revolts in Egypt and Babylon. By 483, Xerxes had full control of the empire and began amassing the largest army of the ancient world in order to conquer Greece and avenge Darius's defeat. Herodotus elaborates on the army's enormity and grandeur.

Darius' expedition against the Scythians looks like nothing in comparison with that of Xerxes . . . Nor can we compare the expedition of the sons of Atreus against Troy . . . nor that of the Mysians and Teukrians before the Trojan War . . . All these expeditions combined, even with others added to them, could not possibly equal the size of this expedition of Xerxes, for what nation of Asia did Xerxes not lead to Hellas? What body of water did his forces not drink dry except for the greatest rivers?⁶⁸

Any hope born from Darius's defeat at Marathon would have quickly turned to apathy. As it turned out, the empire was in no danger at all—Darius died, and a new ruler simply arose to take the former's place. Rebellions were put down with relative ease. Moreover, as Xerxes amassed his innumerable forces, the mercury of the imperial demands rose to even higher temperatures. Xerxes heightened the already burdensome tribute demands of his father; and, like previous Achaemenid kings, he demanded the best cut of everything. Xenophon explains that every nation and city under Persian rule dreaded what would happen if they did not offer their prime portions of crops, animals, and crafts.⁶⁹ One such province

⁶⁸ Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.20–21, as found in Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories* (New York: Pantheon, 2007), 505. Hereafter, English quotations of Herodotus are from Strassler's edition unless indicated otherwise. In this quote, Herodotus's patent exaggeration is on display, but its rhetorical purpose is clear: Xerxes's army was the largest one in known history at that time.

⁶⁹ Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.23. For more on Persian taxation and tribute, see Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 394–421; Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), 669–729; Björn Anderson, "Achaemenid Arabia: A Landscape-Oriented Model of Cultural Interaction," in *The World of Achaemenid Persia: History, Art and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East*, eds. John Curtis and St John Simpson (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 445–55; Victor H. Matthews, *A Brief History of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 112–18.

was Yehud. Unfortunately for Yehud and the descendants of Israel, these increased demands coincided with a devastating drought coupled with an insect plague (Mal 3:8–11). They faced catastrophe. The people questioned the value of even worshiping the God of their ancestors at all (3:13–15). If Persia got their best portions, it seems YHWH received their worst (1:7–8, 12–14). The priesthood enabled and participated in this behavior (2:1–9). The situation was ripe for an apathetic response.

Although Hill’s proposal is the most convincing to date, there is still room to make adjustments. Moving the historical setting of Malachi from the reign of Darius to that of Xerxes satisfies two key issues. First, it provides a more convincing reason for the community’s apathy as seen in Malachi. Second, there is still enough time between Xerxes’s early rule (480s) and the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (beginning in the 450s) to explain why the Sabbath violations—culturally acceptable by Nehemiah’s first visit—are not yet a point of concern in Malachi.⁷⁰

THESIS: A NEW PARADIGM FOR READING MALACHI

The proposal here that Malachi fits best in the time of Xerxes opens up new avenues of investigation. In juxtaposing historical details and accounts of Xerxes’s early reign with concepts and issues in Malachi, does an inter-connectivity surface? Are there points of

⁷⁰ Here I am taking the traditional view that, as stated in Ezra 7:7–8, the man Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (I), or 458. I find Bright’s proposal enticing: that a simple emendation from “seventh” to the “thirty-seventh” year irons out a lot of wrinkles in Ezra-Nehemiah by putting Ezra’s arrival at 428. However, I remain hesitant to adopt this position since there is no text-critical basis for it. My logic stands either way: Placing Malachi during the early reign of Xerxes allows sufficient time for Sabbath issues to arise before Nehemiah arrived in 445 (cf. Neh 2:1), a date that scholars more readily accept than Ezra’s. Also, I find Bright, *History*, 373–402, esp. 391–402, convincing in arguing that proposals for an even later arrival of Ezra are too problematic. See Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NAC 10; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 42–50, for one of the best presentations of the traditional view. The issue, then, is really a non-issue for this project since the historical model for Malachi works with either option, the traditional view or Bright’s emendation. Finally, there are also those who simply deny the historicity of much or all of the material in Ezra-Nehemiah. I find this position overreaching, but one of the best studies from this viewpoint is Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (OTR; London: Routledge, 1998), *passim*, esp. 123–53; 192–95. See, e.g., p. 194: “It is difficult to believe that Ezra was so strongly associated with the law historically and yet was completely forgotten or ignored in some circles . . . This confirms the situation already described about the Ezra story: its connection with actual history is extremely dubious.”

contact? Is there anything in Malachi that supports the historical model? Indeed there is: the concept of the royal messenger.

The Royal Messenger Connection

In 480, Xerxes set out with his massive army and renewed Persia's campaigns against Greece. In an incredible display of resources, sheer force, and undaunted determination, the multitude bridged the Hellespont, crossed the sea into Europe, and proceeded westward. As they marched, Xerxes terrorized city after city by sending his royal messengers to their kings and leaders and demanding offerings of earth and water as tokens of submission and compliance.⁷¹ For many, the terrorism employed by these heralds of doom was sufficient enough to make their recipients acquiesce to Xerxes's demands.⁷²

The origin of Xerxes's royal messengers relates to the origin of Persia's innovative communication system. Persia understood that massive armies are of little use without good highways and large quantities of supplies.⁷³ Beginning with Cyrus the Great and continuing through the reigns of Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes (and beyond), Persia levied crippling taxation upon its provinces. During Cyrus's rule, an imperial network of roads emerged, and the ancient Greek historians "all recognize a relationship between [Persia's] regularity of communication and the ability of the central authority to make its presence felt in the conquered countries."⁷⁴ Cyrus established a royal courier system by which the emperor could hastily make demands on provinces for resources and assistance.⁷⁵ He could simply aim his messengers and fire them at will, and his demands efficiently traveled across the empire

⁷¹ Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.131–33.

⁷² On the history of Xerxes and his campaigns against Greece, see Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 187–239; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 515–68; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 238–309; Philip de Souza, Waldemar Heckel, and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *The Greeks at War: From Athens to Alexander* (Oxford: Osprey, 2004), 38–82. See Chapter 3, below, for a more detailed treatment of this topic.

⁷³ See de Souza et al, *The Greeks at War*, 51–56.

⁷⁴ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 357.

⁷⁵ At least Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.17–18 claims that Cyrus created this institution, although his successors, esp. Xerxes, perfected it. For more on the responsibility of satraps to create and maintain roads as well as depots for royal messengers, see Xenophon, *Anab.* 3.4.31; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 371–74.

through a network of speedy couriers under the protection of an imperial highway patrol.⁷⁶ Xerxes perfected this system. Of his communication network, Herodotus writes simply, “There is nothing in this world faster than this system of messengers.”⁷⁷

As mentioned earlier, Xerxes increased the already strenuous imperial demands for taxes and tributes to fund the Persian communication system and his massive army with which he prepared to invade Greece. The arrival of imperial royal messengers in provinces such as Yehud and cities such as Jerusalem were a regular occurrence as these heralds proclaimed the king’s demands. What little hope sprang up from the news that Darius lost at Marathon (490) and later died (486) was snuffed out soon as the harsh policies and requirements of the old regime were replaced by even harsher ones. Since drought and plague meant a shortage of resources in the first place (Mal 3:8–11), there was little left for the people and apparently for YHWH after Persia got the lion’s share.

The apathy that emerged from this situation did not go unnoticed or uncontested. As Xerxes’s royal messengers terrorized the famed cities of ancient Greece with their imperial ultimatums, an emissary of a different stripe engaged the descendants of Israel in this back corner of the empire off the beaten path.⁷⁸ Even this emissary’s name, Malachi, means “My Messenger.”⁷⁹ He did not enter the scene with a message from Persia’s king; rather, he claimed to convey a message from the Israelite God and true king of the world, YHWH. One can imagine the community’s predicament. Should they maintain the *status quo* and keep the empire at bay, or should they risk listening to the prophet and make YHWH their priority?

Even a cursory reading of Malachi through this lens reveals more surface connections with the royal messenger concept. In Mal 1:1, not only is the prophet designated “My

⁷⁶ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 369; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 730–62.

⁷⁷ Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.98, as found in Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 754.

⁷⁸ That is, Yehud lay in the central area of the Levant between the major coastal highway to the west and the King’s Highway to the east past the Jordan River. To use the vernacular, it was “in the sticks.”

⁷⁹ Interpreters disagree about whether Malachi is a name or a title. See Chapter 4, below, for a thorough treatment of this topic.

Messenger,” but also YHWH’s oracle to the people is “by the hand of” (בִּיד) Malachi, a phrase that frequently refers to the hand delivery of an official message in the HB.⁸⁰ The text describes the one sending this message as a “great king,” a king of armies, a ruler whose name will be great and feared among the nations “from the rising of the sun even to its setting” (1:11–14). These ideas share affinities with descriptions of Persian kings in primary sources such as the Cyrus Cylinder: “I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, mighty king.”⁸¹ When Malachi blasts the priests for societal unfaithfulness (2:1–9), the text employs a messenger metaphor: “For the lips of a priest must guard knowledge, and [the people] should be able to seek Torah from his mouth, for he is the messenger of YHWH of Hosts” (2:7). Finally, the ultimate solution for the community’s systemic covenant unfaithfulness in the text is YHWH’s dispatching of an eschatological messenger who will purify their priests and corporate worship (3:1–5). Merely at the surface level, Malachi is brimming with messenger language, concepts, and vocabulary. It is time to connect these dots and investigate Malachi in its entirety as a royal message.

Prior Observations of Messengers in Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Remarkably, some scholars have tip-toed very close to the present thesis without actually diving into it. It is somewhat surprising that these similar observations do not arise in studies strictly or primarily focusing on Malachi. Rather, one can find the most helpful observations about messengers in Malachi in studies on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi as a corpus.

The obvious relationship of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi is that they are postexilic, prophetic books; but, there is certainly more substance to it than that. Scholars have come to view them as a corpus, especially since Ronald Pierce highlighted their literary

⁸⁰ See Chapter 4, *ad. loc.*, for a detailed explanation.

⁸¹ *COS* 2:314–16.

and thematic interconnectivity.⁸² Theories about the compositional history and redaction of this corpus are fairly divergent. Paul Redditt, for example, sees Zech 9–14 as the final unit, one whose author redacted the formerly independent texts (i.e., Haggai, Zech 1–8, Zech 9–14, and Malachi) into their final form.⁸³ Matthias Krieg, however, argues that the redactor of Malachi’s “seven-words” (*Siebenwortes*) was not only the editor of this smaller corpus, but also the last hand to redact the entirety of Hosea–Malachi.⁸⁴ So, there is hardly a consensus on the compositional history of the Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus (hereafter HZM), but scholars generally agree about their strong literary relationship.

There are some observations about HZM that are extremely relevant to the present investigation. Edgar Conrad observes that all three books make numerous references to angels/messengers (singular מלאך, plural מלאכים).⁸⁵ He points out that (A) Haggai is designated as a מלאך and speaks “with the message” (במלאכות) of YHWH (Hag 1:13); (B) Zechariah is surrounded by מלאכים in his visions (Zech 1:11, 12; 2:3; 3:1, 4, 5, 6) and frequently mentions “the angel/messenger who spoke through me” (המלאך הדבר בי) (1:9, 13, 14; 19 [HB 2:2]; 2:3 [HB 2:7]; 4:1, 4, 5; 5:5, 10; 6:4); and (C) Malachi includes מלאך four times: in its title (Mal 1:1), in a reference to the priests (2:7–8), and twice in its depiction of

⁸² See Ronald W. Pierce, “Literary Connectors and a Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi Corpus,” *JETS* 27.3 (1984): 277–89, which details (A) the historical framework of Haggai and Zech 1–8; (B) the unity of Zech 1–14; (C) the use of oracle/burden (משא) in the openings of Zech 9–11, 12–14, and Malachi; (D) the pervasive interrogative element in the corpus; and (E) the narrative that emerges from the corpus that creates a “profile” of the postexilic community. See also Pierce, “A Thematic Development of the Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi Corpus,” *JETS* 27.4 (1984): 401–11, which argues that the corpus tempers the positive tones of individual pericopae with an overall negative assessment of the postexilic community. Cf., however, Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve* (JSOTSup 97; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), *passim*, who sees Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi adding a positive finish, or “resolution,” to Hosea–Malachi, thus completing an overall comedic shape (i.e., a tragic arc that has a positive ending).

⁸³ Paul Redditt, “Themes in Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi,” *Int* 61.2 (2007): 184–97. For an overview of issues regarding Zech 1–8 and Zech 9–14 as originally separate (but now interrelating with each other and well integrated), see Childs, *Introduction*, 474–85; and Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 36–45.

⁸⁴ Krieg, *Mutmaßungen über Maleachi*, 103–36, esp. 103–4, 123–28.

⁸⁵ Edgar W. Conrad, “The End of Prophecy and the Appearance of Angels/Messengers in the Book of the Twelve,” *JSOT* 73 (1997): 65–79.

an eschatological messenger (3:1–2).⁸⁶ So, the word “messenger” is prevalent and even thematic in HZM.

In Conrad’s linear, synchronic reading of the Minor Prophets, he believes it is unclear what makes a prophet or who even is a prophet until the reader finally reaches Zechariah. Although Habakkuk twice uses the designation “the prophet” (הנביא) for its titular character (Hab 1:1; 3:1), the prophetic status of the titular figures in Hosea–Zephaniah is in doubt until “Zechariah identifies these individuals as ‘former prophets’ (הנביאים הראשונים), 1.4; cf. 7.7, 12).”⁸⁷ Conrad also observes that Hos 12:4 [HB 12:5] mentions the divine messenger/angel (מלאך) who visited their ancestor, Jacob. This term then disappears until HZM. He concludes, “The community has lost the angelic/messenger presence of their patriarchal past.”⁸⁸ The reintroduction of מלאכים in HZM implies that prophecy will end and once more God will be present with the covenant people by means of a divine messenger instead of a prophetic word.

Conrad’s observations about messengers in HZM are helpful, but his conclusions are problematic. First, his theory does not take into account that classical prophets had always been conceptualized as messengers.⁸⁹ It seems highly likely that even later Persian-era readers/hearers of Hosea–Malachi would have regarded the frequent use of the messenger formula, the oracles against foreign nations, the demands of YHWH for proper offerings, the addressing of kings, and so forth as messenger speech. Even a work as late as Chronicles regards “prophets” as “messengers,” using the terms synonymously in its grand conclusion of Israelite history (2 Chr 36:15–16). Conrad himself even points out that Haggai is both a

⁸⁶ Ibid., 69–70.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 72. Conrad further sees this clarification of their status as an intertextual allusion to the test of a prophet in Deut 18:21–22.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁸⁹ See Chapter 3, *ad. loc.*

prophet *and* a messenger,⁹⁰ which problematizes his own theory that HZM was phasing out one role with the other. Finally, as Mark Boda points out, Zechariah is explicitly labeled a prophet but *never* a messenger, further undermining a supposed transition.⁹¹ “Conrad’s theory on the messenger theme in Haggai–Malachi is insufficient. Nevertheless, even though Conrad’s argumentation has been found lacking, the evidence he has culled from the corpus provides a way forward . . .”⁹²

Boda himself provides more observations about messengers in HZM, especially regarding some peculiarities about the phrase מלאך יהוה (“messenger of YHWH”). In Zech 1–8, the phrase appears multiple times as a designation for a heavenly angel/messenger (Zech 1:11, 12; 3:1, 3, 6); however, Haggai, Zech 9–14, and Malachi use it differently.

[O]ne discovers outside of Zechariah 1–8 one reference to a מלאך יהוה in each of the three corpora and each reference links this identity with one of the three key socio-functionaries in ancient Israel: prophet (Hag. 1.13), king (Zech. 12.8), and priest (Mal. 2.7). In Zechariah 1–8, where מלאך יהוה appears to be limited to a heavenly rather than human figure, these three socio-functionaries all enter into the scene at one point or another. Of course, a prophetic figure is evident throughout the night vision sequence and the enduring importance of prophecy is clear from the fact that the prophet is consistently given messages to declare to the people.⁹³

In other words, a prophet is a מלאך יהוה in Haggai; a king is a מלאך יהוה in Zech 9–14; and the priest is a מלאך יהוה in Malachi.

In Zech 1–8, all three of these human agents appear, and they have “intimate contact with the realm where מלאכים dwell, that space between earth and heaven (Zech. 5).”⁹⁴

Moreover, in Zech 1–8 the term is used several times for heavenly messengers, or angels. For

⁹⁰ Conrad, “End of Prophecy,” 78.

⁹¹ Mark J. Boda, “Messengers of Hope in Haggai–Malachi,” *JSOT* 32.1 (2007): 122. Boda also notes (A) Conrad’s interpretation of Zech 8:9–13 as the reading of prophetic scrolls at the laying of the temple’s foundation is a stretch; (B) Zech 13:2–6 focuses on the eradication of false prophecy linked to idolatry, not the ceasing of prophecy altogether; and (C) Conrad’s argument depends on HZM being consumed with the theme of temple rebuilding, which simply is not so for Zech 9–14 and Malachi.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

Boda, these observations suggest that Conrad's conclusions lose even more ground. It appears HZM is not merely about messengers in relation to prophets; it is about messengers in relation to prophets, kings, and priests.

Although Boda still affirms the authenticity of the individual texts, he believes these insights about their redaction into a corpus reveal an important theological point. "In the wake of the exile and failed restoration, those responsible for the redaction of the Haggai–Malachi corpus do not lose hope in the promised renewal of prophet, priest and king, but now look for these as 'messengers of hope' with heavenly origins."⁹⁵ He further recommends giving greater attention to a messenger-redaction in Hosea–Malachi and reading this collection with an eye towards hope in future leadership.

I find the observations of Conrad and Boda both insightful and helpful. Although Conrad's conclusions are problematic, his larger point that messengers are a thematic link in HZM and an essential component of its redaction is irrefutable and innovative. Standing on Conrad's shoulders, Boda pushes forward this discussion by leaps and bounds. Not only can one rule out the idea that HZM signals the end of prophecy; but, one can also detect the emergence of a new hope in postexilic theology. Both works provide insights.

Even Boda's work, however, stops short. He could have gone much further on messengers in HZM. The messenger language is obviously there; but, how would the use of such language have looked and sounded in a social context in which the imperial messenger system was administratively enormous, bureaucratically sophisticated, and geographically expansive? How would the people of Yehud have viewed and heard these messenger-prophets in light of the fact that Persian royal messengers appeared frequently and made demands for their king that were as stringent and costly as those made by Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi on behalf of YHWH? Why was this extended metaphor chosen and used so

⁹⁵ Ibid., 131.

consistently in HZM? If one were to construct a model of Persian messengers as a tool for reading HZM, it seems more messenger language would come to the foreground and more theological points would emerge. After all, the studies by Conrad and Boda hinge primarily on one word: מלאך. Are there other messenger images or vocabulary in HZM?

From this discussion, three vital observations emerge. First, the postexilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah also share points of contact with Persian royal messengers. Second, the thesis of the present study shares important points of contact with prior scholarship. Indeed, Conrad and Boda have tip-toed, so to speak, very close to this thesis without actually plunging into it. Although they investigate the thematic pervasiveness of messengers *in* HZM, both stop short of reconstructing a portrait of royal messengers from the three books' cultural *milieu* and factoring it into their studies. Finally, they stop short in that they do not utilize this messenger theme as a hermeneutical tool for (re)reading the texts.

Statement of Thesis

The central thesis of this dissertation is that the royal messenger concept is a root metaphor undergirding the entire book of Malachi. That is, messenger metaphors are pervasive enough throughout the text to conclude that they derive from a common, overarching metaphor. Malachi thereby contextualizes its message(s) in a form and conceptualization that its audience—postexilic inhabitants of Yehud in and near Jerusalem in the Persian Empire during the reign of Xerxes—would have recognized and understood. The book of Malachi is a royal message from YHWH.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY: ADAPTING MICHAEL WARD'S *DONEGALITY* FOR INVESTIGATING MALACHI'S ROOT MESSENGER METAPHOR

The two patterns, art and craft, were welded together.

—Stephen King, *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger*

*What if within the Moones faire shining speare?
What if in every other starre unseene
Of other worldes he happily shoulde heare?*

—Edmund Spenser, *The Fairy Queene*

This chapter details the methodology used in the procedures of subsequent chapters. The essential thesis of this dissertation—that there is a root messenger metaphor in Malachi that fits best during the reign of Xerxes—requires an eclectic methodology addressing both appropriate literary concerns and relevant historical reconstructions. For this multifaceted task, I am adapting Michael Ward's methodology for interpreting the corpus of C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* in his groundbreaking and highly-regarded study, *Planet Narnia*.¹ Though perhaps a curious choice at first glance, what makes Ward's methodology ideal for this project is that it effectively illuminates previously obscure metaphors in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, an accomplishment that is also a crucial objective of the present study.

ELABORATING ON "ROOT METAPHOR"

Before entering a descriptive exercise regarding Ward's investigation, it is necessary to clarify some terminology. I am essentially² claiming that Malachi is embedded with several messenger metaphors whose totality reveals a root metaphor for the entire book. None of the

¹ Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

² I say "essentially" because there are, of course, other less central claims and exercises.

individual instances to be investigated would merit that claim. The sum of a plethora of examples throughout Malachi, however, would be hard to dismiss.

Zoltan Kövecses makes an observation that proves helpful:

Some metaphors, conventional or novel, may run through entire literary texts without necessarily “surfacing.” What one sometimes finds at the surface level of a literary text are specific micrometaphors, but “underlying” these metaphors is a megametaphor that makes these surface micrometaphors coherent.³

What Kövecses calls a megametaphor (and sometimes “extended metaphor”), I am calling a *root metaphor*. The imagery from this label is intended to suggest that the many individual instances derive from (or take root in) an overarching and governing metaphor. Put otherwise, the messenger micrometaphors are sufficient enough to conclude that there is also a messenger megametaphor. Katherine Hayes makes an observation about prophetic passages displaying a mourning-earth metaphor that is also valuable for the discussion here.

In all these instances, individual images and phrases are placed within an integrated context of meaning and hence gain fuller meaning. The recurrent patterns of phraseology, imagery, and theme draw the reader beyond the bounds of the particular text, even where the given expression of a theme or phrase is partial or merely suggested.⁴

Determining a root metaphor is valuable for making the micrometaphors more effective and giving them “fuller meaning” and stronger impact. Conceivably, it would also be valuable for discovering previously unrecognized instances of micrometaphors.

The idea of a root messenger metaphor is essentially an example of what George Lakoff and Mark Johnson deem an ontological metaphor, one in which experiences take on

³ Zoltan Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51–52. He illustrates this point with examples from Shakespeare, Dylan Thomas, etc. See also similar points about extended metaphors in Paul Werth, “Extended Metaphor—A Text-World Account,” *Language and Literature* 3.2 (1994): 79–103. Also, see Elena Semino, *Metaphor in Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 36–41 for an informative discussion of an extended migraine metaphor in Ewan McEwan’s *Atonement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001).

⁴ Katherine M. Hayes, “*The Earth Mourns*”: *Prophetic Metaphor and Oral Aesthetic* (SBLAB 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 221.

characteristics of “discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind” so that people can make reference to and reason about them.⁵ As Brent Sandy explains,

Metaphors begin with something nonfigurative and make it figurative by using it to describe something beyond the scope of its normal meaning. That is, metaphors describe *x* while referring to *y*. For example: “Some homeowners are sitting ducks for unscrupulous window salesmen.” With the reference to ducks (*y*), a common conception of vulnerability is applied to people (*x*).⁶

This ability to make something figurative to describe something else is why “Metaphors are especially useful for such abstract concepts. The more abstract the concept, the more valuable metaphors become to conceptualize the abstraction.”⁷ The messenger metaphor is ontological because it packages abstract concepts such as covenant unfaithfulness and making YHWH the community’s priority in a tangible form that the people of Yehud experienced: the arrival of royal messengers with the king’s demands. Abstractions become concrete.⁸

The use of this root metaphor in Malachi would have been effective precisely because of the imagery achieved. G. B. Caird notes, “The full stock of a book’s non-literal language, and more particularly its comparative language, is its imagery.”⁹ He clarifies, however, that imagery does not merely mean “picture language,” but also “a great deal more that is incapable of visualisation.”¹⁰ Although a root messenger metaphor would at times conceivably manifest itself in visual micrometaphors (e.g., “by the hand of Malachi,” picturing a messenger with scroll in hand), other related but abstract concepts such as

⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 25.

⁶ D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruninghooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸ David Jasper helpfully observes, “The word *metaphor* is derived directly from a Greek word ‘μεταφέρω’ which means ‘I carry across. . . . Such stretched language is called *figurative*—language which does not mean what it says.” That further elucidates why metaphors are helpful and at times even necessary when dealing with abstractions. Something concrete can be said about a concrete noun, but the meaning can be “carried across” and applied to the abstract noun. See Jasper, *The New Testament and the Literary Imagination* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986), 27.

⁹ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 149. Cf. the discussion of metaphors and “corpus linguistics” in Murray Knowles and Rosamund Moon, *Introducing Metaphor* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 74–77.

¹⁰ Caird, *Language and Imagery*, 149.

sovereignty (i.e., the king's rule) and covenant fidelity (i.e., the community's obedience) could be part of the achieved imagery though not "picture language."

Caird explains that metaphors provide lenses: "When we look at an object through a lens, we concentrate on the object and ignore the lens."¹¹ This observation is helpful; but, I would say that there is actually an inter-play. The lens also requires some attention in order to be focused and refocused as the objects in view approach and recede again through the looking glass. In this investigation, the royal messenger root metaphor is a lens through which to read/view Malachi. In this case we do not "ignore" the lens—to contrary, it is the goal to establish it. After all, readers today are quite removed from the community who originally received this message and presumably do not engage Persian royal emissaries often. "Metaphor as a function of community means that hearers who are not a part of that community will be less prepared to identify and understand metaphors."¹² The tasks of this investigation, then, are (A) to determine how prolific the individual instances are in Malachi, and (B) to demonstrate that it is (or is not) sufficient enough to claim that there is a root metaphor in Malachi. The methodology that emerges from Ward's *Planet Narnia* is well-suited for this endeavor.

OVERVIEW OF WARD'S *PLANET NARNIA*

During the earliest stages of inquiry, while noticing individual messenger metaphors in Malachi and contemplating a historical situation in which these and other characteristics of the book would make sense (and be particularly effective), I coincidentally came across numerous references to a recent volume: Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia*. Reading this work proved serendipitous as it aided me in solidifying my gestating thoughts about Malachi and messengers.

¹¹ Ibid., 152.

¹² Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruninghooks*, 65.

This critical reinvestigation of C. S. Lewis’s beloved series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, has made quite the splash in literary circles and Lewis scholarship. Ward considers personal correspondences, dialogs, and previous writings of Lewis in which he hints that there is an overarching idea that ties together all the books of the Narniad.¹³ From these hints as well as three decades of personal research on Lewis, Ward states boldly, “I think I have stumbled upon the secret imaginative key to the series.”¹⁴

What exactly is this imaginative key? Ward first demonstrates that the Medieval, pre-Copernican perception of the universe—there are seven planets, each with its unique qualities, atmosphere, and characteristics¹⁵—occupies a central place in Lewis’s imagination and writings. For instance, Lewis regards this conception as a central Medieval literary convention in his critical study, *The Discarded Image*.¹⁶ Also, the protagonists of his pre-Narniad, science-fiction Ransom Trilogy¹⁷ visit these planets and literally experience their unique environments. Other examples abound.¹⁸ These Medieval planets constitute the interpretive key for *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Ward makes a formidable case that each of the Narniad’s seven books takes place in one of their unique environments/atmospheres. Viewed with this *lens*, the series looks something like this:

<u>Book of the Narniad</u>	<u>Corresponding Medieval Planet</u>
<i>The Lion, the With, and the Wardrobe</i>	Jupiter ¹⁹
<i>Prince Caspian</i>	Mars
<i>The Voyage of the Dawn Treader</i>	Sol (i.e., the Sun)
<i>The Silver Chair</i>	Luna (i.e., the Moon)

¹³ Lewis scholars often use the designation Narniad as shorthand for the entire series.

¹⁴ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 5.

¹⁵ On this Medieval perception, see esp. Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World, According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (New York: Octagon, 1970); Naomi Reed Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001).

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), *passim*. See also Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (London: Bles, 1956).

¹⁷ Also known as the Space Trilogy, these works are *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1974); on Medieval aspects of this series, see David C. Downing, *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis’s Ransom Trilogy* (Amherst: University of Manchester Press, 1992), esp. Chapter 3, “The Recovered Image: Elements of Classicism and Medievalism” (pp. 60–82).

¹⁸ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 23–41.

¹⁹ Ward argues that this one starts out with a cold, Saturn atmosphere, but there is a constant in-breaking of a Jupiter atmosphere.

The Horse and His Boy
The Magician's Nephew
The Last Battle

Mercury
 Venus
 Saturn²⁰

The body of *Planet Narnia* (Chapters 3–9) demonstrates each of these connections in turn and discusses their impact on reading and interpreting each book. Ward's presentation is so convincing that I have yet to find a dissenting voice in Lewis scholarship. To the contrary, the guild generally affirms Ward's model, usually enthusiastically.²¹

Ward coins the term "donegality" to explain his view of the Narniad's true nature. This designation is an obvious homage to Lewis, to be sure, who loved the city of Donegal. Ward writes of the term, "biographically it is appropriate because Lewis loved Donegal all his life. Semantically it is appropriate because of the imagined etymology: 'don' (as presiding intelligence) + égalité (equality), yielding a word meaning 'something equal to a presiding intelligence.'"²² Ward adds, "The donegality of a story is its peculiar and deliberated atmosphere or quality; its pervasive and purposed integral tone or flavour; its tutelary but tacit spirit, a spirit that the author consciously sought to conjure."²³ In each book of the Narniad, then, the appropriate planetary atmosphere permeates the story's environment as its unique characteristics influence everything about the story.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, for example, exhibits a Jupiter donegality.

The Medieval perception of Jove/Jupiter (as well as Lewis's perception in previous writings) was one of mirth and joy associated with verdant meadows and landscapes, renewal, new life,

²⁰ Ward argues that this book is set primarily in a Saturn atmosphere, but at the end there is a new in-breaking of the warm, jovial, Jupiter atmosphere: "The truth of Joviality springs out of the chaotic remnants of Saturnised Narnia" (Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 212). In this sense, then, there is symmetry in the first and last novels.

²¹ What makes this all the more remarkable is that reviews and engagements are numerous and steadily appearing. See, e.g., the favorable reviews in Patricia M. Davis, review of *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis*, by Michael Ward, *ATR* 90.4 (2008): 844–45; Don W. King, review of *Planet Narnia*, *ChrLit* 58.1 (2008): 130–34, though King suspects there may not be only one governing planet for each book; and Peter Schuurman, review of *Planet Narnia*, *CTJ* 44.2 (2009): 441–43.

²² Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 75.

²³ *Ibid.* If I find any point of Ward's program reasonably disputable, it is his belief that a work's donegality, as he defines it, is "inhabited unconsciously by the reader" (*ibid.*). Although that may have been the case with the Narniad prior to *Planet Narnia*, how could one know of this work and ever again read the Narniad unconscious of the planetary atmospheres in the series? That is to say, it was only unconscious before it was revealed. If Malachi has a messenger donegality, it would have been a conscious quality for its earliest readers, though contemporary readers would need to have it revealed, i.e., rediscovered.

and warmth expressed by the color red. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the cold, fearful, colorless climate in Narnia continually gives ground to a Jovial atmosphere as the snow melts, vegetation steadily appears, and hope emerges in the hearts, speech, and songs of the Narnians.²⁴

This Jupiter/Jovial donegality explains the otherwise puzzling appearance of Father Christmas (i.e., Santa Claus) in the book. Whereas the Narnians keep lamenting that it is always winter but never Christmas, Father Christmas does finally emerge, sporting bright, rosy red cheeks and a red robe “bright as holly-berries.” Upon first seeing him, the children even exclaim, “By Jove!” Father Christmas, embodying mirth and other qualities of Medieval Jupiter, is indeed a Jovial decoration. Ward offers a plethora of similar examples, such as Peter’s shield, which bears the emblem of “a red lion, bright as a ripe strawberry.” There are also the constant, Jupiter-like, kingly descriptions of the lion Aslan, whose royalty receives emphasis in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* unmatched in the other books of the Narniad.²⁵ The result is a Jupiter donegality.²⁶

Although this way of reading the Narniad is new, it is not entirely surprising. After all, Lewis was a formidable Medieval scholar. Mary Frances Zambreno, herself a medievalist, notes that “C. S. Lewis was one of the foremost medieval scholars of his generation, and one of the most influential of any generation.”²⁷ As already demonstrated, Lewis published essential studies on Medieval literature and conventions. He was certainly

²⁴ Again, Ward believes that a cold, gloomy, hopeless Saturn donegality is giving way to an in-breaking Jupiter donegality in this work. See *ibid.*, esp. 57–60.

²⁵ The significance of this, of course, is that Jupiter/Jove is the king of the gods, a royal figure. Ward makes the point that, for all intents and purposes, “Aslan focusses and condenses (we might also say, incarnates) that presiding spirit” (*ibid.*, 57).

²⁶ *Ibid.*: “In the first Chronicle [Lewis] goes inside Jove, as it were, and writes from within specifically Jovial imagery so that Joviality is turned into a story.”

²⁷ Mary Frances Zambreno, “A Reconstructed Image: Medieval Time and Space in The Chronicles of Narnia,” in *Revisiting Narnia: Fantasy, Myth, and Religion in C. S. Lewis’ Chronicles*, ed. Shanna Caughey (Dallas: Benbella, 2005), 253. See also Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, “‘Standing on Lewis’s Shoulders’: C. S. Lewis as Critic of Medieval Literature,” *Studies in Medievalism* 3.3–4 (1991): 257–78.

an expert in this field and one of its major influencers and contributors in the twentieth century.²⁸

Moreover, Lewis was frustrated with the literary criticism of his own time, which in his estimation celebrated any new work that ignored older literary conventions (one might say, anything *avant-garde*) while snubbing any new work with traditional elements, a point he makes crystal clear in his essay, “Christianity and Literature.”²⁹ In the same work, he vigorously defends writing stories using older conventions. In *Planet Narnia*, it is reasonable to conclude that this is essentially what Ward sees in the Narniad: the series manifests an older, Medieval convention—the presiding influence of the seven planets.

Just four years prior to *Planet Narnia*, Zambreno made similar yet distinct points about the Narniad. She explains how the geography in the series reflects Medieval cartography, especially the central location of Narnia in the cosmos. She also discusses the seven Medieval planets—or worlds—as the basis for the multiplicity of worlds in the series (e.g., Narnia, London).³⁰ So, prior to Ward’s work, scholars do recognize the Narniad’s dependence upon Medieval conventions; but, Ward’s unique thesis that a Medieval planet governs each book is truly an innovation in Lewis scholarship.³¹ Still, his model is not entirely a surprise for those well-versed in Lewis’s writings. That is not say its impact is cheapened! *Planet Narnia* has set Lewis scholarship abuzz and changed its landscape forever. After the dust settles from one’s first contact with Ward’s new paradigm, however, there is a feeling that it just makes sense given Lewis’s mastery of and affection for Medieval conventions and his previous focus specifically on the seven Medieval planets.

²⁸ One should note that Lewis continually honed his expertise through a long friendship with J. R. R. Tolkien, whose authoritative scholarship in this area Lewis both admired and frequently references in his own works.

²⁹ C. S. Lewis, “Christianity and Literature,” in Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1967), 1–11, esp. 6–7.

³⁰ Zambreno, “A Reconstructed Image,” *passim*.

³¹ For more on the Medieval aspects of the Narniad, see David C. Downing, *Into the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), esp. Chapter 5, “Classical and Medieval Elements” (pp. 107–27), which looks at Medieval themes (but not cosmology).

EXAMPLE: THE LUNAR DONEGALITY OF *THE SILVER CHAIR*

Since it is Ward's method for investigating and demonstrating his paradigm that I am adopting for the succeeding chapters, at this point it will be helpful to observe how he handles a specific book of the *Narniad*. So consistent and convincing is Ward's presentation that any book of the series would do; so, perhaps at risk of being arbitrary, I will simply use my personal favorite, *The Silver Chair*. Ward discusses this book in Chapter 6, "Luna,"³² where he demonstrates that *The Silver Chair* exhibits a Lunar donegality, which in turn impacts reading and interpretation of the story.

Reconstruction

Before actually turning to *The Silver Chair*, Ward first demonstrates that Lewis did indeed know and make use of the Medieval perception of Luna in his other writings. Ward provides no specific label for this task, but I shall call it *reconstruction*, meaning he constructs/develops a portrait of Medieval Luna from other materials.

In his scholarly writings, Lewis explains that Luna's unique characteristics derive from her unique place in the cosmos. She is part of the heavens, yet borders and has some contact with earth's atmosphere (in Medieval perception). Luna is the closest to earth, a liminal figure, sometimes exhibiting heavenly, incorruptible characteristics, but sometimes earthly, corruptible ones. Thus for Lewis she possesses a remarkable ambiguity. He explains,

Unless this 'great divide' is firmly fixed in our minds, every passage in Donne or Drayton or whom you will that mentions 'translunary' or 'sublunary' will lose its intended force. We shall take 'under the moon' as a vague synonym, like our 'under the sun,' for 'everywhere,' when in reality it is used with precision.³³

Lewis demonstrates how Gower and Chaucer use "under the moon" not to mean *on earth*, but rather as having doubts, uncertainties, ambiguities, and corruptibility.³⁴

³² Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 121–39. Luna, or the moon, was one of the Medieval planets.

³³ Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 108 (Cf. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 122). Obviously Lewis interacts with some writers who were a bit later than Medieval times (e.g., Donne) but still perpetuated Medieval conventions in their writings.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Luna's ambiguous nature is heightened by her constant waxing and waning. This flux meant for Medieval writers that Luna is a watery, shifting planet, a quality evident in the constant changing of the tides under her influence. Unlike the other planets, Luna is not static. She is unstable, yet she is still one of the heavenly worlds—thus her ambiguity.

In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis explains how this unstable behavior was the impetus for another one of Luna's key Medieval characteristics:

In men she produces wandering, and that in two senses. She may make them travellers so that, as Gower says, the man born under Luna will 'seche manye londes strange' [seek many strange lands] . . . But she may also produce 'wandering' of the wits, especially that periodical insanity which was first meant by the word *lunacy*.

Thus Shakespeare's "dangerous, unsafe lunes" in *Winter's Tale* and *Hamlet* have precisely this meaning. He notes further, "Dante assigns the Moon's sphere to those who have entered the conventual life and abandoned it for some good or pardonable reason,"³⁵ those who have left the stability of the convent for the chaos outside it. In an essay on fairy stories, Lewis provides a telling response to those who suggest that, in the *Narniad*, he "drew up a list of basic Christian truths and hammered out 'allegories' to embody them." He says of this explanation, "This is all pure *moonshine*. I couldn't write in that way at all" [emphasis mine].³⁶ Even here Lewis attributes the critics' insanity to Luna's silver light and sometimes maddening influence, her pale moonshine.³⁷

Along with a liquid/fluid nature and an atmosphere that produces lunacy, there is one more Medieval characteristic of Luna that was significant for Lewis: the color silver. In his study of Spenser, Lewis explains how a single instance of carelessness when reading *The Fairie Queene* can lead to interpretive error. To illustrate this point, he discusses an apparent

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109; cf. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 122–23.

³⁶ C. S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," in Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays & Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego, New York, London: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 36.

³⁷ In using this word, was Lewis hinting at his real design in the series? Perhaps he killed two birds with one stone, stamping out a misperception while sneaking in a (rather snarky) hint of his planetary architecture.

misreading by a scholar who claims the unnamed figure in a particular stanza is the character Britomart.³⁸ The imagery should have led him to conclude that it was in fact the moon goddess Diana. Lewis gives a host of reasons from the text for his point, but one in particular makes the error especially egregious: her buskins (i.e., boots) were silver. Lewis says bluntly, “Silver is a Lunar metal, and therefore appropriate for Diana.”³⁹

Ward also demonstrates that Lewis drew from Luna’s Medieval characteristics in *That Hideous Strength*, the third novel of his Ransom Trilogy. Certain characters are baffled when the powers/gods of the heavens come down to Earth. They thought these gods could not cross the realm of the moon, that it was a boundary (suggesting Luna’s contact with both worlds); but, as it turns out, that realm is actually malleable and penetrable by the gods in the right circumstances (suggesting Luna’s ambiguity and fluidity). Ward draws attention to a very telling, reflective statement by Ransom, the primary protagonist:

Sulva is she whom mortals call the Moon. She walks in the lowest sphere. The rim of the world that was wasted goes through her. Half of her orb is turned towards us and shares our curse. Her other half looks to Deep Heaven; happy would he be who could cross that frontier and see the fields from the other side.

There is simply not room here to detail the plethora of further examples Ward highlights. Suffice it to say that, in discussions of the Moon, characters refer to its tarnished silver and “spear-head of madness,” and their behavior is described at times as “pure lunacy.”⁴⁰

Finally, Ward observes, “Luna appears in at least six of Lewis’s poems. She never dominates a whole poem, but is merely added in as one symbolic ingredient among many.”⁴¹ In these writings, Lewis freely draws from her Medieval traits. Ward’s description of a passage from “The Queen of Drum” is revealing:

³⁸ In *The Fairie Queene*, the female character Britomart is practically the epitome of virtue and allegorically represents the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I.

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Spenser’s Images of Life*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 61–63, quote from p. 62; cf. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 123.

⁴⁰ These examples are merely the tip of the iceberg. See Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 123–26 for a brilliant and thorough discussion of Lewis’s use of Luna in *That Hideous Strength*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

The passage features the Lunar metal ('silvery lakes,' 'silver haze,' 'elven silver,' 'silver rush'); Lunar water ('rivers,' 'lakes,' 'smooth like liquid,' 'like the moon herself, / Lapped in a motion which is also rest'); Lunar ambiguity ('The queen whose shafts destroy and bless'); a range of Lunar goddesses (Hecate, Titania, Artemis, Diana 'the pure Huntress riding low'); and Lunar deception (the 'thornbush, milky white' that is mistaken for 'a giant's head').⁴²

Probably the most telling example is the stanza on Luna in Lewis's cosmological poem, "The Planets."⁴³

Lady LUNA, in light canoe,
 By friths and shallows of fretted cloudland
 Cruises monthly; with chrism of dews
 And drench of dream, a drizzling glamour,
 Enchants us—the cheat! changing sometime
 A mind to madness, melancholy pale,
 Bleached with gazing on her blank count'nance
 Orb'd and ageless. In earth's bosom
 The shower of her rays, sharp-feathered light
 Reaching downward, ripens silver,
 Forming and fashioning female brightness,
 —Metal maidenlike. Her moist circle
 Is nearest earth.

This poem captures Luna's Medieval traits. In particular, her watery nature stands out: "And it is this watery aspect which is at the forefront in his Narnian expression of Lunar qualities in *The Silver Chair*."⁴⁴

The Lunar *Poiema* in *The Silver Chair*

After reconstruction, Ward's next task in each chapter is to demonstrate the planetary *poiema* (transliterated from the Greek *ποίημα*) of the book under consideration. He defines *poiema* simply as "something made"⁴⁵ and uses it to refer to the Lewis's deliberate use of decorations in each novel with specific imagery of, allusions to, and qualities of a Medieval planet's

⁴² Ibid.; the passage under discussion is from C. S. Lewis, "The Queen of Drum," in Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (1969; reprint; London: HarperCollins, 1994).

⁴³ Lines 1–13 of C. S. Lewis, "The Planets," in Lewis, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Fount, 1994). See Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 126–27. "The Planets" describes each of the Medieval worlds, beginning with Luna.

⁴⁴ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 127.

⁴⁵ Ibid., *passim*.

atmospheric characteristics and environmental effects upon the story and its characters. The Lunar *poiema* in *The Silver Chair* establishes a Lunar donegality in it.

The most important type of *poiema* in *The Silver Chair* is its water decorations. “Lewis has the Moon’s drenching, drizzling, dewy effects in mind throughout *The Silver Chair*. It is a theme introduced on the very first page of the first chapter where we meet a girl called Jill Pole, who is crying on a ‘damp little path.’ She is joined by Eustace . . . who sits down on ‘grass that was soaking wet.’” Ward’s keen observation does not stop there. That same, opening scene bombards readers with water imagery. The water “dripped off the laurel trees,” droplets “drip off of leaves,” and there are “drops of water on the grass.” The scene is soaking wet. It is the beginning of an ambiance. Ward adds, “Nothing of significance to the plot comes of these images, but they are beginning to create a definite atmosphere.”⁴⁶

This watery, lunar atmosphere continues. In the next chapter, Lewis describes Jill’s tears and a nearby stream before Aslan blows her from England to Narnia, into a “wet foginess” of cloud from which she emerges with “her clothes wet.” She is immediately drenched by a tide, leaving her to exclaim, “How wet I am!” Ward draws further attention to several baths in the book, the frequent rains, Jill’s “wet pillow,” Caspian’s “watery eyes,” watery fountains, a lengthy and detailed traversing of the marshes, and so forth. For Ward, however, the most telling element is the small creature (a watery marsh-wiggle) named Puddleglum who joins the quest with Jill and Eustace.

Puddleglum belongs to a race who do ‘watery’ work and he himself is thrice described as a ‘wet blanket.’ A ‘flood’ features among the disasters he imagines have struck the land; he says his firewood ‘may be wet’; his pipe-smoke trickles out of his bowl like ‘mist;’ he mentions the river Shribble and its lack of bridges; predicts ‘damp bowstrings’; snores like a waterfall; wonders if rain is on its way. His drunkenness in chapter 7 is a further manifestation of Luna, both because it causes confusion and because it comes from liquidity.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 128.

For the entirety of their quest, Lewis consistently draws attention to bodies of water, dampness, rain, moisture, and so forth, successfully conjuring a watery, lunar atmosphere. It is quite effective, too—the reader feels drenched!

The liquidity is not the only lunar decoration, or *poiema*. “From the instability of water we move to the spatial and mental instability that derive from Lunar influence.”⁴⁸ The three are trying to find Prince Rilian, who became lost during one of his “wanderings.” As the quest proceeds, the characters constantly encounter dead ends, wrong turns, and travel frustrations. They are literally wandering: “Luna inspires men to ‘seche manye londs strange,’ and in *The Silver Chair* there are a total of five different lands, more than in any other Chronicle.” Furthermore, Prince Rilian is “a man out of his wits.” Every night he is given to madness, turning into a “lunatic.”⁴⁹

There is yet more Lunar *poiema*. Through all these wanderings, the physical descriptions in the story reflect Luna’s physical features.

[T]he adjective ‘pale’ . . . is found attached to almost every available noun: pale Earthmen, pale sand, pale lanterns, pale beaches, pale lamps, pale light, Eustace’s face is ‘pale and dirty,’ Rilian’s face is ‘as pale as putty’; a Lord ‘with a pale face’ welcomes Caspian home who is himself ‘very pale’; Aslan touches the ‘pale faces’ of Jill and Eustace.⁵⁰

Along with this paleness, Lewis places silver throughout the work. There are silver shields, silver mail on Caspian, a silver trumpet, a lamp hanging by a silver chain, patches of “watery silver,” silver utensils, and so forth. One of the turning points is when the three finally enter Bism, the Underworld, where they see “a pure silver light,” encounter a witch who has “soft silver laughs,” and where there is “real silver” everywhere.⁵¹

Interestingly, the Narnian moon disappears for most of the novel. “In chapter 4, Glimfeather carries Jill by moonlight to the Parliament of Owls, but by the time the meeting

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 128–30.

is over ‘the moon had disappeared’ and it does not properly reappear for eleven chapters.”⁵²

Instead, Lewis points out that various lights are “not moonlight,” and the moon itself appears in Jill’s dreams, but not outside them.

Only after the adventurers have escaped from Underland are they again allowed to see ‘moonlight,’ a ‘moonlit night.’ And when Jill and Eustace clamber ‘out from the blackness into the moonlight’ and see ‘the moon and the huge stars overhead,’ they find that they can’t ‘quite believe’ any longer in the existence of Underland, that sub-lunary world.⁵³

The result seems to be that the Lunar atmosphere is out of kilter, and thus Luna’s characteristic effects become intensified, if not oppressive. This dire situation is something that the quest repairs.

Besides these types of examples, Ward also points out echoes in *The Silver Chair* of Lunar passages in the works of, for example, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Dante. I would even add to Ward’s body of evidence that the atmospheric onslaught on the characters’ sanity intensifies as they travel further into Underworld’s recesses, something akin to the increasing madness that emerges as the ship sails deeper up the river in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. After all, the climax comes when they do finally reach Rilian and find a startling convergence of lunar decorations: a lunatic sits upon a silver chair. The only way to adequately represent the thoroughness of Ward’s observations would be to copy the entire section here.⁵⁴ The Lunar *poiema* in the story achieves a Lunar donegality, or qualitative atmosphere, that exerts an influence upon both the characters of the story and its readers.

The Lunar Logos of *The Silver Chair*

After detailing a book’s *poiema*, Ward’s next task in each chapter is to delve into its *logos*. He defines *logos* (transliterating the Greek *λογος*) simply as “something said” and uses it to refer to the message and meaning a book exhibits (especially in light of its donegality).

⁵² Ibid., 130.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, 127–32, for Ward’s full treatment of the Lunar *poiema* in *The Silver Chair*.

“Indeed, until we realise the nature of each Chronicle as ‘something made’ (*poiema*), we will have little chance successfully to interpret it as ‘something said’ (*logos*).”⁵⁵

For Ward, the most important element of each Chronicle’s *logos* is its Christological message. Aslan is the metaphorical Christ figure in the Narniad, a point that is undisputed since it is made clear in Lewis’s own writings.⁵⁶ Ward sees each Chronicle as having a unique message about Christology derived from its particular portrait of the lion Aslan coupled with its unique donegality. Thus *Prince Caspian*, for example—corresponding with Mars—highlights Christ’s martial qualities⁵⁷; and, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*—corresponding to Jove/Jupiter—highlights joy and divine kingship (as well as the kingship of humanity as those who bear the *imago dei*).

Because Luna touches both spheres, the incorruptible heavenlies as well as corruptible Earth, her presiding donegality is quite complicated and too profound to fully represent here. Ward’s section on the matter⁵⁸ is satiated with insights. He does make a helpful observation, however, that gets at the heart of the matter in *The Silver Chair* and is useful here: “Aslan never incarnates himself in Narnia, nor does anyone express a hope that he might become present or remember a time when he was. The children only encounter him before they enter Narnia and after they leave it.”⁵⁹ That is, Aslan is absent; not from the entire book, but from its central narrative taking place in Narnia. Luna’s atmosphere is out of kilter, and it is as though the children find themselves in a world whose donegality (i.e., predominantly the corruptible, fluid side of Luna nearest Earth) cannot easily exhibit a quality about Aslan or the Christ.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 42. See also p. 67: “Having paid close attention to the *poiema* . . . we are now better equipped to consider the message that the story communicates, its *logos*.”

⁵⁶ On this point, see esp. Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (London, New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 423–25, 431–38; Russell W. Dalton, “Aslan Is on the Move: Images of Providence in The Chronicles of Narnia,” in *Revisiting Narnia: Fantasy, Myth, and Religion in C. S. Lewis’ Chronicles*, ed. Shanna Caughey (Dallas: BenBella, 2005), 129–45; and Downing, *Into the Wardrobe*, 65–87.

⁵⁷ Meaning, essentially, that something has to be defeated by the Christ, soteriologically speaking.

⁵⁸ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 132–39.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 134.

It is this contact with both spheres, however, from whence emerges its *logos*. After all, in the incarnation, Christ was fully God and fully human (traditionally, and for Lewis).

Understood in this light, the theological issue at stake in *The Silver Chair* is not how to ‘bring Christ down,’ but how to imitate Christ’s filial submission to the Father, how to accept second billing. For though Aslan does not descend, Jill and Eustace do; they are, as it were, ‘incarnated’ into Narnia: their task is to remain anchored to the Mountain of Aslan and not to ‘go native’ down where the air is thick. . . . Will the *missio dei* be fulfilled or not?

Entering such a world is like entering pure lunacy; and yet, that is what the Christ did. It is also what Christ-followers encounter. They become locations of divine presence (Spirit), residing in a sphere that is no longer their home and in which they are characteristically out of place. Ward details a passage near the end of the novel, and his penetrating observations provide a sufficient last word here for this matter of the *logos* of *The Silver Chair*:

[I]n chapter 16 [Aslan] suddenly turns up behind Jill, ‘so bright and real and strong that everything else began at once to look pale and shadowy.’ However, when we examine the passage carefully, we find that his arrival is not quite so simple. Jill has apparently summoned Aslan by saying, ‘I wish I was at home,’ and instantly a deep voice from behind her says, ‘I have come.’ ‘I have come’ is not, on the face of it, a granting of Jill’s wish, but we are meant to understand that Jill is now ‘at home’ because she is in the presence of Aslan. And where is the location of this ‘home’? Jill, not perceiving what has happened, repeats her wish, asking, ‘May we go home now?’ Aslan replies: ‘Yes. I have come to bring you Home.’ The capital ‘H’ and the verb ‘bring,’ rather than the expected ‘take,’ help make Lewis’s point that home can be no other place than where the Christ-figure is.⁶⁰

ADAPTING WARD’S METHODOLOGY

Ward’s methodology in *Planet Narnia* is ideal for this project because it so similarly deals with metaphor in the Narniad. The individual, planetary decorations in each Chronicle are instances of micrometaphors. They are rooted in an extended metaphor, a megametaphor, and their cumulative effect creates a donegality, a presiding and influencing environment whose ambiance and presence impacts not only the narrative, but also reading, interpretation, and meaning.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 132.

Remarkably, this model holds true not merely for each Chronicle, but also for the entire Narniad. For each book, a single planet constitutes the source of the micrometaphors in it. Thus instances of silver, lunacy, wandering, water, and paleness metaphorically reference Luna, the root metaphor. For the entire Narniad, however, each book/planet is itself a micrometaphor rooted in the Medieval conception of the cosmos. The seven heavens, as it were, are the source—the megametaphor—and each Chronicle is rooted in this concept.

In Chapter 3 of this study, I employ the first task of Ward’s method: reconstruction. Before investigating messenger imagery and how it affects interpretation, there must be a model of comparison, a lens through which to investigate this thesis in the first place. Chapter 3 builds this lens. Here I detail not only the Persian messenger system and its place in Persian imperial rule, but also an important trajectory in biblical scholarship that compares all the Hebrew prophets with ANE royal messengers. The significance of this chapter for the entire project is that it establishes two wells from whence the book of Malachi could draw its *poiema*.

In Chapter 4, I employ the second task of Ward’s method, *poiema*. The most important accomplishment of *Planet Narnia* is Ward’s superb and convincing presentation of the pervasive planetary decorations in each Chronicle. The imagery is too clear and simply too present to ignore. In Chapter 4, I venture through the looking glass (i.e., the reconstructed messenger lens) and detail individual instances, or micrometaphors, of messenger imagery.

In Chapter 5, I employ the third task of Ward’s method, *logos*. Here he answers the pressing question, “What difference does it make?” For readers of the Narniad, uncovering this planetary model and Medieval convention *will* impact interpretation, whether or not one accepts Ward’s own reading of each Chronicle.⁶¹ In Chapter 5, I discuss the impact of

⁶¹ His readings are so formidable that any future critical study that diverges from his interpretation must interact with Ward’s work or risk immediate irrelevancy. That is hardly to say one must agree with him! But, ignoring Ward’s presentation and argumentation would be a drastic oversight.

Malachi's root messenger metaphor for interpretation, primarily in the task of constructing theology from the book but also for the task of evaluating previous Malachi scholarship.

CHAPTER 3

RECONSTRUCTION: BUILDING A MESSENGER LENS FOR READING MALACHI

Ideas do not literally struggle to propagate themselves (like the ‘selfish gene,’ the ‘selfish meme’ is a metaphor); rather, ideas that are well adapted to their environment will naturally spread through the population.

—Neville Morley, *Theories, Models, and Concepts in Ancient History*

At a general level, it is clear from a moment’s thought that all history involves selection. History shares this with other knowing.

—N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*

This chapter constructs the lens through which to investigate messenger decorations and imagery in Malachi (i.e., its messenger *poiema*). As made clear in Chapter 2, this task corresponds to Ward’s reconstruction¹ of a specific Medieval planet in order to use that planet’s attributes and qualities as a lens for reading the corresponding book of the Narniad. So, in Chapters 3–9 of *Planet Narnia*, Ward first builds a model. That model depicts a planet. Using that model, Ward is able discover that planet’s characteristics and effects in the corresponding book. Likewise, this chapter builds a model.

First, there is a selection of topics from a specific period of Persian history that sheds light on royal messengers in the Achaemenid era, especially during Xerxes’s reign. Second, there is also a focused presentation of the Hebrew prophets that sheds light on correlations between those figures and ANE messengers. Both areas—Persian messengers and prophets as messengers—are important for this study because Malachi emerged in the same *milieu* as the former and from the heritage of the latter. This reconstruction is characteristically a selection. To borrow from Wright’s quote above, “it is clear from a moment’s thought” that priority belongs to those topics most useful for the present investigation. To borrow from the

¹ To be clear (and as stated in Chapter 2), “reconstruction” is my label for Ward’s task, not his, and is used for its convenience (though I think it captures the essence of the task).

Evangelist, if a full account of Persian history was undertaken, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

ROYAL MESSENGERS IN ACHAEMENID PERSIA

First, this section provides a concise historical overview of Xerxes's royal predecessors: Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius. This overview is necessary because Xerxes inherited their empire. Next, it details the rise of Xerxes to the Persian throne as well as imperial policies, practices, and procedures that are relevant for understanding the role of Persian royal messengers in that context. This history is doubly important because it is also the proposed historical context for Malachi.² Next, this section focuses more narrowly on those messengers themselves and their relationship with the province of Yehud. Although it was necessary to briefly address some of these issues in Chapter 1 while discussing the need and basis for this investigation as a whole, this section is more expansive and ultimately more helpful for reconstructing a portrait of Persian royal messengers and building an interpretive lens.

From Cyrus to Darius: A Concise Overview

In the first half of the sixth century BCE, the Neo-Babylonian Empire finished its course and gave way to Persian domination.³ As Babylon waned under the rule of Nabonidus (555–539), Cyrus the Great's power was waxing towards the East. Cyrus became king of Persia at Anshan in 559; defeated Media in 553; established a new capital at Pasargadae; and emerged from these conflicts with the resources of two empires—the Medes and Persians—at his disposal. He campaigned westward and defeated strategic cities across the northern rim of Mesopotamia all the way to the Mediterranean. Cyrus spent the 540s solidifying Persian control of all of Asia Minor and eastern Mesopotamia. When Nabonidus began addressing

² See Chapter 1.

³ This section is necessarily a concise summary. For a detailed overview of the reigns of Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius—the three predecessors of Xerxes—see “Appendix 1: Historical Overview of Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius,” *ad. loc.*

this threat in 543,⁴ it was too late. Persia had become the major power, and in 539 Cyrus marched into and took Babylon.

In 530, Cyrus died from battle wounds while campaigning far to the northeast of his empire. Although his son, Cambyses, proved inferior to his father as a king, he did manage to solidify Persian control of Egypt. In 522, however, Cambyses perished while travelling from Egypt to Persia to deal with reports of unrest. Darius the Great emerged as the new emperor, but widespread revolts had broken out. Once the empire was stable, Darius set his sights on a lofty goal: extending Persia's rule over the Greeks. A long series of engagements ensued; and, though progress was slow, Darius advanced his cause until he was ready to invade Greece. In 491, he sent his royal messengers throughout Greece to terrorize its cities and demand symbolic tokens of submission: gifts of earth and water. Athens refused to acquiesce, war broke out, and in 490 a much smaller Greek force (mainly Athenians) defeated the Persian army at the Battle of Marathon. Persia had no choice but to retreat and begin preparations for another invasion.

Xerxes's Empire

“Darius was fated to die in the midst of his preparations . . . and at his death the kingship was assumed by his son Xerxes.”⁵ With Darius's death (486 BCE), there were naturally rebellions throughout the empire. Xerxes spent the first few years of his reign dealing with various revolts, including an early attempt by Ariamenes, his brother, to grab the throne.⁶ There was a serious rebellion in Egypt, where Darius's tribute demands were particularly burdensome. Xerxes acted quickly and decisively in crushing Egyptian uprisings. “By 484 the whole of Egypt was once more under Persian control. Xerxes left his brother . . . in charge as satrap of

⁴ Nabonidus had moved his residency away from Babylon, a move that further alienated the influential priests of Marduk in Babylon and other key players. In 543, he moved back to Babylon, but it was too late.

⁵ Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.4.

⁶ Apparently Xerxes had several siblings, but was the obvious candidate for the throne. According to an inscription found at Persepolis, he certainly thought so: “Says Xerxes the king: Darius had also other sons; (but) as was the will of Ahuramazdâ, Darius my father made me the greatest after himself.” See Ernst E. Herzfeld, *A New Inscription of Xerxes from Persepolis* (SAOC; ed. J. H. Breasted; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 4. See also Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 244–47.

Egypt and returned to Persia.”⁷ While occupied with Egypt, revolts also sprang up in Babylon. These, too, were crushed in short order.⁸ The empire was stable.

“After the suppression of the revolts in Egypt and Babylon, Xerxes was ready for his massive invasion of Greece.”⁹ Before diving into that topic, however, it is vital for this project to understand *how* Xerxes could even attempt such an undertaking. After all, this exact context is proposed in this project as the historical backdrop for Malachi.

Despite some rebellions, Xerxes inherited from Darius an empire primed for expansion. Xerxes’s predecessors had understood the organic relationship between central power, an integrated system of roads, and communication. That is, mobilizing a world-conquering army required quick access to supplies. Quickly acquiring supplies required a hasty communication (i.e., messenger) system. A hasty communication system required an impressive network of roads. Building an impressive network of roads required quick access to supplies and a functioning communication system for making imperial demands. If this sounds circular and/or impossible, then one can better appreciate the achievement of any sizable society that actually functions. In the Persian Empire, there was a glue for holding these tasks together and making the impossible possible: extremely high taxes.

One of Xerxes’s most important inheritances was a well-organized empire with an effective, centralized structure. When Cyrus conquered the Neo-Babylonians, his structural changes were minimal. “It is clear that neither Cyrus nor [Cambyses] wished (would they even have been able?) to bring about a total disruption of existing conditions.”¹⁰ Cyrus set up rulers called “satraps” to govern the empire’s realms (i.e., satrapies), but his formula in doing

⁷ De Souza et al, *The Greeks at War*, 48. See also Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.7; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 524–25; Peter Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars*, updated ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 50–51.

⁸ See George C. Cameron, “Darius and Xerxes in Babylonia,” *AJSL* 58.3 (1941): 314–25, who details the ancient accounts saying that Xerxes destroyed Babylonian temples as punishment for revolts; cf., however, Amélie Kuhrt, “Xerxes and the Babylonian Temples: A Restatement of the Case,” in *The World of Achaemenid Persia*, 491–94, for a more positive view of Xerxes’s treatment of Babylonian temples.

⁹ Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 194. See also Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 248–50.

¹⁰ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 70.

so was loose and lacked uniformity.¹¹ The same is true for Cambyses.¹² Their loose system was adequate until Persian expansionism began eyeing mainland Greece. Thus Darius had to make some sweeping changes.

“Darius was responsible for the major organization of the empire into districts governed by satraps . . . The satrap was in charge of all aspects of provincial rule.”¹³ Darius organized the empire into twenty satrapies whose satraps had the primary responsibilities of raising imperial funds and providing imperial troops. In order to maximize efficiency through uniformity, Darius also standardized weights and measurements across the satrapies and regulated currency with the minting of Persian coins. The end result was a smoother and more comprehensive system of imperial taxation.¹⁴ Moreover, the satrapies also had to meet imperial needs of hospitality such as providing banquet-worthy feasts for an administrative entourage passing through, providing supplies when the imperial army passed through, and so forth.¹⁵ Thus Xerxes inherited from Darius a centralized satrapy system that efficiently funneled fixed tribute demands (of gold, silver, metals, etc.) straight to imperial administrative centers at Persepolis, Susa, Pasargadae, Ecbatana, and Babylon.¹⁶

Xerxes also inherited an impressive network of roads throughout the empire and, with it, an efficient communication system *via* royal messengers. Because Persian records of these roads are sparse, historians are utterly dependent upon classical and Hellenistic writers for

¹¹ Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.1–23, credits Cyrus with establishing satraps. Cook, “Achaemenids,” 267, provides a helpful definition: “As the King’s governors in the provinces, the satraps (‘protectors of the realm’) were viceroys. Their jurisdiction embraced the spheres of civil and military action; they seem to have been responsible for the payment of the annual tribute, the raising of military levies, and for justice and security.”

¹² E.g., Shalom E. Holtz, “‘Judges of the King’ in Achaemenid Mesopotamia,” in *The World of Achaemenid Persia*, 481–89, demonstrates how Cyrus and Cambyses (and probably Darius) maintained the Neo-Babylonian office “judge of the king” in the Persian Empire. He concludes, “The present discussion has pointed to the Mesopotamian ‘judges of the king’ as evidence for the Achaemenid kings’ maintenance of a native judicial system, and, more broadly, for the survival of the Mesopotamian legal tradition” (p. 488).

¹³ Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 178.

¹⁴ This move earned him the scorn of Herodotus, who labeled Darius a “huckster” (as opposed to Cyrus, who was a “father”). See Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.89; Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 180–82.

¹⁵ One might say, “other duties as described.”

¹⁶ For the most detailed treatment, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 388–421, and note esp. p. 403: “In addition . . . the subjects were required to pay various taxes to the satrap himself.” Thus there were both royal and “satrapal taxes.” It is clear that taxation in the Persian Empire in the reigns of Darius and Xerxes was quite burdensome.

piecing together this information. Fortunately, “The ancient authors were literally fascinated by the vast extent of the Achaemenid imperial territory,”¹⁷ and therefore their writings contain helpful observations.

Herodotus describes a primary route stretching from Sardis in the west to Susa in the east, the Royal Road. Although common travelers could cross this route in merely three months, Persian royal messengers could travel much faster because they constantly switched horses at the frequent royal checkpoints along the way. Also, a messenger would only ride one day before passing on his message to the next messenger. “The first courier passes on the instructions to the second, the second to the third, and from there they are transmitted from one to another all the way through, just as the torchbearing relay is celebrated by the Hellenes in honor of Hephaistos.”¹⁸

According to Xenophon, it was Cyrus who “worked out what distance a horse could cover in a day when ridden hard but without collapsing”¹⁹ and inaugurated this messenger system. Cambyses utilized it, but Darius enhanced it along with his overhaul of the satrapies. With uniform satrapies funneling standardized tributes to the administrative centers, Darius had the means to improve the roads and expand them into a grand network. Imperial messengers could travel along the major routes and then exit onto maintained roads straight to their target cities. An Elamite tablet from Persepolis indicates that Darius’s administration even regulated allocations for the horses in this system.²⁰

Xerxes did not merely inherit this network of roads and communication—he perfected it. Like his predecessors, he used the massive Persian army to make new roads and improve

¹⁷ Ibid., 357.

¹⁸ Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.98 (cf. 5.52–53). Cf. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 174–78; Muhammad A. Dandamaev and Vladimir G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, trans. Philip L. Kohl and D. J. Dadson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 107–10.

¹⁹ Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.17, as found in Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 754.

²⁰ See Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 755.

old ones.²¹ There seems to have only been improvement in the messenger system, for Herodotus admired Xerxes's messengers as the fastest things in the known world.²² The use of beacons and voice signals also enhanced the network's efficiency.²³ It appears Xerxes maintained and even improved his father's innovations in these symbiotic institutions.

With even better roads, better communication, and more funds than his predecessors, Xerxes was able to amass a giant army for invading Greece and avenging his father's defeat at Marathon. "It seems to have been in autumn of 481 that Xerxes reached Sardis, which was to be his base for the invasion. The ensuing winter was probably spent in final preparations for the coming campaign; these included the sending of heralds to all states of Greece (except Athens) to ask for earth and water as evidence of submission."²⁴ Xerxes's force was the largest army the world had ever seen. Herodotus's figures put the army at roughly two and half million soldiers—which is more than doubled when he adds the non-combatants— but this number is logistically implausible.²⁵ Still, "there is little doubt that Xerxes was able to amass the largest army and navy ever mustered in antiquity."²⁶

There is no need to go into great detail about the conflicts themselves since the position here is that Malachi emerged during the period of Xerxes's re-stabilization of the Persian Empire and his early attacks against Greece. The instability following Darius's death would have generated hope and theological curiosity for those in Yehud; but, Xerxes's rise to power and ensuing stability, his increases in taxes and tribute demands, and his formation of

²¹ See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 361–64.

²² Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.98.

²³ Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 755–56. There is more on Xerxes's messengers in the section immediately following this one. For the most thorough treatment of Persian roads and communication, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 357–87.

²⁴ C. Hignett, *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 95.

²⁵ See Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 194–98, for a helpful and convincing breakdown of the reasons why Herodotus's numbers are problematic. His reasons include the simple lack of space for that large an army, the likelihood that Herodotus confused the numbers of a Persian chiliarch and myriarch (military units of one thousand and ten thousand, respectively), the impossibility of acquiring food and fresh water for that many people, the much lower tallies in later Greek writings, and so forth.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 195. On the size, scope, and makeup of the army, see also Green, *Greco-Persian Wars*, 51–62; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 525–28; de Souza et al, *The Greeks at War*, 48–51; Paul Cartledge, *Thermopylae: The Battle that Changed the World* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 2006), 95–122.

a grand army even larger than Darius's would have suffocated any hope in Yehud for the heirs of ancient Israel and led to a sharp cynicism: "Serving God is vanity. And what profit is there in that we have kept his charges, or that we have walked about as mourners before YHWH of Hosts" (Mal 3:14)?

After winter in 480, the massive Persian army built two bridges across the Hellespont by means of boats and cables.²⁷ Battle began at Thermopylae. Numerically speaking, Persia should have routed the Greeks; but, the Greeks knew their land, and so a much smaller Greek force killed tens of thousands of Persian soldiers, though King Leonidas and his celebrated three hundred Spartans (who spearheaded the Greek forces) died in battle.²⁸ Although Xerxes captured Athens, the Greeks won an important battle at Salamis. The war was about to escalate, but Xerxes learned that a serious revolt had sprung up in Babylon. He led most of his forces back east to stabilize the situation. Against significantly smaller Persian forces, the Greeks won important battles at Plataea and Mycale. Cut off from supplies and clearly bested, Persia was forced to retreat.²⁹ Xerxes spent much of his remaining reign involved in massive (and expensive) building projects.

Persian Royal Messengers and the Province of Yehud

The Achaemenids were certainly not the first kings to use royal messengers as their agents of diplomacy in the ANE.³⁰ In the second and third millennia BCE, such figures were the primary vehicle for conducting diplomacy and trade. In fact, Amanda Podany synthesizes a wealth of ideas from primary sources to reconstruct an effective and sophisticated diplomatic process between ANE kings in that time frame (ca. 2300–1300), one in which royal

²⁷ Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 201: "The northern bridge was formed with 360 ships and was 4,220 yards long; the southern bridge was made with 314 ships and was 3,700 yards long. When a storm destroyed these bridges, Xerxes was furious and executed those who built them. He ordered the Hellespont to be scourged with 300 lashes and branded with hot irons (Herodotus 7.35) . . . new bridges were built."

²⁸ See Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.206–239.

²⁹ For more details on these conflicts, see Hignett, *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece*, *passim*; Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 200–225; Green, *Greco-Persian Wars*, *passim*; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 528–42; de Souza et al, *The Greeks at War*, 59–82.

³⁰ Although the Persians and Medes are not always lumped into this general category (ANE), here I do so because clearly the Persian Empire ruled that region.

messengers traveled in safety and maintained the strong connection between rulers in what she deems a “brotherhood of kings.”³¹ Later, in the first millennium BCE, the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian kings also made extensive use of royal messengers, who “existed . . . primarily for the purpose of extending temporally and geographically the existing power of another’s spoken/written words or will.”³² Persia’s use of royal messengers, then, was a method of diplomacy with a long history of antecedents in the ANE.³³

Persian rulers used messengers as imperial tools in a variety of ways. First, royal messengers had a role in Persian court protocol. Very few visitors actually obtained an audience with an Achaemenid king. Instead, visitors could speak to the king’s court messenger, who was invested with the king’s authority. Herodotus and Xenophon place the origin of this practice with the Medes. According to Herodotus, the Median king Deiokes “was the first one to do this. No one was allowed to enter into the presence of the king inside his palace. They must use messengers instead.”³⁴ Xenophon discusses a similar protocol in the court of Astyages, whose cupbearer, Sacas, also performed this messenger role.³⁵ These messengers were close to their kings and wielded authority. It is most likely, then, that the Persian kings adopted this practice from the Medes whom they conquered and absorbed. This reconstruction finds some validation, for example, in the figure of Cambyses’s royal messenger, Prexaspes, who occupied a role of prominence and was close enough to the king to tell him that the people think Cambyses drinks too much wine!³⁶

³¹ Amanda H. Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the Ancient Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), *passim*. That is not to say that the relations were always peaceful. To the contrary, sometimes crises emerged and war ensued. See also Norman K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 3–38, though Gottwald is a bit less romantic about the congeniality of said international relations.

³² John T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East* (BJS 169; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 41. Cf. Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (HSM 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), *passim*.

³³ And, as one can see from the works of, e.g., Homer, other regions of the world as well. There is a more thorough overview of ANE royal messengers below.

³⁴ Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.99.

³⁵ Xenophon, *Cyr.* 1.3.8. Astyages is the Median king whom Cyrus the Great defeated.

³⁶ Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.34. Herodotus’s overall portrait of Cambyses, however, conveniently and at time predictably reflects his negative opinion of Cyrus’s successor.

One practice that Xerxes inherited from Darius was having visiting entourages or important individuals interviewed by royal messengers at the Gate.³⁷ “The *Gate* was actually an imposing building, distinct . . . from the gate of a building. The word became a synonym for the palace and the court, as shown by the expression, ‘Those of the Gate,’ which became a sort of court title (cf. Esth 2:21; 3:2–3).”³⁸ Xerxes had his name added to the Gate at Susa,³⁹ the city from which the king ruled.⁴⁰ Protocol at the Gate was no mere formality. Bypassing the king’s messengers meant death: “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live” (Esth 4:11 NASB). So, royal messengers mediated the king’s presence first of all at the royal palace according to official court protocols.

Also, Persian kings used royal messengers to make a variety of demands upon satrapies and provinces. The satrapal courts were modeled after the central court in Susa and were spectacular sites to behold.⁴¹ When royal messengers arrived, they eventually stood before the satrap in the court and delivered the king’s message(s). Before a messenger’s arrival, of course, the king would have dictated a document and had it officially sealed with his own, royal seal. Often the demands were inconvenient but not necessarily serious. For example, a tablet from Persepolis dated to Darius’s reign⁴² describes the activity of the royal messenger Umayya, who carried a sealed document of the king from Susa to Persepolis detailing allocations for flour.⁴³ A similar tablet describes messengers in the “express service” whom a sealed, royal document authorized to obtain four liters of flour on their way

³⁷ See Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.117; Xenophon, *Hell.* 1.6.7—7.10; idem., *Cyr.* 6.1.1.

³⁸ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 260.

³⁹ It was built by and primarily celebrates Darius.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 345.

⁴² Immediately prior to and thus relevant for Xerxes’s reign.

⁴³ See Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 755.

back to the royal palace.⁴⁴ Though these requests are somewhat mundane, Kuhrt observes from these tablets, “The title of royal messenger clearly carried great prestige with it.”⁴⁵

These royal messages could also convey more weighty matters. When he decided to invade Scythia,

Darius sent messengers around his kingdom to order some of his subjects to provide troops for a land army, some to provide ships, and others to build a bridge across the Thracian Bosphorus . . . When Darius had completed his preparations, he led his army out of Susa.⁴⁶

This text is insightful. It demonstrates the expansiveness of these royal messengers’ reach as well as the symbiotic relationship between imperial roads and communication. The royal messengers made their way “around his kingdom,” and a sizable army was soon ready to march for Darius.⁴⁷

Since Xerxes inherited Darius’ imperial system, it makes sense that he employed similar tactics in making his own preparations to invade Greece:

During four full years following the conquest of Egypt, Xerxes prepared his army and gathered provisions for it. Then, in the course of the fifth year, he set out on his campaign with an enormous body of troops. In fact, of all the expeditions we know of, this was by far the largest.⁴⁸

As this force prepared to cross the Hellespont, Xerxes continued making demands around the empire: “Xerxes ordered Phoenicians and Egyptians to make cables of papyrus and white flax for the bridges and to establish reserves of food for the army to prevent it and the pack animals from starving on their way to Hellas.”⁴⁹ Here one can observe the weight of Persian control. The imperial system was such that satraps and provinces could at any time receive a visit from a royal messenger, who in turn could make any number of demands.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 754–55.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 755, note 8.

⁴⁶ Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.83.

⁴⁷ Darius took similar actions when preparing to attack Greece and avenge the Persian defeat at Marathon (see *ibid.*, 7.1–2), but he died before these plans came to fruition.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 7.20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 7.25.

Also, Persian kings used royal messengers in diplomacy. For example, Darius would send royal messengers to the lands he targeted before attacking them to demand that the various rulers send him offerings of earth and water as tokens of submission. These tokens represented the totality of a land's geographical sphere and resources and signaled its surrender to unconditional enslavement.⁵⁰ Xerxes continued using royal messengers for this purpose:

Upon [Xerxes's] arrival at Sardis, he first sent heralds to Hellas to ask for earth and water and to order the Hellenes to prepare feasts for the King; he sent them everywhere except Athens and Lacedaemon to ask for earth. Xerxes' reason for making this second request for earth and water was that he fully expected that all those who had refused to give it before when Darius had sent heralds would now give it out of fear. So he sent these heralds . . .⁵¹

In this sense, then, the royal messengers had a substantial role in Persia's imperial terrorism and psychological warfare. They were diplomats, yes; but it hardly seems hyperbole to also call them harbingers of doom.

Finally, it is important to note that Persian royal messengers were untouchable (for lack of a better word) and their reading of a message was as if the king himself was speaking. They were "inviolable in their person."⁵² Before Darius had fully consolidated his power, he sent a royal messenger to Oroites, governor of Sardis. Finding Darius's message displeasing, Oroites wanted to slay the royal messenger; but, he knew he could not openly harm the herald or it would mean doom. Instead, he had his men ambush and attempt to slay him in secret.

⁵⁰ M. E. Galanaki and Emmanouil Chalkiadakis, "'Earth and Water' in Ancient Civilizations" (paper presented at the IWA Specialized Conference on Waste and Wastewater, Istanbul, Turkey, March 22–24, 2012). The authors make a strong case that this practice was adopted from "Lydian-Ionian religion and culture." Although some scholars still comment that earth and water have Zoroastrian connotations—e.g., Jack M. Balcer, "The Persian Wars against Greece: A Reassessment," *Historia* 38.2 (1989), 131—that claim lacks definitive support. The best (and refreshingly honest) assessment of Persia and Zoroastrianism is still Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 395–466, who deals specifically with the Achaemenids (pp. 419–33) and concludes, "Since Zoroaster evidently lived long before and far away from the Achaemenids, his teachings were mediated in a modified manner and in turn adapted by the kings as a royal ideology. It is anachronistic to attempt to attribute to these kings Zoroastrian beliefs from the later texts" (p. 433).

⁵¹ Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.32; see 7.132 for a substantial list of those who sent offerings of earth and water.

⁵² Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 344.

Word of this incident got back to Darius. Oroites's force at Sardis was impressive, and it would have been prudent to deal with this incident later. Darius's actions, therefore, illustrate the seriousness of the crime. He sent his servant Bagaios as his royal messenger, and he was admitted to Oroites's court. The guards "regarded the scrolls with great respect and awe, and what was written on them with even more reverence . . ." ⁵³ The royal secretary read the letters aloud, the last of which read, "King Darius instructs the Persians in Sardis to kill Oroites." The guards immediately took out their daggers and did so. This incident illustrates two key points: Royal messengers were inviolable, and so harming them brought the king's wrath—it was akin to trying to harm the king himself; and, the messages they bore inspired awe as the king's very words. ⁵⁴

So, Persian royal messengers functioned in at least three ways: (A) as intermediaries in court protocol; (B) for making demands on satraps and provinces; and (C) for diplomacy. While performing these duties, they were regarded as inviolable. This sheds light on their functions in the Persian Empire and illuminates the general perception of them, but there is still the matter of the province of Yehud. With firsthand observations, Malachi passionately discusses the second temple at Jerusalem and addresses its priests; therefore, its provenance was clearly Yehud, and more specifically, Jerusalem. This being the case, how did the people of Yehud perceive these Persian royal messengers? Can anything specific be said about Yehud's engagement and experience with these figures? Since the present investigation compares Malachi to royal messengers and their messages, a reconstruction of this matter is a crucial task.

⁵³ Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.128.

⁵⁴ Polyaeus, *Strat.* 7.21.5 (as pointed out in Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 344), records an incident in which a satrap named Datames prostrated himself in worship before a royal letter from Artaxerxes II (though Artaxerxes II reigned decades after Xerxes). For more on this topic, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 344–45.

“Yehud (Judah) was but one province in the Persian fifth satrapy (Abar Nahara).”⁵⁵ It was a small entity in a vast empire. Darius’s restructuring of the empire and implementation of a coin system created an international common market in which industry and commerce generally thrived. In the mountainous region of Yehud, however, away from the major trade routes and the coast, “economic life was based on grazing and agriculture.”⁵⁶ The people of Yehud dealt in crops, animals, and labor and not, generally speaking, the wares of industry. In fact, only seventeen coins dating from the entire Persian era have been found in Yehud.⁵⁷ That number, coupled with the high number of measuring stones/weights dating to that time (esp. in the “City of David,” i.e., the hilly spur jutting south from the temple mount in Jerusalem) indicates that Yehud was indeed stuck in older (and indicative of less profitable) forms of exchange.⁵⁸ In short, Yehud was relatively impoverished in Persian times. It was away from the action, so to speak, regarding trade and industry. Indeed, Yehud was not even up to date with respect to the empire’s currency.

The religious center of Yehud was Jerusalem; therefore, religious offerings (e.g., tithes, sacrificial offerings, etc.) flowed towards that city. Although Haggai and Zechariah do not mention the tithe *per se*, they do call for contributions/offerings from the local community (see, e.g., Hag 1:8, 14) and from descendants of Israel outside of Yehud (see, e.g., Zech 6:11–15) for constructing the second temple.⁵⁹ A generation later in the early reign of Xerxes, Malachi blasts the low quality of temple offerings (Mal 1:6—2:9) and calls for

⁵⁵ Mary Joan Winn Leith, “Israel among the Nations: The Persian Period,” in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 381. Abar Nahara means “across the river” (i.e., west of the Euphrates).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 258. Somewhat telling, Carter also demonstrates that the tallies of coins from before the exile and from after the Persian era are much higher (p. 258–71).

⁵⁸ See Abraham Eran, “Weights and Weighing in the City of David: The Early Weights from the Bronze Age to the Persian Period,” in *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985*, Vol. IV, eds. D. T. Ariel and A. de Groot (Qedem 35; Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996), 204–56; for an overview (and excellent illustrations) of weights and measures in ancient Israel, see Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 195–98.

⁵⁹ See Melody D. Knowles, *Centrality Practiced: Jerusalem in the Religious Practice of Yehud and the Diaspora in the Persian Period* (SBLABS 16; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 105–8.

renewed faithfulness in tithing (3:8–11). The situation is so deplorable that the prophet—speaking, of course, for YHWH (אמר יהוה צבאות)—calls for cultic activity at the temple to cease altogether (2:10). This scenario, where temple maintenance and support is the community’s responsibility, fits well with the Achaemenid imperial policies that emerge from archaeological and inscriptional evidence from the reigns of Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes.⁶⁰ Occasionally the empire helped out, but usually the surrounding community provided the means of maintaining the temple and funding its cultic activity. Given the subsistence way of life in Yehud, giving one’s best portions as temple offerings was no small requirement—it was characteristically an act of faith.

Jerusalem was also the province’s administrative center.⁶¹ Taxes flowed there. “From extra-biblical textual evidence, such as the Cyrus Cylinder, the Murašû documents, Strabo,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 115–19.

⁶¹ Here I strongly disagree with Albrecht Alt, “Die Rolle Samarias bei der Entstehung des Judentums,” in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 2, ed. Albrecht Alt (1935; reprint; Munich: C. H. Beck, 1953), 316–37, who hypothesizes that Yehud was ruled by the province of Samaria until Ezra arrived and served as Yehud’s first provincial governor (see also Bright, *A History of Israel*, 376–78, who expresses uncertainty but leans toward Alt’s view). Alt completely ignores important evidence: (A) the Aramaic letter preserved in Ezra 5 from the time of Darius, which details Cyrus’s appointment of Sheshbazzar as Yehud’s “governor” (פחה) in the return from exile (5:14; cf. 5:16); (B) a reference to Sheshbazzar as the “Prince/Ruler of Judah/Yehud” (הנשיא ליהודה); Ezra 1:8; cf. 1:11; and 1 Chr 3:18, which may have an alternate/late spelling for Sheshbazzar, though this point lacks consensus); (C) Haggai’s numerous references to Zerubbabel as “governor of Judah/Yehud” (פחת יהודה); Hag 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21); (D) other references that lack the word “governor” but still assume and imply that Zerubbabel was a prominent leader in Yehud (Hag 1:12; 2:4, 23; Zech 4:6, 7, 9, 10; Ezra 2:2; 3:2, 8; 4:2, 3; Neh 7:7; 12:1, 47; 1 Chr 3:19); and (E) inscriptional evidence from coins, seals, and pottery dating to the first half of the fifth century BCE indicating that Yehud also had governors named Elnathan and Yeho’ezer shortly after Zerubbabel (who disappears from records without a trace) and decades before Ezra and Nehemiah arrived. On this last point, see Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 290–91. All this is not to say that the figures of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are free from their own critical problems. However, given the numerous scriptural attestations to governors in Yehud before the arrivals of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as the evidence from *realia*, I think Alt’s reconstruction for the purpose of explaining opposition to work in Jerusalem from surrounding provinces is too problematic to be a viable hypothesis. Because of the strong attestations of provincial governors in Yehud and at Jerusalem during this time, it is much more plausible to suggest that the administration at Samaria was antagonistic towards the work in Jerusalem because Yehud’s taxation now flowed to and through that city and not Samaria. In other words, it was simply a power play, an attempt at demoralization that would stop the work, ensure the failure of reestablishing Jerusalem to prominence, and divert Yehud’s taxes and tributes back to and through Samaria. For an important argument against Alt’s hypothesis, see, e.g., Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 192–201. See also Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 346–54, who makes a case for continual Davidic governors during the period in question, which further undermines Alt’s hypothesis.

and Pseudo-Aristotle, it is clear that the Achaemenid bureaucracy collected a great deal of tribute and taxes from the provinces (paid in kind and silver and, later, coinage).⁶² As discussed above, it was Darius who standardized tributes and taxation in the Persian Empire as he implemented his satrapy system. Dandamaev and Lukonin, synthesizing information from classical sources and ANE inscriptions, conclude of Darius's system (and thus Xerxes's system, since he inherited it) after his initial reforms in 519 BCE: "All the satrapies were obliged to pay taxes in silver; these taxes had been strictly set for each province and established on the basis of the cultivated land and its fertility, as calculated by the average harvest yield for several years in accordance with the cadastres for individual provinces."⁶³

This policy explains the low number of coins and high number of seal impressions on jar handles and the like found in Persian Yehud: its people were taxed in crops and goods (i.e., "in kind"), and these portions were delineated and designated by stamps on containers.⁶⁴

Charles Carter's observation is helpful:

The biblical texts—tendentious as they are—seem to reflect a social world marked by a subsistence level economy, social differentiation and substantial poverty. In the face of these very real conditions, it is probable that the little surplus that the people of Yehud produced quickly filled the provincial and imperial coffers.⁶⁵

This high cost of living may explain why recent surveys by the Israel Antiquities Authority suggest that agricultural installations (i.e., farmsteads) sprang up around Jerusalem during this time frame.⁶⁶ It would seem that some farms may have been needed and designated just for paying taxes!

These insights allow for a better reconstruction of Yehud's engagements with Persian royal messengers. There is no smoking gun. There is no inscription or stele of which I am

⁶² Ibid., 117. See also Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*, 177–79.

⁶³ Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*, 178.

⁶⁴ See Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud*, 259–68. These impressions, however, also suggest that Ramat Rahel (approx. two miles south of Jerusalem) may also have had an administrative role in Yehud since roughly half the seal impressions from Yehud in the Persian era come from there (see p. 267). This in no way diminishes the role of Jerusalem, however, esp. considering the high number of measuring weights found there.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 259. The biblical texts in this case include Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Ezra-Nehemiah, among others.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 250.

aware that details exactly how the people of Yehud experienced and perceived such emissaries; but, a smoking gun is certainly not necessary for purposes of sketching a semblance. An ample construction has been made above detailing the roles and functions of Persian royal messengers in the imperial administration and of Yehud's own provincial experience in the Persian Empire. Not only did the satraps make their own demands on provinces in order to pay satrapal tributes and taxes to Persia; but, as a province, Yehud also received frequent visits from the king's royal messengers who made demands of their own, sometimes less serious, but sometimes extremely serious.

The king's messengers came with official scrolls in hand, sealed with the king's seal. These messengers, speaking for the king—*Thus says Darius/Xerxes, king of kings, king of lands*—announced the imperial rates of taxation, the king's policy changes for the province, new imperial demands and expectations, immediate tasks and requirements, and so forth. They also appeared whenever an administrative entourage or an imperial army passed through the Levant, which would have been quite often since Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes all had frequent dealings with Egypt to the southwest.⁶⁷ In these cases, Yehud had to meet the imperial demands for “hospitality” discussed above. By that I mean they had to provide whatever the messengers told them to provide.

Visits from royal messengers would have been especially common during the reigns of Darius and Xerxes because of their proclivity for keeping Persia in a state of war. They would have arrived to make demands above and beyond the imperial taxes, tributes, and normal expectations of hospitality as Darius waged wars against revolting cities, Egypt, Scythia, Ionia, and Greece and later as Xerxes also fought revolting cities, Egypt, and Greece.

⁶⁷ Yehud was off the beaten path, but it was still straddled by major highways to the west (the Way of the Sea) and just across the Jordan River to the east (the King's Highway). See Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1977), 9–10 for excellent illustrations of these routes.

In particular, Xerxes's enormous army that crossed the Hellespont would have required a perpetual flow of supplies, especially food.

The experience of Yehud during Malachi's historical context was thus: these royal messengers appeared often, and when they did, Yehud got fleeced. At the words and threats of the king's messengers, the people loaded up the best portions of everything produced in the province into stamped containers and sent them to Jerusalem. From there, these goods departed for grander imperial causes; and in Yehud, the poor got poorer. Amplifying this hardship is the probability that men from Yehud who could participate in battle would have been drafted into the imperial army,⁶⁸ so Persia also got the backbone of Yehud's agricultural labor: workers in their prime. Any romanticism about enlightened policies in ancient Persia and the religious freedom of its conquered lands needs to be checked by a realistic consideration of the high costs of this freedom. It seems Persia's freedom was far from free. In fact, it was crippling.

It is difficult to say how privy the common people of Yehud were to the readings of these royal messages. Exactly how much of the message did they hear from these envoys? It is impossible to be certain. Most likely, any royal messenger visiting Jerusalem stopped and spoke as his entourage arrived at and departed from the city. After all, what use were propaganda texts (e.g., the Nabonidus Chronicle, the Cyrus Cylinder, the Behistun Inscription, the Darius Gate inscriptions, etc.) if the people of outlying provinces never saw them or heard them recited? Propaganda cannot work if people never encounter it. For that matter, neither can state-sponsored terrorism.

The common people may have known more or less of the details of these royal messages that were delivered before the provincial administration—it is simply hard to say how much; but, they certainly knew the score. The people could not help but observe the

⁶⁸ See Jacob L. Wright, "Surviving in an Imperial Context: Foreign Military Service and Judean Identity," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context*, eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 505–28.

content and consequences of these messages. When these royal messengers arrived, spoke forth the king's words, and departed, it meant that the best crops, animals, portions of wool, and basically the lion's share and best portions of everything available made their way to the imperial army, claimed and demanded by King Xerxes himself.

CONCEPTUALIZING HEBREW PROPHETS AS ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN MESSENGERS

This section first of all broadly demonstrates the pervasiveness of royal messengers as diplomats in the ANE, focusing particularly on the second and third millennia BCE. Next, this section demonstrates key changes in the functions of ANE royal messengers beginning with the Neo-Assyrian Empire that correspond to a transformation in Hebrew prophets and prophecy. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that Malachi was part of a prophetic heritage that was highly influenced by contact with ANE royal messengers; therefore, Malachi's mimicry of Persian messengers was in no way an anomaly in the prophetic traditions.

A Long History of ANE Royal Messengers

Ancient Near Eastern kings used messengers as diplomats and as their personal mouthpieces long before Israel was a nation and long before its prophets addressed Israel as spokespeople⁶⁹ for YHWH. The earliest evidence of such activity is a letter discovered in the damaged archives of Ebla from the Eblaite King Jirkab-Damu to King Zizi of Hamazi⁷⁰ (ca. 2350 BCE). The correspondence in this letter is as much between Jirkab-Damu's palace steward (Ibubu) and an administrative messenger of King Zizi as it is between the kings themselves.

⁶⁹ Here I use an inclusive term, spokespeople, because of the Hebrew prophetesses Miriam (see Exod 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:1—5:31, esp. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14–20, esp. 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22–30), an unnamed prophetess (Isa 8:3), and Noadiah (Neh 6:14), though she may or may not be a Hebrew/Judean prophetess. One should note, however, that Noadiah is female—"the prophetess" (הַנְּבִיאָה) in the HB, but not so in the LXX (τῆς Νωαδία τῆς προφήτις).

⁷⁰ The exact location of Hamazi is unknown, but Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings*, 27 suggests it was probably northeast of Ebla.

Thus (says) Ibubu, the steward of the palace of the king to the envoy: I am (your) brother and you are (my) brother. What is (appropriate) to brother(s): Whatever desire you express, I shall grant and you, (whatever) desire (I express), you shall grant.⁷¹

What were these desires? The remaining content explains how Ebla's king had sent ten ropes and two wagons in exchange for excellent horses. The letter ends "with more assurances of brotherhood, this time not between the officials but between the kings they represented."⁷²

What is certain is that someone had to bear this message from one royal court to the other. Someone had to act as royal messenger and speak the letter's content on behalf of the king and his steward. Indeed, a letter from Mari to Ebla dating slightly later begins, "Thus says Enna-Dagan, the ruler of Mari, to the ruler of Ebla."⁷³ Although a messenger is not named, one is implied, someone who speaks for—*thus says*—the king.

There is a sizable body of evidence from the Hittite kingdom (ca. 1500–1200) to discern that its kings also used royal messengers. A treaty between an unnamed Hittite king and Paddatissu of Kizzuwatna (i.e., classical Cilicia) stipulates mutual respect and care for such envoys:

[If] the Great [King] sends either his son or his subject to Paddatissu, Paddatissu shall not harm him. And if Paddatissu sends either his son or his subject [to] the Great King, the Great King shall not harm him.⁷⁴

Another treaty specifies that the words of a royal messenger must match the content of the document he bears.

Furthermore: In regard to a tablet which I, My Majesty, send you—a tablet upon which words have been set down—and the words of the messenger, which he speaks orally in response to you—if the words of the messenger are in agreement with the words of the tablet, trust that messenger, O Sunashshura.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Piotr Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia*, ed. Erica Reiner (SBLWAW 3; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 14.

⁷² Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings*, 27 (and see pp. 26–28 for an excellent discussion of this letter).

⁷³ *COS* 3:235–36.

⁷⁴ Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 2nd ed., ed. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. (SBLWAW 7; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 12.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 24, from a treaty between Tudhaliya II of Hatti and Sunashshura of Kizzuwatna.

At least two observations are important from these two texts: Royal messengers must be treated with reverence and respect; and, they spoke for the king as they read from royal documents.

Several of these Hittite suzerainty-vassal treaties are extant. They provide another category of evidence that supports the idea that royal messengers read their contents aloud in the vassal king's court: The phrase, "thus says the king," is formulaic in these documents.

Thus says Arnuwanda, [Great King, King of Hatti. I have placed the following matters] under oath . . .⁷⁶

Thus says My Majesty, Suppiluliuma, King of Hatti: I have now elevated you, Huggana, a lowly dog, and have treated you well.⁷⁷

Thus says My Majesty, Mursili, Great King, King of Hatti, Hero; [son of] Suppiluliuma, Great King, King of Hatti, Hero.⁷⁸

Hittite diplomatic correspondences (i.e., letters), though far less formulaic than suzerainty-vassal treaties, also display this messenger formula:

Thus says My Majesty, Great King: Say to Niqmaddu . . .⁷⁹

Thus says Prince Piha-walwi: Say to my son Ibiranu:
At the moment all is well with His Majesty.⁸⁰

Furthermore, these same two letters unmistakably indicate royal messengers as the vehicle by which these kings communicated:

And if all of the kings release whatever troops they have for an attack on your land, you Niqmaddu, shall not fear them. Send your messengers to me immediately.⁸¹

Why have you not come before His Majesty since you have assumed the kingship of the land of Ugarit? And why have you not sent your messengers? Now His Majesty is very angry . . . send your messengers quickly before His Majesty.⁸²

⁷⁶ Ibid., 14, from a treaty between Arnuwanda I of Hatti and the people of Imerika.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 27, from a treaty between Suppiluliuma I of Hatti and Huqqana of Hayasa.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 74, from a treaty between Mursili II of Hatti and Kupanta-Kurunta of Mira-Kuwaliya.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 125, from a letter from Suppiluliuma I of Hatti to Niqmaddu II of Ugarit.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 127, from a letter from Prince Piha-walwi of Hatti to Ibiranu of Ugarit.

⁸¹ Ibid., 126.

⁸² Ibid., 127.

From the extant evidence, the point is clear: Hittite kings used royal messengers for extremely important purposes, including reading formal treaties, chastisement of vassals, and reciting the king's demands from written correspondences.

Another important witness to the use of royal messengers in the ANE is the literary corpus from the Egyptian royal archives known as the Amarna letters (ca. 1350–1334). The language of these documents “is Akkadian mixed with some Canaanisms, as well as some Hurrian words.”⁸³ Most of these four hundred documents are letters from Canaanite cities to Egypt/Pharaoh (and some *vice versa*), though roughly forty are diplomatic correspondences with kings further away (e.g., Babylon, Cyprus).⁸⁴ In the Canaanite correspondences, the use of royal messengers is readily apparent—they even begin with cues for the messenger who will be reading them:

Say to the king, my lord: Message of Abid-Heba, your servant. I fall at the feet of my lord, the king, seven times and seven times. What have I done to the king, my lord?⁸⁵

Say to the king, my lord, my god, my Sun: Message of Adda-danu(?), your servant, the dirt at your feet. I fall at the feet of the king, my lord, my god, my Sun, seven times and seven times. I looked this way, and I looked that way, and there was no light. Then I looked towards the king, my lord, and there was light . . . I have heard the orders that the king, my lord, wrote to this servant . . .⁸⁶

Rib-Haddi. Say to the king, my lord: I fall beneath the feet of my lord seven times and seven times. I have indeed heard the words of the king . . . Now indeed they are saying, “Let him (Rib-Haddi) not write or we will certainly be taken.” They seek to take Gubla . . . Because my lord has written to me, they know indeed that they are going to die . . . My lord knows that I do not write lies to my lord.⁸⁷

⁸³ Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, ed. Diana Edelman (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 239.

⁸⁴ See Y. Lynn Holmes, “The Messengers of the Amarna Letters,” *JAOS* 95 (1975): 376–81. For a thorough discussion of the complications involved regarding Amarna's historical context (including modern-day excavations of the site), see Jana Mynářová, *Language of Amarna—Language of Diplomacy: Perspectives on the Amarna Letters* (Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, 2007), 11–39.

⁸⁵ *COS* 3:237. Abdi-Heda was a (pre-Israelite) king of Jerusalem at this time. This letter also ends with a message to the “scribe of the king” informing him to offer even more eloquent words to the king than what is written in the letter.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:239. Adda-danu was probably a king of Gezer. The text says Gazru, and this is most likely Gezer since the letter regards “Gazru” as a guard-city/outpost to which the king's archers will soon travel. Gezer sits at the western edge of the Shephelah (low hill country) in Palestine and was a fortification (i.e. outpost) overlooking the major road to Egypt near the coast.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:241, from a letter of Rib-Haddi, king of Byblos.

These examples demonstrate that the Pharaohs of the brief Amarna period clearly communicated with Canaanite cities *via* royal messengers. The messenger formula is rather obvious. These letters further allude to written correspondences from Pharaoh, ones that were “heard,” implying that Pharaoh’s royal messengers read them aloud.

A letter from Mittani demonstrates similar phenomena in correspondences between Amarna and non-Canaanite kings:

Say to Nibmuareya, the king of Egypt, my brother: Thus Tušeratta, the king of Mitanni, your brother . . . Since you were friendly with my father, I have accordingly written and told you so that my brother might hear of these things and rejoice . . . may my brother send his messengers to me that they may bring my brother’s greetings to me and I hear them.⁸⁸

Once again, the text mentions written correspondences and makes references to messengers who delivered them and read them aloud.⁸⁹

These examples—the ancient Eblaite letter, the Hittite records, and the Amarna archives—sufficiently demonstrate the antiquity of royal messengers in the ANE. It is worth noting, however, that these examples are really just the tip of the iceberg. It is tempting to discuss the robust portrait of messengers that emerges from the Mari letters.⁹⁰ Also, although mythological and cultic compositions receive the lion’s share of attention in the corpus from Ugarit, one can find much evidence of royal messengers in those texts as well.⁹¹ So, other examples abound but are unnecessary for making the point here: the use of royal messengers

⁸⁸ Ibid., 3:240, from a letter of Tušeratta, king of Mittani.

⁸⁹ It may be the case that the Amarna pharaohs considered messengers somewhat disposable (i.e., not inviolable). See J. –P. Vita, “Messengers Who Must Live or Die: A Note on EA 16 and ARM XXVIII 14 [A.2114],” in *He Unfurled His Brow and Laughed: Studies in Honour of Profesor Nicolas Wyatt*, ed. W. G. E. Watson Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007), 309–11. The sampling in this piece, however, is really too small to base any definitive conclusions upon it. The incident in question, in which messengers are treated as disposable tools, could be an anomaly.

⁹⁰ See Robert W. Fisher, “The *Mubassirū* Messengers at Mari,” in *Mari in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Mari and Mari Studies*, ed. Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 113–20; Victor H. Matthews, “Messengers and the Transmission of Information in the Mari Kingdom,” in *Go to the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, eds. Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 267–74; Greene, *Messenger and Message*, 45–48.

⁹¹ See, e.g., several illustrative Ugaritic texts in *COS* 3:89–107. Cf. Meier, *The Messenger*, 183–86; Greene, *Messenger and Message*, 57–59.

in the ANE was a cultural convention and is discernible in the historical record as far back as the third millennium BCE.

Transformations in Neo-Assyrian Messengers and Hebrew Prophets/Prophecy

This convention continued into the first millennium BCE, but not without significant changes. As the practice evolved in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, so too did the Hebrew prophets undergo a transformation.

“The history of the Near East in the first millennium until the late seventh century was dominated by one power: Assyria.”⁹² The Neo-Assyrian Empire experienced a gradual but sustained expansion made possible by a series of powerful and capable kings as well as annual military campaigns.⁹³ As Marc Van De Mieroop observes, there were two heightened phases in this imperial expansion, one in the ninth century and another in the mid-eighth century.⁹⁴

First of all, there was a heightened phase of expansion in the ninth century. Adad-nirari II (911–891) and Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–84) successfully re-asserted Assyrian control over Babylonia to the south while keeping control of the plains to the east of Nineveh. They also partially re-subjugated the northern rim of Mesopotamia to the west into the region of Syria. Assyria once again became the major power in Mesopotamia.

The next two Assyrian rulers, Assurnasirpal II (883–59) and Shalmaneser III (858–24) primarily concentrated on keeping Assyrian dominance over lands their predecessors had subjugated. “They consolidated control over the region from the Zagros Mountains to the Babylonian border . . . [Assurnasirpal II] carried out a systematic conquest in all directions of the zone that immediately surrounded Assyria, relying on the positions that his predecessors

⁹² Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323 BC*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 229.

⁹³ See *Ibid.*, 229–69; A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, rev. by Erica Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 164–70; Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 3rd ed., rev. Saint Julien du Sault (New York, London: Penguin, 1992), 282–317.

⁹⁴ Van De Mieroop, *Ancient Near East*, 229, 238–44, 248–58.

had secured.”⁹⁵ Because of Assurnasirpal II’s campaigns in every direction, Shalmaneser III inherited a kingdom at war on several fronts. Although battles were frequent, Assyrian expansion had stalled.

Despite the high level of military activity, Assyria under Shalmaneser III was not an expansionist state. The borders established by Assurnasirpal were maintained, and campaigns beyond them were to protect them and to obtain booty and tribute.⁹⁶

The empire had ballooned in several directions, but its infrastructure was insufficient to maintain firm control. There was simply no system in place for quickly stamping out the frequent revolts,⁹⁷ nor was there a way to get funds and supplies back to the administration in an efficient manner. The kings following Shalmaneser III (their reigns spanned 823–745/44) saw the dissipation of Assyrian control of Syria-Palestine and had to provide huge gifts of land to keep nearby governors and officials on their side. Central power weakened and the empire was in decline.⁹⁸

This decline continued until 744, which marked the beginning of the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–27). He did more than simply repair problems in the empire—he completely overhauled its systems and created an imperial infrastructure that had been sorely lacking. Locally, he divided prominent offices in Assur (e.g., the commander-in-chief) into multiple persons, thus lessening their power and influence. There was an influx of eunuchs into administrative positions, nullifying competitions and coalitions between heirs for inheriting those offices.⁹⁹ A standing army replaced the previous practice of building a temporary one

⁹⁵ Ibid., 240.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 242.

⁹⁷ See, e.g., *COS* 2:261–64 for the full text of the Akkadian monumental inscription known as the Kurkh Monolith, which details several of Shalmaneser III’s important battles up to the Battle of Qarqar, in which Assyria battled a coalition of armies from Syro-Palestine (including King Ahab of Israel and, most prominently, King Hadadezer of Damascus) in 853. Propaganda points aside, this record depicts the king in a constant state of war.

⁹⁸ See Van De Mieroop, *Ancient Near East.*, 244–45; William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth; Harcourt Brace, 1998), 122–28.

⁹⁹ It seems Tiglath-Pileser III even installed these administrative eunuchs over foreign cities. See, e.g., Tiglath-Pileser III’s final compiled annals in *COS* 2:284–86, esp. 285, “I [subdued] Unqi to its full extent. [. . .] I placed my eunuchs as governors over them,” and “19 districts of Hamath . . . I annexed to Assyria. I placed two of my eunuchs over them as governors.” See also the inscription from Calah in Mordechai Cogan, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel*, trans. Mordechai Cogan

from the Assyrian population as needed for specific campaigns. With a consolidated administrative center and a stronger imperial army, local states to the east and west could not stave off incorporation into the empire. A vassal system emerged, and tributes and taxes began to flow back to the administration. Shalmaneser V's short reign (726–22) seems to have maintained these advances, but Sargon II (721–705) expanded Assyria's control as far as Cyprus and Phrygia (i.e., Anatolia) to the west. Assyrian power reached new heights.¹⁰⁰

All this expansion and structuring of the empire was possible because Tiglath-Pileser III implemented a comprehensive imperial messenger system and transformed the roles and functions of royal messengers.¹⁰¹ The change went hand in hand with a new type of state-sponsored terrorism. Tiglath-Pileser III did not merely intimidate administrative courts and vassal kings; he sought to control entire populations with terror. Thus when a people revolted, Assyria retaliated against all the people and not just the administration. Cities and their populations were besieged, captured, tortured, punished, and made to witness the desecration of its corpses:

I [i.e., Tiglath-Pileser III] impaled alive his [i.e., King Rezin of Damascus] chief ministers; and I made his country behold (them). I set up my camp around the city for 45 days; and I confined him like a bird in a cage.¹⁰²

Assyria deported whole populations to foreign regions (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:1–6; 18:9–12). “No longer was [*sic*] only the king and his court butchered or led into captivity. Now whole *countries* went into exile.”¹⁰³

Tiglath-Pileser III upgraded Assyria's messenger system to coincide with these new terroristic policies. When messengers visited provinces or cities for purposes of chastisement

(Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 65: “. . . of the Upper [Sea], I ruled. Six of [my] eunuchs [as governors over] them I appointed . . .”

¹⁰⁰ For an overview of Tiglath-Pileser III's contributions and innovations as king, see Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 305–10; Van De Mieroop, *Ancient Near East*, 248–52.

¹⁰¹ On this synthesis, I am indebted to personal correspondences with Edwin M. Yamauchi (2012–13).

¹⁰² *COS* 2:286. See also, e.g., *COS* 2:300–302, esp. 302, which records Sennacherib's (ruled 704–681) defeat of Babylonia and gives several instances of him despoiling or burning conquered cities and regions.

¹⁰³ Holladay, “Assyrian Statescraft,” 37. Cf. Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 306–8.

or warning, they no longer addressed only the royal court. In the new system, they spoke to and terrorized entire cities. His successors maintained this practice.

One of the most illustrative examples is Sennacherib's correspondence with Jerusalem when he besieged it during the reign of King Hezekiah. These engagements took place in 701 during Sennacherib's westward campaign in which he quelled revolts by vassal states that arose when Sargon II died in 705.¹⁰⁴ A monumental prism records that Sennacherib besieged forty-six Judean cities and relocated more than two-hundred thousand Judean people. It adds, "[Hezekiah] himself, I locked up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage."¹⁰⁵ Although the inscription is more concerned with the results (and propaganda), the biblical record provides insightful details about the Assyrian royal messenger, Rabshakeh:

And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, rose up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. And Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent to the king of Assyria (who was) at Lachish, saying: I have sinned. Turn away/withdraw from me. . . (2 Kgs 18:13–14a)

Then the king of Assyria sent . . . Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a strong army to Jerusalem. And they rose up and came to Jerusalem. And they rose up, they came, and they stood by the conduit of the upper pool which (is) by the road of the fuller's field. (18:17)

And Rabshakeh said to them, Say now to Hezekiah: Thus says the Great King, King of Assyria: What is this great confidence of yours?¹⁰⁶ . . . Now, is it not with YHWH's approval that I have rose up against this place to destroy it? YHWH said to me, Rise up against this land and destroy it. (18:19, 25)

At this point, Hezekiah's administrators realized that Rabshakeh aimed at terrorizing the city as much as communicating a message.¹⁰⁷ They asked him to speak in Aramaic, the

¹⁰⁴ It seems Hezekiah and Judah attempted to shift dependence from Assyria to Egypt. See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39* (NICOT: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 4–13 for a helpful discussion of the historical situation.

¹⁰⁵ See *COS* 2:302–3 (quote from 303).

¹⁰⁶ Literally, "what is this trust (with) which you are trusting?"

¹⁰⁷ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Int; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 237–38, helpfully observes four fundamental arguments in the Rabshakeh's speech: (A) reliance on Egypt is foolish and dangerous, as history has shown; (B) reliance on their own God is foolish, as evidenced by Hezekiah's removal of that God's holy places; (C) reliance on their own military would be ridiculous; and (D) Assyria is actually God's agent, whom God charged with destroying Judah.

lingua franca at that time, instead of Judean (יהודית) in the presence of the people (18:26).

The Rabshakeh's response is insightful:

But Rabshakeh said to them, Has my master sent me only unto your master and unto you to speak these words? And not (also) to those men who dwell on the wall, those who will eat their own dung and drink their own urine with you? (18:27)

Predictably, the Assyrian and Hebrew records differ regarding who came out on top in this instance.¹⁰⁸ Still, the point here is clear. The Assyrian royal messenger, Rabshakeh,¹⁰⁹ did not merely function as a diplomat between the two kings. He was an agent of terrorism. As such, he did not merely address the royal court—he addressed the entire city. This royal messenger was vastly different than those used in the “brotherhood of kings” of the second and third millennia.¹¹⁰

Other examples abound. For instance, a letter from Nimrud records an Assyrian siege of Babylon in 731 that is very similar to the Hezekiah story: A royal messenger, speaking for the Great King (i.e., Tiglath-Pileser III), bypasses the royal court and addresses the general population in the midst of a siege.¹¹¹ Also, a carved relief from Sargon II's fortress (in modern day Khorsabad) depicts a messenger standing upon a siege engine, holding a scroll/message in hand, and addressing the city's inhabitants on the city's wall.¹¹² There is also a letter from the archives of King Esarhaddon (680–69) that directly addresses a segment in Babylon and not the local administration:

¹⁰⁸ See also Isa 36–37; 2 Chr 32. In the biblical records, Hezekiah at first sends tribute to Sennacherib, but YHWH miraculously delivers Hezekiah and Jerusalem before Hezekiah fully acquiesces to Sennacherib's demands. In the Assyrian record, Sennacherib simply pummeled the Judean cities (including Jerusalem) and received tribute.

¹⁰⁹ Rabshakeh is mentioned in other annals of Sennacherib, e.g., the previously cited record of the campaign against Babylonia (see *COS* 2:301). In that instance, Sennacherib sent Rabshakeh with the governors and an imperial force towards Babylonia, but the text seems to imply that war broke out before any negotiations could ensue.

¹¹⁰ For an immensely helpful treatment of historical issues relating to the Rabshakeh account, see Richard S. Hess, “Hezekiah and Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18–20,” in *Zion: City of Our God*, eds. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 23–41. For the fullest overview of critical assertions, see Lester L. Grabbe, “Introduction,” in *‘Like a Bird in a Cage’: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (ESHM 4; JSOTSup 363; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 2–43, esp. 20–36.

¹¹¹ See H. W. F. Saggs, “The Nimrud Letters, 1952—Part I,” *Iraq* 17 (1955): 23–24.

¹¹² See Hayim Tadmor, “On the Use of Aramaic in the Assyrian Empire: Three Observations on a Relief of Sargon II,” *EI* 20 (1989): 249–52 (Hebrew).

An Order of the king (Esarhaddon) to the “Non-Babylonian” inhabitants of Babylon: I am fine . . . There you are, pretending—against the commands of the god—to be Babylonians, and what unspeakable things you and your master have devised against my subjects! . . . Should you ask yourselves after I sent back to you, with seals intact, your letters full of empty and insolent(?) words which you had dispatched: “Why did he return the letters to us?” I am telling you that I would have opened and read whatever message . . .¹¹³

This example is particularly interesting because it also sheds light on the physicality of the letters which royal messengers carried. The letter describes a bound scroll, “with seals intact.” These examples demonstrate ways in which Neo-Assyrian royal messengers and royal correspondences evolved in the mid-eighth century BCE. The kings, *via* their royal messengers, began addressing entire cities, not just other kings and their courts. This policy amplified strategic, imperial terrorism.

Coinciding with this change was a revolution in Hebrew prophets and prophecy. The pre-classical prophets¹¹⁴ who predate the Neo-Assyrian revamping of royal messengers “were intimately concerned with the life of the state and addressed themselves to the particular sins of the individual kings because of their position and influence.”¹¹⁵ Or, in the case of Deborah, Samuel, and others, these prophets *were* leaders. This conversation excludes, of course, Moses, whose prophetic role in Israel’s traditions of mediating the covenant to the fledgling nation is monolithic.¹¹⁶ Other prophets, however, addressed and were involved in the affairs of Israelite kings. “[T]hey served as counselors in order that the theocratic kingdom might prosper.”¹¹⁷

¹¹³ A. Leo Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia: Official, Business, and Private Letters on Clay Tablets from Two Millennia*, trans. A. Leo Oppenheim (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 170. See also p. 169 for a similar letter from King Assurbanipal (668–27) to the “inhabitants of Babylon.”

¹¹⁴ That is, those prophets prior to the prophetic figures associated with the written works in the Latter Prophets of the HB, Isaiah–Malachi.

¹¹⁵ Laney, “The Role of God’s Prophets,” 314.

¹¹⁶ After all, “Never again did a prophet rise up in Israel like Moses, whom YHWH knew face to face” (Deut 34:10).

¹¹⁷ Laney, “The Role of God’s Prophets,” 314. Cf. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms*, 45–85, esp. 83–85. This point about pre-classical prophets being primarily court prophets is merely a generalization, not a strict rule. For an exhaustive treatment of these figures, see Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 47–104.

In this sense, then, the pre-classical prophets were similar to royal messengers in the ANE prior to the mid-eighth century BCE. “Exactly as the envoy of the Pharaoh or the king of Assyria¹¹⁸ brought the word of the Great King to his vassal rulers . . . so also the prophet was ‘sent’ with the message of the Lord of Israel”¹¹⁹ to Israel’s king. These figures may have addressed the royal court and king for the good of the nation, but they did not typically address the nation.

The classical prophets, however, “began to address the people collectively on a national level. They rebuked the sins of the nation rather than concentrating on those of the individual king.”¹²⁰ John Holladay’s explanation is helpful: “Stripped to its simplest terms, this mutation involves a dramatic shift of the primary *object* of the prophetic address *away* from the ruling houses of the twin kingdoms and *to* the people of Israel as a whole.”¹²¹ That is certainly not to say there was no continuity between the classical prophets and their predecessors. Classical prophecy was a transformation, not a replacement.¹²²

This change is especially evident in the covenant lawsuits (רִיב) of the writing prophets, which address the entire nation (and not just the king and the royal court) and accuse it of breaking covenant with YHWH.¹²³

YHWH rises to prosecute (רִיב), and stands to judge (the) peoples. (Isa 4:13)¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Assyria prior to Tiglath-Pileser III.

¹¹⁹ Holladay, “Assyrian Statescraft,” 34.

¹²⁰ Laney, “The Role of God’s Prophets,” 315.

¹²¹ Holladay, “Assyrian Statescraft,” 35. Holladay notes that Isaiah, however, still has a strong presence in the courts of Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah.

¹²² On this point, see Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy in Israel*, 48–55.

¹²³ This relationship between HB covenant lawsuits and the idea of prophets as messengers seems to at least partially explain why Julia O’Brien views Malachi as a covenant lawsuit (see Chapter 1). Malachi at times sounds similar to a רִיב because it (A) is itself messenger speech, and (B) drew from prior prophets who were mimicking ANE messengers. In that sense, then, O’Brien’s hypothesis gets close to the thesis here, but from a different angle.

¹²⁴ The “peoples” are corrupt leaders (Isa 3:14–15) and the “daughters of Zion” (3:16–4:6), men and women representing the entire nation, as seen in the future, national punishments that will come “in that day” (3:18a; 4:2).

Hear the word of YHWH, O children of Israel, for YHWH (has) a case (רִיב) with those who dwell in the land, because there is neither truth nor mercy nor knowledge of Elohim in the land. (Hos 4:1).

Hear, O mountains, YHWH's case (רִיב), even the enduring foundations of the land/earth. Indeed, YHWH (has) a case (רִיב) with his people, and with Israel he himself will dispute. (Mic 6:2).

The influence of these prophets from the Neo-Assyrian era is also evident in their successor, Jeremiah, who prosecuted Judah on YHWH's behalf during the Neo-Babylonian rise to power and invasion of the Levant (late seventh and early sixth century BCE).

Therefore again I have a case (רִיב) with you—a declaration of YHWH—even with the sons of your sons will I have a case (רִיב). (Jer 2:9)

Even Jeremiah's call experience (1:4–10) demonstrates his role against entire nations and not just kings and royal courts.

See, I have appointed you this day
against the nations and against the kingdoms,
to uproot and to tear down,
and to destroy and to demolish;
to build and to plant. (1:10)

Each verb of destruction in this verse—to uproot (נָתַשׁ); to tear down (נָתַץ); to destroy (אָבַד);

and to demolish (הָרַס)—can refer to the destruction wrought when an army besieges and defeats a city. Grouping them together, then, constitutes a matrix of siege warfare terms.

“[T]hat is, Jer 1:10 conjures very specific imagery. It paints a picture of destruction stemming from siege warfare, the deportation of those who survive, but also the eventual rebuilding and replanting of those deportees.”¹²⁵ The text conceptualizes YHWH as a great king, an emperor who is about to raise an army (cf. 1:15) and proceed with military campaigns that will result in sieges and deportations as punishments for disobedience (cf. 1:16–19). Jeremiah's covenant lawsuit (2:1—3:5) has an organic relationship with the prophet's call narrative, as

¹²⁵ R. Michael Fox, “A Closer Look at Jeremiah 1:10 with Implications for (Re)Reading Jeremiah 1,” *Didaskalia* 22 (2011): 61–84, esp. 67–74.

does the account of Jerusalem's military destruction and exile at the book's conclusion (Jer 52:1–34).¹²⁶

Another phenomenon in the writing prophets that adds definition to their depiction as royal messengers is the oracle against a foreign nation. In such pericopae, the prophets function as YHWH's spokespeople and communicate a divine message to nations other than the Israelites: "The word of YHWH which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Philistines before Pharaoh smote it. Thus says YHWH: Behold, water rises from the north" (Jer 47:1–2a). The larger prophetic books—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—all have substantial collections of these oracles, and they address a plethora of surrounding nations (Isa 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32). In fact, Amos speaks for YHWH—*כה אמר יהוה*, Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 13; 2:1, 4—against six foreign nations (including Judah in this instance) before ever addressing the northern kingdom of Israel (2:6), the book's primary audience.¹²⁷ Obadiah and Nahum exclusively condemn foreign entities (i.e., Edom and Nineveh, respectively), albeit for the purpose of instilling hope in the covenant people. These numerous oracles against foreign nations further enhance the characterization of Hebrew prophets as YHWH's royal messengers.

The point here is not that conceptualizing Hebrew prophets as royal messengers is the exclusive way to view these figures. Comparisons with other ANE shaman and cultic figures certainly have been helpful.¹²⁸ This conceptualization is, however, especially fruitful and its

¹²⁶ It is also interesting to observe the role that textuality plays in the portrayal of Jeremiah. Here I am referring to his practice of writing correspondences in a scroll, e.g., YHWH's message concerning Israel and Judah (36:2) that King Jehoiakim cut up and burned (36:20–26) as well as the message from Jeremiah to YHWH which the prophet left with Seraiah to read upon his arrival at Babylon (51:59–64).

¹²⁷ Cf. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms*, 94–119.

¹²⁸ See esp. Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Patterns," and Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*. I also generally concur with Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 19, where the author provides an assessment of Westermann's treatment of the prophets: "C. Westermann throws very helpful light on the prophet's role as messenger, and what it meant in relation to earlier Israelite and the Ancient Near Eastern background to speak as God's messenger. But he overworks the point. The prophet plays many roles in addition to the messenger role." Raitt is referring to Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*. It is worth noting that neither engages the types of primary

demonstration is convincing.¹²⁹ A remarkable aspect of this comparison is the concurrent transformations of royal messengers and Hebrew prophets during Tiglath-Pileser III's reign in the eighth-century.¹³⁰ What this means for the present study is that there is a strong and definitive precedent for Hebrew prophets contextualizing their messages as royal correspondences from YHWH and behaving themselves as royal messengers. If Malachi is cast as a royal message/messenger, it is no anomaly. In fact, it is normal.

CONCLUSION: A CULTURAL *MILIEU* AND A CONCEPTUAL HERITAGE

This chapter builds a messenger lens for reading Malachi and discovering imagery and metaphors that reveal its messenger donegality. First, there is a reconstruction of Persian royal messengers from primary sources and relevant secondary discussions. Next, there is a presentation of Hebrew prophets as correlating to ANE messengers.

This two-fold lens—or bi-focality—provides a robust grid for the procedures that follow in Chapter 4. It allows for both Malachi's immediate historical context and the traditions of its rich prophetic heritage to shed light on messenger *poiema* in the text, those

sources that Gottwald, Holladay, and Laney do (see above), so Westermann's study is too narrow and Raitt's opinion is not sufficiently informed on this topic.

¹²⁹ Greene, *Messenger and Message*, ultimately concludes that the classical prophets (or "Great Individual Prophets," as he refers to them) employ messenger language but would not have been regarded as messengers *per se*. Although his work is helpful in many places, its Achilles heel is that Greene's conclusions entirely hinge on the term מַלְאָךְ. If a prophet is not called a מַלְאָךְ, he or she could not have been a messenger. He holds this position even though he concedes that Haggai is a מַלְאָךְ. Greene dismisses Malachi altogether since its title is allegedly inauthentic (but see Chapter 4, below, *ad. loc.*), making its use of מַלְאָכִי of "little assistance" for his study (see pp. 147–48). It seems too strict to say that the whole matter hinges on one word, and perhaps too convenient to dismiss instances where that one word does appear. Also, he does not make a strong enough distinction between prophets actually *being* royal messengers and prophets *being conceptualized* as royal messengers. I have tried to be consistent in presenting this metaphor as a conceptualization in the HB. Greene says (in bold type, no less), "I emphasize, however, that with the exception of Haggai, no historical prophet, especially Haggai's contemporary, Zechariah, was ever called or referred to himself, as a messenger in the Hebrew Scriptures" (pp. 256–57). Greene then completely undermines his own argument: "Many of the actions and much language attributed to [prophets] are either clarified, or only become intelligible when seen against the backdrop of the characteristics and functions of ANE messengers" (p. 257). In sum, Greene believes Hebrew prophets were not messengers, but it is absolutely necessary to regard them as and compare them with ANE messengers to fully understand the Hebrew prophets! I find it problematic to try and have it both ways.

¹³⁰ Harold P. Scanlin, "The Emergence of the Writing Prophets in Israel in the Mid-Eighth Century," *JETS* 21.4 (1978): 305–13 makes a strong case that the writing/recording of the prophetic words themselves is a royal messenger characterization. Although the point is perhaps obvious, it is still important. The writing down of the divine message is akin to the recording of a king's message in a scroll to be carried and spoken by his royal messenger(s).

decorations embedded and employed to create a messenger/message atmospheric quality to the work. The process of building this lens corresponds to Michael Ward's reconstruction of the appropriate planet from Medieval literature and C. S. Lewis's other writings before investigating the planetary donegality of a specific book of the Narniad.

CHAPTER 4

POIEMA: MALACHI'S MESSENGER DECORATIONS AND ROOT MESSENGER METAPHOR

*Hummingbird looked at all the
skinny people.
He felt sorry for them.
He said, "You need a messenger.
Listen, I'll tell you what to do."*

—Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Therefore we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us.

—2 Corinthians 5:20

The preceding chapter constructs a messenger lens by (A) providing a detailed portrait of Persian royal messengers and their place in the imperial structure, and (B) explaining the conceptualization of classical Hebrew prophets prior to Malachi as ANE messengers. The Book of Malachi, then, had two important sources from which to draw its messenger language and imagery: a cultural *milieu* and a prophetic heritage. The present chapter is an investigation of Malachi through this bifocal messenger lens. As made clear in Chapter 2, this task corresponds to Ward's demonstration of planetary *poiema* in each book of the Narniad. In Chapters 3–9 of *Planet Narnia*, Ward uses each reconstruction of a Medieval planet to uncover decorations of that planet in the relative Chronicle. Likewise, this chapter sheds light on messenger decorations in Malachi.

First, there is a linear reading of Malachi proceeding pericope by pericope that details messenger *poiema*. Here my demarcations of the text stray little from the disputation outline discussed in Chapter 1,¹ though some divergence is present and discussed when appropriate.

¹ After all, I have never stated that this *outline* is not useful. Rather, its conceptualization as a series of disputations is incomplete. I find it problematic inasmuch as it provides *a* (not *the*) classification of the pericopae within the book but stops short of getting at the book's overall form (as O'Brien notes) and

Next, there is a classification of the decorations into three broad categories. Finally, there is a brief conclusion.

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to elaborate on some important terminology in what follows. There are frequent references to reading a pericope, verse, clause, or form *through a messenger lens*. Readers should interpret this and similar phrases as technical language. It is intended to be shorthand for saying, “in light of the prevalence and significance of Persian royal messengers in the imperial structure and/or in light of Malachi’s prophetic heritage and the messenger semantics in other books and passages of the HB.” Essentially, this phrase means reading the text in light of the data that Chapter 3 presents.

MALACHI’S MESSENGER *POIEMA*

This section is exegetical in nature, but it not an exegesis *per se*. In working through the pericopae, I have necessarily chosen to limit discussions primarily to matters pertinent to the messenger/message concept. I discuss other matters in each pericopae to the degree that they are helpful for the primary purpose. What follows is not a commentary; or, perhaps it is an acutely focused commentary that proceeds with a thesis.

Poiema in Malachi 1:1

Malachi’s title provides an immediate influx of messenger decorations into the text. First of all, however, there is need to explain the choice of the word, “title.” Because the phrase “burden of the word of YHWH” (משא דבר־יהוה) occurs only in Zech 9:1, 12:1, and Mal 1:1, most scholars treat Mal 1:1 as separate from the rest of the text. In this view, the final redactor of HZM (and/or of the Book of the Twelve) provided these superscriptions when attaching their respective units (i.e., Zech 9–11; 12–14; Malachi) in the editing process.² Thus

considering the cultural *milieu* in which the orality of the proposed disputations (as well as, for the purposes here, the messenger language) would have both made sense and been rhetorically effective.

² See, e.g., Ernst Sellin and George Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 469; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 440–41; and Hill, *Malachi*, 137: “The three superscriptions (Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1) do serve to create three subunits in the Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus (Zech 9-11, 12-14, and Mal 1–3 [4]).”

Arndt Meinhold regards Mal 1:1 as a separate “headline” (*Überschrift*)³ and Hill treats it as a prefixed superscription that “stands outside the body of literature it prefaces.”⁴

This perspective has some problems. Glazier-McDonald points out that it is equally plausible that Mal 1:1 uses the phrase *משא דבר־יהוה* as an imitation of Zech 9:1 and 12:1.⁵

After all, Malachi characteristically incorporates language and ideas of prior prophetic books.⁶ Also, as Michael Floyd observes,

This similarity [between Zech 9:1, 12:1 and Mal 1:1] is relatively superficial, however, in comparison with a much more significant element that the superscription of Malachi shares with the superscriptions of Nahum and Habakkuk [which also have *משא* in their titles], namely, the designation of an intermediary through which the prophetic word is revealed.⁷

Moreover, the matrix of messenger decorations in Mal 1:1 fits well with the rest of Malachi that follows.⁸ In that sense, the verse hardly seems separate from what it precedes. I propose that Mal 1:1 introduces a messenger theme that permeates the entire text, and I think “title” captures this conceptual relationship better than the technical designation, “superscription.”⁹

There are some conspicuous messenger decorations in the title, Mal 1:1. First, the revelation is said to be “by the hand of” (*ביד*) Malachi. Understandably, the Hebrew phrase is lost in English translations, where it would be a bit awkward. Most translate the phrase as

³ Arndt Meinhold, *Maleachi* (BKAT; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006), 4–7.

⁴ Hill, *Malachi*, 136 (cf., however, p. 140, where Hill talks about a “compound title in the superscription”).

⁵ Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 24. She attributes this thought to A. van Hoonacker, *Les douze petits prophètes* (Paris: Gabalda, 1908), 704–5.

⁶ See, e.g., Ruth Scoralick, “The Case of Edom in the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Reflections on Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis,” in Rainer Albertz, James Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle, eds., *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations—Redactional Processes—Historical Insights* (BZAW 433; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 229–30, 232–33.

⁷ Michael H. Floyd, “The *משא* (*MAŠŠĀ*) as a Type of Prophetic Book,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121.3 (2002): 415.

⁸ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 180 also sees covenantal connections: “The preamble or title, identifying the author of the covenant and expounding the majesty of the great king, does not precede Malachi’s prophecy but is evident throughout.”

⁹ Childs, *Introduction*, 491–92, labels Mal 1:1 a “superscription” but then argues for “both the integrity and consistency of the title of Malachi with other features in post-exilic literature, and to show its completely different function from the two passages in Zechariah.” This demonstrates how two scholars, Childs and Hill, do not even mean the same thing by “superscription.”

“by” or “through” Malachi.¹⁰ Scholars typically treat בִּיד¹¹ similarly and are content to syntactically classify the phrase and comment on the prophet’s agency in communicating a divine revelation.¹² Such theological points are not incorrect, but they do stop short of fully explaining the phrase and thus miss the implications of its imagery for reading the book.

One of the insights from Chapter 3 that is especially relevant as a lens here is the point that Persian royal messages were physical objects.¹³ They were written in scrolls and sealed with royal insignia, and sometimes they were inscribed on tablets. Royal messengers entered courts and read the king’s demands directly from messages that they carried in hand. When Darius sent a royal messenger to Oroites in Sardis, for example, the messenger entered the court and read from scrolls, and the attending guards regarded these documents with awe.¹⁴ The community at Yehud regularly experienced the arrival of such emissaries and most likely would have received the phrase “by the hand of Malachi/My Messenger” as messenger language. It serves as a cue for what follows and signifies that the text is an official message from YHWH. It also suggests that YHWH, the sender, is a king, a point developed more fully in Mal 1:6–14 (see below).

This reading of “by the hand of” finds strong support from the HB. Although בִּיד is common and used in a variety of ways, it frequently appears in communication contexts and refers to the messages that messengers carry and/or deliver.

¹⁰ E.g., ASV “by”; ESV “by”; HCSB “through”; KJV “by”; NASB “through”; NET “through”; NIV “through”; NRSV “by”; RSV “by.”

¹¹ The preposition ב (“in/by”) plus the noun יד (“hand”).

¹² E.g., Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 191 classifies the phrase בִּיד as instrumental and says it signifies that the prophet is merely “mediating the word of the Lord” and not himself responsible for it; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 166 says בִּיד refers to “prophetic intermediation” and renders it simply “through”; Hill, *Malachi*, 134 says the preposition is “circumstantial” (in relation the preceding phrase, “word of YHWH”) and “demonstrates the agency of the prophet,” and thus renders בִּיד “through”; Meinhold, *Maleachi*, 8 follows suit and renders it “durch,” though he does point out that בִּיד appears regularly in conjunction with prophets in the HB.

¹³ See Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, for a picture of a sealed document dated to the late fifth century BCE from Elephantine in Egypt.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3.

And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not send forth the children of Israel as YHWH had spoken *by the hand of* (ביד) Moses. (Exod 6:1)¹⁵

And [Saul] took a pair of oxen and cut them in pieces, and he sent throughout all the territory of Israel *by the hand of the messengers* (ביד המלאכים), saying . . . (1 Sam 11:7)

Then in the morning David wrote a scroll (ספר) to Joab, and he sent it *by the hand of* (ביד) Uriah. (2 Sam 11:14)

By the hand of your messengers (ביד מלאכיד) you have reproached Adonai, and you said, “With an abundance of chariots I will go up . . .” (2 Kgs 19:23)

Scrolls (ספרים) were sent *by the hand of* (ביד) couriers to all the king’s provinces . . . (Esth 3:13)¹⁶

It is noteworthy that scrolls are specifically mentioned in some of these examples. This point is significant: They are the objects sent “by the hand of” the messengers.

Since prophets before Malachi were conceptualized as ANE messengers, it also noteworthy that ביד is a common descriptor of prophetic intermediation in the HB:

And he said, “This is the word of YHWH which he spoke *by the hand of* (ביד) his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying . . .” (2 Kgs 9:36)

Yet YHWH testified against Israel and against Judah *by the hand of* (ביד) every prophet and every seer, saying . . . (2 Kings 17:13)

YHWH the God of their ancestors sent word unto them *by the hand of his messengers* (ביד מלאכיו) early and often . . . and yet they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and ridiculed his prophets. (2 Chr 36:15–16)

At that time YHWH spoke *by the hand of* (ביד) Isaiah, son of Amoz, saying . . . (Isa 20:2)¹⁷

¹⁵ “By the hand of Moses” (ביד משה) is a common Pentateuchal expression in instances where Moses serves as a mediator/messenger of YHWH’s commands—Exod 4:12–13; 34:29; 35:29; Lev 8:36; 10:11; 26:46; Num 4:37, 45, 49; 9:23; 10:13; 15:23; 17:5; 27:23; 36:13—and in passages outside the Pentateuch referring to this Mosaic phenomenon—Josh 14:2; 20:2; 21:2, 8; 22:9; Judg 3:4; 1 Kgs 8:53, 56; 2 Chr 33:8; 34:14; 35:6; Neh 8:14; 9:14; 10:29.

¹⁶ See also, e.g., Gen 38:20; 1 Sam 16:19–20; 1 Sam 28:15; 2 Sam 10:2; 12:25; 1 Kgs 2:25; 2 Chr 8:18; Esth 1:12, 15; 8:10; Prov 26:6; Isa 37:24; Jer 27:3; 29:3.

¹⁷ See also, e.g., 2 Sam 12:25; 1 Kgs 12:15; 14:18; 15:29; 16:7, 12, 34; 17:16; 2 Kgs 10:10; 14:25; 17:23; 21:10; 24:2; 1 Chr 11:3; 24:19; 2 Chr 10:15; 29:25; Ezra 9:11; Neh 9:30; Jer 37:2; 39:11; 50:1; Ezek 38:17; Dan 9:10; Hag 1:1, 3; 2:1; Zech 7:7, 12.

It is understandable that translations discard and scholars smooth over this phrase—it would simply be awkward. Still, something is lost in translating it dynamically since the phrase is hardly an abstraction. It is a messenger decoration and an important micrometaphor. The imagery of a messenger bearing a scroll in hand dissipates without it.¹⁸

Second, there is the rather obvious term Malachi, “My Messenger” (מלאכי). With the information available, it is impossible to say definitively if this designation is a name or title. In Hebrew the formation is simply a noun (“messenger”) plus a first person singular pronominal suffix (“my”). Either option—Malachi or My Messenger—works. Although some scholars emend the text to read “Messenger of YHWH/Yah” (מלאכיה) or something similar, others point to the inclusion of prophets’ proper names in the titles and introductions of every other HB prophetic book¹⁹ and insist that Malachi must be, likewise, a name.²⁰

Other versions are of little help with this issue. The LXX²¹ treats the term as a title, “by the hand of *his* angel/messenger” (ἐν χειρὶ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ). However, the possessive pronouns in the HB (“my”) and LXX (“his”) are discrepant. Furthermore, the LXX has a

¹⁸ Kessler, *Maleachi*, 100 is thus correct in saying that בִּיד carries the “idea of mediation” (*Gedanke der Mittlerschaft*) and (briefly) pointing to its use in messenger contexts in 1 Sam 11:7 and Jer 27:3. He does not, however, convey just how prevalent this specific use of בִּיד is in the HB.

¹⁹ Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1–3; Ezek 1:1–3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:1; Obad 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1; and, of particular interest are Nah 1:1 and Hab 1:1, each having the prophet’s name and the label “burden” (מִשָּׂא), like Mal 1:1. Although I think Zech 1–9, 9–11, and 12–14 are distinct but interrelated units, I sympathize with Floyd’s frustration with the overreaching that has taken place based on this observation, which has even resulted in “the practice of writing commentaries that combined the interpretation of Haggai with Zechariah 1–8 in one volume, and Zechariah 9–14 with Malachi in another volume, as if First and Second Zechariah were more closely related to Haggai and Malachi, respectively, than to each other.” See Floyd, “The מִשָּׂא,” 408. It also worth noting that Daniel, which might seem an exception, is part of the Writings (*Ketubim*) in the HB, not the Prophets (*Nebi'im*). Although certainly prophetic in many ways, it was not originally canonized as such.

²⁰ For an overview of (and bibliographic data for) the various positions and reconstructions, see Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 27–29; Hill, *Malachi*, 135–36; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 165–66; and E. Ray Clendenen, “Malachi,” in *Haggai, Malachi* (NAC 21A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 204–7.

²¹ I use the definite phrase “the LXX” merely for its convenience. Given the numerous early Greek texts that are collated into modern editions of the Septuagint, I generally agree with Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), *passim*, that “the LXX” is characteristically a misnomer. What we have are several extant Greek versions and manuscripts and not a single, uniform LXX.

lengthy embellishment at the end of the verse: “Place it, indeed, upon your heart.” *Targum Jonathan* adds an interpretive phrase—“whose name was called Ezra the Scribe” (תקרי שמייה עזרא ספרא)—to the end of the verse. Although this variation implies that מלאכי is a title, the Aramaic line is clearly traditional and hardly useful for interpreting מלאכי in the HB.²² So, there are simply too many discrepancies and embellishments for these versions to be of much help. They seem to go their own ways and bear their own traditions.

Based on the ambiguity of the Hebrew construction and the interpretative nature of the LXX and Targum, the position here is two-fold: (A) It is impossible to say definitively whether מלאכי is a proper name or title²³; but (B) it makes no difference for this study. Either way, the prophet’s name or title means “My Messenger,” and so it is a clear and unmistakable messenger decoration in the book’s first verse. Moreover, this same decoration reappears in what follows, once for the priests who should behave as a “messenger of YHWH of Hosts” (2:7, מלאך יהוה-צבאות) and twice for the eschatological messenger(s) who will purify YHWH’s covenant people (3:1, “my messenger,” מלאכי, exactly as in 1:1; and “the messenger of the covenant,” מלאך הברית).

Especially noteworthy for this discussion is the book of Haggai, where ביד and מלאך both appear multiple times. In Hag 1:1, 3 the word of YHWH comes “by the hand of Haggai the prophet” (ביד הגי הנביא), who is also a “messenger of YHWH” (1:13, מלאך יהוה) and speaks “with a message of YHWH” (1:13, במלאכות יהוה). In light of prior observations about messengers in HZM (see Chapter 1), it seems Haggai and Malachi may even bookend the

²² Cf. Chapter 1 for problems in dating Malachi as late as Ezra and Nehemiah.

²³ However, I do *lean* towards it being a proper name since every other prophetic book includes a proper name in its title or introduction—see above, footnote 18.

corpus with royal messages. Regardless, Haggai is another postexilic prophetic book in which the terms “messenger” and “by the hand of” describe the prophet’s role and activity.

In summary, Mal 1:1 contains two conspicuous messenger decorations: the phrase “by the hand of” and the agent’s name, Malachi/My Messenger (מלאכי). These decorations provide an influx of messenger *poiema* at the onset of the book.

Poiema in Malachi 1:2–5

Since most scholars view Malachi as a series of disputations, they usually treat Mal 1:2–5 as the first one in the book. At risk of belaboring the point, I think this designation offers an explanation of what Malachi *contains* while stopping short of explaining what the book *means*, especially if it proves full of messenger imagery. Because I am proposing a different way of reading the text, I will henceforth refer to each unit with a more neutral term than disputation—pericope—even though my demarcations stray little from the disputation model.

After the title, the first pericope establishes a serious tone for the book. YHWH has loved Israel and hated Edom, for whom the text uses their eponymous ancestors Jacob and Esau, respectively. The proof of this claim is the fact that Edom lies in ruin²⁴ while the descendants of Israel have returned to Yehud. There are three decorations in the text that contribute to Malachi’s messenger *poiema*.

First, there is the language of love and hate. Scholars have long recognized that the verbs “love” (אהב) and “hate” (שנא) do not always refer to passions in the HB,²⁵ but are often stock language for covenant relationships. This perspective emerges primarily from readings of Deuteronomy that take into account its consistency with ANE suzerainty-vassal treaties.

²⁴ See Chapter 1 for an overview of the issues revolving around Edom’s antagonism and destruction.

²⁵ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 200 notes that love and hate are often used of emotions when it comes to individual relationships in the HB. In Gen 29:30–31, e.g., Jacob “loves” (אהב) Rachel more than Leah, so YHWH gives a child to Leah because she was “hated” (שנא). When it comes to YHWH’s relationship with Israel, however, “love” usually has covenant overtones.

* * *

EXCURSUS 1: LOVE, HATE, AND ANE ROYAL MESSENGERS

The progenitor of this treaty perspective, George Mendenhall, argues that Deuteronomy (and other parts of the Torah, e.g., Exod 19–24) contains the six basic parts of Hittite treaties: preamble; historical prologue; stipulations; deposition of the text; a list of witnesses; and a list of curses and blessings for keeping or breaking the treaty/covenant.²⁶ Subsequent scholars have built upon and refined Mendenhall’s observations.²⁷

With an eye towards this treaty comparison, W. L. Moran observes that the verb “love,” extremely prevalent in Deuteronomy, primarily carries a connotation of covenantal fidelity in that book.²⁸ For example, YHWH “loved” (אהב) Israel’s ancestors, thus choosing to rescue their descendants from Egyptian bondage (Deut 4:37), implying that the love displayed in the exodus was an act of YHWH’s covenant loyalty. Also, YHWH is faithful in “keeping *the covenant* (הברית) and the loyalty *to those who love him* (לאהביו), even those who keep his commandments” (Deut 7:9). Here love is essentially equated with covenant fidelity. Deuteronomy is saturated with this language.²⁹

Deuteronomy exhibits a synthesis of love and covenant, a point that makes sense given that it is virtually “the biblical document *par excellence*” of both concepts.³⁰ Although Moran’s focus is on the verb “love,” it is noteworthy that “hate” (שנא), too, appears in Deuteronomy and elsewhere with strong covenant overtones. In Deut 5:9, for example, YHWH threatens to punish even the descendants of those who commit

²⁶ See George E. Mendenhall, “Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law,” *BA* 17 (1954): 26-46; Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *BA* 17 (1954): 50-76; and Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

²⁷ See, e.g., Charles Fensham, “Malediction and Benediction in the Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties and the Old Testament,” *ZAW* 74 (1962): 1–9; Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in the Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (AnBib 21; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963); John A. Thompson, *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1964); Klaus Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*, 2nd ed. (WMANT 4; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964); Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); and Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). For a canonical angle on HB covenants, see Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985). See also subsequent investigations that focus more on social-scientific aspects of HB covenants (esp. reciprocity) than comparative treatments, e.g., Saul Olyan, “Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environment,” *JBL* 115.2 (1996): 201–18; Zeba Crook, “Reciprocity: Covenantal Exchange as a Test Case,” in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed. Philip F. Esler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 78–910.

²⁸ See W. L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77–87. Cf. Dennis J. McCarthy, “Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship between Yahweh and Israel,” *CBQ* 27 (1965): 144–47.

²⁹ See, e.g., Deut 5:10; 6:5; 7:13; 10:12, 15, 18, 19; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:4; 19:9; 23:6; 30:6, 16, 20. See also, similarly, Exod 20:1; Josh 22:5; 23:11; Judg 5:31.

³⁰ Moran, “Love of God,” 82.

idolatry, visiting the iniquity “upon those who hate me” (אֲנִי־שׂוֹנֵאִים).³¹ Here hating YHWH describes a concrete action and covenant violation (i.e., idolatry), not merely an abstract emotion. So, it is clear that love and hate can be loaded language with strong covenantal implications.

This arc is relevant for Mal 1:2–5 because Moran proposes that a covenantal use of love/hate reflects friend/enemy language found in a wide range of ANE diplomatic texts.³² The aforementioned Hittite treaties, for example, commonly stress that their vassals must behave as friends and share the suzerain’s enemies:

Whoever is My Majesty’s [friend shall be] your friend. [Whoever is My Majesty’s enemy [shall be your] enemy. . . . I, My Majesty, [will send] noblemen of Hatti, and infantry [and chariotry, to him from] Hatti to the land of Amurru. [Because] they will go up to your cities, protect [them].³³

In the future the Hittites and the Mittannians [shall not look upon one another] with a malevolent eye. . . . When the King of Hatti goes to war, the king of [the land] of Mittanni [shall attack] any enemy of [Hattie]. As someone is the enemy of the land of Mittanni, [he shall be] the enemy [of Hatti]. The friend] of the King of Hatti [shall be] the friend of the king of the land [of Mittani].³⁴

These texts conceptualize covenant relationships/treaties as friendships in which the partners have mutual enemies.³⁵ Not only does Deuteronomy use love and hate similarly, but it clearly discusses YHWH’s role in dealing with Israel’s antagonists: “YHWH shall make all your enemies who rise up against you to be struck down before you; they will set out against you one way, but seven ways shall they flee from your presence” (Deut 28:7). Dealing with Israel’s enemies was one of YHWH’s covenant duties and one of the ways YHWH would both love and hate.

* * *

Through a messenger lens, the language of love and hate in Mal 1:2–5 merits close attention. Malachi’s use of this language to demonstrate YHWH’s covenant faithfulness is a strong echo of Deuteronomy and, indirectly, older ANE covenantal forms. Indeed, offering Edom’s destruction as proof of YHWH’s loyalty fits well with YHWH’s (i.e., the suzerain’s) covenant duty towards Israel’s (i.e., the vassal’s) enemies in Deut 28:7. Considering that

³¹ See also Deut 7:10, 15; 30:7; 32:41; 33:11. See also, similarly, Exod 20:5; Lev 26:17; Num 10:35.

³² Moran, “Love of God,” *passim*. Note, however, that Moran mentions texts both predating and postdating the Hittite documents, spending the most space for such correlations looking at first millennium BCE Neo-Assyrian documents.

³³ Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 38–39, from a treaty between Suppiluliuma I of Hatti and Aziru of Amurru.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 45, from a treaty between Suppiluliuma I of Hatti and Shattiwaza of Mittanni. See the numerous other treaties in Beckman’s work (pp. 14–124) for more examples. Friend/enemy language is standard in these treaties.

³⁵ For more examples, see Moran, “Love of God in Deuteronomy.” Cf. Charles Fensham, “Clauses of Protection in the Hittite Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament,” *VT* 13.2 (1963): 133–43 for a more focused treatment of the Hittite materials.

royal messengers played a vital role in the reading and delivery of such ANE treaties and correspondences,³⁶ the concept fits well in Malachi and the language of love and hate contributes to its messenger *poiema*.³⁷

Second, the report of Edom's destruction exhibits strong correlations with the sending of a Persian royal messenger to announce the outcome of a battle. A famous example is Xerxes's dispatching of a messenger to announce the defeat of Athens. Because Athens had defeated Darius at Marathon and had dishonored Persia by casting its royal messengers into a pit,³⁸ Xerxes had a particular grudge against that city. When his Persian forces crossed the Hellespont in 480, they eventually made their way to Athens, surrounded the city, launched flaming arrows into it, and managed to open its gates after stealthily entering the city near the heights of the Acropolis. Upon taking Athens, the Persians plundered its mountain sanctuary and set afire the entire Acropolis.³⁹

Xerxes sent a royal messenger to announce this accomplishment to the rest of the empire: "Having taken complete possession of Athens, Xerxes now sent off a mounted messenger to Artabanos to announce his present success."⁴⁰ Those in Susa who received this message were so delighted that they celebrated publically with incense offerings, sacrifices, and "pleasure."⁴¹ This incident was not an isolated one. Kuhrt says, "The progress of the campaign and the result of each battle, especially one involving the king, were always communicated to the main imperial centres."⁴²

³⁶ See Chapter 3 as well as Excursus 1.

³⁷ Two other concepts in the passage may correlate to the curses found in treaties/covenants: (A) The idea of Jackals plaguing Edom sounds similar to the curse of wild animals inhabiting a land or city in a Sefire treaty and in Isa 34:11–17, a text that may have a treaty background; and (B) Edom's inability to rebuild sounds similar to futility curses in the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut 28:30–32, 35–40). See McKenzie and Wallace, "Covenant Themes in Malachi," 556–57.

³⁸ See Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.133.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.51–53.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.54. Artabanos was Xerxes's uncle whom he left in charge back in Susa.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.99–100.

⁴² Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 286 section 62 footnote 1.

Through a messenger lens, this report of Edom's destruction provides an announcement similar to Xerxes's royal message about Athens that was heralded and celebrated throughout the empire. After all, Israel clearly regarded Edom as an enemy.⁴³ Hill observes,

An anti-Edomite polemic can be traced through the OT/HB from the mixed blessing granted Esau by Isaac (Gen 27:39–40), to the exilic imprecation of Edom for its part in the fall of Jerusalem (Ps 137:7), right through Malachi's avowal of Edom's obliteration (Mal 1:2–4). National oracles of judgment pronounced against Edom are prominent in the prophetic literature, including Isa 21:11–12; 34:5–17; Jer 49:7–22; Ezek 25:12–14; 35:1–15; Amos 1:11–12; and the book of Obadiah.⁴⁴

This polemic is so intense that Bruce Cresson sees a “Damn-Edom” motif in the HB.⁴⁵ Albert Mailland concludes that, in Isa 34–35, Edom becomes Israel's prototypical, hated, foreign antagonist, “the main enemy” (*l'ennemi principal*).⁴⁶ Through a messenger lens, the report of Edom's destruction is an instance of messenger *poiema*.

This announcement of YHWH's victory coincides with a third decoration in the pericope: the designation YHWH of Hosts (יהוה צבאות) for the deity. The HB uses this construction two hundred and eighty-four times.⁴⁷ It is especially frequent in several prophetic books,⁴⁸ but nowhere is it as concentrated as in Malachi, where it occurs twenty-three times in a text consisting of four small chapters.⁴⁹ This observation is significant here

⁴³ From this messenger angle, “enemy” is an appropriate term; but, it is important to remember that this text and others construct a particular and biased portrait of one of Israel's “Others,” as noted in Johnny Miles, *Constructing the Other in Ancient Israel and the USA* (BMW; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), *passim*.

⁴⁴ Hill, *Malachi*, 151. Cf. Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 201–3; R. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 304–6.

⁴⁵ Bruce C. Cresson, “Israel and Edom: A Study of the Anti-Edom Bias in Old Testament Religion” (PhD Diss., Duke University, 1963), *passim*. See also Bert Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* (JSOTSup 169; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), *passim*, esp. 13–17.

⁴⁶ Albert Mailland, “La ‘petit apocalypse’ d'Isaïe. Etude sur les chapitres XXXIV et XXXV du livre d'Isaïe” (Diss., Lyons, France 1955–56), 75–90.

⁴⁷ Terence Fretheim, “Yahweh,” *NIDOTTE* 4:1295–1300.

⁴⁸ See esp. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai, and Zechariah.

⁴⁹ Four, that is, in the ET; there are only three in the HB. See Mal 1:4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14; 2:2, 4, 7, 8, 16; 3:1, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17; 4:1, 3.

because יהוה צבאות has a strong military connotation: It refers to YHWH leading the entirety of creation—everything in the heavens and upon the earth—as its military commander.⁵⁰

Genesis 2:1 announces the completion of the heavens and the earth “and all their hosts” (וכל־צבאם), using the term host (צבא) for the “vast array”⁵¹ of creation. Because this and other texts use the term for the stars and heavenly entities that YHWH created (e.g., Judg 5:20; Ps 33:6; Isa 13:4; 40:26; Neh 9:6), and because host so often refers to an army (e.g., 2 Sam 2:8; 10:7; 1 Kgs 16:16), it is best to take יהוה צבאות as a military title.⁵² In Mal 1:2–5, it makes sense that this title would appear in the report of Edom’s destruction since, during the reign of Xerxes, the people of Yehud would have heard that report as a victory message.⁵³ Through a messenger lens, this title for the deity contributes to the messenger *poiema*.⁵⁴

In summary, there are three noteworthy messenger decorations in Mal 1:2–5. The first is the language of love and hate. Second, there is an announcement of Edom’s destruction, which finds a strong corollary in Xerxes’s announcements of battle outcomes *via* royal messengers. Finally, there is the military designation, YHWH of Hosts (יהוה צבאות).

Poiema in Malachi 1:6—2:9

There is some disagreement about the scope of the next pericope in Malachi. Scholars who follow E. Pfeiffer’s influential demarcation of the text into six disputations tend to see Mal

⁵⁰ See Fretheim, “Yahweh”; Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (AB 25B; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 18–19; Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (AB 25C; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 248–49. Cf. Hill, *Malachi*, 157–58.

⁵¹ Tremper Longman III, “צבא,” *NIDOTTE* 3.733–35, quote from 3.733.

⁵² A few texts are esp. helpful here: 1 Kgs 22:19, where the prophet Micaiah speaks of YHWH’s heavenly throne surrounded by all the hosts of heaven; 1 Sam 17:45, where David mentions “YHWH of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel; Job 38:7, which personifies the heavenly stars and then mentions the angels (“sons of God”); and Ps 103:19–21, which mentions YHWH’s throne, the angels, all creatures, and hosts together.

⁵³ See the discussion of the next pericope, below, for elaborations on YHWH of Hosts and Xerxes’s role as a military commander of several armies.

⁵⁴ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 19 suggest that the title is so frequent in HZM precisely because it harkens back to preexilic conceptions of YHWH as the ultimate authority, a conception that would have been especially powerful in light of the expansive reigns of Persian emperors.

1:6—2:9 as a single unit addressing the priests. In support of this perspective is the direct mention of priests in Mal 1:6 (“you priests who despise my name”) and the acute focus on priests in Mal 2:1–9. Also, there is a natural relationship between priests and the cultic concerns in Mal 1:6–14. Others, however, see two distinct units here, one dealing with the unsatisfactory cultic practices (1:6–14) and the other with the priests as the primary culprits (2:1–9).⁵⁵ Both models work, and choosing one or the other makes no impact on interpretation—either it is one large pericope with two distinct sections or it is two interrelated but distinct pericopae. I will treat Mal 1:6—2:9 as one large unit, primarily because of the priest and cultic connections.⁵⁶

First, one metaphor in particular is very strong in this unit and of utmost importance for this entire investigation—the text presents YHWH as the great king of all nations:

“For from the rising of the sun even unto its setting, great (shall be) my name among the nations, and in every place incense (shall be) presented to my name, as well as a pure offering; for “Great (shall be) my name among the nations,” says YHWH of Hosts. (Mal 1:11)

“For I (am) a great king,” says YHWH of Hosts, “and my name (shall be) revered among the nations.” (1:14b)

As indicated by the parenthetical, supplied verbs, the tense is ambiguous in these verses. Is YHWH’s name already revered among the nations (“great *is* my name”) or does the text anticipate that phenomenon in the future (“great *shall be* my name”)? The same question applies to the incense offering in Mal 1:11. Scholars differ on the matter. Baldwin, for example, reads these verses eschatologically and looking towards the future.⁵⁷ Hill, however, sees a durative element in the text, meaning “my name *continues* to be great.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of disputations and Malachi’s structure.

⁵⁶ It seems to me that using the term priest at the head of the section and then taking up this topic in Mal 2:1–9—after a cultic discussion, no less—is too well-designed to be a coincidence. Similarly, note also the uses of “honor/glory” (כבוד) in Mal 1:6 and 2:2 and “fear/reverence” (מורא) in Mal 1:6 and 2:5. In some ways, Mal 1:6 maps out some specific concepts that resume in 2:1–9.

⁵⁷ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 228–30. Cf. Joyce G. Baldwin, “Malachi 1:11 and the Worship of the Nations in the Old Testament,” *TynBul* 23 (1972): 117–24.

⁵⁸ Hill, *Malachi*, 187.

Also, some find the universalism in these verses—all nations worshiping and revering YHWH—out of place in Malachi and the HB, and thus regard them as secondary additions.⁵⁹ Those who read the passage eschatologically, however, find it anticipatory and easily reconcilable with the rest of the text.⁶⁰ Certainly there is no consensus, and Hill may be justified in seeing the matter as a *crux interpretum*.⁶¹

Through a messenger lens, however, there is a different way of handling these matters. Inscriptions reveal that Persia conceptualized Xerxes and his predecessors to the throne very similarly to how this passage conceptualizes YHWH:

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, mighty king, King of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters . . . By his exalted [word], all the kings who sit upon thrones throughout the world, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, who live in the dis[tricts far-off], the kings of the West, who dwell in tents, all of them brought their heavy tribute before me and in Babylon they kissed my feet.⁶²

Darius, the great king, king of kings, king of countries, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid. King Darius proclaims: This (is) the kingdom which I hold, from the Saca who are beyond Sogdiana, from the Indus as far as Sardis.⁶³

I (am) Darius the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing all kinds of men, king on this great earth far and wide, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid. King Darius proclaims: I am a Persian; from Persia. I seized Egypt.⁶⁴

I (am) Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of all kinds of people, king on this earth far and wide, the son of Darius, an Achaemenid. Xerxes, the great king, proclaims . . .⁶⁵

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Horst, *Nahum bis Maleachi*, 261, 265–67; Elliger, *Zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, 189, 194–95; Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 406. See R. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 312–14 for a fuller overview of various positions on Mal 1:11, 14.

⁶⁰ Baldwin, “Malachi 1:11,” esp. 122, where she points out other passages with the phrase “from the rising of the sun to its setting” (Pss 50:1; 113:3; Isa 45:6; 59:9) that are in “contexts which look towards an eschatological demonstration of the Lord’s person to the whole inhabited earth.” I think an eschatological perspective regarding Mal 1:11, 14 dovetails easily with the Abrahamic Covenant (see esp. Gen 12:1–4), Israel’s role as a mediatory “priestly kingdom” (Exod 19:4–6), and a forward looking Zion theology in which all the nations will stream to the Jerusalem temple to worship YHWH (see esp. Isa 2:1–4). In the more immediate context, I think the universal scope of Mal 1:11, 14 and the focus on Israel’s election in Mal 1:2–5 make for an interesting and intentional juxtaposition. Both are needed in the book. Israel’s election is for the nations, and the extension of YHWH’s kingdom to all nations comes (or will come) through Israel’s election. Juxtaposing both concepts creates a more interesting reading, but admittedly the presence of both is an essential factor in why some (see previous footnote) see Mal 1:11, 14 as secondary.

⁶¹ Hill, *Malachi*, 218.

⁶² *COS* 2:315, from the Cyrus Cylinder.

⁶³ Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 476, from a trilingual inscription from Persepolis.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 486, from a trilingual text on a granite stela from Egypt. See similar Darius inscriptions from a terrace at Persepolis (p. 488), from an archive text found at Susa (p. 491), and from Darius’s tomb (p. 502).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 301, from a trilingual inscription in a rock-cut niche near Lake Van in eastern Turkey.

I (am) Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing many peoples, king on this great earth far and wide, son of Darius, the king, an Achaemenid.⁶⁶

These royal inscriptions and Mal 1:11, 14 have three pronounced correlations. (A) There is the idea of superlative kingship. The Persian king was not one among many, but head and shoulders above the rest, the “great king” and “king of kings.” So too is YHWH the “great king” (1:14). (B) There is the political enormity of these kingships. The Persian ruler was “king of countries” and of “all kinds of people.” So too shall YHWH, the great king, be revered “among the nations” (1:11, 14). Finally, (C) there is the geographical expansiveness of these reigns. The Persian king rules a kingdom stretching far in every direction, an idea conveyed through merisms—“king of the four quarters”; “king on this earth far and wide”—as well as more direct language—“king of the world”; “from the Indus as far as Sardis.” So too shall YHWH’s name be revered throughout the world, an idea conveyed with the merism “from the rising of the sun even unto its setting.” So, Malachi and Persian royal inscriptions have strong correlations in their presentations of their respective kings.

Even without these correlations, the image is still a potent metaphor: YHWH is king. In light of these overlapping concepts, however, the metaphor becomes much more specific: YHWH is the superlative king, the king of nations, and king of lands—in short, the text presents YHWH as the true emperor. The significance of this point for the present study is difficult to overstate. Malachi/My Messenger is not merely a generic messenger, but a royal one, a spokesperson for the divine emperor. Thus Malachi’s message is a *royal message*.

Second, grasping the fullness of this kingship metaphor explains the cultic element in Mal 1:11 (i.e., every nation making offerings to YHWH) that has been so divisive for critical

⁶⁶ Ibid., 244, from bilingual tablets from Persepolis. See also similar Xerxes inscriptions from Mount Elvend near the site of ancient Ecbatana (p. 301) and from a trilingual inscription in the garrison quarters at Persepolis (p. 304). See also Xerxes’s “Gate of All Nations” at Persepolis (pp. 582–83).

scholars.⁶⁷ All the Persian royal inscriptions from which the extracts above are taken revere foreign deities. In the Cyrus Cylinder, there is a lengthy discussion of Marduk's actions in history—especially his raising up Cyrus as an act of mercy—before the text even gets to Cyrus's first-person speech. Also, the extracts about Darius and Xerxes come from texts that heap praise on the Persian deity Ahuramazda.⁶⁸ The deities in each case are praised for bringing the king to power and for their divine attributes.

In Mal 1:11, 14, however, deity and king are one and the same—"For I (am) a great king, says YHWH of Hosts"—and so there is no place for praising a separate deity. The text provides a creative solution in that it inverts the formula. Instead of a king venerating the deity for installing him, Malachi presents the nations themselves as directly venerating YHWH, *who is* the king. In that sense, the cultic element is present because it correlates to the Persian royal descriptions, which lavish praise and adulations on deities; but, Malachi transforms this element. What emerges is an incredible extension of the ongoing messenger metaphor. Malachi/My Messenger speaks for the divine king, YHWH, who is worthy of worship and reverence.

Third, in Mal 1:8, while deploring the unsatisfactory temple offerings, the prophet asks if their "governor" (פֹּהֵל) would be satisfied with such gifts. Through a messenger lens, there is more here than initially meets the eye. In the Persian satrapal system, governors ruled provinces such as Yehud,⁶⁹ and the provinces themselves bore responsibility for supporting their local administrations. As a Persian province, Yehud saw its best portions of everything

⁶⁷ Åke Viberg, "Wakening a Sleeping Metaphor: A New Interpretation of Malachi 1:11," *TynBul* 45.2 (1994): 297–319 rightly recognizes that a kingship metaphor undergirds Mal 1:11, 14, but he omits any discussion of Persian kings and their relevance to the metaphor, instead arguing that the kingship metaphor allows one to interpret the universalism in Mal 1:11 as hyperbolic language. I find his point helpful, but there is room to go further and consider this idea in light of Malachi's Persian *milieu*. This step reveals YHWH's eclipsing of Persian royalty in the text.

⁶⁸ For more on Persian kings and Ahuramazda, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 124–28, 241–42, and esp. 550–53.

⁶⁹ Before Nehemiah, four governors of Yehud are known, two attested from biblical texts (Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel) and two solely from primary sources outside of scripture (Elnathan and Yeho'ezer). The latter two are known to have governed in the early fifth century BCE and are likely candidates for Malachi's time period. See Chapter 3, footnote 94.

make their way to the Jerusalem administration and then off to the satrap and, ultimately, to the Persian king and the imperial army.

Since the entire system was designed to usher the best portions to the imperial administrative centers (e.g., Susa), it would have been unthinkable for a mere provincial governor to receive better shares than the king. In a text that so forthrightly conceptualizes YHWH as the great king, the point is clear: YHWH is receiving gifts of such low quality that even their governor would not tolerate them. From the king's perspective, they despise YHWH's name (1:6) and table (1:7), even defile them (1:12), and hold YHWH worship in general disdain (1:13). A mere mortal ruler—and a relatively small one in the Persian machine—receives more reverence than the divine king. Through a messenger lens, this reference to the governor keeps the imperial structure foregrounded in the text and is another instance of messenger *poiema*. Malachi addresses the community's imperial priorities.

Fourth, it is also significant that the issue regarding these offerings is a cultic concern: The primary problem is that the quality of the animals used in sacrifices is pathetic (see Mal 1:8–9, 12–14a). Inscriptions and archives reveal that much of the tribute that made its way to the imperial administration was for worshiping deities. An Elamite tablet from Persepolis dating to Darius's reign records that a priest named Bakabana received four hundred dry liters of grain for offerings to Ahuramazda and four hundred for Mishdashi.⁷⁰ A similar tablet records an offering of one hundred sixty liters “for the god Ahuramazda” and two other deities.⁷¹ These types of records are prolific.⁷² In this matter of worship and offerings, then, the failures are doubly egregious since YHWH is both king and deity, the one who should rightfully receive their best portions and for whom the best sacrificial offerings should be made. Through a messenger lens, the serious concern for cultic offerings in the pericope is

⁷⁰ See Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 556.

⁷¹ See *ibid.*, 557.

⁷² See, e.g., *ibid.*, 556–59.

one shared by the Persian Empire. Malachi's extensive decoration of the text with this concern adds to the overall messenger *poiema*.

Fifth, the passage contains several instances of the divine title, YHWH of Hosts (יהוה צבאות). It occurs eleven times in Mal 1:6—2:9,⁷³ making it one of the two most saturated pericope with this designation in the entire HB.⁷⁴ As discussed above regarding Mal 1:4, this phrase is a military title for YHWH in the HB and emphasizes YHWH's power and dominion over creation. Here the title so prominently weaves in and out of the text that there is need for further elaboration.

It is interesting to juxtapose YHWH's army—the hosts of all creation—with Xerxes's imperial army, which was essentially a conglomerate of several armies:

Xerxes searched throughout the entire continent to muster his forces. During four full years following the conquest of Egypt, Xerxes prepared his army and gathered provisions for it. Then, in the course of the fifth year, he set out on his campaign with an enormous body of troops . . . for what nation of Asia did Xerxes not lead to Hellas?⁷⁵

[T]he entire land army had gathered together and, with Xerxes, was making its way to Sardis; it began its march in Critalla in Cappadocia, where the whole mainland army had been told to assemble.⁷⁶

When they reached Thessaly, [Xerxes's general] Mardonius picked out his troops. The first were all the Persians known as the Immortals . . . Next he chose from the rest of the Persians the troops who wore breastplates, and 1,000 horsemen; he also took Medes, Sacae, Baktrians, and Indians, both infantry and cavalry. While he chose these as entire national contingents, he also picked out troops from the rest of the allies in lesser numbers . . .⁷⁷

It was the formation of this massive army for invading Greece that had ratcheted up the imperial demands during Malachi's historical context. The impact of Xerxes's force was not lost at all on Yehud since Persia had most likely drafted its best laborers into this army.⁷⁸

⁷³ See Mal 1:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14; 2:2, 4, 7, 8.

⁷⁴ Zech 8, which is a little lengthier than Mal 1:6—2:9, has fifteen occurrences.

⁷⁵ Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.19–21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.113. See also, e.g., Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 251, 254, 256–58, 261, 268, 270, 272.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 3, *ad. loc.*, which details these points.

Thus the title יהוה צבאות (YHWH of Hosts) is rhetorically powerful in this pericope since its metaphor—YHWH rules an army consisting of the manifold hosts of creation—correlates so well with Xerxes’s command of an international army.⁷⁹ Malachi’s/My Messenger’s repetitive use of this title is another instance of messenger *poiema* in the text.

Sixth, the pericope expresses YHWH’s desire to close the temple gates in Mal 1:10: “Oh that someone among you would shut the gates, that they would not kindle my altar in vain!”⁸⁰ Through a messenger lens, there is a vibrant metaphor present. In Chapter 3, the point is made that Persian royal messengers played an important role in the imperial court protocols. Anyone who wanted an audience with the king could go no further than the complex known as the Darius Gate, where a messenger acted as a mediatory figure between the king inside the premises and would-be visitors without. In Mal 1:10, where Malachi/My Messenger conveys YHWH’s desire to close the temple gates⁸¹ and keep out the people,⁸² there are strong parallels with the Persian custom. The messenger is communicating the king’s decision (or warning) to refuse their entry.

It may be tempting to object to this connection on the grounds that the text discusses the temple and not a royal palace. One has to consider, however, the point already made that YHWH is both deity *and* king in the text. In the same way that the pericope combines the royal offerings and cultic ones, here the refusal to grant entrance can be both a political and

⁷⁹ For a thorough treatment of the Persian emperors as commanders-in-chief, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 114–28, 213–16, 240–45. Xerxes and his predecessors were the ultimate commanders of the army and actively involved in the strategic aspect of war.

⁸⁰ Although this verse begins with an interrogative pronoun (מי), it clearly expresses a wish and therefore best translates as such. Since even the ancient versions (e.g., LXX, Vulgate, etc.) are so divergent in their renderings, one should probably avoid too staunch a position on the matter. See Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 220–21 for a detailed discussion.

⁸¹ The HB sometimes uses the term “gates” (דלתים) in reference to the temple doors. See, e.g., 1 Kgs 6:34; 2 Kgs 18:16; Ezek 41:25; Neh 6:10. Since Mal 1:10 mentions closing the gates to prevent vain worship, it is clear that at least the temple complex is in mind. As for exactly which gates are in view, the matter is complicated. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 182–83 discusses several possibilities and concludes that Mal 1:10 refers to the outermost gates of the entire temple complex and thus expresses a desire to keep the people away from the entire temple courtyard. He further notes that Ezra 2:42 and Neh 11:19 mention Levites known as “gatekeepers,” which—along with references to the Levites in Mal 2—provides strong support to this view.

⁸² It is specifically the priests who are banned since it was their duty to kindle the altar. See below.

cultic concept simultaneously. One must also consider the evidence above regarding Mal 1:11—the very next verse, no less—and Mal 1:14 revealing parallels between those verses and descriptions of Persian kings. In short, YHWH’s desire to close the gates is one and the same as the king’s desire.⁸³ Although scholars typically discuss Mal 1:10 in order to take a position on whether or not the prophet is favorable or unfavorable to temple worship⁸⁴ (and there is no consensus), a messenger lens suggests a different way of handling the text: Malachi’s/My Messenger’s relaying of YHWH’s message to shut the gates is another instance of messenger *poiema*.

Finally, another messenger decoration in the text is its title for the priests in Mal 2:7: “the messenger of YHWH of Hosts” (מלאך יהוה צבאות). As Baldwin points out, the priests are in mind throughout the entire pericope, not just in Mal 1:6 and 2:1–9 where they are mentioned directly. She says of Mal 1:10, “*Kindle fire upon my altar* refers to the part of the priests in worship, not to the slaying of the animals, which was done by the offerer [*sic*] (Lv. 1:5; 3:2; 4:24, 29). The prophet has in mind throughout the passage the responsibility of the priests.”⁸⁵ Malachi 2:1–9, then, is the culmination of their condemnation.

Malachi 2:7 is the only verse in the HB that uses the term messenger (מלאך) as a designation for the priests. That observation alone merits a closer look, but it is also interesting that the divine epithet “Hosts” (צבאות) appears since it is a military title for YHWH and already used multiple times in the passage (see above). Furthermore, the pericope blurs the distinction between Levites and priests⁸⁶ and condemns these figures for a

⁸³ Furthermore, YHWH’s presence in a tabernacle after the exodus and later in a temple at Jerusalem is itself a metaphorical picture of YHWH’s kingship, a point made clear by the numerous references to the Ark of the Covenant as YHWH’s throne, e.g., 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Pss 80:1; 99:1; Jer 14:21; 17:12. On this point, see R. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 316–17, where he also draws attention to numerous other references to YHWH as king (see esp. Isa 6).

⁸⁴ For an overview, see Clendenen, “Malachi,” 272–73;

⁸⁵ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 227.

⁸⁶ See O’Brien, *Priests and Levites*, *passim*. On the difficulty of constructing a consistent picture of the Levites from HB texts, see Mark A. Christian, “Middle-Tier Levites and the Plenary Reception of Revelation,”

broad failure that is really a summation of their poor offerings, leadership, and teaching: the priests demonstrate no covenant loyalty: “And you will know that I sent this commandment to you, that my covenant with Levi might continue” (2:4). They are messengers of YHWH the military commander, and they have been unfaithful to the king. It is with great irony, then, that Malachi/My Messenger brings the king’s words to other messengers already on the local scene—the messengers need a messenger! The title “messenger of YHWH of Hosts” for the priests is a strong messenger decoration in the book and a robust addition to its *poiema*.

In summary, Mal 1:6—2:9 contains seven noteworthy decorations. First, there is a presentation of YHWH as the great king that shares attributes with Persian royal descriptions. Second, the statements of universal YHWH worship correlate with the dual focus on deity and king that one finds so frequently in Persian texts. Third, the reference to the governor of Yehud keeps the Persian imperial structure foregrounded.⁸⁷ Fourth, the dual political/cultic concerns regarding Yehud’s offerings in the text correlate to the Persian requirements of offerings for both the political machine and deity worship. Fifth, the military title YHWH of Hosts saturates the text and is conceptually similar to Xerxes’s role as commander of an international army. Sixth, YHWH’s threat *via* Malachi/My Messenger to close the gates and close off access to YHWH’s presence correlates to court protocols involving royal messengers at Persian administrative centers. Finally, using the designation “the messenger of YHWH of Hosts” for the priests is as about as obvious a messenger decoration as one can imagine and enhances both the kingship metaphor in the immediate context and the growing messenger metaphor in the book.

in *Levites and Priests in Biblical History and Tradition*, eds. Mark A. Leuchter and Jeremy M. Hutton (AIL 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 173–97, esp. 176–78. He says (p. 176), “One searches in vain for a consistent picture of the Levites, even within the Pentateuch alone.” Though perhaps “in vain” is a bit exaggerated, one can sympathize with his point.

⁸⁷ Since a royal messenger was indeed a diplomatic and political tool.

Poema in Malachi 2:10–17

Verhoef's caution about this passage is important: "This pericope is regarded as the most difficult in the book. It poses many and various problems with regard to the translation and interpretation of its contents, and in connection with questions pertaining to the *Sitz im Leben*, the context, and the general theme of this prophetic discourse."⁸⁸

Interpretive issues abound. The community has profaned "what is holy to YHWH" (Mal 2:11, קדש יהוה), but is this a reference to the temple,⁸⁹ the covenant people Israel,⁹⁰ the marriage covenant,⁹¹ or YHWH's holiness in character?⁹² The people of Yehud are guilty of marrying the "daughter of a foreign god" (2:11, בת-אל נכר), but does this refer to intermarriage with foreigners⁹³ (and assimilating their deities) or is it simply an idolatry metaphor?⁹⁴ Where one falls on these issues will impact one's treatment of divorce in the passage (2:13–16), especially the ambiguous and difficult statement, "'He hates sending forth,' says YHWH the God of Israel" (2:16, שונא שלח אמר יהוה אלהני ישראל). These questions are merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg concerning the exegetical difficulty of this pericope.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 263. Note, however, that Verhoef puts Mal 2:17 with the next pericope, which is a common perspective. This move allows 2:17 to begin the next passage with a question, which would be similar to Mal 1:2, 6; 2:10. I find 2:17, however, a fitting conclusion to the first half of the book and a segue to the next one. Malachi 2:17 concludes that they have wearied YHWH (with everything in 1:6–2:16), and so the very next unit (beginning with 3:1) reveals the eschatological messenger(s) and the purification of Israel's worship. As Mal 1:1 opens with "My Messenger," the prophet who reveals the community's problems, Mal 3:1 also opens with "My Messenger," an eschatological figure whose arrival will herald the onset of YHWH's reparations of their problems. In that sense, 2:17 is best seen as a transition verse.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., J. M. P. Smith, *Book of Malachi*, 48; Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 82.

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, 182.

⁹¹ See, e.g., Eli Cashdan, *The Twelve Prophets* (SBB; Bournemouth, England: Soncino, 1948), 345.

⁹² See, e.g., Hill, *Malachi*, 231.

⁹³ See, e.g., *ibid.*, 232–33. Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, "Divorce in Malachi 2:10–16," *CTR* 2.1 (1987): 73–84, esp. 74, which points out "warnings against *religiously* mixed marriages, such as Exod 34:12–16, Num 25:1–3, Deut 7:3–4, and 1 Kgs 11:1–13."

⁹⁴ See, e.g., Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 198–200.

⁹⁵ See Hill, *Malachi*, 221–59 for the most thorough exegetical treatment as well as a thorough and consistent presentation of different positions on each issue in the passage.

One important and relevant reason for this difficulty is that there are features of the text that suggest idolatry is the issue, yet there is no substantial evidence that idolatry was a problem in the early postexilic community at Yehud. In Mal 2:11, for instance, the un-pointed Hebrew text contains forms that are remarkably close to the Canaanite deities Asher and Baal. The line, “Yehud has profaned what is holy to YHWH, *which* (אשר) he loved” is very close to reading, “Yehud has profaned what is holy to YHWH—he [i.e., Yehud] has loved *Asherah* (אשרה).”⁹⁶ The un-pointed verb in the next line, “he *married* (בעל) the daughter of a foreign god,” is the same form as Baal (בעל).

Hill dismisses such interconnections primarily because of “the lack of any supporting textual evidence”⁹⁷ for an emendation of אשר to אשרה; but, that requirement is unnecessarily strenuous. There does not have to be an *emendation* for the text to contain phonetic *allusions*. Indeed, the same verse contains frequent terms for idolatry—“abomination” (תועבה)⁹⁸ and “profane” (חלל)⁹⁹—and its primary concern is marriage to the daughter of “a foreign god” (בת-אל נכר). Also, the following verses mention offerings (2:12, 13) and YHWH’s altar (2:12). Thus the cultic and idolatry language of the literary context suggests that אשר and בעל do phonetically allude to foreign deities, though they still technically may mean “which” and “married,” respectively. An emendation is not a necessary requirement for finding such allusions here. The most convincing readings of this passage must take seriously its idolatry language, a point to which I will return shortly.

⁹⁶ See Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 193–200. Petersen emends the text and translates the form as *Asherah*, but the phonetic allusion can remain without going this far.

⁹⁷ Hill, *Malachi*, 231.

⁹⁸ See *HALOT*, “תועבה,” esp. II.3.a and II.3.d.

⁹⁹ See *BDB*, “חלל.”

Using a messenger lens for this passage and giving attention to the messenger connotations in previous pericopae reveals some messenger decorations worthy of investigation and leads toward a reading that goes in a different direction than previous interpretations. First, the passage opens with a father metaphor (2:10): “Is there not one father for all of us? Did not one god create us?” This is not the first instance of this metaphor for YHWH. The previous passage (1:6—2:9) begins, “A son honors a father, and a servant his master. But if I am father, where is my honor?” So, in a short span of verses, the text employs this metaphor twice. Malachi is certainly not innovative in presenting YHWH as a father. As Verhoef notes, these depictions are somewhat common (see, e.g., Exod 4:22–23; Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16; Hos 11:1; Ps 89:27; etc.) and the body of literature on this subject is fairly extensive.¹⁰⁰

According to Herodotus, the Persians viewed their first and greatest emperor, Cyrus the Great, as a father because “Cyrus was gentle and saw to it that all good things would be theirs.”¹⁰¹ Assessing this observation is difficult because the body of texts and *realia* from ancient Persia, although vast, is categorically from the perspective of the imperial administrative machine and not from the Persian citizens. The royal descriptions cited above about Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes, for example, are from texts and inscriptions that are obviously imperial propaganda.¹⁰² They provided the views that the state *wanted* its people to have and not necessarily the views that actually reverberated among the citizens. The bottom line is that there is not really any outside support for Herodotus’s claim, but it is hard to do anything with that fact because the viewpoint of Persian citizens is not represented in the Persian corpus of texts and inscriptions.

¹⁰⁰ See Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 212–13; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 237 further notes that the twin concepts of God as father and creator in Mal 2:10 are also found together in Deut 32:6 and Isa 63:16; 64:8, “but always with Israel in mind because the nation was meant to reflect the character of the Father, who had taught them to walk in His way (Ho. 11:1).”

¹⁰¹ Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.89.

¹⁰² On this point see esp. Amélie Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83–97.

That said, the most detailed and singularly important ancient source for reconstructing this period—Herodotus—does say that the Persians regarded Cyrus as a father; and, in Mal 1:6—2:9, YHWH is both a father (1:6) and a king (1:11, 14). Moreover, YHWH is clearly the deity and object of cultic worship in that pericope. If one considers these prior decorations, then the father metaphor for YHWH in Mal 2:10 has already been fused with kingship in the book; and, this fusion correlates to the public perception of Persia’s founding ruler, Cyrus the Great, a king and father. Through a messenger lens, “father” is a kingship decoration that keeps the imperial structure foregrounded in the text.

Second, the messenger lens also seems to explain the strange conglomeration of issues in Mal 2:10–17. The pericope addresses covenant unfaithfulness (2:10), idolatry (2:11), marriage to foreigners (2:11), unacceptable cultic activity (2:12–13), divorce (2:14–15), and a bitter attitude towards YHWH’s covenant requirements (2:17). It is a robust mixture of concerns for so short a passage, and it is little wonder that interpretations are so divergent. As Hill notes, however, there is a common and central feature: “The verb [בגד] is repeated 5 times in Malachi’s third disputation (2:10, 11, 14, 15, 16), isolating ‘faithlessness’ as the central thesis of the oracle. The verb is found in the Twelve elsewhere only in Hos 5:7; 6:7; Hab 1:13 and 2:5.”¹⁰³ To Hill’s astute observation one can add that, although בגד does carry the general meaning “to act faithlessly,” it often has a more specific connotation in the HB: “to act treacherously” (see, e.g., Judg 9:23; Lam 1:2).¹⁰⁴ This meaning makes sense here. Through a messenger lens, the conglomeration of trespasses adds up to one general point: they have betrayed the king.

Moreover, the messenger lens is doubly helpful here in that it keeps one from having to parse out the specifics of multiple concerns in the pericope, of which there is nothing

¹⁰³ Hill, *Malachi*, 226.

¹⁰⁴ See *HALOT*, “בגד,” for a host of other examples.

remotely close to a consensus. Hill is certainly correct that idolatry does not appear to have been a problem in Yehud in the early fifth century BCE,¹⁰⁵ but he and others seem to dismiss too quickly the prevalent idolatry language and allusions in the text instead of asking why they appear here. The answer seems to lie, again, in the previous pericope (1:6—2:9). There the messenger lens demonstrates that the political and cultic spheres overlap. YHWH is both deity and king. Offerings are both political obligations (i.e., the governor would not even accept them, 1:8) and religious ones (i.e., ones presented at the altar, 1:7). Since YHWH is both the great king and the rightful object of international worship (1:11, 14), the two spheres converge.

Reading Mal 2:10–17 in this light reveals that its concern for so many issues may be cultic, political, or even both since the book intertwines those two spheres. Trying to identify specific failures produces a host of divergent interpretations and misses the overall point: YHWH is the king, so disobedience is betrayal. It may very well be that foreign marriage, rampant divorce, and/or idolatry are literal issues, but the inherent difficulty of the Hebrew text¹⁰⁶ and the multiplicity of scholarly perspectives suggest a general interpretation is best; and, the messenger lens provides such a reading. Malachi/My Messenger relays King YHWH's perspective: In their treacherous behavior with each other (2:10), the people are, more importantly and more dangerously, betraying their father and emperor.

Third, the messenger lens sheds light on one of the most difficult verses in the entire HB, Mal 1:16. It is best to start with a wooden, literal translation before discussing some of its common interpretations and then a nuanced messenger reading.

“For he hates sending forth,” says YHWH the God of Israel,
 “And he covers violence over his garment,” says YHWH of Hosts.
 “And be guarded in your spirit,
 And do not be treacherous.”

¹⁰⁵ Hill, *Malachi*, 231; but cf., however, Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 193–200, for some evidence that may suggest the contrary.

¹⁰⁶ This is reflected in the awkwardness of English translations.

Almost every interpretation of this verse centers on divorce for two reasons: (A) The verb “to send forth” (שלח) at times refers to divorce in the HB (see, e.g., Deut 22:19, 29; 24:1; Jer 3:1); and (B) as mentioned above, the pericope comments on marriage and divorce before getting to this verse.¹⁰⁷ It is rare to find an interpretation that does not see at least some aspect of divorce in Mal 1:16.¹⁰⁸

One key change that virtually every critical scholar (and English version) makes is translating “he hates” (אִשָּׁא) as “I hate,” even though “The Masoretic punctuation of the Hebrew word for *hate* is that of the perfect third person masculine singular: *he hated*.”¹⁰⁹ Many scholars choose to ignore the pointing of the MT and instead treat the form as a participle, “hating.”¹¹⁰ A similar but simpler position is to regard YHWH as the implied subject of “he hates”¹¹¹ and translate the form dynamically. For others the best solution is to emend the text to read “I hate” (אֲנִי אִשָּׁא) instead of “he hates.”¹¹² Hill’s observation is correct: “The third-person masculine singular form proves awkward if Yahweh [through his prophet] is the speaker (as the messenger formula implies).”¹¹³ Put simply, the heart of the issue is that it is awkward that YHWH says, in self-reference, “he hates” instead of “I hate.”

Through a messenger lens, however, there is another possibility. Although the word “to send forth” (שלח) can refer to divorce, one has to understand that this root is extremely common and versatile in the HB, appearing almost nine hundred times and used with great

¹⁰⁷ Though these comments may be metaphorical, which is the position here.

¹⁰⁸ See, however, A. S. van der Woude, “Malachi’s Struggle for a Pure Community: Reflections on Malachi 2:10–16,” in *Tradition and Reinterpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Jurgen C. H. Lebram*, eds. Jan W. van Hentan et al (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 66, who argues that the passage addresses polygamy and that the verb “to send forth/away” describes husbands lowering the social status of their first wives by bringing in other wives (and not a literal divorce). This reconstruction is too complex and specific given the verse’s ambiguity, and I have yet to find anyone who agrees with it.

¹⁰⁹ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 278.

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., *ibid.*, 278–79; Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 110–11.

¹¹¹ See, e.g., Hill, *Malachi*, 221, 249–50, who translates the line as “‘Indeed, [The One] hates divorce!’ Yahweh, the God of Israel, has said.” “The One” is supplied here from Hill’s translation of the previous verse.

¹¹² See, e.g., R. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 320.

¹¹³ Hill, *Malachi*, 249.

variety. One of its other common meanings would fit extremely well in this context: the dispatching (or “sending forth”) of a messenger.¹¹⁴ After all, YHWH is frequently the subject of this verb with messenger as its accusative:

Behold, I am *sending forth* (שלח) *a messenger/angel* (מלאך) before you. (Exod 23:20)

And I will *send forth* (ושלחתי) before you *a messenger* (מלאך), and I will drive out the Canaanite . . . (Exod 33:2)

[YHWH] heard our voice, and *he sent forth* (וישלח) *a messenger/angel* (מלאך) and he brought us up out of Egypt. (Num 20:16)

Clearly the accusative is missing in Mal 2:10. If “He hates sending forth” refers to divorce, then it is the only instance in the entire HB where this divorce usage lacks an accusative. Whom does YHWH hate sending forth? The object of the verb must be supplied, and it would seem “messenger” is as good a candidate as “spouse,” if not better.

Tipping the scales in favor of messenger is how “send forth” (שלח) is frequently used in the HZM corpus:

The entire remnant of the people listened to the voice of YHWH their God, and to the words of Haggai the prophet just as YHWH their God *had sent him* (שלחו). (Hag 1:12)¹¹⁵

And the man standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, “These are those whom YHWH *has sent* (שלח) to go about the earth.” (Zech 1:10)¹¹⁶

In total, the verb occurs sixteen times in HZM,¹¹⁷ and only once is YHWH not its subject. In this lone exception (Zech 7:2), however, the city of Bethel “sent” (שלח) men to the temple complex to seek counsel from the priests and prophets. That is precisely how “send forth”

¹¹⁴ See *HALOT*, “שלח,” esp. 2.3.b.

¹¹⁵ One must keep in mind that, in the very next verse (Hag 1:13), the prophet Haggai is explicitly given the designation “messenger of YHWH” (מלאך יהוה). Thus he is “sent” as a “messenger” by YHWH.

¹¹⁶ The “man,” in context, is one of the frequent horse-riders.

¹¹⁷ Hag 1:12; Zech 1:10; 2:12, 13, 15; 4:9; 6:15; 7:2, 12; 8:10; 9:11; Mal 2:2, 4, 16; 3:1; 4:5 (HB 3:23).

usually occurs in HZM—with a messenger/angel/human agent as its accusative—making “messenger” the most likely candidate for the implied accusative in Mal 2:16.

Through a messenger lens, translating the verse is much simpler and requires less hermeneutical gymnastics than are usually employed:

“Surely (כִּי) he¹¹⁸ hates sending forth (a messenger),” says YHWH the God of Israel,
 “But (וְ) he¹¹⁹ covers violence over his garment,” says YHWH of Hosts.
 “So (וְ) be guarded in your spirit,
 and (וְ) do not be treacherous.”

Every interpretation will have to make some difficult decisions regarding the conjunctions (and everything else!) in this verse, which I have supplied in parentheses. The syntactical difficulties necessitate flexibility.¹²⁰ Regardless, the point is clear in this translation: Their behavior has warranted a visit from a royal messenger. The community must change its ways immediately, for although this messenger brings the king’s harsh words, the king is willing to go much further and send an eschatological messenger to prepare the way for an imperial purge (see the next pericope, beginning with Mal 3:1).

Finally, the title YHWH of Hosts appears twice in the passage. Again, this designation is a military title for YHWH and a frequent decoration in the book that maintains a political overtone in the text, one in which a royal messenger (Malachi/My Messenger) fits very well.

In summary, there are four important messenger decorations in Mal 2:10–17. First, the text conceptualizes YHWH as a father, which maintains a kingship metaphor in the passage and thus a royal connotation for the message. Second, the frequent use of בָּגַד (“to act

¹¹⁸ I.e., YHWH.

¹¹⁹ I.e., Israel/Judah.

¹²⁰ For the first two lines, I am taking the כִּי as asseverative (“surely”) and the first וְ as adversative (“but”). So, “Surely X . . . but Y . . .” See Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), *ad. loc.* For the next two lines, I am taking the syntactical construction, וְ . . . וְ . . . , as essentially consequential and meaning “so . . . and . . .” See *HALOT*, “וְ,” 26., “וְ may introduce a consequence.”

treacherously”) implies that the overall, general concern of the conglomeration of issues is political treachery against the king, YHWH. Moreover, with an eye towards previous pericopae, the messenger lens suggests that parsing out the specifics of these issues is unnecessary (and probably impossible) and misses the point. Third, Mal 2:16 most likely refers to YHWH sending forth a messenger. Finally, the military title YHWH of Hosts appears twice more.

Poiema in Malachi 3:1–7

The ongoing messenger metaphor is on full display in this passage, so much so that simply providing a translation would suffice to prove the point. A close look at specific decorations *via* messenger lens, however, reveals even greater levels of saliency. If previous pericopae are decorated with messenger micrometaphors, then this text is something of a messenger apex in Malachi.

The first line of the pericope is saturated with messenger decorations: “Behold! I will send forth my messenger” (3:1a, **הנני שלח מלאכי**). First, there is **הנני**. Here the exclamatory particle **הנה** (“behold!”) is embedded with a first person subject, **י** (“I”). This combination is common in the HB (occurring one hundred seventy-eight times), but it has a more narrow meaning when paired with a participle, as is the case here (**שלח**): “The exclamation [**הנה**] + participle is a type of messenger formula that anticipates a pronouncement of speech of some kind.”¹²¹ Thus in Mic 2:3 one finds it integrated squarely with the messenger formula: “Therefore *thus* says YHWH (**כה אמר יהוה**): ‘Behold! I (**הנני**) am planning evil against this clan.’”¹²² Likewise, its placement here in Mal 3:1 is a strong, initial instance of messenger *poiema* in the pericope.

¹²¹ Hill, *Malachi*, 265.

¹²² See also, e.g., Isa 28:16; Jer 1:15; Ezek 5:8; Dan 8:19; Amos 6:14; Joel 2:19; Zech 2:13–14 (2x).

Second, the next form in the line, שלח (“sending forth”), is a common verb in the HB for the dispatching of a messenger (see above). With the actual word messenger (מלאך) occurring twice in this same verse (including, no less, the immediately following accusative), the messenger connotation is unmistakable.¹²³ The form שלח is another instance of messenger *poiema*.

Third, the next form in the line is מלאכי (“my messenger”), which is the accusative of “sending forth.” This form is an exact match for the titular form in Mal 1:1, and prudence dictates paying close attention to their relationship as well as the ongoing messenger metaphor that precedes Mal 3:1. As we have seen, Mal 1:1—2:17 provides Malachi’s/My Messenger’s words from the king to the unfaithful community and brings up a host of behaviors that reveal Yehud’s treachery. They are violators, and so the king dispatched Malachi/My Messenger to relay words of displeasure (see esp. 2:16). In that sense, Mal 3:1 is something of a reboot in the book. Whereas the first Malachi/My Messenger brings the king’s message, here that same herald anticipates another My Messenger whose future coming will signal the king’s imminent arrival. The form מלאכי is another unmistakable instance of messenger *poiema*.

Fourth, when this messenger comes, “he will prepare the way before me” (לפני ופנה־דרך). Baldwin’s observations are insightful: “Just as preparations are made in advance for a royal procession, so the Lord’s coming would be heralded by a forerunner to indicate the route (Is. 40.3) and summon the population to fill up the ruts and remove the

¹²³ An intriguing verse with both הנני and שלח is Isa 6:8, where YHWH makes inquiry about whom to send (שלח) to the covenant people, and the prophet Isaiah responds, “Behold me! Send me!” (הנני שלחני)

boulders (Is. 57:14; 62:10), that is, *prepare the way*.”¹²⁴ She and others are right to find correlations with Isa 40–66 since the language and imagery are so similar:

O voice of one crying in the wilderness, *prepare the way* (פנו דרך) of YHWH; straighten out in the desert/Arabah a highway for our God. (Isa 40:3)

Build up, build up, *prepare the way* (פנו־דרך); remove the obstacle *out of the way* (מדרך) of my people. (Isa 57:14)

Pass through, pass through the gates, *prepare the way* (פנו דרך) of the people! Build up, build up the highway! Remove the obstacle. (Isa 62:10)

This connection touches upon another important correlation between Mal 3:1 and these verses from Isaiah. In both books, the primary divine metaphor is that of king. Thus in Isa 6—set against the backdrop of the earthly king’s death, no less (Isa 6:1)—the prophet sees a vision of YHWH on a throne (6:1) and exclaims, “My eyes have seen the king, YHWH of Hosts” (6:5). For the remainder of Isaiah, kingship is the definitive metaphor for YHWH.¹²⁵ As demonstrated above, YHWH is also the divine king in Malachi, and the prophet his royal messenger. This point is important because it supports the idea that the preparations initiated by the messenger in Mal 3:1 are done precisely for a royal visit.¹²⁶ Thus the messenger’s task of preparing the way not only adds to the wealth of messenger decorations in this pericope, but it also maintains the kingship metaphor for YHWH and keeps the imperial structure foregrounded in the text. It is a multi-layered instance of messenger *poiema*.

Fifth, after the preparation of the way by My Messenger, Mal 3:1 reads,

- A “And suddenly, *he will come* (יבוא) to his temple,
 B *the lord* (האדון) *whom* (אשר) you seek;
 B’ *And the messenger of the covenant* (ומלאך הברית) *in whom* (אשר) you delight,

¹²⁴ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 242. See also, e.g., Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 287; Clendenen, “Malachi,” 384–85; and see esp. Hill, *Malachi*, 266: “Malachi employs the processional motif of Second Isaiah as a metaphor assuring the restoration community of Yahweh’s eventual covenant presence in Jerusalem.”

¹²⁵ On this point, see esp. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 32–36

¹²⁶ For more on YHWH as king, see Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 238–41; John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003–2009), 2:59–84.

A' Behold, *he is coming* (בוא)!”
says YHWH of Hosts.

Syntactically speaking, this construction is difficult; but, a closer look reveals a chiasm. The verb “come” (בוא) occurs twice and frames two clauses in which the nouns are modified by the relative pronoun “who/whom” (אשר). This arrangement suggests that the Lord (האדון) and the messenger of the covenant (ומלאך הברית) are the same figure. The matter is complicated, however, by the use of “the lord” (האדון) instead of YHWH (יהוה), which readers would expect to find here with the possessive construction, “his temple.”¹²⁷

Interpreters differ on the identity of “the lord” (האדון). Zechariah uses the term both for YHWH’s angelic messenger (Zech 1:9; 4:4, 5, 13) as well as for YHWH (4:14; 6:5),¹²⁸ so its use elsewhere in HZM fails to clarify its use here. Hill’s observation is sound:

Elsewhere in the OT/HB, [אדון] with the definite article is always paired with *YHWH* indicating that this is whom Malachi has in mind as well (cf. Exod 23:17; 34:23; Isa 1:24; 3:1; 10:16, 33; 19:4). The term [אדון] emphasizes Yahweh’s role as sovereign over all the world and further enhances Malachi’s description of the eschatological day of Yahweh.¹²⁹

Taking האדון (“the lord”) as a reference to YHWH is the best and most plausible reading, which is exactly why the matter is so complicated.¹³⁰ How can YHWH and the messenger of the covenant be the same figure? How can king and herald be the same person? Most do indeed take the Lord as YHWH but see the messenger of the covenant as a prophet or other human figure¹³¹ while others see it as an angelic messenger.¹³² Though convenient, these positions contradict the Hebrew syntax.

¹²⁷ Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 211 correctly observes, “The ambiguity in this material involves the identity of the lord and the covenant messenger, who will do the act of refining.”

¹²⁸ Hill, *Malachi*, 268.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Perhaps the clinching evidence is that the book already uses “lord” (אדון) for YHWH in Mal 1:6.

¹³¹ See, e.g., Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, 184; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 211–12;

Approaching this construction through messenger lens, however, provides a different solution. It is important to keep in mind that Persian royal messengers spoke the very words of the king and not their own message. That is precisely why they were inviolable and why it was so dangerous to mistreat or harm them. When these figures spoke their royal messages, there was a blurring of the identities of herald and king, as demonstrated in the correspondence between Oroites and Darius.¹³³ It is this blurring that seems present in Mal 3:1. YHWH will come to the temple, *that is*, the messenger of the covenant will come.

This blurring of messenger and YHWH is not without precedent in the HB. As Glazier-McDonald points out,

There are many instances in the Old Testament of such coalescence—the messenger blends into and is swallowed up by Yahweh (cf. Gen 16:7, 13; Exod 13:19, 24f.; Num 22:22–35). In Exod 3, the call of Moses, a [מלאך יהוה] appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush (3:4f.). A similar situation is found in Judg 6:11f. A [מלאך יהוה] appeared to Gideon and said that Yahweh was with him . . . In all these instances, the messenger . . . is Yahweh’s mode of self revelation.¹³⁴

So, this blurring of YHWH and messenger is not without precedent; and, in light of the Hebrew syntax, Glazier-McDonald’s identification of the messenger of the covenant makes the most sense: “Therefore it can be none other than Yahweh who is the [מלאך הברית], the covenant enforcer of Mal 3:1e. On his day, he will reestablish his covenant and enforce its justice thereby satisfying those who questioned him in 2:17.”¹³⁵ This is true, but for those postexilic readers living in Yehud during Xerxes’s reign, this blurring of identities would have conjured still another vivid image: that of king and the royal messenger(s) who mediated the king’s message. Here the blurring of YHWH and the messenger of the covenant is another instance of messenger *poiema*.

¹³² See, e.g., Hill, *Malachi*, 269–70; Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 289.

¹³³ See Chapter 3, above.

¹³⁴ Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 131. In that sense, David L. Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles* (SBLMS 23; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 43–44 may be correct in seeing Mal 3:1 as a reworking of Exod 23:20, though I think it is still clear that verses from Isaiah 40–66 (a new exodus unit, no less) were also in mind, and probably more so.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

Sixth, the title YHWH of Hosts appears three more times in this passage (Mal 3:1, 5, 7). As already discussed, this designation is a military title for YHWH that keeps the imperial structure foregrounded in the text while preserving the royal connotation of Malachi's/My Messenger's message.

Seventh, the pericope uses fire imagery to characterize the destruction and purging that will occur upon the king's arrival (3:2–4). YHWH will be a refiner's fire and a smelter (3:2–3). These metaphors depict the purification of precious metals through flames and intense heat,¹³⁶ which may have conjured another important image of Xerxes.

In discussing Mal 1:2–5, the point was made that Malachi's/My Messenger's report of YHWH's victory over Edom is similar to the heralding of Xerxes's victory over Athens. Through a messenger lens, it appears that Mal 3:1–7 possibly reports one of YHWH's victories in a similar fashion, but in this case a future one over Jerusalem and Yehud. Moreover, Xerxes destroyed Athens by fire; and fire is, of course, an essential image in Mal 3:2–4. Also, it was specifically the Athenian Acropolis that Xerxes's had lit on fire. The Acropolis was the mountain site of an ancient temple, a proto-Parthenon, and other significant cultic and cultural structures that were destroyed in the blaze. Likewise, it is the temple mount at Jerusalem (3:1) to which YHWH will come and purge the covenant community. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the temple mount *was* Jerusalem's Acropolis. Since Xerxes had his victory over Athens heralded throughout the empire, the fiery destruction accompanying YHWH's arrival in Mal 3:2–4 is another possible instance of messenger *poiema*.

Eighth, once again the community's offerings are in view. As discussed earlier regarding the fusion of political and religious offerings in Mal 1:6—2:9, the Persian royal administration received prime portions from every province and satrapy through tribute

¹³⁶ On this point, see esp. Daniel I Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 717–18.

offerings. Moreover, these offerings were used for both political and cultic purposes. In Mal 3:1–7, YHWH’s arrival and fiery purge will result in an onset of acceptable offerings (3:3–4), rectifying the primary problem in Mal 1:6—2:9 (i.e., deplorable offerings). Having already established that YHWH’s coming will be a royal visit preceded by messengers, the reparation of offerings in the passage becomes an important messenger decoration. It is the reason for Malachi’s/My Messenger’s visit in the first place and the accomplishment of the eschatological messenger(s) in the day of YHWH.

In summary, there are eight important messenger decorations in Mal 3:1–7. First, there is the form *הנני* (“Behold! I”), which is a common messenger formula in the HB. Second, there is the form *שלח* (“sending forth”), a frequent technical term in the HB for sending a messenger. Third, there is the form *מלאכי* (“My Messenger”), an exact replica of the titular form in Mal 1:1. Fourth, this messenger’s visit is to “prepare the way” for the king’s arrival. Fifth, there is a second messenger, “the messenger of the covenant,” whose blurring of identity with that of the king is also reminiscent of Persian imperial messengers. Sixth, the military title YHWH of Hosts appears multiple times in the text. Seventh, announcement of a fiery purge of Jerusalem resulting from the king’s arrival is conceptually similar to Xerxes’s sending forth a royal messenger to herald his fiery destruction of the Athenian Acropolis. Eighth, the goal of the messengers’ preparatory work and the purging fires is to manufacture acceptable offerings on the part of Yehud, which corrects the problem in Mal 1:6—2:9 of deplorable political/cultic offerings to the divine king.

Poïema in Malachi 3:8–12

There is some disagreement about the demarcation of this pericope. Most see verse 6 as the first line,¹³⁷ others verse 7,¹³⁸ and so forth. The heart of this disagreement seems to be verse

¹³⁷ See, e.g., Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 245.

7. Is this invitation to return to YHWH the final word of one pericope or an initial concern in another? The position here is that Mal 3:7 is essentially another transition verse like Mal 2:17 and makes sense either way (or perhaps best as its own, small pericope). Fortunately, the problem does not impact any serious matters of interpretation. That said, I am taking verse 8 as the start of this pericope, which opens with the people robbing God (3:8) but closes with God honoring the people (3:12). A powerful antithesis frames the unit.

One matter on which scholars do agree is the covenant concern of this passage. In Deut 28 (i.e., Deuteronomy's list of covenant blessings and curses), it is clear that covenant unfaithfulness/disobedience will result in curses, especially crop failures and widespread drought. Covenant faithfulness/obedience, however, will result in blessings such as abundant crops and life-sustaining rains. These are the essential concerns of Mal 3:8–12. The community robs God (3:8) and is therefore cursed (3:9). If they instead give acceptable offerings, the cursed state will change to a blessed one (3:10). YHWH will send abundant rains (3:10) and restore their crops (3:11), and even the surrounding nations will call the covenant people “blessed” (3:12; cf. Deut 28:12–13). The pericope approaches extremely serious issues—drought and a plague of crop-devouring caterpillars¹³⁹—as covenant concerns.¹⁴⁰

A messenger lens reveals another layer of imagery in this pericope. First, the text describes the king's (i.e., YHWH's) concern for agriculture. Regarding Persian kings, Briant observes, “The elite warrior Great King could also engage in agricultural work and influence

¹³⁸ See, e.g., Clendenen, “Malachi,” 409, who sees Mal 3:7—4:6 as one large pericope.

¹³⁹ On the identity of the “devourer” (אכל) as caterpillars, see esp. Victor A. Hurowitz, “אכל in Malachi 3:11—Caterpillar,” *JBL* 121.2 (2002): 327–30. Cf., however, Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 308, for a solid case that locusts are in view. Fortunately, this identification issue is interesting but has no hermeneutical impact. Be it locust or caterpillar, something was devouring their crops!

¹⁴⁰ McKenzie and Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” 555 make a helpful observation: “In fact, such contrasts of fertility for obedience and barrenness for disobedience are commonly associated with the covenant (Lev 26:16; Deut 11:13–14; 28:11–12, 18, 28) . . . With the mention of the messenger of the covenant and probably the Lord of the covenant in 3:1, the people are called to return to the covenant with Yahweh (3:7). If they do return, the covenant curses will be reversed and the blessing will result.”

the prosperity of the fields.”¹⁴¹ Xenophon shows particular interest in this characterization. He writes, the “[K]ing of the Persians . . . pays close attention to husbandry and the art of war, holding that these are two of the noblest and most necessary pursuits.”¹⁴² Xenophon elsewhere credits Cyrus with mandating that every satrap create and maintain a garden-paradise,¹⁴³ to which Briant adds: “In fact, the Classical texts, Babylonian tablets, and also a few tablets from Persepolis show that there was at least one paradise in each satrapy.”¹⁴⁴

Evidence reveals that Xerxes was perceived as one of these gardener kings. Esther 1:5, for example, describes a banquet that Xerxes hosted at Susa “in the court of the garden of the palace of the king,” a special area near the citadel and its throne room (cf. Esth 1:2). Also, Herodotus records an incident in which Xerxes, marching between Phrygia and Sardis, came across a sycamore tree so beautiful that he decorated it with gold and left an Immortal (i.e., an elite Persian soldier) to guard it.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Briant provides a rendering of a seal impression depicting Xerxes standing in reverence before a tree with his crown in hand.¹⁴⁶ Such examples abound.

Whether Xerxes was truly involved in horticulture is not the issue: The point is that it was an official and pervasive image of the king. Xerxes, like his predecessors, cared for the land’s flora and brought agricultural prosperity to the empire. This image is so regular in Persian *realia* that Briant sees “the good gardener” as one of the king’s official roles.¹⁴⁷ There is, therefore, a strong correlation between YHWH’s actions in Mal 3:8–12 and this imperial conceptualization of Persian kings, especially Xerxes. YHWH is the gardener king, and this decoration and royal image keeps the imperial structure foregrounded in the text.

¹⁴¹ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 232.

¹⁴² Xenophon, *Oec.* IV.4, translated in Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 233.

¹⁴³ Xenophon, *Cyr.* VIII.6.12.

¹⁴⁴ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 233 (see pp. 233–40 for numerous examples of such texts).

¹⁴⁵ Herodotus, *Hist.* VII.31. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 234–35 gives examples of other historians recording this incident, though with slight variations.

¹⁴⁶ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 235.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

Second, the military title “YHWH of Hosts” appears twice more in this brief pericope (3:10, 12). Such a title might seem out of place in a text simply about divine care and restoration; but, it fits well here since the agricultural language conjures a royal image. After all, Xenophon recorded that both the art of war and husbandry “were two of the noblest and most necessary pursuits” of Persian kings. The use of YHWH of Hosts in this passage is another important instance of messenger *poiema* because it keeps the imperial structure foregrounded in the text and extends the royal connotation of Malachi’s/My Messenger’s message.

Third, the community is guilty of not providing “the tithes and the contributions” (3:8). Generally speaking, the Torah legislates that Israelites must set aside one tenth of all produce as holy offerings to YHWH and for the primary purpose of providing sustenance for the Levites (see Lev 27:30–33; Num 18:21–31; Deut 14:22–29; 26:12–15).¹⁴⁸ That does seem to be the concern in the present pericope, yet there is nothing specific about the altar, the priests and Levites, the temple complex, or the participation of families in consuming these offerings. Why is it problematic that the contributions are insufficient? Through a messenger lens, this lack of specificity is reminiscent of the concern for both political *and* cultic offerings in Mal 1:6—2:9. In that passage, the community is guilty of bringing offerings to YHWH that even their provincial governor would reject (see esp. 1:8–10), and so political and cultic responsibilities become fused.

Furthermore, it is interesting that the ambiguous term “the storehouse” (בית האוצר) is used instead of temple. In the HB, “storehouse” can refer to granaries (e.g., Joel 1:17), royal

¹⁴⁸ Rex Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 155 observes that Lev 27 and Num 18 show a Priestly (P) concern in which the tithes are compulsory and primarily for temple upkeep and the Levites, while the Deuteronomy passages (D) treat the tithes as offerings that the providers themselves consume. This Wellhausian distinction is the prevalent perspective on the matter, though some blur the two traditions together—e.g., J. G. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy* (JSOTSup 33; Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1984), 86—and still others see two different types of tithes in Deuteronomy itself—e.g., Kaufmann, *Religion in Israel*, 388. For more on the issue in relation to Malachi, see Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 302–8; O’Brien, *Priest and Levite*, 96–100.

treasuries (e.g., Isa 2:7), cultic treasuries (e.g., Dan 1:2), containers of divine forces (e.g., Jer 10:13), and so forth, so it does not inherently refer to the temple complex. Again, through a messenger lens, this lack of specificity is rhetorically effective. At the same time that the text addresses cultic responsibilities, its ambiguity allows the kingship metaphor to move forward. The community is not providing the stipulated offerings that the present and coming king (3:1–5) requires of them. The (royal) storehouse is not full.¹⁴⁹ So, in light of Mal 1:6—2:9 (esp. 1:6–14), the ambiguous focus on compulsory obligations here allows the imperial structure to remain foregrounded in the book and contribute to the messenger *poiema*. That is, Malachi/My Messenger once again relays the king’s demands for proper tribute.

Finally, the text refers to Yehud as a “nation” (גוי), a term characteristically reserved in the HB for nations other than the covenant people, especially in HZM.¹⁵⁰ As Verhoef points out, on those occasions when the HB does label Israel a “nation,” the implication is usually negative:

The reference to Israel as a [גוי] conveys a suggestion of paganism. In many instances this word is used to describe Israel as “a nation void of counsel” (Deut. 32:28), a “sinful nation” (Isa. 1:4), “a godless nation” (Isa. 10:6), a nation who has “transgressed my covenant” (Judg. 2:20), “the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord” (Jer. 7:28), “a nation of rebels” (Ezek. 2:3).¹⁵¹

Glazier-McDonald sees the term in this passage as something of a double entendre. On the one hand, YHWH has reconstituted the exilic people into a “nation,” which has positive connotations. On the other hand, they are behaving precisely as a foreign “nation” and not as

¹⁴⁹ As for the tithe itself, I find O’Brien, *Priest and Levite*, 99 most convincing in arguing that the tithe for Levites is in view in this passage, especially since theirs is the one that was actually stored up for the Levites’ use. Still, that point is inferred in but not stated in Malachi, and this ambiguity is what allows the imperial connotation to walk alongside the cultic one(s).

¹⁵⁰ See Hill, *Malachi*, 308: “The term [גוי] used in the special religious (and pejorative) sense of ‘non-Israelite nation’ has a wide distribution in the Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus (Hag 2:7, 14, 22; Zech 1:15; 2:4 [1:21], 12 [8], 15 [11]; 7:14; 8:13, 22, 23; 9:10; 12:3, 9; 14:2, 3, 14, 16, 18, 19; Mal 1:11 [2x], 14; 3:9, 12).”

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 306.

the covenant people.¹⁵² The rhetorical force is clear. There is nothing distinct about YHWH's chosen people.

Through a messenger lens, labeling the covenant community a "nation" supplies another layer of meaning. As Malachi/My Messenger relays YHWH's desire to bless their horticulture and end their curse,¹⁵³ the prophetic figure is an intermediary between the imminent king (cf. 3:1–5) and a "nation" in the king's realm (i.e., the entire world, cf. 1:11, 14). The presence of this term helps keep the imperial structure foregrounded in the text and is therefore another instance of messenger *poiema*. It also extends the royal connotation of Malachi's/My Messenger's message.

In summary, there are four important messenger decorations in this pericope. First, there is a strong correlation between YHWH's horticultural concerns and the official image of Persian rulers as gardener kings. Second, the military title YHWH of Hosts reappears in this passage. Third, the concern is once again the community's offerings to the king. Finally, the text labels the covenant community a "nation" (גו).

Poiema in Malachi 3:13—4:3

Scholars tend to agree that the scope of the next pericope is Mal 3:13—4:3.¹⁵⁴ This demarcation makes sense primarily because it exhibits a fairly clear three-fold movement. (A) The text first addresses the cynicism of the arrogant and disobedient (3:13–15). Then, (B) in stark contrast, there is an account of "those who revered YHWH" being recorded in a memorial scroll (3:16–18). Finally, (C) there is an account of the eschatological day of YHWH in which both types—the arrogant evildoers and those who revere YHWH—will

¹⁵² See Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 192–93. Cf. Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 306.

¹⁵³ This point is conveyed with the messenger formula, no less: "says YHWH of Hosts" (3:10).

¹⁵⁴ Here the ET and HB have different enumerations. I am using the ET demarcations simply for convenience. Those who see the pericope as 3:13—4:3 include, e.g., Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 247; Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 136; Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 312; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 219; Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 205–6; Hill, *Malachi*, 326; Bullock, *Prophetic Books*, 411–12; and Kessler, *Malachi*, 266. A noteworthy exception is Clendenen, "Malachi," 239, who includes 4:4–6.

receive their just desserts (4:1–3). Essentially, the passage distinguishes two types of people in the covenant community before discussing their ultimate ends.¹⁵⁵

The pericope contains some noteworthy decorations. First, the title YHWH of Hosts (יהוה צבאות) appears four more times in merely eight verses. As already discussed (see above), this designation is a military title for YHWH in the HB. Its reoccurrence and concentrated presence in this passage once again keeps the imperial structure foregrounded in the text and maintains the royal connotation of Malachi's/My Messenger's message.

Second, the pericope describes the recording of those who revered YHWH in a memorial scroll, literally a “scroll of remembrance” (3:16, ספר זכרון). This narrative detail is unusual for Malachi because it provides a third person account and strays from the dialog format. Since it seems to break form, one perspective is that this historical detail must be an editorial insertion:

Verse 16 does not recount the activity of the prophet, but shares a narrative perspective apart from the original disputation. The verse reports a historical response—the contrast is deliberately made with the repetition of the vocabulary (3.13//16)—and then adds a historical judgment which is obviously of a theological order: God heard them and reckoned their response to their credit. Then the original words of promise (vv. 17ff.) are attached to this historical group of faithful Israelites.¹⁵⁶

For Brevard Childs, then, who already sees Malachi as a series of disputations, this brief account must be secondary and is “obviously of a theological order.”¹⁵⁷

Through a messenger lens, this account is hardly so out of place in Malachi. Baldwin was on to something when she observed, “The *book of remembrance* recorded not righteous deeds, as in a Persian king's chronicles (Est. 6:1, 2), but the names of *those who feared the*

¹⁵⁵ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 312 helpfully labels this passage, “Antithesis between Righteous and Wicked.”

¹⁵⁶ Childs, *Introduction*, 496.

¹⁵⁷ Ironically, there is nothing “obvious” about why he singles out Mal 3:16 as “theological” since so much of the prior material in the book is also quite theological. Is this point supposed to bolster Childs's perspective that this account is secondary?

*Lord and thought on his name.*¹⁵⁸ Perhaps surprisingly, that is literally all she wrote on this point; but, this matter of Persian chronicles and Esth 6:1–2 rewards a closer look:

On that night the king was unable to sleep; so he said, “Bring the scroll of memorials (ספר הזכרונות), the chronicles,”¹⁵⁹ and they were read aloud in the presence of the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh—two eunuchs of the king who guarded the entrance—that they sought to assassinate¹⁶⁰ King Ahasuerus. (Esth 6:1–2)

From here proceeds “arguably the most ironically comic scene in the entire Bible.”¹⁶¹ Haman, thinking the king wants to honor him, receives instead the royal command to honor Mordecai, whom Haman hates! The fact that Mordecai’s act of loyalty to the king was recorded in a scroll finds a strong correlation with those who revere YHWH being recorded in a scroll in Mal 3:16. Indeed, the phrase “scroll of memorials” is very close to the phrase in Mal 3:16, except the absolute noun in Esth 6:1 (memorials, זכרונות) is plural instead of singular.¹⁶²

Karen Jobes sees this incident in Esther as standard procedure for Persian kings:

It was important that Persian kings publically reward those who were loyal as a means of promoting their own safety in such treacherous times. Herodotus records examples of two such honors. In one instance Xerxes granted land to two ships’ captains who had assisted in battle against the Greeks and recorded one of them in the list of the “King’s Benefactors.” In another incident, a man was made governor of Cilicia for saving the life of Xerxes’ brother.¹⁶³

Closer study reveals that there were certainly more instances than these two. Darius, for example, had an official list made that recorded the names of six aristocrats who were faithful to him and whose lineages were to be honored perpetually by successive kings.¹⁶⁴ Also, as Xerxes and his forces passed through Acanthus, an important and esteemed Persian architect named Artachaias died. Xerxes grieved his death, ordered an impressive funeral, and had the

¹⁵⁸ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 249.

¹⁵⁹ “Chronicles” is lit. “the words of the days.”

¹⁶⁰ “To assassinate” is lit. “to lay a hand against.”

¹⁶¹ Karen H. Jobes, *Esther* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 152.

¹⁶² Also, “memorials” is definite in Esth 6:1, but not in Mal 3:16. It is a very rare noun in the HB, occurring only twenty-four times. There are two other places where it appears in a plural form: Job 13:12 and Isa 57:8. In those verses, the plural makes sense; but, in Esth 6:1, it is not certain what is meant by the plural form unless the implication is that there was a scroll/book recording multiple memorials.

¹⁶³ Jobes, *Esther*, 153. See Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.85; 9.107.

¹⁶⁴ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 130–31.

army build a memorial mound for him.¹⁶⁵ Also, during the Battle of Salamis, Xerxes observed the conflict closely and noted those who deserved official honors.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Herodotus writes that it was Xerxes's custom to observe battles and have his scribes record the names of individuals who achieved "some remarkable feat."¹⁶⁷ This was done so that they could be honored later in more official documents.¹⁶⁸

From this perspective, it seems David Deuel hits close to the mark in taking the scroll in Mal 3:16 as a "royal memorandum." Noting that Malachi means "My Messenger" and that YHWH is a king in Mal 1:14, Deuel thinks it is best to compare the scroll to Persian archive materials mentioned in Daniel, Esther, and Ezra.¹⁶⁹ "God's memorandum is on file in His royal archives for the great and terrible day of His visitation in battle against his enemies (cf. Malachi 4)."¹⁷⁰ Deuel's observations are helpful; but, looking at primary sources outside the biblical material, it becomes clear that it was the custom of Persian kings, including Xerxes, to memorialize individuals in documents and through other means. Also, one must consider the manner in which the HB typically uses "memorial" (זכרון):

Now this day shall be for you as a *memorial* (זכרון), and you shall celebrate it as a feast to YHWH; throughout your generations you shall celebrate it as a perpetual ordinance. (Exod 12:14)

And YHWH said to Moses, write this (as a *memorial* (זכרון) in the *scroll* (הספר), and recite it in the ears of Joshua—that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from beneath the heavens. (Exod 17:14)

¹⁶⁵ See Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.117. Cf. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 258. Though this example is not about a document, it demonstrates the great length to which Xerxes and other Achaemenids would go to memorialize faithful and outstanding individuals.

¹⁶⁶ See Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.87–88. In particular, he took note of Artemisia for her ship's reckless but brazen and courageous efforts in the conflict.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.90.

¹⁶⁸ For a helpful note on Xerxes's manner of observation, see Frank J. Frost, "A Note on Xerxes at Salamis," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 22 (1973): 118–19.

¹⁶⁹ See Dan 7:9–10; Ezra 4:15; 6:1–2; Esth 2:21–23.

¹⁷⁰ David C. Deuel, "Malachi 3:16: 'Book of Remembrance' or Royal Memorandum? An Exegetical Note," *TMSJ* 7.1 (1996), 107–11 (quote from p. 110).

So these stones shall be as a *memorial* (זכרון) for the sons of Israel perpetually. (Josh 4:7)¹⁷¹

In short, Deuel's "memorandum" is a helpful observation, but it does not convey an important function of a זכרון, namely that it serves as a memorial/reminder.

In these and other examples, the purpose of the memorial (זכרון) is to perpetuate the event by reminding later generations about it. In Esth 6:1–2,¹⁷² it is clear that (A) a memorial scroll recorded the faithful deed of Mordecai, but also (B) the specific purpose for memorializing that deed was to perpetuate it in memory. Indeed, that is exactly what happens: the king hears the reading of the scroll, remembers the deed, and gives orders to publically celebrate Mordecai.¹⁷³ So, through a messenger lens, the recording of those who revere YHWH in a memorial scroll correlates to the practice of Persian rulers of memorializing and honoring loyal and noteworthy individuals. It is a pronounced decoration and adds to Malachi's growing body of messenger *poiema*.

Third, Mal 3:17 anticipates a future time when YHWH will make those who revere him into a "special treasure" (סגולה). This form is extremely rare in the HB, appearing merely eight times.¹⁷⁴ Scholars proffer various interpretations of this term in Mal 3:17. Baldwin sees it as drawing "attention to the original election of Israel" in Exod 19:5 (cf. Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4).¹⁷⁵ Similarly, and noting that YHWH calls Israel to be a holy nation in Exod 19 (see esp. 19:1–6), Verhoef, Hill, and Clendenen emphasize the piety of this remnant who

¹⁷¹ See also Exod 13:9; 28:12 (2x), 29; 30:16; 39:7; Lev 23:24; Num 10:10; 16:40; 31:54; Neh 2:20; Zech 6:14; and perhaps Eccl 1:11; 2:16.

¹⁷² Deuel, "Malachi 3:16," 110 devotes merely two sentences to this text, but cites it as an example of a memorandum.

¹⁷³ It is most curious that Deuel sees the prophet as a messenger (based on the title Malachi/My Messenger) and YHWH as a king (based on 1:14) but does not do anything further with these observations than attempt to classify the scroll in 3:16 as a royal memorandum. I think this point underscores (and perhaps legitimates) the value of the methodology in the present project, which actually constructs a messenger lens *before* reading Malachi.

¹⁷⁴ Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; 1 Chr 29:3; Ps 135:4; Eccl 2:8; and here in Mal 3:17. It is also worth noting the observation in Hill, *Malachi*, 342: "The word is unique to Malachi among the prophetic books of the OT/HB."

¹⁷⁵ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 249.

fears YHWH.¹⁷⁶ Glazier-McDonald provides a lengthy explanation of the covenant overtones of סגלה.¹⁷⁷ All these emphases prove fruitful and, collectively, address the obligations that accompany a covenant relationship.

It seems, however, that one can say more about the metaphor that סגלה provides. It is a royal term and refers to a king's special treasury. This meaning is not so obvious in the Torah when describing Israel as a "special possession/treasure" of YHWH, but other texts are telling:

I collected for myself also silver and gold, and a *special treasury* (וסגלה) from kings and provinces. (Eccl 2:8a)

And moreover, because of the delight I take in the house of my God, (and because) I possess a *special treasury* (סגלה) of silver and gold, I give to the house of my God beyond all that is already allotted for the holy house. (1 Chr 29:3)¹⁷⁸

When other appearances of this term refer to Israel (i.e., the covenant people), one has to keep this metaphor in mind. Israel is not merely YHWH's special possession, but more specifically YHWH's royal treasure. Christopher Wright's explanation makes sense:

[סגלה], translated by the NIV as "treasured possession," is a word that comes from royal contexts. It was used (in Hebrew and Akkadian) to describe the personal treasure of the monarch and his family (cf. 1 Chron 29:3; Eccles 2:8). The whole country and people might be thought of as the wider property of a king, but he also had his own personal treasure, in which he took particular delight. This is the metaphor God uses to describe the identity of Israel.¹⁷⁹

Clendenen seems to share this view regarding סגלה in Mal 3:17: "As a king who owns everything in his kingdom would choose and treasure certain things above all else (1 Chr

¹⁷⁶ See Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 322; Hill, *Malachi*, 342; Clendenen, "Malachi," 446.

¹⁷⁷ See Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 223–26. She (and others) point to the influential case for the term's covenant meaning in Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 226 (esp. footnote 2). Cf. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (1979): 184–203.

¹⁷⁸ The Hebrew syntax of this verse is extremely difficult, but its aim is fairly clear.

¹⁷⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 256.

29:3; Eccl 2:8), so God chose Israel out of all the peoples of the earth (Deut 7:6; 14:2).”¹⁸⁰

Through a messenger lens, this decoration exhibits much more specificity. The text anticipates a future time when YHWH, as king, will make the faithful into a personal and prized royal treasure. This extension of the kingship metaphor is important because it also extends the royal connotation of Malachi’s/My Messenger’s message.

Finally, Mal 4:2 begins, “But¹⁸¹ for you who fear my name, a sun of righteousness will rise up, (with) healing in its wings.” Scholars handle this image of a winged sun in two primary ways. The first can be illustrated by Eugene Merrill. He feels it is unnecessary to make comparisons with ANE winged suns outside the HB because “there is enough inner-biblical support for the winged sun of Malachi as an apt metaphor for blessing as not to require any cross-cultural borrowings.”¹⁸² Clendenen follows suit and provides a plethora of biblical cross-references to demonstrate that the HB frequently depicts YHWH with sun imagery.¹⁸³ These scholars approach the imagery strictly (or at least primarily) from the biblical canon.

The second primary way scholars handle this image is to make broad comparisons with winged solar disks in ANE iconography. Baldwin says, “Only here in the Bible does the term ‘sun of righteousness’ occur, and the imagery of *wings* representing the sun’s rays recalls the winged sun disc which appears on so many Near Eastern monuments.”¹⁸⁴ Petersen more specifically mentions the Mesopotamian sun deity Shamash as a possible referent.¹⁸⁵ Frank Schnutenhaus perhaps goes furthest with such comparisons by claiming that the text

¹⁸⁰ Clendenen, “Malachi,” 446.

¹⁸¹ The conjunction (ו) is taken as “but” instead of “and” because it contrasts the fate of the faithful in this verse with that of the arrogant and unfaithful in Mal 4:1.

¹⁸² Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 447. I would affirm his statement when speaking of sun imagery for YHWH, which is indeed prevalent.

¹⁸³ See Clendenen, “Malachi,” 451–52. He cites, e.g., Deut 33:2; 2 Sam 23:3–4; Isa 9:2; 59:17; 60:1–3, 15; Jer 23:5–6; Ps 84:11; 104:1–3; Matt 4:16; etc.

¹⁸⁴ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 250. See, similarly, Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 158: “The wings refer to the portrayal of the winged solar disc in Egyptian and Mesopotamian art.”

¹⁸⁵ Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 225.

intentionally transfers a pagan sun-deity's characteristics to YHWH.¹⁸⁶ Hill's conclusion sums up this second treatment well: "Given the similarities of Malachi's figurative language to the icon of the ANE winged sun disk, it seems more likely that the prophet intended direct correspondence with the winged feature of the symbol . . ." ¹⁸⁷

Through a messenger lens, however, one can be much more precise in analyzing these correlations. For the Persians during the reign of Xerxes, the winged sun depicted the Persian god Ahuramazda.¹⁸⁸ This deity, whose name means "wise lord,"¹⁸⁹ appears prolifically in art and inscriptions from the reigns of Darius and Xerxes. The figure features prominently, for example, on Darius's Behistun Inscription. Also, a royal inscription from Xerxes's reign heaps praise on Ahuramazda: "A great god is Ahuramazda, the greatest of the gods, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, created happiness for man, who made Xerxes king, one king of many, one lord of many."¹⁹⁰ Herodotus records that Xerxes, before crossing the Hellespont, worshiped the rising sun by pouring a libation into the sea and praying to the sun for conquest of Europe.¹⁹¹ Finally, an imperial cylinder seal depicts two Persian kings, clad in battle attire, worshiping a winged sun above an altar of fire.¹⁹²

From this small sampling, one sees that Ahuramazda, the winged sun, was not merely one deity among many in ancient Persia. He was the deity of the Achaemenid kings, the

¹⁸⁶ Frank Schnutenhaus, "Das Kommen und Erscheinen Gottes im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 1–22 (esp. p. 9).

¹⁸⁷ Hill, *Malachi*, 351–52. See Hill, 349–52, and Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 327–32 for thorough overviews of various other scholarly positions that are less prevalent.

¹⁸⁸ Very few scholars have challenged the view that the winged sun is Ahuramazda, but some have, e.g., A. S. Shahbazi, "An Achaemenid Symbol I: A Farewell to 'Frahvar' and Ahuramazda," *AMI* 7 (1974): 135–44; P. Calmeyer, "Fortuna-Tyche-Khvarnah," *JDAI* 94 (1979): 346–65. These scholars argue that Persians did not visibly represent their deities, and they basically assume the winged sun is the spirit of the king or simply the king himself. However, John Cook, *The Persian Empire* (New York: Schocken, 1983), 149, exposes the Achilles heel of this perspective—Persian *realia* depicts emperors worshiping the winged sun: "In favour of the view that it represents Ahura Mazda are the fact that it seems to appear on independent satrapal coins (as of Datames) and above all the postures: the King is raising his hand as though in adoration to a superior being." At this time, the most thorough and comprehensive works on ancient Persia treat the winged sun as Ahuramazda, e.g., Yamauchi, *Persian and the Bible*; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*.

¹⁸⁹ See Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 436.

¹⁹⁰ Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 301, from a rock-cut niche near Lake Van in eastern Turkey.

¹⁹¹ Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.54.

¹⁹² See Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 561, and for further examples, see, e.g., pp. 237; 244; 247; 473–75; 552; 555; 556; 561; 565.

primary recipient of official, imperial worship, and the featured deity and source of benevolence in imperial propaganda. It is true that a winged sun appears in materials of other ANE cultures; but, those who first received Malachi did so under Persian rule and not in Egyptian or Assyrian dominance. Therefore the winged sun in Mal 4:2 is an important messenger decoration. The text presents YHWH as eclipsing both the Persian king and Ahuramazda. This *poiema* keeps the imperial structure foregrounded in the text, and its kingship overtones extend the royal connotation of Malachi's/My Messenger's message.

In summary, there are four important messenger decorations in this pericope. First, the divine title YHWH of Hosts (יהוה צבאות) appears four more times. Second, the passage describes the recording of those who revere YHWH in a memorial scroll (ספר זכרון), a concept that correlates to practices by Persian kings, including Xerxes. Third, the pericope anticipates a future time when YHWH will make the faithful into a "special treasure" (סגולה), which is a royal term. Finally, the passage anticipates a time when YHWH will provide a healing, winged sun for the faithful. This image alludes to the Persian deity Ahuramazda, the god venerated by Xerxes.

Poiema in Malachi 4:4–6

Scholarly perspectives on these final verses of Malachi are so diverse that delving into the task of sorting them out is to risk getting lost in the cavernous terrain. The position here is essentially two-fold: (1) The verses do seem to exhibit a canonical function, possibly serving as a final word for the Book of the Twelve, the entire prophetic corpus (*Nevi'im*), or both. That said, (2) the verses are clearly an integral part of Malachi.

* * *

EXCURSUS 2: ON MALACHI'S "APPENDICES"

In critical scholarship, it is commonplace to see these verses as one or two appendices, the first (Mal 4:4) dealing with Moses and the Sinaitic covenant and the second (4:5–6) dealing with a future, restorative return of

Elijah. Wilhelm Rudolph sees these verses, especially verse 4, as the “completion” (*Abschluß*) to the entire prophetic corpus, the *Nevi'im*. Malachi 4:4–6 thus serves as a covenantal bookend of sorts with Josh 1:1–9, the functional prologue.¹⁹³ Childs sees two distinct, editorial, secondary appendices. The first conjures the Sinaitic Covenant, and the second provides a theological context for reading the book. Unlike Wilhelm, however, Childs sees both as appendices to Malachi, not the *Nevi'im*.¹⁹⁴ Petersen sees all three verses as a “single, monitory and explanatory epilogue to the series of dialogues that have made up the book.”¹⁹⁵ He notes that Hosea, the first text in the Book of the Twelve, has a similar epilogue. Thus the endings to Hosea and Malachi are bookends to the Twelve that connect the entire collection to the rest of the HB canon.¹⁹⁶ Finally, there are also scholars who simply treat Mal 4:4–6 as an integral part of the rest of the book.¹⁹⁷

The position here, though not a dogmatic one, is that Mal 4:4–6 is an integral part of the larger text. There are at least five factors supporting this view. (A) The inclusion of Moses and Elijah fits with earlier instances of naming Jacob (1:2; 3:6), Esau (1:2), and Levi (2:4; 3:3), all looming figures in Israel’s traditions. Put simply, Malachi is prone to name-dropping. (B) Malachi 4:4–6 exhibits clear covenantal overtones with references to the “Torah of Moses,” the “statutes and ordinances,” Mount Horeb,¹⁹⁸ and a threat of cursing the land.¹⁹⁹ As Verhoef and Glazier-McDonald demonstrate, these covenantal overtones are quite at home in Malachi.²⁰⁰ (C) The first word of the unit is “remember” (from זכר), which echoes the cognate form “memorial” (3:16, זכרון) in the immediately prior pericope. This is no coincidence: The faithful will be recorded in a “memorial,” so the community must “remember” YHWH’s Torah.²⁰¹ (D) Malachi 4:4–6 shares other important vocabulary with the rest of Malachi: “dreadful/terrifying” (participle of ירא; see root and cognates in 1:6; 2:5

¹⁹³ Wilhelm Rudolph, *Haggai—Sacharja 1–8—Sacharja 9–14—Maleachi* (KAT 13.4; Gütersloher: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1976), 290–93. Cf., similarly, Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 536.

¹⁹⁴ Childs, *Introduction*, 495–96. R. Smith, *Micah—Malachi*, 340–41 shares a similar view.

¹⁹⁵ Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 227–28. Similarly, Reddit, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, ad loc.*, sees Mal 4:4–6 as a fitting conclusion the Book of the Twelve, but not necessarily mirroring Hosea’s “epilogue.” Hill, *Malachi*, 364–66 is favorable to Petersen’s theory.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 232–33. I would find this model more convincing if Hosea’s prologue corresponded to Malachi’s epilogue, which would serve more clearly as a bookend for the Twelve. That said, Wilhelm’s model seems more plausible, though there is clearly room for both models.

¹⁹⁷ See, e.g., Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 250–51, who sees this text as a “fitting conclusion” to Malachi, one that is “complementary”; Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 244–45; Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 338. It is worth noting that others—e.g., Nowack, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 428—see Mal 4:4 as authentic, but not verses 5–6.

¹⁹⁸ I.e., Sinai, where Moses receives the Torah in Israel’s Pentateuchal traditions.

¹⁹⁹ See esp. Deut 28, where a land curse is the essential punishment for covenant unfaithfulness.

²⁰⁰ See Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 341–46; Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 243–70. Cf. O’Brien, *Priest and Levite, passim*, esp. 53–55. For the strong covenant overtones in Malachi, see esp. McKenzie and Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” *passim*.

²⁰¹ Though the connection is murky in English translations, it is much clearer in the HB.

[2x]; 3:5, 16, 20); “great” (גדול; see root and cognates in 1:5, 11, 14); “day” (יום; see 3:2, 4, 17; 4:1, 3);

“restore/return” (שוב; see 1:4; 2:6; 3:7, 18); “fathers” (אב; see 1:6; 2:10; 3:7); and “sons” (בן; see 1:6). (5)

Finally, (E) the generational healing—restoring fathers and sons—repairs the community’s treacherous treatment of each other in Mal 2:10. These connections may not entirely clear up the canonical function of Mal 4:4–6, but they do provide ample justification for reading this passage as an integral part of Malachi and not *merely* as a separate appendix or appendices.

* * *

Through a messenger lens, this closing pericope provides two pronounced messenger decorations and a fitting, thematic ending rooted in the ongoing messenger metaphor. First, it invokes two of the most exemplary prophets of YHWH in all of Israel’s traditions: Moses and Elijah. In the HB, Moses is the prophet *par excellence*²⁰² (see Deut 34:10; Hos 12:13). Elijah is also an exemplary prophet, and the “mystery of Elijah’s translation”²⁰³ clearly made a profound impression on Israel’s imagination.²⁰⁴

Chapter 3 of this study demonstrates that Israel’s prophets had always been presented as messengers. That observation makes sense here. Noting that Malachi means “My Messenger,” Deuel rightly sees a correlation between Malachi in the book’s first verse and Elijah in the closing verses: “[C]hapter four predicts Elijah’s return as a Messenger.”²⁰⁵ That is true, but one should say the same for Moses, the prophet *par excellence*. Indeed, metaphorically, Malachi presents many of its characters as messengers: the titular prophet (1:1); the priests (2:7); the eschatological forerunner (3:1a); and probably even YHWH (3:1b,

²⁰² There is no doubt that Moses is the prophet *par excellence* in the HB. The canon presents him so. The Torah closes by acknowledging, “Since that time no prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses, whom YHWH knew face to face” (Deut 34:10). In Josh 1:1–9, the opening passage of the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the passage that follows Deut 34 in every canonical tradition, Joshua is commanded to keep “the Torah which Moses my servant commanded you” (1:7), and the name Moses appears five times. When the Writings (*Ketubim*) open with an image of the blessed person meditating on YHWH’s Torah (Ps 1:2), Moses again comes to mind since he was the mediator of YHWH’s Torah in Israelite traditions. It is also noteworthy that Hosea 12:13 takes it for granted that, “By a prophet YHWH brought Israel up from Egypt.”

²⁰³ “Translation” refers to Elijah’s being taken up from earth in a whirlwind in the presence of horses and chariots of fire. See 2 Kgs 1.

²⁰⁴ Beth Glazier-McDonald, “Elijah,” *EDB* 395–97 (quote from p. 397). She points out Mal 4:5–6; Sir 48:10; Mark 6:14–15; 8:27–28; Matt 16:13–14; Luke 9:7–8; John 1:21, 25.

²⁰⁵ Deuel, “Malachi 3:16,” 108.

the messenger of the covenant). Through a messenger lens, the inclusion of the prophets Moses and Elijah is an additional instance of messenger *poiema*.

Second, the pericope says specifically that YHWH will “send forth” (שלח) Elijah. As already discussed at length (see above), this verb is the expected term for the deployment of a messenger. That is its most likely meaning in Mal 2:16 and its unquestionable meaning in Mal 3:1. Moreover, as in Mal 3:1, the “sending forth” of a messenger in Mal 4:5 will be in anticipation of the eschatological “day” (יום) of YHWH’s arrival. The term שלח is another instance of messenger *poiema* in the book.

In summary, Mal 4:4–6 has two messenger decorations. First, it invokes the figures of Moses and Elijah, two exemplary messenger-prophets of YHWH. Second, it uses the term “send forth” (שלח), a common term for the dispatching of a messenger that appears elsewhere in Malachi with that exact connotation. With these decorations, this short pericope closes the text by dipping one last time into the root messenger metaphor.

SUMMARY: GRADATIONS OF DECORATIONS

Having ventured through Malachi using a messenger lens, it is apparent that there is a plethora of messenger decorations adorning the text from start to finish. Not all of these decorations shine with the same brightness and definition. Some are very bright and well-defined, others stand out but are not quite as bright, and still others are subtle and their messenger connotations would not be discernible apart from using the messenger lens. Based on how necessary the messenger lens is for detecting these decorations, they tend to fall into three broad categories.

First, some are *brilliant decorations*. These are those instances of *poiema* that are well-defined, unmistakable, and so obvious that it is nigh impossible to deny their connotations. Pride of place goes to the four instances in which the term “messenger” (מלאך)

actually appears in the text: for the titular prophet (Mal 1:1); for the priests (2:7); and twice for eschatological messengers (3:1). Other brilliant decorations are: the presentation of YHWH as a “great king” (מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל) in Mal 1:14; the “memorial scroll” (סֵפֶר זִכְרוֹן) in Mal 3:16; and the “special treasure” (סֵגֻלָּה) in Mal 3:17. Taken together, these metaphors paint several characters in the text as messengers and depict the one sending them, YHWH, as a king. These decorations are so strong that their presence in the text generated this study in the first place. Surely only the most ardent skeptic would argue that the word “messenger” has no messenger connotation!

Second, others are *bright decorations*. These may not share the same luminosity as the brilliant ones, but they are hardly dull. Through a messenger lens, these bright decorations readily move to the foreground in the text. They are: the technical phrase “by the hand of” (בִּיד) in Mal 1:1; the reference to Yehud’s “governor” (פַּחַה) in Mal 1:8; the focus on YHWH’s rule of the nations in Mal 1:11, 14; the concentrated use of the military title “YHWH of Hosts” (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת); the accusations of treachery in Mal 2:10–17; the inclusion of the messenger formula “Behold, I!” (הִנְנִי) in Mal 3:1; the use of “send forth” (שָׁלַח) in Mal 3:1 and 4:5; the blurring of YHWH and the messenger of the covenant in Mal 3:1; the preparation for a royal visit from YHWH in Mal 3:1–7; the reference to a winged sun in Mal 4:2; and the naming of Moses and Elijah in Mal 4:4–6. These bright decorations enhance the brilliant ones and strengthen the case that there is a root messenger metaphor.

Finally, there are *subtle decorations*. These decorations are only visible with the aid of an interpretive lens. These include: the implicit treaty connotation of the love/hate language in Mal 1:2–5; the correlation between the announcement of Edom’s destruction in Mal 1:2–5 and similar victory announcements by Persian royal messengers; the blurring of

cultic and political responsibilities throughout the book; the correlation between the call to shut the gates in Mal 2:10 and official Persian court protocols; the correlation between the depiction of YHWH as a father in Mal 1:6 and 2:10 and the popular view that Cyrus was a father; the idea that YHWH hates to “send forth” in Mal 2:16; the correlation between YHWH’s royal visit and fiery purge of Jerusalem in Mal 3:1–7 and Xerxes’s fiery destruction of the Athenian Acropolis; the correlation between YHWH’s concern for horticulture in Mal 3:8–11 and the image of Persian rulers as gardener kings; and the use of the label “nation” (גו) for the covenant community in Mal 3:9. The subtle decorations demonstrate how fully pervasive the root metaphor is in Malachi.

Furthermore, the subtle decorations may be the most important ones of all for the present thesis, not the brilliant and bright ones. If there is a root metaphor, then it stands to reason that a hermeneutic shaped around such a phenomenon would reveal otherwise undetectable micrometaphors. That is what occurs here. The messenger lens unveils related imagery in multiple layers of the text. Some of these images shine brilliantly, others brightly, and still others subtly and delicately. These last decorations lay hidden in the others’ candescence until the lens moves over them at just the right angle. They are perhaps in turn the discoveries that most illuminate the value of the lens.

CONCLUSION

Constructing a messenger lens and using it to read Malachi reveals that messenger metaphors of various gradations decorate the entire text. Coinciding with this phenomenon is a constant depiction of YHWH as a royal figure, a king. Upon synthesis, this data suggests that the book of Malachi has a root messenger metaphor that is the source of the barrage of individual messenger metaphors that persist throughout the text. Since the thesis proves plausible, the next question is, “What difference does it make?” Malachi displays messenger *poiema*; so, in following Ward’s procedure, what *logos* emerges from this observation? And, is this model

helpful with other critical issues? Answering these questions is the task of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

LOGOS: THE IMPACT OF MALACHI'S ROOT MESSENGER METAPHOR

“Then he isn't safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.”

—C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

Thus in a marvelous and divine way he loved us even when he hated us.

—Augustine of Hippo, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*

The two chapters preceding this one construct a messenger lens for reading Malachi and investigate Malachi's messenger *poiema*, respectively. These procedures demonstrate that Malachi is brimming with royal messenger metaphors, some of which are brilliant in definition, some bright, and some subtle. The text is so saturated with this imagery that the overall thesis proves plausible: *The Book of Malachi exhibits a root messenger metaphor and fits best during the reign of Xerxes in the early fifth century BCE.*

The next step is to interpret Malachi in light of this new model. In each body chapter of *Planet Narnia*, Michael Ward moves from (A) reconstructing a Medieval planet, to (B) demonstrating the *poiema* (i.e., “what is made”) of that planet in the relative Chronicle, and finally to (C) articulating the *logos* (i.e., “what is said”) that emerges once the *poiema* is detailed. He recognizes that ascribing a planetary donegality¹ to each book will impact interpretation. Following Ward's model, the task that remains here is articulating Malachi's *logos*. What difference does the messenger donegality make?

¹ For a full discussion of donegality, see Chapter 2, above, *passim*. Ward essentially defines donegality as the atmospheric quality of each Chronicle created by its planetary *poiema*, i.e., its unique and pervasive planetary imagery and decorations. So *The Silver Chair*, e.g., has a Lunar (i.e., the moon) donegality arising from the pervasiveness of its Lunar decorations.

Ward's *logos* sections are straightforward: He interprets each Chronicle with an eye towards its Christological message. In much the same way, the aim here is to interpret Malachi with an eye towards constructing theology. The *logos* task for this project, however, must necessarily be a bit more robust than in *Planet Narnia*. After all, an essential component of this study is evaluation: evaluation, that is, of particular and prevalent positions in Malachi scholarship, primarily (A) a reduction of Malachi to *merely* a series of disputations, but also (B) the predominant view that the book is of low literary quality and value.

In what follows, there is first of all a discussion of the impact of this investigation for reassessing Malachi's form. Next, there is a reading of Malachi as a royal message. Here I synthesize material from previous chapters and provide a succinct, linear reading of the book. Next, there is a discussion of this study's impact on constructing theology from Malachi followed by a reevaluation of Malachi's literary quality and artistic merit. Finally, there is a presentation of some possibilities of this investigation's impact on future research in biblical studies before the chapter closes with a concluding summary.

RETHINKING MALACHI'S FORM

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the consensus among critical scholars is that Malachi is some sort of discussion.² Only a brief summary is needed here. Surprisingly, hardly anyone makes an attempt to classify the entire book. Rather, what scholars do is classify the parts and not the whole. Since E. Pfeiffer's demarcation of the text into six disputations, that is by far the most prevalent position—that Malachi is a series of disputations.

Since a disputation is by definition a judicial form, I find that classification for Malachi problematic. Using this label implies that there is something legal about the text and suggests that Malachi puts the covenant community on trial. This is a rigid classification, in fact too rigid for some. In an attempt to shed the judicial connotations of "disputation,"

² See Chapter 1, *ad. loc.*, for a thorough treatment of Malachi and form criticism.

Boecker simply calls the units “discussions” (*Diskussionsworte*). Petersen and Clendenen make similar moves, describing Malachi as diatribe-like discourse and hortatory communication, respectively. They see the text as a discussion, but not a judicial one.

By contrast, Julia O’Brien offers a model for Malachi that is more judicial than any other model, including the disputation. She regards the book as a formal covenant lawsuit. In this model, the prophetic figure is explicitly and overtly putting the covenant community on trial for unfaithfulness/disobedience. Malachi, however, lacks essential attributes of covenant lawsuits, and scholars have justifiably found her model problematic.

The present study paves the way for another option. I sympathize with the disputation model because it recognizes that Malachi is speech. It is some sort of conversation, albeit one-sided except for caricatures of the community’s responses. That said, I find the more generic positions of Boecker, Petersen, and Clendenen more convincing because, as they point out, Malachi does not seem judicial. The text does not read as though Malachi is putting the community on trial to demonstrate why they will be punished by YHWH. Rather, the text reads much more like a warning. *If* the community remains unfaithful, it will face destruction; but, *if* it chooses faithfulness, it will find divine healing and restoration, especially in the eschatological day of YHWH. It is this ingrained contingency so essential to Malachi that leads me to ultimately find the disputation model problematic.

So what is the new option presented here? Given the plausibility that Malachi emerged in the early reign of Xerxes and has a root messenger metaphor, my conclusion is that Malachi is a royal message. I think Boecker, Petersen, and Clendenen are essentially correct—Malachi is speech. Calling it a royal message, however, provides a new level of specificity without reverting back to judicial models such as disputations or a covenant lawsuit. The community in Yehud who first received this message would have found it extremely similar to imperial messages that Persia’s royal heralds proclaimed throughout the

empire. That is precisely why Malachi would have been rhetorically powerful and garnered a hearing. Malachi packages a theological message into a form that its earliest audience would have recognized: a royal message from the Great King.

SYNTHESIS: READING MALACHI AS A ROYAL MESSAGE

In the early fifth century BCE, the heirs of ancient Israel who lived in and near Jerusalem existed under Persian domination. They were part of a small Persian province called Yehud, which was part of the larger Persian satrapy called Abar Nahara. Darius the Great's imperial expansionism and vast military campaigns meant that these citizens in Yehud lived in relative poverty as they funneled the vast majority of their goods to the capitol city of Jerusalem and, from there, off to Persian administrative centers.

When Darius died in 486, there was excitement in Yehud generated from the possibilities that YHWH was finally shaking the nations (cf. Hag 2:7) and the plights of the covenant community might be coming to an end. By 483, however, Darius's successor, Xerxes, fully re-stabilized the empire and renewed Persia's campaigns against Greece. As this news traveled back to Yehud, and as the king's royal messengers arrived with burdensome demands, the excitement following Darius's death morphed into apathy. The people of Yehud found themselves back under Persia's heel; nothing had really changed. It is at this time that a prophet addressed this people regarding its cultic failures and misguided priorities. To reinforce the point that their allegiance to YHWH must trump everything else, this prophet presented his oracle as a royal message, YHWH as the Great King, and the prophet himself as a royal messenger. The result is preserved as the book of Malachi.

Title: A Message from YHWH, the Great King (Mal 1:1)

Malachi's opening verse functions as a title and introduces a root messenger metaphor that undergirds the entire book. Although "burden" (אֲשֶׁר) is a flexible word in the HB, in the prophetic material it is a common designation for an oracle (see, e.g., Isa 13:1; Jer 23:33;

Ezek 12:10; Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1), as is the case here. The text presents this oracle of YHWH as coming “by the hand of Malachi,” a phrase loaded with messenger imagery. “By the hand of” (ביד) is a common phrase in the HB for the delivery of a message by means of a messenger (see, e.g., 1 Sam 11:7; 2 Sam 11:14; Esth 3:13). The designation “Malachi” (מלאכי), whether a name or title, literally means “My Messenger.” Thus Mal 1:1 exhibits strong metaphorical imagery that prepares readers for hearing the rest of the book: YHWH’s oracle for Israel is coming to them in the form of a message and by means of a royal messenger.

A Report of the King’s Victory over Edom (Mal 1:2–5)

In this first pericope, the messenger emphasizes the king’s faithfulness to the covenant community by reporting YHWH’s victory over Israel’s paradigmatic enemy, Edom. The language of love and hate in the text (i.e., YHWH loves [אהב] Jacob/Israel and hates [שנא] Esau/Edom) has strong covenant connotations in the HB and primary sources from the ANE, a point that one can observe throughout Deuteronomy (see, e.g., Deut 4:37; 5:9; 7:9; 13:4; 19:9; 23:6). Throughout the first and second millennia BCE, these types of treaty/covenant relationships were maintained by royal messengers. Therefore when Malachi/My Messenger uses this covenant language, it alludes to long-standing conventions: The king whom the messenger represents is assuring the recipients of continued faithfulness.

In the more immediate situation of Yehud, this messenger’s announcement shares strong correlations with Persian imperial practices. Just as Xerxes sent heralds to announce his important victories, here the messenger announces the king’s over Edom. In this light, it makes sense that this pericope introduces a designation for YHWH that is a divine military title in the HB: “YHWH of Hosts” (Mal 1:4, יהוה צבאות). Thus early in the book of Malachi, a tension begins to emerge alongside a pressing question: Who is the real king? To whom

should the heirs of ancient Israel give their utmost allegiance, YHWH or Xerxes and the empire?

The King's Displeasure (Mal 1:6—2:9)

In this second pericope, the messenger quickly turns the tables on the covenant community. Whereas Mal 1:2–5 reports YHWH's destruction of Edom, this passage details YHWH's displeasure with Yehud's lack of reverence in and general pathetic quality of cultic life. The inherent danger for Yehud is that the same king who annihilated their enemy now turns to examine them. This danger is heightened by the fact that the military title YHWH of Hosts occurs eleven times in this passage (Mal 1:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14; 2:2, 4, 7, 8), which is more than in any other pericope in the HB. In this pericope, then, the royal messenger details the divine king's acute displeasure towards the covenant community; and, this displeasure means danger, for this king leads a cosmic army, the vast hosts of creation.

The rhetorical power of this passage lies in its clever overlapping of political imagery and cultic concerns. The general issue is clear: the community's cultic life is pathetic. They are presenting their worst goods for offerings instead of their best ones (1:8, 13) and therefore defile and make a mockery of the sacrificial system (1:7, 12). They are not, however, merely dishonoring their covenant deity—they are dishonoring the real king and true power, YHWH of Hosts. This blurring of political and cultic spheres is particularly clever in that it makes YHWH both king *and* deity, a point that distinguishes this text from Persian propaganda that separately venerates both the king (e.g., Xerxes) and the deity (e.g., Ahuramazda).

The text presents YHWH as a father (1:6) and as a superlative king of kings, the true king of the entire world (1:11, 14). Since the populous regarded Cyrus the Great as a “father,” and since Persian royal propaganda presented each Achaemenid ruler as the superlative king, this passage undermines Xerxes's authority and heightens the tension introduced in Mal 1:2–5. This observation explains why YHWH's messenger asks if their provincial “governor”

(1:8) would be satisfied with such detestable offerings. Do so foregrounds political overtones. Furthermore, YHWH threatens to shut the gates of the temple complex and bar their access to divine presence. This action conjures imagery of Persian court protocols in which visitors could get no further to the king than the Darius Gate, at which point royal messengers would meet visitors and speak for the king as intermediaries. The general image in the text is that the covenant community has displeased their king, YHWH, in their cultic offerings and characteristic apathy (cf. 1:13), so the king no longer desires to accept them into the royal presence.

Finally, the text closes with a lengthy address to the primary culprits, the priests (2:1–9). Malachi briefly introduces these figures early in the pericope—“O priests who despise my name” (1:6)—but returns to them here to deal with them more substantially. The passage essentially threatens the priests with curses from the king and public shaming (2:2–3, 9) for their dishonoring of the king’s name in cultic activity (2:2; cf. 2:5). To clarify and emphasize their disobedience and cultic failings, the text presents the priests as messengers who are misrepresenting the king: “For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge . . . for he is the messenger of YHWH of Hosts” (2:7). What emerges from this reading of Mal 2:1–9 is highly ironic and rhetorically effective: the king’s messengers (i.e., the priests) are so terrible that YHWH had to send another messenger (i.e., Malachi) specifically to address them.

Traitors! Yehud’s Unfaithfulness to the King (Mal 2:10–17)

Whereas the prior pericope (Mal 1:6—2:9) addresses how the people of Yehud dishonor and displease the king, this third pericope presents an escalation: they are outright traitors. This short passage makes the point five times that Judah has “dealt treacherously” (בגד), both with each other and as a community towards YHWH (2:10, 11, 14, 15, 16).

Malachi 2:10–17 continues the overlapping of political and cultic spheres introduced in the immediately prior passage (1:6—2:9). As for the political sphere, it presents YHWH as

a “father” again (2:10; cf. 1:6) and uses the military title YHWH of Hosts two more times (2:12, 16). As for the cultic sphere, the text presents Yehud’s treachery with terms that usually suggest idolatry, a curious move since there is no evidence that idolatry was an issue for Yehud in Malachi’s time frame. They have committed an “abomination” (2:11, תועבה) and profaned “what is holy to YHWH” (2:11, קדש יהוה). They have “married the daughter of a foreign god” (2:11). Two words that appear in close proximity, אשר (“which”) and בעל (“marry”), phonetically allude to the pagan gods Asherah (אשרה) and Baal (בעל).

Idolatry, however, does not appear to be the literal issue here. After all, Yehud is clearly engaged in presenting offerings and weeping at the altar, though these practices will not halt the king from severing the culprits from the community (2:12–13). Furthermore, the reason for the cultic system’s impotency is that YHWH has witnessed their treachery (2:14), which must cease immediately (2:15). The real issues—for which idolatry is a stand-in—are that they betray the king with in their cultic life while betraying each other in everyday behavior. By presenting YHWH as king while discussing Yehud’s treachery in cultic terms, the messenger once again fuses political and cultic spheres. The covenant community betrays its God and king, who are one and the same.

There is another specific messenger image in this pericope in Mal 2:16. Although interpreters and translations usually take “sending forth” (שלח) as a reference to divorce, that interpretation is too problematic. It is best to take שלח as a reference to the dispatching—or “sending forth”—of a messenger. This interpretation fits best with the ongoing messenger metaphor. With this motif in mind, translating the verse becomes an easier task:

“Surely he³ hates sending forth (a messenger),” says YHWH the God of Israel,
 “But he⁴ covers violence over his garment,” says YHWH of Hosts.

³ I.e., YHWH.

“So be guarded in your spirit,
and do not be treacherous.”

This interpretation also fits the idea of treachery so prevalent in this pericope. YHWH hates having to send forth a messenger with such an extreme and volatile message, but that is what is necessary. It is the action that their treacherous behavior demands. Their unfaithfulness has necessitated a visit from the king’s emissary, a visit that is far from pleasant.

Finally, Mal 2:17 closes this pericope by highlighting the community’s apathy in two proverbial sayings. First, they claim that YHWH delights in those who do evil and regards them as good. Second, they ask rhetorically, “Where is the God of justice?” This lack of reverence and acute cynicism reflect the apathy that emerged when Xerxes re-stabilized the empire and the community realized that Darius’s death did not in fact signal the end of Persian domination or the onset of YHWH’s radical intervention in the affairs of history.

Reboot: My Messenger, Take Two (Mal 3:1–7)

Malachi naturally divides into two halves, and the second half begins here. To fully understand the shift in the book that takes place with this pericope, it is necessary to understand where it falls in the book’s progression. The first half of Malachi (Mal 1:1—2:17) progresses from (A) a report of the king’s victory over Edom (1:2–5), to (B) the king expressing displeasure over Yehud’s cultic failures (1:6—2:9), to (C) the king implicating Yehud as traitors (2:10–17). In Mal 3:1–7, the book moves on from explaining these failures to describing what the king is going to do about them: YHWH is going to send a messenger to make preparations for a royal visit (3:1).

The present pericope, then, is a reboot in the text. By “reboot” I mean that Malachi/My Messenger has brought the first half of the message to a close, and the second half begins by envisioning the king sending forth another “my messenger” (3:1, מלאכי). Here the contours of the characters blur as the identities of the king and the future messenger

⁴ I.e., Israel/Judah.

overlap. This blurring of identity between YHWH and angels and/or messengers is not uncommon in the HB; but, for those addressees in Yehud under Persian domination, this overlap would have been especially useful for continuing the ongoing messenger metaphor in the book since the identities of Persian kings and their royal messengers also blurred when those heralds delivered the king's word.

Upon the messenger's arrival, several things will happen. First, the messenger and "Lord" (אדון) will make his/their way to the temple (3:1). There will be a general, fiery, cleansing purge (3:2). More specifically, this messenger's arrival will bring about the fiery purification of the priesthood (3:3) and, by extension, the cultic offerings of Yehud in general (3:4). In Mal 3:5 the king threatens to come and judge those traitors who violate the covenant. Yet even at this point Yehud is invited to "return to me, and I shall return to you" (3:7).

Finally, in this reboot (3:1–7) the coming of the future "my messenger" will bring about reparations for everything that Malachi/My Messenger addresses in the first half of the book. He will go to the temple, the site at which Yehud is betraying YHWH (cf. 1:7–8, 12–14). The purification of priests and offerings repairs the root problem in the first half of the book as seen in its largest pericope (1:6–2:9). Finally, the king's judgment of covenant violations (3:5) addresses Yehud's treachery to both its king and fellow citizens as made clear in Mal 2:10–17. In summary, the future messenger will rectify the issues that the titular Malachi/My Messenger addresses in Mal 1:1–2:17.

YHWH as the Gardener King (Mal 3:8–12)

The prior passage (Mal 3:1–7) ends with an invitation to return to the king, and the present passage provides a tangible way for the covenant community to do so: They must quit robbing the king by withholding "tithes and offerings" (3:8). There are strong covenant overtones in the passage. Yehud is "cursed" (3:8). Additionally, there is no rain (3:10) and an insect plague devours what little fruit is produced (3:11). Deuteronomy 28 specifically lists

these hardships as divine curses for unfaithfulness. Likewise, YHWH's desire to cause rain (3:10), provide a plentiful harvest (3:11), and make all other nations call the covenant community "blessed" (3:12) are divine blessings for faithfulness in Deut 28. The point is clear: their covenant disobedience in matters of tithes and offerings is precisely why Yehud is experiencing these catastrophic disasters. With no rain and no produce, they face extreme hardship and are in immediate danger.

For the people of Yehud under Persian domination, however, the presentation of these covenant concerns in Mal 3:8–12 would have conjured more royal imagery. The divine military title YHWH of Hosts appears two more times (3:10, 12). Also, the text refers to the people as a "nation" (3:9, גוי), a term the HB characteristically uses for nations other than Israel. Furthermore, they are to bring their tithes into the "storehouse" (3:10, **בית האוצר**), an ambiguous word that lacks specificity. Put simply, YHWH is the military ruler who regards Yehud as a general political entity that is failing in its duty to supply the storehouses. In this light, YHWH's horticultural concerns and involvement are highly reminiscent of a prevalent image associated with Persian rulers: the gardener king. Here in the text, the king expresses a desire and ability to bless their flora and agricultural prosperity. If this nation will renew its faithfulness and return to its king (cf. 2:7), then the king will cultivate their land and make it a delight (3:12).

The Return of the King (Mal 3:13—4:3)

This pericope contrasts the faithful who "revere" (Mal 3:16; 4:2) the king with the unfaithful who instead continue in their arrogance (3:13; 4:1), wickedness (3:18; 4:3), and evil ways (4:1). Up to this point, the second half of Malachi provides a vision of the king's future visit (3:1–7) and an explanation of how the covenant people can return to the king's favor (3:8–12). The present pericope is a logical extension of the prior ones in that it distinguishes two types of responses to this invitation—a faithful one and an unfaithful one—and clarifies the

ultimate outcomes of each. In YHWH's dealings with each type, readers see both the mercy and severity of the king.

The first section of this pericope is Mal 3:13–15. Although the king accuses the people of arrogant words, they balk at this accusation and ask for an explanation (3:13). The answer lies in the acuteness of their apathy and cynicism. The text provides two of their claims that condemn them. First, these arrogant addressees claim that there is no benefit in serving the king, for whom they brazenly invoke the military title, YHWH of Hosts (3:14). Second, they claim that the arrogant and wicked are actually well off because “they test God and escape” (3:15). Although the prior pericope (3:8–12) provides a way for the community to demonstrate faithfulness to the king, those whom this section addresses answer with a callous response.

The second section of this pericope is Mal 3:16–18. It provides a dramatic contrast with those addressed in Mal 3:13–15 by presenting an account of “those who revere YHWH” (3:16). The king takes notice of their reverence and records their faithful behavior in a memorial scroll, literally a “scroll of remembrance” (3:16), meaning their account will always be remembered in the royal archives. Furthermore, the king claims these faithful citizens as his own “special treasure” (3:17, סגולה), a reference to the special treasury of a king and the royal family. Whereas the arrogant claimed there is no benefit in serving the king (3:14–15), this section shows that those who do serve the king will go neither unnoticed nor unrewarded. They will be the king's own prized possession, and there will again be a distinction between the righteous and the wicked (3:18).

Finally, the last section of this pericope is Mal 4:1–3. This section looks forward to the eschatological day of YHWH's judgment. It addresses the ultimate ends of both the faithful and the wicked. In that day, the military commander YHWH of Hosts will extinguish the arrogant and evildoers in a fiery destruction (4:1). The faithful, however, will experience

renewal and rejuvenation (4:2), and YHWH will even weaponize them to crush the wicked (4:3). By using an image of the winged sun, the text purposely and powerfully eclipses both the Persian king, Xerxes, and the most important deity for the Persian Empire, Ahuramazda. It is a rhetorically powerful reminder that YHWH is the true king and ultimate power in the cosmos, despite the enormity of human empires and the grandiosity of their administrations. Those who trust Israel's king and covenant God will someday enter into royal rewards.

The Return of the Messenger (Mal 4:4–6)

In this final pericope of the book, the king provides last words and a fitting ending to the royal message that is Malachi. The first word, “remember” (4:4, from זכר), directly connects this passage to the prior pericope (3:13—4:3), which has at its center the crucially important royal image of a scroll of “remembrance” (3:16, זכרון). The king will remember the faithful; now it is up to the community to remember the king. They must adhere to the YHWH's demands.

Just as the book emphasizes a messenger in its title (1:1) and reboots with a description of an eschatological messenger (3:1), this last pericope also highlights specific messengers: the prophets Moses and Elijah. At one level, these names are not surprising since YHWH's messenger has been dropping famous names for rhetorical purposes throughout the text (i.e., Jacob, 1:2; 3:6; Esau, 1:2; Levi, 2:4; 3:3). Yet there is more to it than that. It is hardly coincidental that there is such an acute emphasis on YHWH's messenger(s) at Malachi's major seams—the title, the reboot, and the ending. At the seams, one can see that the messenger concept is an interpretive key for reading this ancient text.

Malachi 3:5 announces that the king, YHWH, will “send forth” (שלח) Elijah the prophet. Not only is שלח the standard word for the dispatching of a messenger, but Elijah's return will also signal the king's arrival. These concepts make the passage conceptually

similar to Mal 3:1–2. There is an important difference, however, in the two passages. In Mal 3:1–7, the royal visit will be destructive. There will be fire and purging, albeit for purposes of purification. In Mal 3:4–6, the royal visit will be restorative. There will be generational healing and, ultimately, no more cursing of the land.

Malachi is essentially a royal message carved out in such a way that three messengers stand in relief. First, YHWH sends forth Malachi/My Messenger to express the king's great displeasure in the community's treacherous behavior. Second, because of their behavior, the king will send forth another messenger to initiate a dangerous and destructive visit from the king. In light of this announcement, the community is warned to return to YHWH's favor and trust that the king will rightly distinguish between the righteous and the wicked. Finally, the king will send forth another messenger, Elijah, to initiate restoration.

TOWARDS MALACHI'S THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE

This messenger reading of Malachi impacts how one constructs theology from the book. Frankly, however, not every critical study shows interest in Malachi's theology. In Robert Pfeiffer's view, Malachi is much more useful for history: "[T]he book of Malachi is of slight religious and literary importance, but an invaluable historical source for the obscure history of the Jews in the Persian period before Nehemiah."⁵ O'Brien aims at mining Malachi's contribution to our understanding of the priesthood, not unpacking its theological message.⁶ Glazier-McDonald and Petersen focus heavily on diachronic issues and end up saying more about Malachi's anthropocentric concerns than its theological ones.⁷ For many scholars, Malachi's theology is a non-issue. They simply do not go there.

⁵ R. Pfeiffer, *Introduction*, 614. I include this reference because at least part of what Pfeiffer seems to mean in slighting Malachi's "religious and literary importance" is that it is relatively useless for constructing theology.

⁶ O'Brien, *Priest and Levite*.

⁷ Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi, passim* consistently focuses on the community (or communities) that produced Malachi as well as those responsible for interpolations in the text. Glazier-McDonald, *Divine Messenger*, 271–75 concludes her study with a summary of the prophet's aims in proclaiming YHWH's message to the community as well as the appropriate actions required by the community upon receiving the message. See esp. p. 274: "Malachi deplores the people's neglect and contempt of their

For others, Malachi does indeed generate theological constructions. Hill, for instance, sees Malachi “as primarily a theology of YHWH.”⁸ Such theological presentations focus heavily on positive attributes: YHWH’s faithfulness and constant love. One can readily detect this emphasis in the title of Walter Kaiser’s study, *Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love*. Although Kaiser recognizes some threat of covenantal punishments in the text, his commentary leans heavily towards YHWH’s positive attributes and their role in motivating Malachi’s audience towards renewed faithfulness. Baldwin and Verhoef follow suit, while also explaining the covenant nature of YHWH’s loyalty.⁹ Clendenen states plainly,

Its message concerns God’s loving and holy character and his unchanging and glorious purpose for his people. Our God herein calls his people to genuine worship, to fidelity both to himself and one another, and to expectant faith in what he is doing and will do in this world and for his people.¹⁰

Finally, Hill sees a close relationship between YHWH’s sovereignty, love, and election in Malachi. Because YHWH is sovereign, YHWH’s keeping of the covenant with Israel is their true hope.¹¹ Furthermore, “Malachi retains the divine prerogative of restoration for those who turn back to Yahweh in repentance.”¹²

Through a messenger lens, this general, more positive area of theological construction finds strong support. YHWH, the great king, is loving and faithful. These attributes emerge in

religious duties not because they are important in and of themselves, but because such neglect reveals a lack of reverence, faith and love for Yahweh. Clearly, succinctly, Malachi states that it is precisely the sins of Israel that render it inconceivable that the blessing of Yahweh should rest upon her as she now is and he demands certain definite and tangible actions as a prerequisite to the coming of the desired good.” She adds that Malachi “seeks to instill” an internal devotion to God in the covenant people (p. 275). Some theology can be inferred, but this treatment is unmistakably anthropocentric—it gets at what the author behind Malachi wanted to accomplish and how the community should actualize the message. For other studies less interested in theology and more anthropocentric, see, e.g., De Wette, *Introduction*, *ad. loc.*; J. M. P. Smith, *Book of Malachi*, *passim*; and to some extent Rudolph, *Haggai—Sacharja 1–8—Sacharja 9–14—Maleachi*, *passim*.

⁸ Hill, *Malachi*, 47.

⁹ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, esp. 211; Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 181–83.

¹⁰ Clendenen, “Malachi,” 204. See also Bullock, *Prophetic Books*, 412: “Having stated God’s love for Israel and having entertained the inquiry for further explication, Malachi . . . centralizes attention upon God’s choice of Jacob and His rejection of Esau.” Bullock further adds, “Primary in the special relationship between Yahweh and Israel was His unconditional love. Perhaps it could be best seen in His choice of Jacob over Esau” (cf. p. 404). For Bullock and others, YHWH’s love emerges as the central divine attribute in Malachi.

¹¹ Hill, *Malachi*, 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, 48.

(A) the sending of a messenger in the first place and not an imperial army¹³; (B) the report of YHWH defeating one of Israel's longstanding enemies, Edom, coupled with Israel's divine election (Mal 1:2–5); (C) YHWH's negative feelings about having to send forth a messenger to speak against the people (2:16); (D) YHWH's willingness to refine and purify the covenant community rather than discard and abandon it (3:3–4); (E) YHWH's invitation to the covenant community to return and renew their broken relationship (3:7); (F) YHWH's desire to heal their land of drought and insect plague, and thus undue their curse (3:8–11); (G) YHWH's desire to give the covenant community the place of prominence in YHWH's world-encompassing empire (3:12; cf. 4:3); (H) YHWH's desire to celebrate the faithful as a special, royal treasure (3:16); (I) YHWH's provision of eschatological healing and renewal (4:2); and finally, (J) YHWH's future sending forth of Elijah to bring generational restoration (4:5–6). Malachi thus depicts YHWH as good and faithful, as a healer, a restorer, and a benevolent power.

Scholars usually recognize, however, that there is another side of this coin: YHWH requires faithfulness. In covenant terms, and as Verhoef notes, this means that unfaithfulness brings divine curses instead of blessings.¹⁴ Hill states, “While this choice on God's part and the subsequent covenant bond with Israel constitute the platform for the prophet's entire discourse, the message of Yahweh's love is not so much one of comfort as it is a warning.”¹⁵ Baldwin notes that YHWH's visitation will be unpleasant for some: “[YHWH] will perform His twofold task, to refine and to judge (3:2–5). Ultimately all that resists the refining process will be burnt up (4:1).”¹⁶ The people must be faithful to this king or there will be consequences.

¹³ This was, of course, YHWH's ultimate choice in dealing with the northern kingdom, Israel (the Neo-Assyrian army) and with the southern kingdom, Judah (the Neo-Babylonian army).

¹⁴ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 183.

¹⁵ Hill, *Malachi*, 47.

¹⁶ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 217.

So, scholars recognize that Malachi exhibits some sort of danger, but this threat loses some of its edge in theological constructions. Hill does see the text as a warning; but, he immediately clarifies that it is a warning for the community to put its hope in YHWH as the “covenant-keeper.”¹⁷ One can infer the idea, “or else,” but it is not plainly stated. Because most scholars recognize the prominence of the covenant concept in the book, the typical theological construction is one in which YHWH is faithful, loving, and inviting, but will purify them if necessary. In that sense, even the negative constructions of YHWH are characteristically tinged with hope—the people are in danger, but they can repent!—which is certainly a valid point.

When the starting point is Malachi’s messenger donegality, however, this negative theological construction undergoes amplification. YHWH is more than the covenant God: YHWH is the king, the sovereign, the universal emperor, and the head of the imperial army. Therefore points about imminence, purification, and judgment are not merely *warnings*. They are threats! Malachi 3:1–7 does not merely warn Yehud that YHWH will purify them. It is a threat that, as YHWH waged war on and destroyed Edom (1:2–5), the same can and will happen to Jerusalem (3:1–4). If they do not give the king the king’s due, the community will find that they can get no further than the gates (1:10); that is, they will find YHWH’s presence unobtainable. This gardener king who blesses their land is willing to curse it instead (2:2; 3:9). The time is imminent when the unfaithful will find ultimate destruction from this king’s hand instead of an invitation to return and be faithful (4:1). The king even threatens to use the faithful for treading the disloyal into ashes (4:3).

Essentially, interpreters of Malachi have stopped short of constructing what Walter Brueggemann describes as YHWH’s “capacity for violence.” He says,

Israel’s countertestimony makes clear that Yahweh is a God capable of violence, and indeed the texture of the Old Testament is deeply marked by violence. In the end, a

¹⁷ Hill, *Malachi*, 47.

student of the Old Testament cannot answer for or justify the violence, but must concede that it belongs to the very fabric of this faith.¹⁸

That is the case with Malachi, and it is the extent to which its interpreters do not typically go. The prophetic voice, as YHWH's royal messenger, invites the community to return while threatening them with divine violence made possible by divine sovereignty. As when YHWH waged war upon and defeated Pharaoh in the exodus,¹⁹ so too in Malachi is YHWH ready to employ martial actions, but in this case against the covenant community. This further explains, as discussed at length in Chapter 4, why Malachi contains the highest concentration of the military designation "YHWH of Hosts" in the entire HB. Put simply, YHWH threatens war. Malachi anticipates and shatters any insistence that YHWH's capacity for violence ended with Cyrus's decree and the restoration of the covenant people from exile.²⁰

Furthermore, when the starting point is Malachi's messenger donegality, it is apparent that the text's first readers faced the real possibility of experiencing what John Goldingay deems "the nightmare."

Built into what it means to be Israel is a response to God as father, king and restorer. The trouble is that Israel does not give God that response. There are then consequences, of which prophets have a nightmare vision, a nightmare from which Israel wakes to find it was more than a nightmare.²¹

For those willing to return in faithfulness to the king, yes, YHWH is the "covenant-keeper." Malachi presents a different outcome, however, for those who do not return. They will confront a series of terrors and difficulties stemming from their violation of the king's commands and expectations.²² They will face both immediate and ultimate destruction as

¹⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 381.

¹⁹ On this point see Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (HSM 5; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), esp. 113–17. See also Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), esp. Ch. 3, "Warfare and the Exodus" (pp. 46–64).

²⁰ On YHWH's holy war against Israel, see esp. William L. Moran, "The End of the Unholy War and the Anti-Exodus," *Bib* 44 (1963): 333–42.

²¹ Goldingay, *Theology*, 2:254.

²² *Ibid.*, 2:278–310, proceeds poignantly through a detailed list of such consequences in the HB, which include defilement, corruption, rejection, rebuff, abandonment, withdrawal, wrath, darkness, attention (with negative implications, not positive), blinding, exposure, shame, war, wasting, annihilation, expulsion, pollution,

they see flames engulf their access to YHWH's presence, Jerusalem, and as YHWH defeats them forever in the eschatological day; and, "Yhwh's day means the collapse of the nation. It will be as sudden as the unforeseen crumbling of a poorly constructed high wall and as complete as the shattering of a pot that does not leave a shard big enough to scoop coals (Is 30:13–14)."²³ The unfaithful will enter a nightmare that proves itself their reality.

Readers of Malachi understand that YHWH's faithfulness is an essential concern in the text. More needs to be said, however, on how this point is both a positive and a negative one. YHWH does indeed keep the divine promises, but this is reason for both great hope and utter horror. Paul House captures this idea poignantly: "Malachi caps the Twelve's determined depiction of the God who keeps promises. These promises include blessings for the remnant that turns from sin as well as woe for the wicked who refuse to obey Yahweh."²⁴

What emerges from Malachi's messenger donegality is a potent theological juxtaposition. YHWH loves, and YHWH hates. YHWH chooses, and YHWH rejects. YHWH invites the community to repent and come near; and, YHWH wants them nowhere near the temple and the king's divine presence. YHWH desires to heal their land; and, YHWH will decimate Zion upon his arrival. YHWH conquers the community's enemies; and, YHWH will conquer the community itself in due time. With YHWH there is safety, and there is danger; there is security, and there is threat; there is life, and there is death.²⁵

withering, dissolution, and death. The point is that sin has far-reaching, dramatic, and incredibly painful and disturbing consequences for the covenant people. Malachi characteristically exhibits this concept.

²³ Goldingay, *Theology*, 298.

²⁴ Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP 1998), 398.

²⁵ There is perhaps something here akin to Karl Barth's dialectic, expressed vividly, e.g., in his construction of God's eternal "No" to sin and humanity's corrupted state, coupled with God's eternal "Yes" to God's self as creator and to humanity as creature. For an accessible discussion of this idea, see esp. Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), *passim* (see esp. pp. 68–77). Levenson, *Sinai & Zion*, presents the entire Hebrew Bible in a conceptually similar manner to the one presented here for Malachi: He sees the Sinaitic Covenant ensuring God's justice, and the Davidic Covenant ensuring God's mercy. There will be destruction, and there will be restoration. Thus Israel must make room for both mountains, as it were, Sinai and Zion. "Absolute justice means that sinful Zion will fall; absolute mercy means that the promise of protection will be valid, whatever the sins of the city" (p. 164). The key difference between my own presentation of Malachi here and these two presentations is that I reserve commenting on whether Malachi presents any ultimate hope for those who are not "faithful."

Malachi, a royal messenger of YHWH of Hosts, offers readers something beautiful yet disturbing, something full of grace and hope yet jagged and unpalatable: the dangerous business of knowing the covenant God of ancient Israel and the Great King of all there is. This messenger informs readers that YHWH is imminent, right around the corner, bringing both salvation and doom. In the onset of dizziness and dissonance that accompany the impact of this herald's bombastic and unbelievable words, do not shoot the messenger! For such a spokesperson is a lunatic, a liar, or a prophet, in which case all who hear must rethink everything and make difficult but unavoidable choices regarding allegiances and priorities. For this messenger claims, "Thus says YHWH of Hosts!"

RETHINKING MALACHI'S LITERARY QUALITY

Now the case has been made that Malachi is a royal message, which generated both a messenger reading of the text and a theological construction based heavily on the root messenger metaphor. The next task is evaluating the negative assessments of Malachi as literature so prevalent in critical scholarship. Chapter 1 sufficiently demonstrates how commonplace it is to regard Malachi as bad literature. Only a summary is needed here. De Wette describes it as having a "dull, exhausted spirit." J. M. P. Smith calls Malachi "simple," adding that "the element of beauty is almost wholly lacking." He gives two specific reasons for this assessment: There is "slight attempt at ornamentation at any kind"; and, "The figurative element is very limited." Von Rad writes that Malachi leaves "an impression that prophecy was flagging." Finally, Hammershaimb calls its admonitions clichés, opining that the book is full of "pale reminiscences of the older prophets of doom." These descriptions sufficiently demonstrate the point.

It is worth mentioning again that some scholars disagree with these negative characterizations. Bewer regards Malachi's terseness as fresh and lively. Baldwin sees it as haphazard, but is favorable about the book's progression. Verhoef and Hill point out specific

literary devices in the text. These more positive opinions, however, lack some force because they do not seriously counter the specific charges proffered by De Wette, Smith, and others. And so, as Glazier-McDonald points out, negative characterizations are presumed with little discussion.²⁶

In light of the present study, do the predominant, negative characterizations of Malachi's literary quality hold up? The answer is no, they do not. Because his reasons are more concrete and specific than those of others, it is best to start with J. M. P. Smith's position. One of his reasons is that Malachi lacks "ornamentation." That claim is highly problematic. A messenger lens reveals that multiple messenger decorations, or micrometaphors, appear in each pericope of the text. From start to finish, they saturate the book. To be fair, there is some ambiguity in Smith's word choice, "ornamentation." With that caveat noted, the point stands. Malachi does not lack ornamentation when read as a royal message. If one can even loosely equate Smith's ornaments with Ward's "decorations,"²⁷ then it is fair to say that ornaments are extensive in Malachi.

Smith's other reason for disparaging Malachi as literature is that "the figurative element is very limited" in it. That claim is also problematic. Through a messenger lens, reading Malachi is a journey in which one constantly encounters figurative language, whether euphemisms (e.g., "by the hand of," an image of a messenger with a scroll), allusions to imperial iconography (e.g., the winged son), depictions of YHWH as an emperor (e.g., the great king of all nations), the portrayal of priests as royal messengers (cf. Mal 2:7), and so forth. This is not literal language, but figurative; and, it is fair to conclude that Malachi is extremely figurative. Non-literal, metaphorical language is a standard feature that permeates the entire text.

²⁶ For a fuller presentation as well as thorough documentation, see Ch. 1, *ad. loc.*

²⁷ See Chapter 2, *passim*.

Smith's reasons for denigrating Malachi as literature fail to stand under close scrutiny, but so do the other less specific claims. De Wette's description of the book as dull and exhausted is dubious at best. Through a messenger lens, Malachi is lively and powerful. The position of Von Rad and Hammershaimb—essentially that Malachi is a lesser heir of greater prophetic sires—also falls flat. It appears that Malachi was hardly the last, dying, faltering voice among the Hebrew prophets. Rather, it was a final and energetic innovation in this world-altering corpus of religious spokespeople. Whereas Malachi's spiritual forebears imitate the royal messengers of the powers that be, Malachi moves from imitation to complete and utter embodiment. It casts its message, concerns, and admonitions as the Great King sending forth a messenger to correct other messengers (i.e., the priests) as well as the covenant community. It presents the rewards for renewed faithfulness as royal rewards: a place of perpetual honor in a memorial scroll; the blessing of the gardener king upon the land and its produce; and an exalted status above the other nations under this sovereign's universal reign. Furthermore, the dangers of unfaithfulness are presented as imperial dangers: the king will come and purge them with fire. There will be a devastating visit from the true sovereign.

If the reasons for the negativity towards Malachi's artistry are that it is too literal, too sparse, and overall simply too tired, then the reasons merit wholesale reassessment. They have been weighed here and found wanting. Malachi is creative, innovative, elaborate, figurative, and rhetorically powerful. Armed with this presentation of the text as a royal message, I will be so bold as to claim that it is good literature.

TOWARDS FUTURE STUDY

Donegality and Biblical Interpretation

The essential question that generated this research from its earliest stages was a simple one: Why does Malachi contain so much messenger language? What followed became far more complicated as a multiplicity of tasks arose. Michael Ward's concept of donegality and his

methodology in *Planet Narnia* have provided a methodology and a hermeneutic capable of handling the eclectic array of interpretive issues for this project.

Although not every text has a root metaphor that drives it forward, it should be clear at this point that some do. This study has put forth a case that Malachi is such a text. Michael Ward has made a provocative case—one presently lacking any serious dispute—that C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* is also such a text/collection of texts. Moreover, these hermeneutical procedures are more than mere exercises and actually impact interpretation. They make a difference in how one reads these texts. With an eye towards this project's impact on future study, it is worthwhile to consider how Ward's methodology—henceforth “donegality”—might be of further usefulness in biblical interpretation.

To be clear, I do not think donegality is broad enough to be useful for reading every text, biblical or otherwise. It is simply too specific. Two requirements must be present: (A) A text must use interrelated metaphors as it proceeds; and, (B) there must be an adequate corpus to investigate in order to understand the source of a possible root metaphor. If the first requirement is lacking, then donegality is simply not applicable. If the second requirement is lacking, then there is no basis for comparison and, ultimately, insufficient data to make a convincing case that a root metaphor is present. In *The Silver Chair*, for example, both criteria are met: there are persistent and interrelated lunar metaphors as the story proceeds; and, Medieval literature and C. S. Lewis's own writings provide a corpus for comparison. So it is with Malachi. There are persistent and interrelated messenger metaphors, and there is a corpus for comparison: Persian primary sources and relevant HB texts. Theoretically, if a biblical text met both requirements, donegality could be an appropriate and fruitful method of investigation and interpretation. Two examples demonstrate this potential, one from the HB and the other from the NT.

First, Jeremiah is a text for which donegality may prove useful. It meets the first requirement because siege warfare is a persistent metaphor and vivid image throughout the book.²⁸ One can see this phenomenon, for example, in Jer 1. The introduction (Jer 1:1–3) ends on the note, “until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month,” a clear reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by Neo-Babylonian siege warfare in 587 BCE. In the following section on Jeremiah’s call (1:4–10), one finds YHWH’s characterization of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry (1:10). Here the first four infinitives (“to uproot and to tear down, and to destroy and to demolish”) can all be found in (but not exclusive to) a plethora of texts in the HB about siege warfare. Furthermore, the last two infinitives in Jer 1:10 (“to build and to plant”) are words that one can find regularly in texts about (re-)establishing a people or nation already displaced or in exile.²⁹ Put simply, YHWH calls Jeremiah to besiege nations and kingdoms, but also to rebuild from such destruction. A warfare metaphor emerges. More metaphors and imagery arise in the rest of the chapter (1:15, 18–19) and recur frequently throughout the entire book.³⁰ It even ends with a full account of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 52). Thus Jeremiah fulfills the first requirement for donegality because interrelated siege warfare metaphors and images persist throughout the book. It is a theme.

Jeremiah also meets the second requirement because there is a corpus for comparison. In this case, as with Malachi, the corpus is a combination of relevant HB texts using similar images, metaphors, and vocabulary as well as primary sources from the larger cultural context.³¹ So, the siege imagery in the text sends the interpreter to primary sources, which in turn send the interpreter back to the text with a better understanding of ANE siege warfare and a hermeneutical lens for re-reading the text in order to detect more ambiguous instances

²⁸ I first explored this idea in Fox, “A Closer Look at Jeremiah 1:10.”

²⁹ See *ibid.*, 67–74, for a full presentation of this data for the vocabulary of Jer 1:10.

³⁰ See, e.g., Jer 4:16–17; 5:15–17; 6:1–3; 10:17–22; 21:4, 9; 25:8–11; 27:16–22; 32:2, 24, 28–29; 33:4–5; 34:1–3, 6–7; 37:1–11, 17; 38:2–3, 18, 22–23; 39:3–10, 16; 40:1; 43:8–13; 44:2, 6; 45:4; 46:1—49:39, *passim*; 50:2–3, 9–10, 13–16, 21–46; 51:1–4, 11–12, 20–23, 27–32, 41–44, 54–58, 62. See *ibid.*, 66.

³¹ See, e.g., David Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); F. Mario Fales, *War in the Assyrian Empire* (Ancient World at War; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

of siege warfare language. Because it meets both requirements detailed above, Jeremiah is a book for which donegality may prove appropriate and fruitful.

Second, Philippians is another text for which donegality may prove useful. Closely reading the Greek text reveals several interrelated military metaphors in the letter.³² Key spatial terms, for instance, are common Greco-Roman military terms for holding ground in battle and advancing against the enemy rather than retreating and giving ground: Thus Paul emphasizes the “advancement” (προκοπή, 1:12; cf. 1:25)³³ of the gospel and encourages the Philippian believers to “stand firm” (στήκω, 1:27; cf. 4:1).³⁴ Further martial metaphors arise when Paul describes their faithfulness as “contending together” (συναθλέω, 1:27; 4:3)³⁵ for the furtherance of the gospel and when he labels their opposition “opponents” (ἀντίκειμαι, 1:28).³⁶ Also, Paul employs terms often used for defeat and victory in battle as he describes the “destruction” (ἀπώλεια, 1:28; cf. 3:19) of their opponents and the “salvation/deliverance” (σωτηρία, 1:28; cf. 1:19; 2:12) of the Philippian believers.³⁷ The Philippians’ present hardship is a “battle” (ἄγών, 1:30).³⁸ The exemplary colleague Epaphroditus is explicitly a

³² Here I need to acknowledge F. Alan Tomlinson (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) for first introducing me to this phenomenon in Philippians.

³³ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 111, footnote 20, illustrates this point with 2 Macc 8:8, which describes Judas Maccabeus as “making progress/advancing” in his early campaigns against the Syrians.

³⁴ On the military connotation of this term, see Timothy C. Geoffrion, *The Rhetorical Purpose and the Political and Military Character of Philippians* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), esp. 53–60. Geoffrion illustrates this point with several classical texts. See also E. Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956), *ad. loc.*, for a thorough list of evidence supporting this metaphorical meaning for the term.

³⁵ Geoffrion, *Rhetorical Purpose*, 60–62 fully explains the military connotation of this term and demonstrates its pervasiveness in classical texts. Note, however, that most are content to comment on merely its use in describing fighting alongside one another in gladiatorial battles—see, e.g., Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 150–51; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC 43; Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 57; and Carolyn Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 49–50.

³⁶ See esp. 1 Macc 14:7 for an example of this term having a martial meaning.

³⁷ See Geoffrion, *Rhetorical Purpose*, 57–58, on this point.

³⁸ For this term in martial contexts, see, e.g., 2 Macc 10:28; 14:18, 43; 15:9. Cf. *ibid.*, 77–81, for a thorough discussion.

“fellow soldier” (συστρατιώτης, 2:25).³⁹ Thus Philippians fulfills the first requirement for donegality because several interrelated martial metaphors are present in the text.

Philippians also meets the second requirement because there is a corpus for comparison. Timothy Geoffrion provides an encyclopedic presentation of the martial uses of these terms in classical Greek texts. Beyond these classical sources, some of the martial terms are present in 1 and 2 Maccabees, two books for which battles and warfare are quite prevalent.⁴⁰ So, there is a sufficient basis of comparison for the military language.

Furthermore, and beyond mere vocabulary and imagery, primary sources reveal a rich military history in Philippi that reaches back a century before Paul arrived there. “In 42 B.C., Philippi became famous as the place where Mark Antony and Octavian defeated the Roman Republican forces of Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar. The victors settled a number of their veteran soldiers there and established Philippi as a Roman colony.”⁴¹ Indeed, in many ways this Battle of Philippi decided the outcome of the Roman civil war, and it is difficult to overstate the significance of this heritage for those dwelling in Philippi when Paul arrived there in the middle of the first century CE. It is certainly plausible that martial metaphors would have been especially effective in communicating with the Philippian Christians. Like Jeremiah, Philippians meets both requirements for donegality: there is an interrelated group of metaphors and a sufficient corpus outside the text for comparison and constructing a hermeneutical lens.

These two examples, Jeremiah and Philippians, demonstrate the potential usefulness of donegality for reading biblical texts other than Malachi. In the case of Philippians, Geoffrion detects this martial language and makes it a key component of his study.⁴² Because his methodology, however, focuses predominantly on the text’s rhetorical structure and only

³⁹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 116 says of this word, “It is a military term, used in general of those who fight side by side . . .” Cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 275–76.

⁴⁰ See above, e.g., footnotes 33 and 35.

⁴¹ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 6; see also Fee, *Philippians*, 25–26; Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon*, 24–26; and

⁴² Geoffrion, *Rhetorical Purpose*, esp. 53–82.

partially on literary phenomena, it is the judgment here that the vividness of the martial metaphors is not as brilliant as it could be in his presentation. His study is an excellent example of one in which donegality would have proven especially useful and provided a great deal of benefit towards understanding the text's imagery and its impact upon reading and interpretation. Moreover, in foregrounding this imagery in the overall presentation and articulating the connection in these images as a root metaphor, Geoffrion would have strengthened his primary argument about the book's rhetorical function.

Finally, Jeremiah and Philippians also reinforce the point that donegality has its limitations. It is potentially useful for reading these two texts only because they meet the criteria detailed above: One can detect interrelated metaphors in each book and there is a corpus outside each text for comparison. This in turn leads to a hermeneutical lens that one can bring back to the text for (re-)reading. These books demonstrate, then, that in the right situations, donegality has the potential to provide new, useful, and important layers for reading and interpretation; but, not every text is suited for donegality.

Malachi and Empire

A relatively recent hermeneutical perspective in biblical studies that continues to gain momentum is imperial-critical theory. This is especially evident in NT scholarship. At risk of oversimplification, the essence of this enterprise is a foregrounding of the NT documents' engagement with the Roman Empire:

[T]he New Testament texts assume and engage Rome's world in every chapter. Even when the New Testament texts seem *to us* to be silent about Rome's empire, it is, nevertheless, ever present. It has not gone away. The Roman Empire provides the ever-present political, economic, societal, and religious framework and context for the New Testament's claims, language, structures, personnel, and scenes.⁴³

A key part of these engagements is the negotiation that ensues when those who are powerless, vulnerable, and perhaps even marginalized create discourses that in any way threaten the

⁴³ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 1.

interests of those who possess power.⁴⁴ The NT, which offers a different “Lord” (κύριος) than Caesar and a different kingdom than Rome, is indeed such a threat. At present, this enterprise remains primarily a NT one,⁴⁵ though new works in HB scholarship continue to appear.⁴⁶

The present study provides new possibilities for reading Malachi with an imperial-critical lens. After all, the text employs a form and imagery directly from Persian imperial discourse and propaganda. Moreover, it is a rhetorically powerful construction that emerged from an imperially-dominated and marginalized province, Yehud. Malachi points not to Xerxes and Persia as the ultimate ruler and power, but to YHWH, the covenant god of their Israelite ancestors. The text insists that the community must make YHWH its priority, even above province, satrapy, and empire. Practically speaking, this meant that the covenant community should demonstrate its allegiance by devoting its best portions and the full tithe requirements to cultic activity at the temple.⁴⁷ One could make a strong case that Malachi posed a threat to the interests of the Persian Empire. At the very least, it calls for insubordination *via* a major shift regarding Yehud’s primary allegiance.

⁴⁴ This point is precisely why the imperial-critical enterprise so frequently and thoroughly engages and employs James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990). Scott’s models for discussing cultural transcripts and discourses are invaluable and probably even foundational for imperial-critical theory in biblical scholarship.

⁴⁵ In addition to the sources cited directly above, see also, e.g., Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Horsley, *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); John Dominic Crossan and John L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004); Walter E. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

⁴⁶ See, e.g., three significant essays that appear in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006)—Philip Chia, “On Naming the Subject: Postcolonial Reading of Daniel 1” (pp. 171–85); Kari Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh: A Postcolonial Reading of 2 Kings 24–25” (pp. 186–92); and Jon L. Berquist, “Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives of Canonization” (pp. 78–95). See also Robert Allen Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 235–41. A work that is not necessarily imperial-critical yet still acknowledges the influence of that perspective is Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (OTR; London; New York: Routledge, 2000). Since imperial-critical theory relates to, shares some overlap with, and at times is hard to distinguish from postcolonial theory, another pertinent work is Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), esp. Ch. 8, “From the Colonial Bible to the Postcolonial Text: Biblical Theology as Contextual” (pp. 280–339).

⁴⁷ Along with, of course, repentance, purity, and keeping the covenant requirements both in their relationship to YHWH and to each other.

So, the present study opens up new avenues for imperial-critical readings of Malachi; but, at the same time, it also calls for some limitations on how far such readings can go. A major focus of imperial-critical readings in NT scholarship is the way in which the NT undermines the Roman Empire. This objective at times becomes the main thing. That is, it suggests that the early church was *primarily* (or even *only*) trying to undermine the political structures. Soteriological objectives and concerns can recede to the background or disappear altogether in some imperial-critical models.

One would be hard-pressed to make a convincing case that Malachi was solely or even primarily trying to undermine the Persian Empire. This study has shown—and I am particularly thinking of the theological discussion in this very chapter—that if anyone is in danger according to the text of Malachi, it is not Persia, but Yehud! It is not the dominating, but the dominated whom YHWH threatens. Furthermore, the danger that the text presents is not Persian intervention, but YHWH's. Malachi warns Yehud that YHWH is imminent, a point the text views as a threat and a crisis. From this vantage point, I think Malachi is ripe for imperial-critical treatments; but, at the same time, the present study problematizes a tendency in some NT imperial-critical readings to see the church's aim (or perhaps "mission") as primarily or even solely an anti-imperial program.⁴⁸

SUMMARY

The present chapter presents the *logos* of Malachi's messenger donegality while demonstrating its impact on both interpretation of the book and future critical study. First, Malachi's messenger donegality provides a new level of specificity when classifying the text. Given the pervasiveness of Malachi's root messenger metaphor, it is best to take the book's

⁴⁸ Warrior, "Native American Perspective," essentially acknowledges the same problem in reading Exodus, but he arrives there from a completely different starting point. Warrior finds the use of Exodus in liberation enterprises ultimately problematic because YHWH is a "conqueror" in the narrative and because Israel ends up as YHWH's servant and not truly free. Also, Israel becomes YHWH's primary means of conquering and displacing the Canaanites. Warrior, writing from a postcolonial perspective, writes, "I believe that the story of the Exodus is an inappropriate way for Native Americans to think about liberation" (p. 236).

form as a royal message. This new classification fits the proposed historical context and provides a new level of specificity regarding Malachi's overall form.

Second, Malachi's messenger donegality impacts how one constructs theology from the text. No scholar to my knowledge completely ignores any danger, warning, or negative attribute of YHWH in Malachi; however, the scholars who do actually show interest in Malachi's theology focus heavily on the positive attributes and say little about the negative ones. Understanding Malachi's messenger donegality reveals to a greater extent how dangerous and extreme YHWH is willing to be, both in the immediate future and in the eschatological day.

Third, Malachi's messenger donegality demands serious reassessment of the book from a literary perspective. *Contra* the pervasive, negative characterizations of the text that stem from critical readings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Malachi exudes a high literary quality because of its rich imagery and careful design. The presence of a root messenger metaphor seriously problematizes negative appraisals of the book's overall artistry and literary merit.

Finally, Malachi's messenger donegality has the potential to impact future critical study. Because a plausible and fruitful presentation of Malachi's root messenger metaphor emerges from this investigation, it is worthwhile to consider how the methodology of this project might be of further use in reading other biblical texts. A brief look at two texts, Jeremiah and Philippians, demonstrates this potential. Furthermore, because Malachi's messenger donegality reveals that the text shares a form and imagery with Persian imperial discourse and propaganda, there is a brief consideration of Malachi's contribution to the imperial-critical enterprise in biblical studies.

APPENDIX 1: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CYRUS, CAMBYSES, AND DARIUS

In the first half of the sixth century BCE, the Neo-Babylonian Empire finished its course and gave way to Persia. “After Nebuchadnezzar’s forty-two-year reign, three of his successors failed to last long in competition for the throne. Stability within the court was restored only under a new ruler with no connection to his royal predecessors, Nabonidus (555–539).”¹ To stabilize the Neo-Babylonian Empire, Nabonidus spent most of his reign away from the city of Babylon, leaving his son Belshazzar to rule the capital city as governor. Nabonidus alienated many key players in the empire (e.g., the priests of Marduk in Babylon) in two specific ways: Instead of trumpeting Marduk worship,² he “gave special attention to the temples of Sin in Harran and Ur”³; and, he abandoned Babylon in 552 to reside at and operate from the oasis of Teima in the Arabian Desert. He failed to garner the necessary support to stabilize his authority, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire was ripe for displacement.⁴

During Nabonidus’s reign, a power was growing to the east. Cyrus the Great, son of the Persian king Cambyses I and grandson of Astyages, king of Media, became king of Persia at Anshan in 559. In 553, he revolted against Median control and eventually defeated his grandfather, Astyages (ca. 550). With this victory, Cyrus ruled both the Medes and the Persians. He plundered the Median capital, Ecbatana, and established his new capital,

¹ Lindsay Allen, *The Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 25.

² Marduk was the most important deity in the Babylonian pantheon, was closely associated with the city of Babylon, and was the focus of the annual New Year festival at Babylon, which had immense cultic and cultural significance.

³ Van De Mieroop, *Ancient Near East*, 278–80. Sin was a Mesopotamian moon goddess.

⁴ On Nabonidus, see Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 147–49, 152–53; Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 381–88; Hallo and Simpson, *The Ancient Near East*, 145–47; Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Nabonidus,” *ISBE* 3:468–70; Bright, *A History of Israel*, 352–54, 360–61; Van De Mieroop, *Ancient Near East*, 276–85.

Pasargadae, at the site of his victory over Astyages. With the resources of two empires at his disposal, Cyrus set his sights on even grander achievements.⁵

Cyrus campaigned westward and conquered strategic cities across the northern rim of Mesopotamia. This campaign culminated in a war with King Croesus and the kingdom of Lydia (ca. 547–46). After defeating Lydia, Persia had control of Asia Minor to the west as well as the northern and eastern spheres of Mesopotamia.⁶ “[E]vidence suggests that Cyrus spent the years between 546 and 540 B.C. consolidating his control over the eastern parts of his empire.”⁷ In 543, Nabonidus moved back to Babylon to regroup and stave off the growing Persian threat, but by then it was too late: the Neo-Babylonian Empire had lost considerable ground and Nabonidus himself was nearly a lame duck.

“By 540 . . . Cyrus’ attention had clearly returned to the core of Babylonian power in Mesopotamia.”⁸ Before marching against Babylon, he first demonstrated Persia’s might by pummeling Neo-Babylonian forces at Opis by the Tigris River. The Persians then captured Sippar. In 539, Cyrus took Babylon without a battle, having been welcomed by its inhabitants as a liberator.⁹ He presented himself as Marduk’s chosen instrument. “The Persian takeover was conducted in such a manner that there was little disruption.”¹⁰

⁵ On Cyrus’s defeat of Media and uniting of the two empires, see J. M. Cook, “The Rise of the Achaemenids and Establishment of their Empire,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2, *The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, ed. Ilya Gershevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), esp. 209–11; Max Mallowan, “Cyrus the Great (558–529 B.C.),” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2, 392–419; Yamauchi, 56–58, 65–81; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 13–33; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 47–60; Allen, *The Persian Empire*, 15–25.

⁶ On Cyrus’s campaigns west and his defeat of Lydia, see Cook, “Achaemenids,” 211–12; Mallowan, “Cyrus,” 408–12; Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 81–84; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 33–38; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 60–70.

⁷ Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 84.

⁸ Allen, *The Persian Empire*, 26.

⁹ Though the Nabonidus Chronicle and the Cyrus Cylinder, which provide the bulk of these details, are obvious propaganda texts aimed at garnering public support for Cyrus.

¹⁰ Cook, “Achaemenids,” 212–14. For more on Cyrus’s conquering of Babylon, see Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 85–89; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 40–44; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 70–87; Allen, *The Persian Empire*, 26–29.

In 530 BCE, Cyrus died from battle wounds while campaigning in the region to the northeast of the Persian Empire.¹¹ His son, Cambyses II, became king. “Cambyses inherited an immense territory, only very recently acquired, so that Persian control of it was as yet fragile . . . Egypt presented the most serious threat: its king, Amasis (570–526) . . . had strengthened his power vis-à-vis the Levant by his conquest of Cyprus.”¹² Persian and Egyptian diplomatic relations proved volatile and unproductive. In the early 520s, Cambyses strengthened control in Persian fringe areas such as the Levant. He established a legitimate Persian navy in the process of defeating Phoenicia and Cyprus. In losing these and other footholds, Egypt was backed into a corner.

When Egypt’s long-time ruler, Amasis, finally died (526), Cambyses decided the time was right for conquest. Reading the writing on the wall, Phanes of Halicarnassus and his mercenary army defected from Egypt to Persia, bringing crucial strategic insights. In 525, Persia won an important battle at Pelusium on Egypt’s Mediterranean coast. With this entry point secured, Persia went on to conquer Egypt and control the Nile delta, the region’s breadbasket.¹³ Cambyses, however, had little success after his Egyptian campaigns, struggling to decisively conquer the eastern Mediterranean. In 522, he received reports of unrest back in the east. He died that same year while travelling back to Persia. Although accounts of his death vary, Darius’s Behistun Inscription—which simply says that Cambyses

¹¹ According to Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.201–204, Cyrus died in campaigns against Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae. His account, though, is possibly stylized to make Cyrus’s death the result of hubris, in this case failing to be content with so massive an empire and trying to campaign into distant lands too far out of reach. As Allen, *The Persian Empire*, 29 explains, “Herodotus had possibly selected this variant of Cyrus’ death as an early illustration of his theme that the Persians had a tendency to overreach themselves.” It is also worth mentioning that Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.7.5–28 attributes Cyrus’s death to natural causes. See discussions in Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 92, esp. footnote 132; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 49–50; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 99–103, which is particularly helpful for seeing variation in ancient accounts of Cyrus’s death.

¹² Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 104.

¹³ Eddia Bresciani, “The Persian Occupations of Egypt,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2, 502: “The conquest of Egypt was after all a natural objective of [Persia’s] expansionist policy, the Nile Valley being the most important, if not the only source of economic and political power in Africa.” Gaining Egypt, then, also meant controlling the crops of the Nile River delta. However, *contra* the idea of Egypt’s Nile Valley being the sole source of African political power, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 149–54 (esp. 153) on the might and influence of the Nubians to the south of Egypt.

“died his own death”—may substantiate some ancient claims that he committed suicide.¹⁴

The empire was once again without a king.¹⁵

Since Cambyses left no heir,¹⁶ the transition to the next king was not smooth. Furthermore, since historians rely heavily on the Behistun Inscription—an enormous propaganda piece aimed at legitimatizing Darius the Great¹⁷—the exact details of how Darius became king are murky at best. Still, the Behistun Inscription and Herodotus’s account are remarkably compatible.¹⁸ With the caveat that biases are thick in primary sources on this subject, one can at least attempt a broad sketch.

In the wake of Cambyses’s death, a figure named Gaumata pretended to be Cambyses’s brother, Bardiya,¹⁹ and usurped the throne for approximately seven months. Though he had a fair amount of support, the Behistun Inscription paints Gaumata as a tyrant and characterizes his short rule as chaos. Darius, a former spear-bearer among the Immortals (i.e., the elite imperial soldiers) and prominent Persian military leader, killed Gaumata and his entourage and seized the throne. Since he (allegedly) shared ancestry with Cyrus through a mutual ancestor named Teispes, Darius had a claim for legitimate kingship. He became the new emperor of Persia in 522, though the empire needed serious repair.

Due to Cambyses’s death and Gaumata’s usurpation, rebellions had broken out across the empire, “first in the provinces of Elam, Media, Persia and the area of Babylon, then

¹⁴ Cf., however, Muhammad A. Dandamaev, *Persien unter den erstern Achämeniden*, trans. H.-D. Pohl (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1976), 146–48, who makes the point that the phrase in Akkadian (the trilingual Behistun Inscription is in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian) is not typical language for suicide. He suggests it probably means a premature and violent death.

¹⁵ On Nabonidus’s reign, see Bresciani, “Persian Occupation,” 502–7; Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 93–128; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 49–61; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 104–34; Allen, *The Persian Empire*, 29–35.

¹⁶ Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.66, contains the line, “[Cambyses] had sired no children at all, male or female.” Ancient witnesses are in general agreement on this point.

¹⁷ The entire inscription can be found in Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 141–51.

¹⁸ See Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 136–38.

¹⁹ Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.67, calls Cambyses’s brother “Smerdis.” The Behistun Inscription says that Cambyses had actually killed his brother to eliminate a contender for the throne, but kept it secret, thus allowing Gaumata to make claims before a public that was ignorant of Bardiya’s/Smerdis’s death.

Assyria, Egypt and the central eastern provinces of Margiana and Sattagydia.”²⁰ Darius manufactured a powerful alliance of various nobles and generals and “successfully led armies against these new kings.”²¹ After three years of conflict, the rebellions were snuffed out; indeed, Darius could depict himself as the gift of the deity Ahuramazda and as a ruler who ended chaos and brought order. He traced his lineage even further back than Teispes: Darius descended from the legendary progenitor of Persian royalty, Achaemenes; thus the label “Achaemenid” is used for Persia’s early emperors.²²

After taking care of more immediate problems, Darius travelled to Egypt (ca. 519). There he ended rebellions and unrest caused by the regional ruler, Aryandes, whom Cambyses had appointed. Darius’s benevolent attitude towards Egyptian cultic activity (they were ritually mourning the death of a sacred Apis bull²³) secured a relatively easy transition back to imperial rule. Once again, Persia controlled the Nile Valley with its plenteous crops.²⁴ Having stabilized the empire and regained the tactical advantage of using Egypt’s delta as a source of food, Darius was emboldened to assert his power in Europe. In 514/13 he crossed the Bosphorus²⁵ and engaged the Scythians, though “they frustrated [Darius] by their mobility and their refusal to stand and fight.”²⁶ The exact details of this campaign are unclear; but, Darius may have had some success²⁷ since he subsequently changed his focus to Greece, a

²⁰ Allen, *The Persian Empire*, 37.

²¹ Ibid. See also the account in the Behistun Inscription in Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 148, esp. paragraphs 52–55.

²² On Darius’s rise to power, see Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.85–89; Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 129–48; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 97–128; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 135–41, 158–77; Allen, *The Persian Empire*, 37–43.

²³ See Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 148–49.

²⁴ On Darius’s subduing of Egypt, see *ibid.*, 148–54; Richard A. Parker, “Darius and His Egyptian Campaign,” *AJSL* 58.4 (1941): 373–77; Brescia, “Persian Occupation,” 505–509; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 141; Hill, *Malachi*, 53–54; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 189–193.

²⁵ I.e., the relatively narrow oceanic channel near modern-day Istanbul in northwest Turkey.

²⁶ Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 161.

²⁷ See, however, Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.10, where Artabanos explains to Xerxes (i.e., Darius’s successor) that the campaign against Scythia had a high Persian body count and warns him against campaigning against Greece/Hellas: “[Darius] marched against them and returned only after throwing away many noble and courageous men of his army.”

large number of Greek mercenaries sided with Persia, and Darius was able to set up Greek tyrants to rule the cities of Ionia.²⁸

In 498, Athenian and Ionian rebels burned portions of Sardis, the location of Persia's satrap/administrator for that region of Ionia. A series of revolts ensued and Persia was not able to decisively end them until Darius won the Battle of Lade in 494. Angered at Athens's participation in revolts, Darius focused his attention in their direction with an eye towards revenge²⁹ and expansion: "This revolt . . . was forcibly suppressed. But Darius did not aim merely to hang on to the empire he had inherited. He burned also, like Cambyses, to expand it."³⁰

Engagements began with terrorism. "In 491 King [Darius] of Persia sent envoys to the leading states of mainland Greece demanding that they submit to his rule by offering him symbolic gifts of earth and water."³¹ Many caved to the messengers' demands, and soon the Persians launched an offensive with an enormous army that included Ionians and Greeks. The Athenians, however, refused to acquiesce. War was imminent. An exiled Athenian tyrant, Hippias, led the Persian forces to the plain near the Bay of Marathon. After much deliberation, the Athenians decided against a defensive strategy in favor of marching straight to battle. The result was that, in 490, an Athenian army of nine thousand hoplites (plus a small contingency from Plataea) routed the much larger Persian army. Darius failed to obtain his entry point into Greece, and Persia had to retreat in defeat.³²

Darius spent the next few years preparing for a larger invasion of Greece, one that he himself would lead. His royal messengers traveled throughout the empire, making imperial

²⁸ See Daniel Gillis, *Collaboration with the Persians* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1979), *passim*. Cf. P. B. Georges, "Persian Ionia under Darius: The Revolt Reconsidered," *Historia* 49 (2000): 1–39.

²⁹ Herodotus, *Hist.* 5.105: "[Darius] appointed one of his attendants to repeat to him three times whenever his dinner was served: 'My lord, remember the Athenians.'"

³⁰ Cartledge, *Thermopylae*, 49. For a thorough treatment of these Ionian revolts, see Green, *Greco-Persian Wars*, 15–28; and Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 146–56.

³¹ De Souza et al, *The Greeks at War*, 38.

³² On Darius's loss at Marathon, see Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 164–72; Green, *Greco-Persian Wars*, 28–40, 43–72; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 156–61; Hill, *Malachi*, 52–55; de Souza et al, *The Greeks at War*, 40–47; Cartledge, *Thermopylae*, 51–63.

demands for the war. In 486, however, “news of an Egyptian insurrection arrived at the court. Darius was preparing to put this insurrection down when he was seized by an illness . . .”³³ He died before getting his chance to lead a second Persian invasion of Greece, but “the Achaemenid Empire had achieved its greatest extent: from Iaxartes to the Persian Gulf and the First Cataract, from Danube to the Indus.”³⁴

³³ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 161.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

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