THE OFFERING ASPECT OF ISRAEL’S CULTIC OBSERVANCE IN THE BOOK OF MALACHI

by

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This study looks into Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult within Israel’s prophetic heritage. Malachi presents a different attitude toward offerings than his pre-exilic predecessors who spoke harshly against the cult focusing on religion’s ethical and spiritual aspects.

The thesis of this study argues that pre-exilic anti-cultic statements do not diminish or reject the cult per se but a corrupted form of it conditioned historically and religiously. Malachi’s post-exilic pro-cultic emphasis presents a different context in which criticism of the cult’s corrupted usage takes place while remaining positive toward the cult itself. The key to understanding properly both anti- and pro-cultic attacks on different aspects of the cult is the covenantal relationship with Yahweh.

Malachi’s positive attitude toward offerings balances the anti-cultic prophetic heritage of Israel showing that there was never a rejection of the cult, only misunderstandings and misuses of it.

KEY TERMS
Malachi; offering; cult; pre-exilic anti-cultic; tithe; sacrifice; attitude; prophetic heritage; priest; covenant
DECLARATION

Student Number: 4213-296-7

I declare that ‘The Offering Aspect of Israel’s Cultic Observance in the Book of Malachi’ is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature: ……………………………………………
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### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theology Bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZAW</td>
<td>Beihefte zur ZAW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTR</td>
<td>Criswell Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBQ</td>
<td>The Jewish Bible Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNES</td>
<td>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOTSUP</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAC</td>
<td>New American Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>NICOT</td>
<td>New International Commentary of the Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIDOTTE</td>
<td>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and</td>
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OTL Old Testament Library

OTS/OS Oudtestamentische Studiën

Presb Presbyterion

RevExp Review and Expositor

RTR The Reformed Theological Review

SBLDS Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series

SBLSP Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers

ST Studia Theologica

SWJT Southwestern Journal of Theology


TynB Tyndale Bulletin

OTWSA Die Ou Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika

VTSup Vetus Testamentum, Supplements

WBC Word Biblical Commentary

WTJ Westminster Theological Journal


ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
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I. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

1. AIM OF THE STUDY

This analysis aims to contribute to the study of the cult in Israel’s history by exploring the book of Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult. I intend to examine the significance of Malachi’s focus on offerings by concentrating on the following questions: Is Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult unique or distinct in any way to Israel’s prophetic heritage? Closely tied to this question is the difficulty of reconciling Malachi with pre-exilic prophetic views on the cult which have been interpreted by many as contradictory, i.e., anti-cultic in nature, while post-exilic views are taken as pro-cultic. Such are the questions this study aims to answer.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A clear contrast exists between pre- and post-exilic prophetic writings when the subject of their criticism is the cult. The former are understood to be anti-cultic, and the latter to be pro-cultic. For someone like E. W. Heaton, the debate will never end because of the lack of evidence. For others, like John Barton, some of the tension can be alleviated if we recognise that the pre-exilic prophets, to the exception of Micah, only speak against sacrifices that belong to feasting and not to general religious ritual.

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1 The book of Malachi will be abbreviated Malachi in this paper.
2 The “offering aspect of the cult” is understood here as the offerings alluded to in the book of Malachi, i.e., food offerings (1:7), animal offerings (1:8), burning of incenses (1:10-11) and the tithe (3:8-10). Therefore, it includes the sacrifices of animals, the burning of vegetables and the giving of money. Mention should be made of the fact that this study focuses on Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult, but this does not overlook or diminish the ethical and spiritual aspect of the cult in the book. Malachi does not only focus on offerings, for the book mentions the ethical aspect as well. However, Malachi’s mentioning of the offering aspect of the cult is noteworthy and distinctive from most prophets. Therefore, it is justifiable to talk of Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult.
observances. This, however, seems not to do justice to pre-exilic prophecies that refer to many kinds of offerings, and not just festive ones (e.g., tithes, votive offerings, etc).

In his article “The Prophets and the Cult” Barton explains another problem when it comes to comparing pre- and post-exilic prophets, namely, that of comparing groups rather than individuals. Rather than trying to group each body of prophets as opposing groups or as different groups that share the same perspective on the cult, it would do each prophet more justice to be treated individually. But such an approach should not deter investigation as to whether both groups can be reconciled or not. I will look for unity and continuity among all prophetic books, in spite of their different nuances in respect to the cult. The importance of doing so would be to discover whether Malachi is poles apart from pre-exilic understandings of the cult or whether his emphasis lies elsewhere.

A secondary (but related) issue concerns which religious traditions influenced Malachi. The debate on the traditions behind Malachi has originated a fair amount of literature in the last few decades. This emphasis on traditions goes hand in hand with the belief that Malachi is a written rather than an oral work. Prophecy, it is argued, changed after the exile and by the time of Malachi had become more interpretive of traditions than

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creative, as it may have been with the pre-exilic prophets. H. Utzschneider goes as far as calling the author of Malachi a “scribe” (“Schreiber”) who merely interpreted the written texts available to him. Though few would label the author of Malachi a “scribe,” many scholars agree with Utzschneider to one degree or another.

While few scholars would argue that Malachi was oral, most unanimously agree that Malachi depends heavily on traditional sources. This debate about traditions, in turn, includes the topic of the cult, even to the point of finding it central, as Julia M. O’Brien states: “the history of Israel’s cultic institutions is perhaps the most common battle ground of the struggle to prove the sources that were available to the author of Malachi.”

Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, followed by Elizabeth Achtemeier, Pieter A. Verhoef and others, have emphasised the covenant themes present in Malachi that relate closely to the book of Deuteronomy. Many other scholars also see in Malachi evidence of the Priestly document, Wisdom literature and other prophets.

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7 PL Redditt, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 152, the disputes in Malachi represent “only a literary device.” cf. idem, “The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting”, CBQ 56 (1994), 249; Reynolds, “Malachi and the Priesthood,” 158f.; the “prophet responsible for the book of Malachi may indeed have been an author” (italics are Reynolds’) cf. 146f.; Krieg, Mutmassungen Uber Maleachi, believes that when Malachi was completed, prophecy had disappeared (137ff.), as quoted in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 38; Lescow, Das Buch Maleachi, states that prophecy had changed into a kind of teaching and interprets the book as the product of exclusively literary activity (31ff.), as quoted in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 38.
8 See Mason and Fishbane who do not exclude the possibility of oral/rhetoric prophecy. Also JN “Boo” Heflin, “The Prophet Malachi, His World and His Book,” SJFT 30 (1987), 5.
9 O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 96.
13 E.g. GB Hugenberger, Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi, VTSup 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 48-50, identifies nine connections. Also Wellhausen [1892] (1963), Prologomena, 209-10; JMP Smith, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Malachi, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 38 but also
There is also the related debate concerning how the prophet of Malachi uses traditional sources. O’Brien argues that the prophet uses these freely, not necessarily concurring with the “ideological goals” behind them, but actualizing and interacting with them to advance his own interests.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly Karl William Weyde concludes that the “teaching of the authoritative traditions was by no means only a repetition of older theologumena; the prophet was no copyist, but used the material at his disposal in a creative way.”\textsuperscript{18} Weyde’s extensive contribution seems to be the last word after decades on the search for Malachi’s traditions. Hence, the widely held view that Malachi mainly reapplies old traditions needs to be questioned. This study will build on the studies of O’Brien, Weyde and others to address how traditions shaped Malachi’s understanding of the cult. One might ask, did the prophet to whom Malachi is ascribed merely reapply old traditions or did he introduce novel nuances to old traditions? If so, what were these nuances? This, however, is a secondary concern of this thesis.

In summary, Malachi’s sources have been extensively researched, but its unique emphasis on the offering aspect of cultic observance has been scarcely addressed in light

\begin{itemize}
\item O’Brien, \textit{Priest and Levite}, 111.
\item Weyde, \textit{Prophecy and Teaching}, 402.
\end{itemize}
of the widest prophetic corpus. While controversy has surrounded the difference between the pre- and post-exilic prophets’ understanding of the cult, each prophetic book needs to be focused upon individually.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM AND STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

On the surface, Malachi’s emphasis on the offering element of the cult seems to contradict the pre-exilic biblical prophets' views on the cult. This has often been understood as a problem of discontinuity or contradiction within Israel's prophetic heritage. It is widely believed that pre-exilic biblical prophecy was against the cult in general and that post-exilic prophecy, at least Malachi, offers a different, pro-cult view.

This problem has led me to the statement of the following research question: Is it really the case that Malachi contradicts earlier biblical prophets? Related to this question my study will also focus on the question whether Malachi's views on the offering element of the cult are unique within the prophetic corpus or not.

4. WORKING HYPOTHESIS

One possible answer for Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult is that the prophet placed great importance on the law as did other post-exilic prophets. His goal, therefore, was to return to Israel’s past traditions and reaffirm the importance of obeying the law’s stipulations as established at Sinai. Many see this emphasis as opposed to the one found in pre-exilic prophets. I would question, however, if the pre-exilic attitude toward offerings was different because of the historical context previous to the
exile. Perhaps what looks like anti-cultic statements are not a rejection of the cult but a criticism of a corrupted form of the cult. My study will be an attempt to determine the validity of the hypothesis that Malachi’s emphasis is unique but not disconnected to previous prophets.

5. EXEGETICAL SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS

The following research objectives will be considered as most adequate:

- What kinds of offerings and sacrifices is Malachi talking about? How are these offerings associated with either festivities and celebrations, or sin-offerings, or both?

- What can we learn about the cult in Malachi’s day?

- What is the prophet’s understanding of the cult? How does he approach it? Is it distinctive in any way?

- What is Israel’s understanding of the cult? Is it distinctive?

- Did the prophet to whom Malachi is ascribed merely repeat old traditions or did he introduce novel nuances to old traditions? If so, what were these nuances?

- Is Malachi’s message on the offering aspect of the cult unique or distinct in any way to Israel’s prophetic history?

- In what way is Malachi’s emphasis on the cult so different to that of former prophets who also drew from traditions but whose emphasis focused on the spiritual and ethical aspects of the cult rather than on the offerings? Can we reconcile these differences?

- Is there continuity between Malachi and his predecessors or is his emphasis on the cult completely different and disconnected?
6. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The term “cult” is used frequently in this paper and requires a clear definition. Leo G. Perdue states,

the concern of cult is to maintain a continuing relationship with that deity in the hopes of securing divine blessings for the community by means of obeying the commands of the deity, providing for the deity’s needs, propitiating his anger, and maintaining the integrity of his sanctity which must be guarded from the contact with or incursions from the profane…the cultic institution itself is believed to have been originated and continues to be legitimated by this deity. 19

Cult will be understood as the totality of a worship system of external religious practices and observances which is the “ordered response of a society and its individuals to their belief that a deity has appeared within its midst.” 20

I understand “the offering aspect of the cult” as the part of Israel’s cult that deals with any offering and/or anything related to it, be it sacrifices, tithes, or celebrations that include offerings.

7. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study on the cult proposed here is limited and will focus on the observance of Israel’s cultic life, particularly the offering aspect of the cult that the book of Malachi seems to emphasise, i.e., offerings on the altar (of animals, cereals and incense, Mal 1:7, 8, 11) and tithing and first fruits (Mal 3:8).

This study will interact with the rich works of other scholars who have already contributed to the issue of traditional sources in Malachi. Further, this study will not

19 LG Perdue, Wisdom and Cult: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Cult in the Wisdom Literatures of Israel and the Ancient Near East, SBLDS 30 (Missoula: Scholars, 1977), 9. He admits the difficulty of defining the term’s meaning and limits, as does Barton, who notes that “the cult’ is a rather slippery term, which perhaps needs closer definition before we can be sure what we are talking about” (120).

delve into original research concerning the socio-historical context of Malachi, but rely on other secondary literature that provides a convincing argument for a valid date.

8. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

My research involves two methodological elements: (1) exegesis of certain passages in the book of Malachi that deal directly with the cult; and (2) a comparative study, where the main elements of Malachi's views on the cult are compared to those of other (especially pre-exilic) prophets. The process of exegesis I am going to apply involves the following steps:

1. Determining the limits of the passage to be exegeted;
2. Translating the text;
3. Dealing with the issues of textual criticism;
4. Analysing the historical context;
5. Analysing the literary context;
6. Analysing the form and structure of the passage;
7. Analysing the grammar and the lexical data;

These exercises lead to the determination of the meaning of the final form of the text through application of the scientific tools of lower and higher criticism. This takes place in full recognition of the inevitable presence of the presuppositions one brings to the text. I follow the advice of Odil Hannes Steck:

The goal of exegesis cannot be to subdue the text under a dominating measure of socio-political wishful thinking or an individual model of experience…the most decisive thing paving the way for exegesis is not the “I” in the face of the text, but in accordance with the self-understanding of
the biblical world, the text in its liberating, critical and reorienting outlook towards the humanity and the living world.\textsuperscript{21}

The research design and methodology of this study will be as follows: A limited study of the socio-religious and socio-historical context will be conducted insofar as it sheds lights on plausible influences on Malachi’s understanding of the cult. An exegesis of Malachi will be done with detailed attention given to pertinent texts that mention the offering aspect of the cult in order to answer the exegetical questions posed above. An analysis of key cultic terms will be included in order to understand what offerings Malachi refers to. Following this, it will be necessary to interact with pre-exilic biblical texts that deal with the cult in an either positive or negative way in order to contrast Malachi and see whether his post-exilic attitude is unique. For this section I will rely more heavily on other scholars and secondary literature. I will complete my study by comparing the finding on Malachi and other prophetic attitudes toward the cult. I will conclude with a summary of my findings.

\textbf{9. TRANSLATION}

I have provided my own translation of the book of Malachi, which tends to be literal. I understand that this is not the most readable version, but it helps the academic purposes of this study in order to grasp the original style and grammar of the text. The interpretation of Hebrew idioms and syntax is given in the exegesis.

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF MALACHI

1. AUTHORSHIP AND COMPOSITION

Given the limitations of time and space of this thesis, only two aspects about the author of the book of Malachi will be briefly considered. First, is the superscription in 1:1 referring to a prophet named Malachi who lived in the 5th century BC? Second, what was the profession of the author/redactor(s) of the book and how much does it influence the message?

The word כִּיMAL appears a total of five times in the OT (Exod 23:23; 32:34; Isa 42:19; Mal 1:1; 3:1) meaning “my messenger/angel.” Only in Mal 1:1 has it been understood as a proper name. Until today, scholars still remain divided as to whether כִּיMAL is the prophet’s proper name/title or a common noun that conveys anonymity. My conclusion is in line with the conclusions of such scholars as Baldwin, Kaufmann, Childs, Kaiser, Verhoef, Glazier-McDonald, Klein and Hill, all of whom, along with others, understand the term as a name or title for the prophet ascribed to the book.

22 The LXX reads ἐγερθῆκα αὐτόν (“his messenger” or “his angel”). Though the LXX seems to support anonymity, it calls the book “Malachi.” The Targum of Jonathan states that the author is Ezra. Jerome, Rashi and Calvin followed this interpretation. 2 Esdras 1:40 names the last three books of the Minor Prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Tertullian, Origen and Chrysostom identified Malachi as an incarnate angel.


27 Verhoef, Haggai and Malachi, 154-56.

28 B Glazier-McDonald, Malachi, the Divine Messenger, SBLDS 98 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 27-29.


31 For extended discussions on the topic see Hill, Malachi, 15-18; ibid, “Malachi, Book of,” in ABD (vol. 4; ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 478-79; GV Smith, “Malachi,” in The
The second question pertains to the office of the prophet and how this may have influenced both the message and its composition. Some scholars defend that the prophet belonged to the inner circles of Israel’s priesthood. They provide several reasons to believe so:

1) Malachi’s references to the Temple, sacrifices and offerings, offal, covenants, priesthood, Levi and the tithe suggest that the prophet is particularly familiar with the priesthood.

2) Malachi’s positive attitude toward Levi (2:4-7) and the Levitical covenant may indicate his proximity to the priesthood.

3) According to Lescow, Malachi’s interpretation of the Jacob-Esau tradition (1:2ff.) also exhibits the author’s profession.

4) Church tradition supports a Levitical background.

Hill and Heflin consider these arguments in support of a Levitical background insufficient and provide other reasons to believe that Malachi was an outsider to the priesthood. The strong words against the priesthood in 1:6-2:9 are the main reason to arrive at this conclusion. Expressions such as “O priests who despise my name…” (1:6);
“you present the blind for offering” (1:8); “you present the limping and the sick” (1:8); “this has happened because of you” (1:9); “Oh that one of you would shut the temple doors so that you would not set light to my altar in vain. I have no pleasure in you” (1:10); “you sniff at the table of the Lord” (1:13) are, according to these scholars, too harsh for a priest to say about his fellow workers and brethren. But particularly strong against the priesthood is the curse found in 2:2: “I will send against you the curse, and curse your blessings. Indeed I have cursed them because none of you have set your heart. Behold, I am rebuking your seed and I will spread offal on your face, the offal of your festivals.” Since no stronger oracle against the priests is found in the entire OT, they conclude that Malachi was an outsider to such a group.

In recent decades, instead of focusing on whether Malachi was inside or outside the priesthood, scholars have been inclined to see Malachi as someone acquainted with scribal activity. In this sense, he was neither a Levite nor a layman. His office gave him an outsider’s perspective on the priesthood but in full knowledge of its nature and components. This view is directly connected to the study of the literary form and genre of the book.

In his publication Prophecy and Teaching (2000), Karl Weyde surveys previous works and studies on the book of Malachi and explains that there is an increasing tendency among scholars towards emphasising that Malachi is a literary product, a ‘written’ interpretation of the traditions; the prophet is more often than not called ‘author’ (or ‘authors’) or ‘writer’, someone whose message was probably not delivered orally.
Among others, Weyde names Utzschneider, Meinhold, Nogalski, Berry, Lescow, Krieg, Petersen, Reynolds, Steck, Bosshard/Kratz and Redditt as scholars who support this view.

Scholars remain divided as to whether Malachi is purely a written product or an original oral deliverance. M. Fishbane, R. Mason and Verhoef among others, have defended to differing degrees that Malachi was delivered orally. However, the disagreement will most likely remain unresolved since our knowledge of the prophet’s life is very limited.

The present study will assume that the message was originally delivered by a prophet named Malachi (or later called Malachi). In this sense, an oral deliverance is also assumed. Since what is known about the author/s is reduced to his literary work, I will not focus on studying his possible profession. Obviously, to know whether the prophet was a priest, a scribe, a farmer or even a cultic prophet would most likely influence the direction of this thesis. However, attempts to decipher the prophet’s profession have proved to be mere speculation.

As to the composition of the book, this study will not concentrate on the redactional or editorial transmission of the text, but rather assume its final form as a finished product. Whether one or more editors influenced the text cannot be asserted

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36 Utzschneider, “Die Schriftprophetie und die Frage,” 377ff., as quoted in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 40-41, goes as far as calling the author of Malachi a “scribe” (“Schreiber”) who merely interpreted the written texts available to him. See also Redditt, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, 152, who states that the disputes in Malachi represent “only a literary device.” cf. idem, “The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting,” 249; Reynolds, “Malachi and the Priesthood,” 158f., the “prophet responsible for the book of Malachi may indeed have been an author” cf. 146f.; M. Krieg, Mutmassungen Uber Maleachi, believes that when Malachi was completed, prophecy had disappeared (137ff.; as referred to in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 38); Lescow, Das Buch Maleachi, 31ff., states that prophecy had changed into a kind of teaching and interprets the book as the product of exclusively literary activity (as referred to in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 38).
37 Verhoef, Haggai and Malachi, 156.
38 As defended by AR Johnson, The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1962).
with total certainty. Neither can it be assumed that the prophet himself wrote down his own oracles. Multiple authorship, as adopted by some,\(^\text{39}\) will be taken as conjectural. Neither will this study consider it vital to choose whether the prophet was from Levitical circles or from without. The traditions that lay behind Malachi will be considered only in relation to how much they influence, enlighten or darken the present text. As to the composition, admittedly as some have underlined, Malachi’s question-and-answer rhetorical pattern is not found elsewhere in the OT and calls for a premeditated literary composition rather than an oral speech. On the other hand, we must admit that we are very limited as to knowing exactly how the book was composed and to what extent an editorial process is present in the book, a fact that those devoted to high-criticism tend to oversee.

2. DATE

Determining Malachi’s date of origin is complex due to scant evidence. The book of Malachi gives no explicit time reference such as dates, battles, reigns or kings. We can frame the book between 515 BC as the \textit{terminus ad quem}, since reference to the doors of the Temple (1:7-14) imply it was rebuilt, and 312 BC as a \textit{terminus ad quum} since Southern Judah was called Idumaea and not Edom, implying that it had already been destructed by the Nabataeans (1:2-5). Though some scholars have claimed the term

\(^{39}\) Noteworthy are the works of scholars like YT Radday, and MA Pollatschek, “Vocabulary Richness in Post-Exilic Prophetic Books,” \textit{ZAW} 92 (1980), 333-46, who studied the vocabulary of Malachi aided by computer software and concluded that, since chapter 3 differed strongly from the other chapters, multiple authorship was probably the cause. This, however, does not exclude the possibility of a single author who delivered the messages, but may imply that at least two redactors compiled the oracles into its written form, or that the author himself wrote the chapter at different stages of his life.
“governor” (pehā) is of no help in dating the book due to its broad usage in the OT, the overwhelming majority see a clear indication of a post-exilic Persian government.

Many voices have risen defending one date or another in between these two. Three options remain as the most disputed and are relative to both Ezra and Nehemiah:

1) Malachi preceded Ezra and Nehemiah (before 458 BC); 2) Malachi prophesied between Ezra and Nehemiah; and 3) Malachi continued the reform Nehemiah could not successfully implement. Time and space do not allow us to enter into this complex debate. Even though no exact date can be defended in a dogmatic way due to weaknesses found in every chronology, my commitment is with the first view for several reasons:

1) Admittedly, Ezra and Nehemiah faced similar problems that Malachi confronted (with the exception of the Sabbath), such as lack of tithing (Neh 10:32-39; 13:10-13), mixed marriages (Mal 2:10f.; Ezra 9:1f.; Neh 13:1-3, 23-27), and the oppression of the poor (Mal 3:5; Neh 5:1-5). However, Nehemiah confronted a different tithing problem, for in his days no tithe was given at all, reaching the point of the Levites being forced to abandon their offices. Malachi talks about the entire tithe, i.e., the Levites had assumed their office but were accepting only part of the tithes. Also, the problem of

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41 See Hill, Malachi, 78-79.

42 I follow the traditional chronology on Ezra preceding Nehemiah (538 BC – Cyrus decree; 458 BC – Ezra’s return to Jerusalem; 445 BC – Nehemiah’s journey to Jerusalem; 433 BC – Nehemiah’s return to Jerusalem) for the simple reason that it raises fewer questions than the view that Nehemiah preceded Ezra, understanding Cyrus as Artaxerxes I (7th year = 458 BC). For a good summary of the problem see EH Merrill, Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 503-06; FC Fensham, The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 5-16.

43 For an extended exposition of the problem of dating Malachi see Hill, Malachi, 51-84; EH Merrill, An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 371-78.
mixed marriages must not be assumed to be equal in Neh 13 and Mal 2:10-16. Malachi addresses people who are divorcing their wives, presumably in order to marry younger, foreign wives. However, Nehemiah addresses people who are marrying their children to foreign wives (Neh 13:23-28). There is no divorce involved in such actions since they are marrying for the first time. In this sense, the accusation is rather different than the one in Malachi (Mal 2:10f.).

2) The need for Temple funds does not fit the period of Ezra when the royalty treasure paid for the expenses (Ezra 6:6-9).

3) Mal 1:8 could not have referred to Nehemiah as the governor because he would not have accepted any offering from his people (Neh 5:1-8), i.e., the analogy is not applicable (if not meaningless) if it refers to Nehemiah.

4) Ezra and Nehemiah’s first visits are positive toward the Levites, perhaps due to the previous reforms by Malachi.

5) A linguistic analysis carried out in 1976 by Robert Polzin, which studied the stages of development in the OT, exhibits that Malachi’s vocabulary and grammar is consonant with the Chronicler, Haggai and Zechariah (i.e., early 5th century BC).

6) The great majority of scholars opt for a date prior to Ezra and Nehemiah. The reading of the law by Ezra in the middle of the 5th century caused a deep spiritual reformation and brokenness among the people. Ezra’s scene suggests that the people had forgotten the law and lived their lives without any consideration toward it. This should be

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44 See GV Smith, “Malachi,” 227.
47 For a list of scholars who support this view (and other views) see Hill, Malachi, 393-95.
a hint that if Malachi preceded Ezra, enough time must be allowed for the people to reconsider their paths. Malachi brings some of the law to the same audience Ezra did; therefore, a date around 490-470 BC seems logical, which sets the scenario during the time of Darius I.  

This study will read the book of Malachi against the background of Darius I but will not exclude the possibility of placing the book during the reign of Xerxes (468-465 BC). Therefore, Malachi preceded Ezra and Nehemiah, preparing the terrain for their reforms.

3. RECIPIENTS OF THE MESSAGE

Malachi addresses different groups who hold different belief systems and ethos. Though similar attempts have been made to describe these groups best, I follow Berquist’s approach which argues for a three-group scenario.

First, there is an inner group (mostly addressed in the 3rd person) to which Malachi belongs and is presented as true יְהוָה יָרָא (3:16). Those in this group have exemplary faith and hold Yahweh’s name in high esteem (3:16). They receive God’s favour in many ways: God honours them by recording their names in a book of remembrance (3:16). God says of them: “they will be mine,” and they will be spared on...
the day Yahweh acts (3:17). “The sun of righteousness will shine upon them” (4:2) and they will trample the wicked (4:3). This group stands in clear contrast with the third group which is cursed due to its wickedness and attitude toward Yahweh’s name.

Second, there is an in-group (addressed in the 2nd person) of sceptics who will resolve their doubts (3:13-15) on the day Yahweh acts (3:17-18). It is largely formed by the priests, thus representing the majority of the addressees in the book.50 Though it is longing for the messenger of the Lord (3:1), this group exhibits profound scepticism (1:2, 6, 7; 2:14; 3:7, 8, 13, 14), self-righteousness (1:6; 2:14, 17, 3:7, 8, 13, 14), cynicism (3:14), contempt for Yahweh’s name and contempt for his worship (1:6-14; 3:14), complaints against the cultic duties (1:13; 2:13-14), partiality in applying the law and biased instruction (2:6-9), disrespect for the marriage covenant (2:14), robbery against God (3:8), and harsh words against Yahweh (3:13-14). Nevertheless, though the group is highly criticised for its many sins against God, it is not entirely condemned. Yahweh offers the group’s members restoration “if they return to God and to the proper fear of the divine name (3:17-4:2).”51 In fact, as Mal 3:3 shows, Yahweh has reformation in mind for them: The refiner and purifier of silver will sit and purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver until they become to Yahweh people who present offerings in righteousness. Not only should we understand the priests as the entire body of this group, but also those who are influenced by their teaching and who follow their steps.

50 Berquist, “The Social Setting of Malachi,” 124, where he says that “the priests belong to an in-group whose actions are severely criticised, but whose traditions are treated as valid and for whom restoration and salvation are possible.”
51 Ibid. Furthermore, Yahweh threatens this group with curses and destruction; twice he appeals to their repentance in 1:9 (“do appease God that He may be gracious to us!”) and 2:1 (“if you do not listen and decide to give honour to my name, I will send against you the curse, and curse your blessings”). Such threats show that Yahweh is not finished with them, but he is giving them a chance to repent.
Third, there is an out-group (addressed in the 3rd person) composed of the רודים and רשע (4:1). In this group we find sorcerers, adulterers and liars. They exploit the poor, oppress the widow and orphan, and mistreat the alien (3:15). Above all, they do not fear Yahweh (3:5) and put him to test (3:15). They lack any faith and will be completely destroyed (2:17; 3:5; 3:14-15; 4:1).

Therefore, among Malachi’s recipients, there were people who were outside the prophet’s admonitions and exhortations. Additionally, there are the רשע עשׂי who are cursed. The priests are in between these two. While Yahweh has not yet expelled them from the community, their actions are highly condemned and challenged to be reformed.

Though Malachi’s perspective of reality divides the society in three groups, his depiction of it is based on religion. The text does not aim to describe how the society was fragmented. Rather, it offers a religious classification of society based on Malachi’s perspective of the society of Yehud (the Persian name for Judah), which shapes and informs the message of the prophet. In Berquist’s words, “Malachi’s perception of society coloured his rhetoric, and is thus essential to the accurate exegesis of the book of Malachi.”\(^{52}\) Therefore, the three-group scenario should have an important role in our exegesis, but not so much in our understanding of the society of his day. After all, it is a fragmentation with a religious basis, not a sociological one.

In this section we have described the fragmentation of the society of Yehud as seen through Malachi’s eyes. Malachi addresses three main groups with different belief systems and ethos that live in a highly fragmented society. I will focus primarily on the

\(^{52}\) Ibid.
second group, i.e., the priests and those influenced by the priests, since the passages I will analyse are directed toward this group.

4. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Since a date between 490 and 470 BC seems to best match the sparse evidence available today, the following is a study of the political, economic and socio-religious background around that temporal scope.

4.1 Political Considerations.

Between 522 and 486 BC the Persian Empire, under one of its most capable king Darius I, reached its greatest extension becoming a “gargantuan empire embracing virtually the entire world within the ken of Old Testament man.”\(^{53}\) More than one scholar has described this period as one of political tranquillity for the Persian Empire.\(^{54}\)

As a result of such quietness, the small province of Yehud\(^{55}\) found itself protected by Persia’s secure frontiers. Events like the battle of Marathon in 490 BC or the revolts of Egypt in 486 and 464 BC would have raised all kinds of expectations and questions of an apocalyptic nature among Yehudaites as the known world was shaken. However, these

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\(^{54}\) e.g. Heflin, “The Prophet Malachi,” 8. An extensive and helpful political and historical description of the Persian period is offered by Hill, *Malachi*, 51-73.

\(^{55}\) Yehud was a small province out of 120 that formed the Persian Empire. It was around 20x25 miles (Stuart, “Malachi,” 1253). The province was divided in at least six districts: Jericho, Mizpah, Jerusalem, Beth-Zur, Beth-Hacherem and Keilah (Hill, *Malachi*, 62). We can assume there were different groups in Yehud when the approx. 50,000 expatriates returned in the 2nd half of the 6th century. Hill states that a “residential population” can be estimated around 150,000 based on certain texts as Mal 3:5, Ezra 10:2; Neh 13:3, 23.
struggles between Egypt, Greece and Persia did not affect the province of Yehud politically since the province experienced no major direct confrontation.

As to the administration of Yehud, certain characteristics can be underlined. The post-exilic Israelite community was governed by a Persian-appointed governor (Hebrew pehā). Before and after the time of Malachi, these were natives of the province (e.g. Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah), but there is discrepancy as to who governed the province during the time of Malachi. Regardless of who governed, it is now believed that the governor of the satrapy of Eber-Nehara ruled over Yehud’s governor and, if Malachi’s satrapy governor was similar to the one preceding him (Zerubbabel) and following him (Nehemiah), we would expect a complete lack of sympathy on his part.

The satrapy governor and his affiliates were most likely committed to stopping any development in the province of Yehud, as the book of Ezra testifies about periods preceding and following the time of Malachi. Such opposition would have brought unity among the oppressed people, but it reminded Yehud of its little political significance and weakness in an Empire that controlled most of the world.

The return from Babylon, fulfilling the long-proclaimed prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah, brought hope to the Israelites. The prophecies spoke of a new beginning, a restoration of the land, and so forth. However, the picture in Yehud was far different after a few decades of repatriation. Yehud remained under a pagan authority, a fact difficult to reconcile with the prophecies, especially the Davidic promises. This “contradiction” probably caused many to doubt whether Yahweh had disappeared from the scene. After

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56 For a good discussion on the topic see RA Taylor, and ER Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 211-212. Their conclusion is that the evidence “seems to point to Jewish governors of a separate province of Judah through at least much of the time in question” (Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 215). See also Hill, Malachi, 71-73, who believes that most likely all governors since Sheshbazzar (538 BC) were of Jewish origins.
all, Israel had not experienced political independence for more than a century. Scepticism toward Yahweh therefore seems most logical after all these political and theological contradictions and fits perfectly well with Malachi’s depiction of the scepticism among the priests in Jerusalem (1:6-2:9).

Post-exilic biblical writings point in this direction as well. Israelite expectations for a political independence seem to have been lost sometime after the construction of the Temple (516 BC) when Zerubbabel mysteriously disappears from the biblical literature. The books of Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chroniclers exhibit a unison agreement as to Yehud’s loyalty toward Persia. No sign of revolt or libertarian expectations are recorded in these books or in any source. Rather, Yehud exhibited an obedient submission as a Persian vassal. To this Hill says,

as texts from various sources show, the Jews, for their part, were generally quite willing to act loyally toward the empire – including offering prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the king and his family (Ezra 6:10; 7:23) – in return for relative religious and legal freedom as well as tax concessions.57

This submissive attitude toward the Empire goes hand in hand with the downplay on the Davidic element characteristic of late post-exilic biblical literature. Scholars believe that by the time of Malachi “the Davidic era had been recently dashed.”58 It should not surprise us, then, that the Davidic line and covenant are completely omitted in Malachi.59 Instead, the Levitical covenant is mentioned (Mal 2:4, 5, 8). Similarly, the Chronicler

57 Hill, “Malachi, Book of.” 84.
58 Hill, Malachi, 71. See also H Niehr in The Crisis of Israelite Religion, 231 where he states that “the Davidic dynasty came to an end only around 500 BCE;” also, WJ Dumbrell, “Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms,” RTR 35 no. 2 (1976), 46 states that “the books of Ezra and Nehemiah show no concept of Davidic expectancy.”
59 Hill, Malachi, 70 states that “by the time of the prophet Malachi, the House of David is a nonfactor in the restoration community, politically and religiously.”
“plays down the Davidic element”\textsuperscript{60} and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah do not express any concern for it. Therefore, soon after Zerubbabel disappeared and with him the Davidic promises attached to him (Hag 2:23), Davidic expectations lost their present political value and transformed into one of an apocalyptic nature when the Messiah would reign over all the earth (Zech 12:8-13:1).\textsuperscript{61} The implications are important for our understanding of Malachi.

First, if the Davidic era had temporarily lost its continuity for those in Yehud, then all political hopes for the land and its political independence would have been temporarily forgotten. Having no political hope would have caused tremendous apathy and no energy to revolt against an all-powerful Empire.

Second, living in this hopeless and indifferent political situation must have marked the atmosphere of Yehud. The Yahwists must have struggled to define themselves. They could reconcile the exile with their theology because they understood they had been punished for their idolatry. However, could they reconcile their continuous subjugation to gentile superpowers with a God who had promised to never forsake David’s line? Could they reconcile being an insignificant province, a small one out of a 120, and worship the God of the heavens and the earth? Such apparently irreconcilable positions must have caused some Yehudaites doubt Yahweh and become sceptics about any expectation of political independence. Yehud’s condition during the time of Malachi was thus one of stability, submission and scepticism.

These considerations are important as they show some of the factors that influenced Yehudaites to adopt an attitude of scepticism toward Yahweh, the very


\textsuperscript{61} cf. Hill, \textit{Malachi}, 75.
attitude that Malachi addresses. Also, the questioning of Yahweh and whether he had abandoned them is also reflected in the first verses of Malachi (1:1-2): “In what have you loved us?” Thus, the political considerations just described prove to shed some light on the atmosphere in Yehud during the time of Malachi’s message.

4.2 Economic Considerations.

The economic situation of Yehud has played an important role in the understanding of Malachi’s context and particularly in regard to the prophet’s emphasis on certain cultic sins (e.g. the defilement of Yahweh’s table, or failing to bring the tithe). Scholars interpret that Yehud experienced a poor economic situation during Malachi’s time. Such interpretation influences the exegesis of the text. A good example is Andrew E. Hill’s commentary on Malachi which states that some of Yehud’s sins were “sheer pragmatism” because the poor economy did not allow them to meet the cultic requirements. Obviously, Hill’s interpretation is not as simple as that for he also takes into account the religious factor, but his approach shows that assuming a depressed economy influences the exegesis. Hill’s interpretation, which is a common one, is therefore dependent on the assumption of a poor economy. But, can we really assume a poor state of the economy? The following discussion aims to examine this question.

The assumption that poverty remained from the end of the sixth century to the time of Nehemiah has often been taken for granted. Scholars give reasons to prove that

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62 E.g., Hill, Malachi, 75. Similarly, scholars (e.g. Stuart, “Malachi,” 1253; Heflin, “The Prophet Malachi,” 9) who defend that poverty was widespread, do so on a weak basis and scant evidence. Texts such as Neh 1:3; 2:3, 17; 4:2; 5:1-5; 9:36-37 are used to advance this theory; however, these verses only refer to the social ills of Nehemiah’s immediate generation. Another text used is Mal 3:5, however, this verse does not imply poverty but injustice.
Yehud was in poverty during the time of Malachi. I will address those and show that the evidence is not sufficient to arrive at such a conclusion.

It is argued that natural disasters such as famine, blight, pests and droughts were present during Malachi’s day which would have made the agricultural resources meager. However, the argument is based on Hag 1:6, 10-11, referring to a time at least 30 years earlier than Malachi, and Mal 3:11, which speaks only of a future agricultural blessing. There is little evidence, if any, to affirm that these natural disasters were present during Malachi’s time.

Scholars argue that because the corrupt elite class in Jerusalem mistreated the less privileged people (Neh 5:3, 7-8, 15; Mal 3: 8-12), this reflects a suppressed and poor economy in the entire province. Though corruption usually damages the macro-economy of a country, it does not necessarily mean it causes an economic depression. Such was the case in Amos’ context, in which the rich mistreated and oppressed the poor, and all kinds of social injustices were done (Amos 2:6-7; 4:1, 5:11), and yet the economy was at its best (Amos 3:15; 5:11). We simply cannot assess the scale of corruption present in Malachi’s time.

Hill and Stuart agree that heavy taxation undermined Yehud’s resources, based on Neh 5:15 and 9:37. According to Herodotus, the entire satrapy of “Beyond the River” had

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63 Hill, Malachi, 75 summarizes most of them: “[the severe economic pressures faced by the province of Yehud were] caused in part by a shortfall in the imperial budget and stingy satrapy treasurers; cf. Clines (1984:207); Petersen, (1995:20). Other factors, however, were responsible for the adverse conditions too, including natural disaster (Hag 1:6, 10), heavy taxation (Neh 5:15), and a local economy controlled by corrupt officials and nobles in league with the resident alien population (Neh 5:3, 7-8, 15).”

64 For this view see Stuart, “Malachi,” 1253, or Heflin, “The Prophet Malachi,” 9.

65 I use Ezra and Nehemiah as historically accurate ancient accounts. For a discussion on the reliability on these two sources see Kaufmann, History, 185-87.
to pay 350 talents of silver. But how much Yehud had to pay remains unknown.\(^6^6\) Since taxation went up in all satrapies when the Persian Empire experienced defeat on the battlefields, we can affirm that Yehud reduced its economic benefits in support of the Persian armies around 490 BC, when Persia lost against Greece in the colossal battle of Marathon, in 486-483 BC due to Egypt’s revolt, in 480 BC when Greece won over the Persian navy at Salamis, or in 479 BC when Persia was defeated at Platea. Such defeats meant great loss to the empire’s treasury and higher taxation burdens over all the empire. Though these circumstantial events indeed influenced the economy of Yehud, it remains unknown to what extent.

Some scholars interpret the fact that Jerusalem was in ruins as a sign of the province’s economy. True, Jerusalem was barely inhabited and its walls were most likely in ruins until the time of Nehemiah (Neh 1:3; 2:13-7).\(^6^7\) Not only does Nehemiah (Neh 5) attest to this, but also other extra biblical sources.\(^6^8\) However, this should not be understood so much as the result of a poor economy but as the result of the submissive character of the province of Yehud to the Persian satrapy governors determined to stop any work to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. In other words, though it is plausible that Jerusalem lay in ruins due to economic limitations, the evidence leans heavily toward a political reason, i.e., due to political opposition.


\(^{67}\) Fensham, NICOT, 152. In his opinion, this view “seems to be the more acceptable.”

\(^{68}\) As to *ruralization*, Petersen explains that the goal was to move the population out of the cities in order to foster agriculture and the creation of new villages. “such policy is utterly consistent with reports about a depopulated Jerusalem” (DL Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995], 20).
Though the land of Israel lay in complete economic and structural devastation during the exile, there are reasons to support that the economy started to flourish at the end of the 6th century. These reasons must be contrasted with all the previous evidence against a favourable economy.

First, the Persian kings’ help toward the reconstruction and enrichment of Yehud must have made an economic impact on the province. The Persian policy was to return the exiled cultures to their land, reconstruct their infrastructures and allow their religion/s and traditions. By doing this they would gain loyalty and submission. Under Cyrus (539 BC), the returnees carried with them all the temple utensils, vast amounts of gold, silver and all kinds of free offerings to Yahweh (Ezra 1:4, 6-11), and their own wealth accumulated over 70 years in Babylon. Under Darius I (515-486 BC) the economic support was increased substantially (Ezra 6:3-9). Nevertheless the Persian economic support was restricted only to the construction of the Temple in the city of Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4) and a great part of the treasure received by the empire was given directly back to Temple-related expenses (Ezra 2:68-69).

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69 Taylor and Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, 208-09 referring to E Stern, and A Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible. Volume II: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods, 732-332 BCE*. Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 323 “the most prominent feature left by the seventy years of Babylonian domination in Palestine was the total destruction and devastation of all the main cities that had flourished during the Assyrian period... so rudimentary must this existence have been that it has proved extremely difficult to find its traces in the material remains. Of the destroyed cities and towns, many ceased to exist entirely; others were inhabited by poorer elements.”


71 Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 11: “The Persians had a policy of restoring and supporting temples in order to stimulate and control the economy as well as to encourage the loyalty of priests (and at least some of the local population).”

72 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.1, reports that many of them did not return due to their comfort and wealth accumulated in Babylon which would contrast vastly with the lifestyle of those living in the small and ruined province of Yehud.
Second, since Persians were particularly interested in securing the area of Palestine due to its strategic location next to Africa and the Mediterranean Sea, sources of continuous threats from Greece and Egypt,\textsuperscript{73} they must have provided some kind of financial support in order to secure the area. However, it is impossible to know the extent of this support since there is no evidence for it.

And third, the policies Petersen calls \textit{commercialization} and \textit{ruralization} must have helped toward enriching the economy of the province. Petersen explains how Persia practised the policy of \textit{commercialization}, which was proactive in developing the economy of the Levant. He states, “Persians were interested in maintaining the goods through the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Such trade… opened up local communities to the benefits of economic development.”\textsuperscript{74} In regard to \textit{ruralization}, he explains that Persians fomented depopulation of the cities and spreading the population in order to increase the agriculture throughout the land. Their interests in a prosperous Palestine were manifested in these practical ways which must have benefited the economy. However, there is no evidence for this.

These three economic factors indeed influenced the province. Nevertheless, to what extent and for how long we do not know. It remains too little evidence to judge the province’s wealth.

\textsuperscript{73} Petersen, \textit{Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi}, 10-11 says that “during the early Persian period, military conflict on the Western flank of the Achaemenid Empire provided strong reasons for its leaders to be interested in secure rule over the diverse peoples of the Levant.” Hill agrees that “Yehud and the Eber-Nahara satrapy were valuable to the Persians primarily as a land bridge for monitoring commerce between two continents and as a base for military operations directed against Egypt” (Hill, \textit{Malachi}, 75). This proves that Persian Kings favoured the province of Yehud in order to facilitate their usage of it when help was needed. For the same reason, we can see how Artaxerxes I supported the reconstruction of the walls in Jerusalem; it would be a secure city he could use in times when Egypt revolted.

\textsuperscript{74} Petersen, \textit{Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi}, 19-2 based on K Hoglund, “The Establishment of a Rural Economy in the Judean Hill Country in Late Sixth Century,” (unpublished paper) who highlights four Persian policies that would have influenced the province of Yehud in a significant way: \textit{militarization, commercialization, ruralization} and \textit{ethnic collectivization}. 

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As we have seen, the argument that the economy of Yehud was poor during the
time of Malachi is not so firm. We know that famine, blight and other natural disasters
were present before and after Malachi, but not during his time. The fact that the elite class
in Jerusalem was mistreating the poor does not necessarily imply a poor economy at the
time of Malachi, neither can it be surmised that heavy taxation influenced the economy to
the extent of depression. We simply do not know. That Jerusalem was in ruins and
inhabited is better explained on a political basis, rather than an economic one. All this
shows that one cannot make a clear assessment of the province’s economy. Neither can it
be assumed that Yehud experienced a depression in its economy nor that the economy
flourished. Therefore, any conclusion drawn from such inferences is mere conjecture.\textsuperscript{75} Yehud’s economy, in the decades of 490-470 BC, remains unknown and in need of
further research.

In spite of what has been argued above, scholars do draw conclusions assuming a
poor economy. They see a direct relationship between the poor economy in Malachi’s
time and the sins addressed by the prophet. Among such sins are offering cheaper
sacrifices (1:7, 8, 13-14), marrying foreign wives (2:11), abusing the poor and
disadvantaged (Mal 3:5) or not bringing the whole tithe (3:8-10).

For example, Rogerson concludes that the priests committed certain cultic sins not
so much out of disrespect for Yahweh but because they were acting “on the basis of
compassion or realism”\textsuperscript{76} toward their poor fellow Jews. His argument is that Yehud
experienced a transition from agriculture to horticulture thus leaving the land with fewer

\textsuperscript{75} Such is the case when assuming a relationship between Yehud’s sins and the economic situation as
Hill and others do.

\textsuperscript{76} JW Rogerson, “The Social Background of the Book of Malachi,” in \textit{New Heaven and New Earth -
Prophecy and the Millennium: Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston}, (eds. A Gelston, CTR Hayward, PJ
Harland, and R Hayward; VTSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 179.
animals to offer at the temple.\textsuperscript{77} Such would be the background of Mal 1:6-14 where we read that cheap, blind or damaged animals were offered. Rogerson’s point leads him to the logical conclusion that “the priests may have been acting as much on the basis of compassion or realism as lax standards, in accepting unfit animals for sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{78} However, I have two objections. First, we do not know to what extent horticulture was appropriated. Besides, the fact that commerce was open throughout the Persian Empire (Neh 10:31; 13:15-22) would have allowed Yehudaites to buy animals in order to offer the proper sacrifices. Second, Mal 1:14 presents a strong objection to Rogerson’s background. There a Yahwist worshipper whose office is to raise animals is accused of choosing to offer a blemished (male) animal even when having a good (male) one in his flock. Rogerson himself admits that his point remains conjectural.\textsuperscript{79} But not only is this argument conjectural but also weak in light of Mal 1:14.

Similarly, Hill says, “the social ills confronted by Malachi were not so much the by-product of baalism, as \textit{sheer pragmatism} on the part of the Jewish restoration community in response to the depressed local economy” (italics are mine).\textsuperscript{80} But, again, his conclusion is based on the poor economy of Yehud, a conclusion based on mere speculation.

Both Rogerson and Hill would agree that some of the sins mentioned above were caused in part by the economic circumstances.\textsuperscript{81}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 177-78, “the reference to offering animals that were blind lame or sick might then indicate a crisis in animal husbandry in which animals were scarce and flock too small.”
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 179.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, 178, “all this, of course, remains conjectural with regard to the background of Malachi 1:6-14.”
\textsuperscript{80} Hill, \textit{Malachi}, 75.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid: “Intermarriage with the resident alien population, neglect of the deprived and disadvantaged, and reneging of the tithe are but symptoms of the severe economic pressures faced by the province of Yehud”
\end{footnotes}
It is important to note, however, that not only do these scholars infer too much from the scant evidence, but also that they shift the emphasis from how the text deals with the situation to what the actual reason for the situation is. By focusing on what may have caused post-exilic Jews to sin in regard to cultic regulations, we lose the emphasis of how the text deals with those sins.

My goal is to approach the context not by asking what caused the actual situation, but how the text seems to deal with it. Whether Yehud sinned because they were in economic crisis or not, we do not know, as the text does not tell us. But the text does stress the importance of those sins. Rather than asking what caused the people to sin, we may ask, why Malachi is greatly concerned about these cultic sins.

4.3 Religious Considerations.

This section aims to address two questions concerning the religion of Yehud during the time of Malachi (490-740 BC). The first one concerns the previous religious events leading to and influencing the time of Malachi. I will review the religious events immediately after the exile up to the time of Malachi. The second considers whether it is possible that Yehud’s religion experienced any religious influence of neighbouring cultures. The following discussion will unpack these two.

4.3.1 Previous Religious Events Influencing Religion in the Early Fifth Century BC: I will concentrate on two major aspects: the construction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and the religious revivals of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.
The first wave of returnees came from Babylon to Jerusalem with Sheshbbazar in 539 BC to reconstruct the Temple. In 522 BC a second wave of Israelites returned with Zerubbabel to support the work. But it was not until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah challenged and encouraged the people to finish the Temple that the reconstruction took place. Their spiritual reform was a total success and by 515 BC the 2nd Temple achieved its completion, continuing its existence until 70 AD.

The construction of the Temple impacted the people in several ways. On the one hand, it was a new beginning for the Israelites, a time of prophetic fulfilment and a renewal of identity. On the other hand, the Temple was notoriously inferior to the glamorous Solomonic Temple. Its state reminded the people of their mediocre times, not just politically, but also religiously. But even more impacting than the mediocre exterior of the Temple was the crude fact that the glory of the Lord (Shekinah) had not filled the Temple (Ezek 8-11, espec. 8:6, 10:11 and 11:23; cf. Mal 3:1, 17). Stuart stresses this point when he says that the Temple “was as devoid of the divine presence as it was earlier when God’s glory departed from Jerusalem.” Zechariah had predicted that the glory of Yahweh would return to the temple (Zech 1:3, 16, 17; 2:14-16; 8:3); however, a few decades later during the time of Malachi, it had not come yet.

Both Haggai and Zechariah said that after the temple was finished, God would pour blessings on his people. The glory of the second temple would be greater than the former one (Hag 2:9). The “bars of their yoke” would be broken and would live in abundance and safety (Ezek 34:27-29). Jerusalem would be rebuilt with stones of turquoise, its foundations with sapphires and its battlements with rubies (Isa 54:11-12). Its walls restored with precious stones, even Yahweh himself would be a wall of fire to

82 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1254.
the city (Zech 2:5). Any opposition would surrender to them (Isa 54:15). The population of Israel would surpass the former limits (Isa 54:1-3); Jerusalem would not be able to sustain its population and livestock because of the great numbers (Zech 2:4). The messianic era would start with Zerubbabel as its signet (Hag 2:20-23). All of the above and similar prophecies did not reach their fulfilment by the time of Malachi and were misunderstood by their contemporaries, who waited for an immediate manifestation.

This “delay,” added to the lack of Yahweh’s presence in the Temple, plays an important role in the context of Malachi: It turned the hopeful attitude of the returnees into one of mistrust, indifference and religious scepticism since, in their own view, the prophecies had not been fulfilled and Yahweh seemed not present or at least indifferent. Such is the religious background during the time of Malachi, one of mistrust, indifference and religious scepticism.

4.3.2 Pagan Influences in the Book of Malachi?: The question of whether there is any pagan religious influence on the religious life of Malachi’s recipients or in the prophet himself is a crucial one. Tracing pagan influences in the culture of Israel is complex and cannot be treated briefly in a dissertation like this one. Rather, I will concentrate on a simpler and more specific task, that is, to find traces of polytheism. If Yehud adopted some kind of polytheistic behaviour or belief after the reforms of Haggai and Zechariah, the direction and development of this thesis could change substantially in at least two ways:

First, it could be possible that the prophet is addressing some form of idolatry among the priests which may have been infiltrated at some point after (or during) the
exile. Several scholars have defended that the expression “daughters of other gods” indeed point in this direction (see discussion ahead). This would have tremendous exegetical implications for my thesis since the prophet would be addressing, not so much deficiencies in the performance of the Israelite cult which are based on Israel’s traditions (e.g. 1:6-2:9), but religious syncretism. In this case, Malachi would not differ at all with all the pre-exilic prophets who condemned idolatry instead of condemning failures to fulfil the cultic regulations to worship Yahweh.

And second, it is also plausible that Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult was rooted in or prompted by a pagan influence of the time which stressed a similar emphasis in its own cult. Part of the thesis’ aim would then become a search for such intercultural influences, i.e., an attempt to separate in the text of Malachi Yahwistic traditions from pagan ones.

Therefore, I consider necessary to invest time in looking for signs of syncretism or idolatry present in early post-exilic times, especially during Malachi’s time. These signs or references to idolatry may be found in post-exilic literature. Also, the archaeological evidence of the early 5th century in the land of Palestine may provide helpful information as to the religious practices present in that time.

In an article published in 1999, H. Niehr argues that Yehud, after the exile, did compromise with polytheism. His argument is that since continuity was the dominant feature which characterized royalty, priesthood, temple and piety during the Achaemenid period, we should not expect any changes in the pantheon venerated in the Jerusalem temple either.83

Therefore polytheism must have remained in the land. He defends this even admitting there is no “primary evidence tackling this subject.”

Niehr’s argument seems plausible but its basis is weak since no evidence is given. To justify that Yehud embraced syncretism would require a more solid ground. I believe that the literary and archaeological evidence is enough to judge whether Niehr is right or wrong.

4.3.2.1 Biblical Literature. When we look at the biblical records, particularly the post-exilic prophets, we see a dramatic change in the rebukes to Yahweh’s people. Nothing is said about other gods being worshipped as would be the case with the pre-exilic prophets. Writing after the exile, the Chronicler stresses the importance of monotheism and the consequences of idolatry throughout the entire history of Israel’s monarchy. Each king is judged primarily on the basis of his loyalty or unfaithfulness to Yahweh. It is the Chronicler’s objective to highlight the devastating consequences of embracing polytheism. Obviously, the Chronicler could have stressed this point because in his own generation he saw Israel falling into idolatry. In this case, his motivation was to alert and remind his contemporaries about the consequences of polytheism. However, his strong awareness of Israel tendency to fall into idolatry shows how present idolatry, and especially its consequences, was in their minds. In my opinion, it is best to read

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84 Ibid. See also G Fohrer, History of Israelite Religion (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 355 who argues that Israel had two predominant pagan religious influences: Canaanite and Persian. The former “entangled the Israelites in sexual cults;” the latter “shattered a purely cultic religiosity.” However, Fohrer fails, as Niehr, to provide any evidence for proving that Israel fell into these paganisms. Fohrer’s conclusions are only based on his assumption that Isa 58:1-12 is contemporary with Malachi.

85 See Kaufmann, History, 11-15.

86 See MJ Selman, 1 Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 56-65. In general, the historical books try to condemn idol worship as much as possible (Kaufmann, History, 11).
Chronicles as a historical document that served as a pedagogic record for reminding Yahweh’s people of the strong consequences of idolatry.

Neither Ezra nor Nehemiah rebuke the people for idolatry. To this Stuart states, “judging from the complete lack of reference to it in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi, the practice of idol worship,…was now gone.”87 The problem of mixed marriages, present in the three books, should not be understood in these books as connected to idolatry, but rather as a marriage preference or even an economic preference.88

The book of Malachi contains a possible reference to idolatry in Mal 2:11. The expression “daughter of other gods” has been considered by some to refer to idolatry.89 Most scholars, however, take the expression to mean “women outside the community of faith, foreign pagans who worshiped a god other than the Lord.”90 Taylor and Clendenen concede that there is no direct mentioning of idolatry in this expression, but that there is an obvious connection with idolatry in that the close bond (covenant) of marriage misleads Israelites from their loyalty to Yahweh (e.g. Deut 7:3-4; Exod 34:11-16; Neh

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87 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1255.
88 Hill, *Malachi: the Divine Messenger*, 75 suggests that the reason why intermarriages were undertaken was due to a poor economy in Yehud. Stuart also highlights that the sexual element should not be discarded (Stuart, “Malachi,” 1333).
However, we can only speculate that Jews who married foreign wives embraced their partners’ religion. The opposite may be true as well.

Therefore, from a biblical perspective, everything points to the fact that Israel learnt its lesson during the exile: heading idolatry brings the nation to ruin.

4.3.2.2 Archaeological Evidence. In his article Religion in Palestine, Ephraim Stern explains that during the exile, our knowledge of what happened with the cult in Palestine, from an archaeological point of view, is almost zero. Once the Persians take over the Babylonians, the picture changes. We find dozens of figurines spread throughout Palestine. The question is, then, do these archaeological findings show any evidence of idolatry, particularly in the land of Yehud?

According to E. Stern, the archaeological discoveries of that period are significantly convincing as to the lack of idolatry in Jewish territories after the exile:

during the Persian period, we find a very strange phenomenon: in the area of the country occupied by Jews, not a single cultic figurine has been found! This in spite of the many excavations, as well as surveys that have been conducted in Judah, and the same is true of Samaria…Also, archaeologists failed to locate any sanctuaries for this period within Judah and Samaria while many have been found elsewhere…apparently, pagan cults ceased to exist among the Judaeans who purified their worship and Jewish monotheism was at last consolidated.

The fact that we find no archaeological evidence in Jewish lands that reflects syncretism, and this in the midst of many archaeological findings around the province which do show pagan practices, tips the balance of evidence strongly against defending that Yehud remained idolatrous in its Yahwism.

91 Cf. Hill, Malachi, 232.
93 Ibid, 253, “In the Negeb (or Edumaea, then inhabited by the Edomites), as well as along the coastal part and the Galilee, regions which in that time are inhabited mostly by the Phoenicians.”
94 Ibid, 255.
Therefore, since both literary and archaeological evidence take us to a monotheistic Yahwism after the exile, any syncretistic attitude in Malachi’s day (or post-exile) must be discarded forefront. Niehr’s conclusions that Israel must have embraced syncretism after the exile do not hold firmly against the evidence. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the community of Yehud was free from pagan influences; after all, the return from exile was still recent and most of the community had lived in another culture for many years. Only the exegesis will show if there were pagan influences within the cult to Yahweh. Nevertheless, the possibility that Malachi places a strong emphasis on the cult should not be connected with syncretism or idolatry, but rather with basis of Jewish traditions and the Hebrew Scriptures. To say the contrary is based on little, if any, evidence.

5. SUMMARY

To conclude this introductory section, I will highlight the conclusions of the issues discussed throughout it.

The message of the book was delivered orally by a prophet named Malachi (or later called Malachi) who preceded Ezra and Nehemiah and prepared the terrain for their reforms. I place the book between 490-470 BC, i.e., against the background of Darius I. The prophet’s profession remains unknown since past studies have proved inconclusive and speculative.

I will not concentrate on the redactional or editorial transmission of the text, but rather assume its final form as a finished product. Following Berquist’s three-group scenario approach, I argue that Malachi addresses three main groups with different belief
systems and ethos that live in a highly fragmented society. The second group, i.e., the priests and those influenced by the priests, will be my main concern since the passages I will analyse are directed toward this group.

The political background of Malachi is one of stability, submission, hopelessness and scepticism. The causes for this are the present subjugation to the Persian Empire and the seemingly disappeared Davidic line, both pointing to the lack of Yahweh’s political presence. This questioning of Yahweh and whether he had abandoned them on the political level matches perfectly well with Malachi’s depiction of his recipients when they ask Yahweh, “In what have you loved us?” (Mal 1:2).

As we have seen, the argument that the economy of Yehud was poor during the time of Malachi is not so firm. Rogerson and Hill see a direct relationship between the poor economy and the sins addressed by the prophet. Sins such as offering cheaper sacrifices (1:7, 8, 13-14), marrying foreign wives (2:11), abusing the poor and disadvantaged (Mal 3:5) or not bringing the whole tithe (3:8-10), are, according to them, caused in part by the economic circumstances. I have argued that these scholars infer too much from the scant evidence. We cannot make a clear assessment of the province’s economy in the decades of 490-470 BC until more evidence comes to light. Besides, by focusing on what may have caused post-exilic Jews to sin in regard to cultic regulations, instead of focusing on how the text deals with the situation, we lose the emphasis of how the text deals with those sins. Rather than asking what caused the people to sin, we may ask, why Malachi is greatly concerned about these cultic sins.

Two questions were highlighted as to the religion of Yehud during the time of Malachi: what events led to and influenced the religion of Malachi’s time; and whether it
is possible that Yehud’s religion experienced any pagan religious influence of neighbouring cultures. I analysed both the literary and archaeological evidence and concluded that everything points toward a monotheistic Yahwism after the exile, though pagan influences within the cult to Yahweh cannot be discarded at this point. Niehr’s conclusion that Israel must have embraced syncretism after the exile based on the argument of continuity stands in contrast with too much evidence against it. Therefore, we should read Malachi as a book written on the basis of Jewish traditions and the Hebrew Scriptures.

The next section will analyse Malachi’s traditions behind the text. Can we trace Jewish writings and traditions in the book?
III. TRADITIONAL SOURCES REGARDING THE CULT IN MALACHI

In the next section we are going to look at the ancient religious writings and traditions that may lay behind the text of Malachi. While my aim is not to reconstruct the formation of the book and its possible editing phases, a task proper of source (or high) criticism, I consider it important to analyse what writings (or knowledge of them) and traditions may have been at the disposal of the prophet. The question is obviously too broad and exhaustive for me to treat here. My intention is not to break new ground on the topic, but to briefly summarise where scholars stand and where the focus is, especially in the last decades.

1. MALACHI’S TRADITION UNDER RESEARCH

Whether in works addressing directly the matter or works focused on similar issues, much research has been conducted on the traditions behind Malachi. Studies including traditio-historical approaches can be found since Wellhausen’s influential publication of *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* in 1878. Due to Wellhausen’s emphasis on unpacking the original documents that were used to compile the Hebrew Bible, scholars have since paid much attention to the formation of the Canon. Malachi is also included in this search.

The quest for Malachi’s traditions is connected with the formation of the canon. The discussion is particularly influenced by the Documentary Hypothesis (DH) which
divides the development of the Hebrew Bible in very late stages and documents.\textsuperscript{95} On the DH O’Brien states,

A scholarly consensus has held that the biblical canon developed in three stages: the Torah was compiled under Ezra, the prophets were completed a few hundred years later and the Writings were finalized ca. 100 C.E.\textsuperscript{96}

Wellhausen and his followers maintained that the Pentateuch was formed by four original sources, J, E, D and P. The Priestly document,\textsuperscript{97} according to this line of thinking, would be the last of these sources dating from the time of Ezra to the end of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century. It is called Priestly because it emphasizes the priestly tradition or ideology, showing detailed descriptions and interest on the cultic affairs of Israel and its ritual laws.

Th. Vriezen describes well the document:

[\textit{P}] makes a direct connexion between the cultic legislation and the actual institution of the religion of Moses…the laws concerning the priests and the high priest, the sacrificial system, rites of purification, festivals and so forth, are included, and everything is represented as having been given directly by Yahweh to Moses.\textsuperscript{98}

Given P’s emphasis, the question of what relationship it has to Malachi is most pertinent since the book has a strong emphasis on the cultic life of Israel. Even though Malachi shows similarities with the content of the so-called P, scholars like Wellhausen and J.M.P Smith have maintained that the document is obviously not present in Malachi due to its late formation after the time of Malachi.\textsuperscript{99} The following paragraphs will summarise the main studies on the sources of Malachi.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{95} According to many scholars who support the DH (influenced by Wellhausen), the composition of the OT as a unified work should be dated around 100 BC.
\textsuperscript{97} Also called Priestly Code and Priestly source; from now on, P.
\textsuperscript{98} Th Vriezen, \textit{The Religion of Ancient Israel} (London: Lutterworth, 1967), 257.
\textsuperscript{99} E.g. Wellhausen, \textit{Prologomena}, (1976), 209-10; Smith, \textit{ICC}, 38 the book was written “before the adoption of the Priestly Code.”
\textsuperscript{100} In this section I rely heavily on the research of O’Brien, \textit{Priest and Levite}, 85-112, and Weyde’s “\textit{Malachi and the Biblical Traditions},” 37-45.
In *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, J. Blenkinsopp defends Malachi’s dependence on the Deuteronomic language, however, he discards the possibility that Malachi had knowledge of the Priestly document:

The dependence of Malachi on Deuteronomic language and thought is pervasive throughout the book. Important Deuteronomic themes such as the love of Yahweh for Israel (Deut 7:7-8, etc.; cf. Mal. 1:2), the father-son relationship (Deut 1:21; 32:5-6; cf. Mal. 1:6; 2:10; 3:17), the name of Yahweh (Deut 12:5, etc.; cf. Mal. 1:6, 11, 14; 2:2, 5; 3:16; 4:2 [MT 3:20]), the acknowledgment of him as the one God (Deut 6:4; cf. Mal. 2:15), appear throughout. The same goes for stipulations of law to which the book refers which draw not on the Priestly legislation but the Deuteronomic lawbook: sacrificial offerings (Mal. 1:8, 13-14, based on Deut 15:21; 17:1) and tithing in particular (Mal. 3:10; cf. Deut 18:1-8)...In general, the distinctive Deuteronomic style is much in evidence (e.g., Mal. 2:2-3; 3:7).\(^{101}\)

Similarly, Steward McCullough thinks that the fact that P takes a single sanctuary for granted suggests that it comes after Deuteronomy, and since it does not seem to have influenced Haggai, Zechariah, or Malachi, it can hardly have been known to these prophets. It is generally thought, therefore, that the priestly narrative, laws, and traditions which came to constitute the P document were brought together over a period of time, from 550 to 400 BC.\(^ {102}\)

At first glance, the book of Malachi appears to be deeply influenced by the ideology and language of the book of Deuteronomy. Terms as love (1:2), father (1:6), son (1:6), fear (1:6), one God (2:10), abomination (2:11), special possession (2:17), sending (2:16), sorcerers (3:5; cf. Deut 18:10), adulterers (3:5; cf. Deut 5:18), oppressor of workers (3:5; cf. Deut 15:18), foreigner, widow and orphan (3:5; cf. Deut 24:14, 17, 19-21; 27:19), all Israel (3:22), law of Moses (3:22) and Horeb (3:22) are shared by both Malachi and the book of Deuteronomy. Also, words used to describe animals unfit for sacrifice may also remind the reader of the book of Deuteronomy. Such is the case of blind (1:8), lame (1:13), sick (1:8, 13), seized (1:13), spoiled (1:14). Therefore, almost unanimously

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scholars have long agreed that Malachi follows the ideology and language of the book of Deuteronomy more than any other biblical tradition.\textsuperscript{103}

Disagreements arise, however, when it comes to deciphering what other sources inform the book. Was the author aware of other Jewish writings apart from Deuteronomy? Was the Pentateuch formed by his time? Was the prophet familiarised with the prophetic corpora? In summary, what Jewish writings were at his disposal?

As O’Brien has rightly pointed out, many of the terms listed above (almost all of them), although may seem of Deuteronomistic nature, are also present in the so-called Priestly document, or the Book of the Covenant, or prophetic writings such as Ezekiel or Jeremiah.\textsuperscript{104} O’Brien concluded that very few of them are purely Deuteronomistic.\textsuperscript{105} The language used in Malachi reflects covenant dependence, rather than a Deuteronomistic or Priestly one. These traditions, she argues, are difficult to pinpoint to one single source since they borrow from one another and can be found in different books.\textsuperscript{106}

Similarly, S. L. McKenzie and H. N. Wallace highlighted the covenant themes present in Malachi which reflect Deuteronomic influences, an approach followed by many others.\textsuperscript{107} Still, we may ask, is there any evidence for the so-called Priestly document?

\textsuperscript{103} See e.g. Blenkinsopp, A History of Prophecy in Israel, 242; Coggins, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 75-76; Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 32-33 and most scholars mentioned below.

\textsuperscript{104} O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 85-112.

\textsuperscript{105} For an in-depth terminological study of all these terms see O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 86-106. O’Brien, in an attempt to report the occurrences of each of these words, is balanced in showing that terms usually ascribed to D are not only dependant on D. Also she points out that some terms proposed by other scholars as purely Priestly, are shared with other biblical writings, whether D or the prophetic corpora.

\textsuperscript{106} See, e.g., O’Brien’s “Table 1” which compares all the different traditions found on Mal 3:5.

\textsuperscript{107} Hugenberger, “Marriage as a Covenant,” 48-50, identifies nine connections; see also Achtemeier, Nahum-Malachi, 172; Verhoef, Haggai and Malachi, 180-84; O’Brien, Priest and Levite; Stuart, “Malachi,” 1257-62.
2. P IN MALACHI

One influential article arguing for evidence of the Priestly language in the text of Malachi has been E. M. Meyers’s “Priestly Language in the Book of Malachi.” Meyers contends that “the mixing of D and P language in the Book of Malachi has led many commentators astray. Its existence, however, may signify nothing more than the author’s dependency on written components of the unofficial canon, i.e., what Freedman calls the Primary History (Gen-Kings).”

M. Fishbane has argued that the second oracle in Malachi, Mal 1:6-2:9 is an inverse interpretation of the Priestly Blessing found in Num 6:23-27. Fishbane has argued that this is the main source of the passage which the author turns into negative, i.e., he turns the blessing into a curse. Though the similarities are obvious between the two passages, Fishbane has been criticised at least on two levels. Num 6:23-27 is considered by some a very ancient document that was later added into P. Therefore, to prove that Malachi uses Num 6:23-27 does not prove that Malachi had knowledge of P, but of an ancient document. The fact that Fishbane fails to mention other sources in Mal 1:6-2:9 has also been detrimental to his argument.

Utzschneider has argued that Mal 1:6-2:9 exhibits a strong similarity with Lev 26, a section of P, recognizing as well the similarity with Deut 28. Reynolds suggests that “there is a real possibility that both streams of traditions [D and P] played a role in

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110 O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 89-90.
111 Among others, Utzschneider has argued against Fishbane in this line showing that Mal 1:6-2:9 has clear references to Lev 26 and Deut 28. See Utzschneider, “Die Schriftprophetie und die Frage,” 377ff.
Malachi’s formation.” O’Brien maintains that Malachi shows familiarity with both D and P. Weyde sees in Mal 1:7-14 a clear use of the tradition found in Lev 22:17-25.

In light of the increasing number of scholars defending the Priestly influence in Malachi it seems that the singularity of D is no longer defended. Furthermore, scholars have argued that not only does Malachi use P, but also many other traditions.

O’Brien, states that Malachi “exhibits familiarity not only with the Pentateuchal sources of D and P but also with a broad corpus of Israel’s prophetic traditions.” Mason links Malachi to post-exilic material and the emphasis on obedience to cultic law. He sees connections with Chronicles, Haggai and Zechariah. D. K. Berry defends that Malachi “developed within the milieu of a relatively full canon.” Utzschneider, sees references to Lev 26 and Deut 28. Nogalski focuses on the editorial work on the Book of the Twelve trying to decipher the motivation of the editors when they compiled the Minor Prophets into one work. He sees a relationship with Zechariah, Haggai and Chronicles in that they reflect a concern for the obedience of cultic laws. He also sees Obadiah and Hag 2:18f. in Mal 3:10f, and Joel in Mal 3:16ff. M. Noth and D. W. Thomas, have focused on the wisdom literature connections with Malachi. Similarly, J. Lindblom sees clear influences on the book of Malachi from wisdom biblical writings.

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113 O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 111, see further 85-112.
114 Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 118-22.
115 For an extensive summary of the research conducted in the last century also including all the German scholars, see Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 37ff.
116 O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 111, see further 85-112.
117 Mason, Preaching the Tradition, 235ff. as quoted in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 39.
118 Berry, “Malachi’s Dual Design,” 270ff., as quoted in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 44.
119 Utzschneider, Kinder oder Schreiber, 71, as quoted in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 40.
121 Noth and Thomas, Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East, 210ff.
an opinion shared by R. Mason.\textsuperscript{123} Weyde as well argues that the book of Proverbs plays a role in Malachi.\textsuperscript{124} As we have seen, the consensus seems to be that Malachi relies predominantly on Deuteronomy, though this has been overemphasised in previous research. The author of Malachi is most likely familiarized with the entire Pentateuch, the prophetic corpora including post-exilic prophets (i.e., Haggai and Zechariah), wisdom literature and probably the book of Chronicles.

A different issue, however, is not so much the finding or agreeing with priestly terms or priestly language, but whether the Priestly document was finished and available to the prophet. Wellhausen and JMP Smith have argued that Malachi could not have had knowledge of the full Priestly document based on the dating of the document. But can we assume such theory today?

3. THE SO-CALLED PRIESTLY CODE

For decades, thanks to the influence of Julius Wellhausen and others, there has been an almost unanimous agreement that there was a P document which was dated between 450-400 BC.\textsuperscript{125} Prophecy preceded law; thus, it is the latter that was composed on the basis of what the former taught throughout the centuries. According to Wellhausen, “it is a vain imagination to suppose that the prophets expanded and applied

\textsuperscript{123} Mason, \textit{The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi}, 143; idem, \textit{Preaching the Tradition}, 242.

\textsuperscript{124} Weyde, \textit{Prophecy and Teaching}, 114-118.

\textsuperscript{125} J Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena of History of Ancient Israel}. 392-410; 422-25. O’Brien, \textit{Priest and Levite}, 19, describes Wellhausen’s understanding of the document: “according to Wellhausen, P was written by Israel’s priests in the post-exilic period (ca. 400 B.C.E.) as an attempt to establish the restoration community as a religious body-as opposed to a nation-and to fortify their own control over it.”
the law.” This would imply that, taking Malachi before 460 BC (as most scholars do),
the prophet and those around him, not to mention the entire post-exilic community, were
not aware of the cultic regulations contained in the so-called Priestly document.

The consequence of Wellhausen’s late dating of P is that Malachi would have been explaining those very same regulations to an audience that knew nothing about them. Malachi, and probably a very limited group, would have been the only ones to have a privileged access to the information contained in a pre-Priestly document. Therefore, Malachi’s oracles should be considered not so much a prophecy, in the classical way, but more of a scribal activity: mere teaching. It is not strange, therefore, that many a scholar defends that Malachi originated as a written work rather than an oral proclamation (see discussion above).

The dating of P, and even the existence of such a document, however, has been strongly questioned in recent decades.

O’Brien explains the number of scholars, especially Israeli scholars, who advocate for a much earlier date for P has increased significantly. She mentions, for example, Milgrom, Haran and Kaufmann:

Kaufmann and Haran, as well as Milgrom, offer at least three grounds for their pre-exilic dating of P. First, they maintain that the Priestly Code, especially in its original form, does not reflect knowledge of the Temple in Jerusalem…Second, they agree that P does not fit the post-exilic period…Third, these scholars maintain that literature written before the post-exilic period quoted directly from the Priestly Code. Not only do all of these scholars attempt to demonstrate Ezekiel’s knowledge of P, but also Milgrom, having analyzed D’s formula for quoting sources in which it relies, concludes that Deuteronomy quotes not only from E, but also from P.

\[126\] Ibid, 399.
\[127\] O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 14.
O’Brien concludes that “due to the scholarship of the past decades, a post-exilic date for P no longer can be merely assumed.” 129 She and the scholars mentioned above are not alone in their assessment. Freedman contends that P “is thought to have originated in priestly circles no later than the 8th century B.C.E.;” 130 Zimmerli says that the “covenant idea was of considerable antiquity in biblical Israel” and therefore covenant must have preceded prophecy. 131 Similarly, Kaufmann has rightly pointed out that the law never refers to the prophets, but the other way round, implying that the former preceded the latter. Meyers considers the assumption that P was as late as 450-400 BC as something to be discarded; 132 and Fishbane opposes the late dating of P by providing few examples of prophetic writings that make “explicit reference to earlier laws, but without Aggadic transformations.” 133

In light of such opposition to an early dating for P, we no longer can argue for any direct relationship between the oracles of Malachi and the publication of the so-called P. The evidence is in favour of a much earlier date. The consequence, then, is that Malachi and his readers were aware of the teachings of such writings.

Not only has the date of P been questioned in the last decades, but even its very existence, along with other Pentateuchal sources. 134 Hill warns the reader about the assumption that there are “distinct Pentateuchal sources as unravelled by the

129 Ibid, 23.
133 Fishbane, Aggadic Exegesis, 293.
134 See e.g., RN Whybray, Introduction to the Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 12-13, where he says that “there is at the present moment no consensus whatever about when, why, how, and through whom the Pentateuch reached its present form, and opinions about the dates of composition of its various parts differ by more than five hundred years.”
documentary hypothesis.”  

He contends that this theory is much questioned in both literary and linguistic analysis of the Pentateuch and the OT. Some of this evidence, according to Hill, has been offered by the studies of Polzin (1976), Alter (1981), Kikawada and Quinn, Wenham (1977, 1985 and 1986), and Whybray. Therefore, not only is the dating of the so-called priestly document questioned, but also the fact it ever existed.

4. MALACHI AS A SCRIBE

The fact that Malachi seems to have a strong dependence on traditions and religious writings, among other factors, has led more than one scholar to see a change in the history of prophecy in post-exilic times. Prophecy, it is argued, changed after the exile and, by the time of Malachi, it had become more interpretive of traditions than creative, as it may have been with the pre-exilic prophets. Thus, the classical view on prophecy changed to a more “scribal” type. The prophet became a teacher falling into mere interpretation of past traditions.

The theory further contends that prophecy became a literary activity leaving the classical oratory in the past. It is not a surprise, then, that some scholars redefine post-exilic prophecy along these lines. H. Utzschneider considers the author of Malachi a “scribe” who interpreted old written traditions. Redditt says that the disputes in

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135 Hill, Malachi, 79.
136 Whybray, Introduction to the Pentateuch. See Hill, Malachi, 79 for all references.
137 For an extensive discussion see Weyde’s overview of this line of thinking (4-6). Others, like Heflin or Stuart, on the other hand, have defended that Malachi seems to contribute significantly to the prophetic history of Israel.
Malachi represent “only a literary device;” ¹³⁹ Reynolds states that the “prophet responsible for the book of Malachi may indeed have been an author” (italics are Reynolds’);¹⁴⁰ Krieg believes that when Malachi was completed, prophecy had disappeared;¹⁴¹ Lescow argues that prophecy had changed into a kind of teaching and interprets the book as the product of exclusively literary activity.¹⁴²

True, classical prophecy died right before the exile and a significantly different kind of prophecy emerged during and after the exile, what has been called as late Israelite prophecy¹⁴³ or post-exilic prophecy. Petersen notes:

Though very few scholars agree about what signifies the end of classical prophecy, it is clear that after some point no one uttered oracles or wrote tracts in the way Isaiah or Jeremiah had; or at least, the canonical process did not admit or accept such “prophetic” efforts.¹⁴⁴

However, while the fact that prophecy changed after the exile is undisputable here, the question is what characterised prophecy. Can we define post-exilic prophecy in the terms these scholars do, i.e., a scribal activity?

If this theory proves to be true, there are certain implications. Weyde asks whether Malachi’s quotations reflect more than mere use of traditions. He suggests the prophetic markers תַּבָּאָה גְּנַחַת יְהוָה may indicate that the prophet uses old traditions to give authority to his message as if the message were divinely inspired. In addition to this, the fact that Malachi does not mention or gives no signs of divine inspiration prompts Weyde to ask whether there is any divine communication,

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¹⁴² Lescow, *Das Buch Maleachi*, 31ff.
¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 5.
There are no signs of divine communication like those we find in several other prophetic books; phrases such as “the word of Yahweh came to”…or “Yahweh spoke/said to”…do not occur there. For sure, similar phrases are absent in some other prophetic books as well, but these at least contain references to some kind of divine revelation which preceded the performance of the prophet. It will be asked then whether the absence of such features in Malachi indicates that the prophet conveys a message from YHWH without having received a divine word, without having experienced a vocation in which he was given the authority to speak on behalf of YHWH. If this is the case, the formulas marking divine speech, including the two formulas מַר יְהוָה and נְאֻם יְהוָה in 1:2.4…mark the use of a divine message attested elsewhere in the traditions. If we are correct in this, the implication of this suggestion is that the traditions are quite essential to the message in Malachi: they form the foundation of the message; the traditions are actualised and applied in some way or other… [the traditions] give him [Malachi] authority; actualizing the traditions he is equated with those intermediaries of YHWH’s words to whom YHWH had spoken previously; and the formulas marking divine speech give him prophetic authority.\textsuperscript{145}

Weyde has pointed out that there is no divine communication but a pure dependence on traditions that are past divine revelations upon which the author develops an application; what he calls, “actualizing the traditions.”\textsuperscript{146}

The view that Malachi was written rather than delivered orally has encountered opposition since it cannot be proven (see discussion on Introduction).\textsuperscript{147} However, whether Malachi was originally written or delivered orally, it should not make much difference to our study. The recipients, author, context, and content of the message remain the same.

A quite different claim is that of Weyde who sees Malachi as merely interpreting old traditions without divine inspiration. This will be discussed in chapter 5 in the comparison between pre- and post-exilic prophecy. For now I will only question this theory.

The widely held view that Malachi mainly reapplies old traditions also needs to be questioned. One might ask, Did the prophet to whom Malachi is ascribed merely

\textsuperscript{145} Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 5.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} See Mason, Preaching the Tradition, 256; cf. 235ff.; Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 334. These scholars do not exclude the possibility of oral/rhetoric prophecy. Also Heflin, “The Prophet Malachi,” 5; and Stuart, “Malachi,” 1248-49, who seems to imply an oral preaching.
reapply old traditions or did he introduce novel nuances to old traditions? If so, what were these nuances?

Though Malachi strongly depended on covenantal themes to one degree or another, his message nevertheless remains unique within the canon and indeed of vital relevance to his recipients.
IV. EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF MALACHI

1. EXEGETICAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Style

Malachi is written as a group of disputes between God and Israel. The intention of the author is to present Yahweh as the main speaker who addresses directly his audience. The quotation formulas and the direct speech used in Malachi enforce this device. The expression “says Yahweh Sabaoth” and similar introductions to Yahweh’s words appear a total of 26 times giving the book unity and consistency as well as empowering the prophet’s words as divine direct speech. With no doubt, the prophet’s interest lays not in propagating his own message, but propagating Yahweh’s. Furthermore, the lack of any information about the prophet strengthens even more the argument that the prophet is a mere utensil through whom the message is passed.

Malachi contains a remarkable amount of quotations where the prophet comes in and out, “the prophet remains generally in the background, emerging only occasionally outside the quotation formulas.”¹⁴⁸ However, it gets complicated at some points because the prophet intermixes his own speech with Yahweh’s. For example, in Mal 1:9 we have a clear example of a mixture between the prophet’s and Yahweh’s words. Clearly, the prophet is using direct speech when he addresses the priests: “And now, do appease God that he may be gracious to us! This has happened because of you.” As expected, he continues to address the priests using direct speech, “Will he [God] lift up your face?” However, the question ends with the marker “says Yahweh of Hosts” clearly marking divine speech. In this example, and some others, it is difficult to recognise the speaker. It

is as if the words of the prophet and Yahweh’s merge into one.\textsuperscript{149} Besides, the fact that there are three recipients in the book, should make us cautious to generalise as to whom the prophet is speaking. These factors must be taken into account if we are to do justice to the original intention of the book.

The disputes in Malachi are given as if they were a real, audible conversation between God and the audience. This is most likely a rhetorical device, i.e., the disputes are better understood not as if a real debate were happening, but as if the prophet were speaking out loud the minds of the readers. To borrow Baldwin’s definition, “Malachi reads the attitude of his people and intuitively puts their thoughts into words, and so gains their attention before driving home his word from the Lord.”\textsuperscript{150} This device has been called pseudodialogue\textsuperscript{151} and is seen by many as unique in its form. However, others defend that this disputation style is common throughout the prophets.\textsuperscript{152} Oracular disputations are not foreign to the OT. Direct speech, quoting the opponents, disputations and the like are part of Israel’s prophetic heritage, but nowhere in the OT do we find exactly the kind of disputation pseudodialogue offered by Malachi. The book presents the dispute as a real discussion between Yahweh and the people. The prophet is the intermediary who speaks for both Yahweh and the people. The debate is not portrayed as

\textsuperscript{149} See other similar examples in Malachi, e.g., 1:4, 14
\textsuperscript{150} J Baldwin, \textit{Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi}, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1972), 214.
\textsuperscript{151} Taylor and Clendenen, \textit{Haggai, Malachi}, 227.
\textsuperscript{152} See Verhoef, \textit{Haggai, Malachi}, 165-66. However, not all of the examples given by Verhoef present a direct dialogue: Mic 2:6, 11; Isa 28:23-29 there is not even a quotation; Isa 40:27-31 the prophet with the people, there is no direct speech; Isa 49:14-21 is not a disputation; Jer 13:11, 12 and 15:1, 2 quotes the future words of the people, but there is no real present dispute; Ezek 12:21-28 Yahweh tells the prophet to speak in his behalf; Ezek 18:2, the people do not speak to God; Ezek 18:19, 25 not direct; Zech 1-6 is a narration of a dialogue; Amos 3:2, 12; 5:18-20, 24-25 are not disputes. The only similar disputation between Yahweh and the people, through the prophet is found in Jer 2:23-25, 29, 20, 24-27. Here the people seems to be arguing with God, however, most translations understand the dispute not as direct and present, but as Yahweh quoting past words from the people. In this sense, Malachi’s disputation is unique in the OT.
illusory but as if a real discussion between Yahweh and the people were taking place in the present, and this is unique to Malachi.

Presumably, the prophet is well acquainted with the thoughts and attitudes in the atmosphere of Yehud. This is clear from the pseudo-dialogue which, differently to many other prophetic writings where Yahweh’s words are left uncontested, gets the outside reader into the recipients’ mentality providing a clear picture of how the people responded to Malachi’s words. Ironically, their attitude before God addressed them seems to match their attitude when speaking to him. In this sense, Malachi is a masterpiece since it fills many contextual gaps that other writings would leave to the reader’s guesswork. Malachi tells us what the audience said in response to the accusations, as well as their initial attitude that prompted him to speak. This is what it means that Malachi’s style is unique to the OT.

1.2 Themes of the Book

It is important to look into the themes present in the book to get a general picture since this study will only focus on smaller sections of the book. But perhaps it is even more important to know what the general theme of the book is. The reason to state the theme at this point, before the exegesis, is that it might prove helpful in order to understand Malachi’s emphasis on the offerings aspect of the cult. In order to do so, especially before the exegesis, I am relying on the larger stream of scholarly/exegetical work on the book of Malachi.

I understand that the theme that binds the entire book together is Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant. The strong emphasis on covenants found in Malachi, as
pointed out by Wallace and McKenzie and others, whether looking back to Deuteronomy or Leviticus and Numbers, is unavoidable in the book.

I agree with Wallace and McKenzie that, in Malachi, “the patriarchal covenant is seen as the overriding covenant applying to the postexilic community.” The start of the book determines the tone of the rest of the book. In Mal 1:2-5, Yahweh’s main concern is to demonstrate that he remains faithful to his elected people and faithful to the promises involved in the long-held patriarchal covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Mal 3:6 strengthens this emphasis.

In the case of the covenant with the patriarchs as well as the covenant with Levi, the purpose of casting the origins of the covenant back to the patriarchal ancestors seems to be bound up with an emphasis on election. Malachi stresses in 1:2-5 and 3:6 that Yahweh chose Jacob over Esau and that Jacob’s descendants remain Yahweh’s elect. However, as I explain below, the Sinaitic covenant is the predominant covenant referred to in the book of Malachi. We should see this not as a contradiction between the two covenants for the Sinatic covenant is an extension of the Abrahamic covenant.

There are at least three direct mentions of covenant in Malachi: the covenant of Levi (2:4, 8), the covenant of the fathers (2:10) and the covenant of marriage (2:14). However, other covenants or covenantal stipulations may be inferred from the book.

1.2.1. **Covenant of Levi** (Mal 2:1-9). The priests have broken the covenant of Levi. They are reminded where their role comes from and what it should look like (2:4-7). The priests are reprimanded for not keeping up to the standard and following Levi’s example,

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154 Ibid, 559.
their forefather and priest-model, for they “have turned from the way and caused many to stumble against the law. [They] have ruined the covenant of Levi” (Mal 2:9). This covenant is distinguished as one of “peace and life” in 2:5.

When trying to decipher what covenant Malachi refers to, several passages from the OT should be considered. McKenzie and Wallace look for a source tradition on the covenant of Levi. They reject Num 25:11-13, the covenant with Phinehas; Deut 33:8-10, a covenant with all Israel where the duties of the Levites of the law of Moses are described; Num 18:19 and Lev 2:13, the covenant of salt; Jer 33:20-26 and Neh 13:29 which according to them concern different matters, apart from being later than Malachi. They consider more plausible a connection with Deut 28:1-2, 15 and Lev 26:3, 14-32 since the “conditional formula is followed by curses,” as in Mal 2:2-3.

1.2.2. Covenant of the Fathers (Mal 2:10-16,). The people, among which must be included the priests, are accused of breaking the covenant of their fathers. This refers not to the patriarchal covenant per se (i.e., Abrahamic covenant), as Wallace and McKenzie and others have suggested, but to the Sinai covenant. The social characteristics of breaking this covenant which are found before and after, i.e., dealing treacherously with the brother (2:10) and marrying pagan women (2:11), exhibit the

156 Note Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 327, who rightly say “the Mosaic covenant should be viewed as an extension and development of the patriarchal covenant.” However, in Mal 2:10 it is the Mosaic or Sinai covenant that is in mind.
157 McKenzie and Wallace, “Covenant Themes,” 552; Also, see Mason, The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, 149 who argues for the covenant of Levi instead.
158 Following this view are Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 197; W Rudolph, Haggai-Sacharja-Maleachi, Kommentar zum Alten Testament, Band 13, 4 (Gutersloh: Mohn, 1976), 272; Smith, ICC, 48; Stuart, “Malachi,” 1329-30; Hill, Malachi, 227-28; Redditt, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, 70; DR Jones, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM, 1962), 194; Verhoef, Haggai and Malachi, 192.
Mosaic social laws that are found not in the patriarchal covenant, but in the Mosaic one. Besides, the only exact reference to this covenant is found in Deut 4:31 which refers to the Sinai covenant. Jer 34:13 has “covenant with your fathers” instead of “covenant of your fathers.” Given the similarity, it is important to note that Jeremiah refers clearly with this to the Sinai covenant.

In v. 14, the word covenant appears again: “Yahweh was a witness between you and the wife of your youth because you yourselves have dealt treacherously with her even though she is your partner and the wife of your covenant;” also, in v. 15, “do not deal treacherously with the wife of your youth.” We should understand the first covenant, “the covenant of the fathers” here to refer to the general breaking of the Sinai covenant. The reference to the wife of your covenant is a particular law inside such covenant. Therefore, the first one shows the gravity of the second one. The former is the result, the latter the cause.

Another explicit mention to covenant is found in Mal 3:1: “the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.” That this is a prophetic figure is clear from other usages in the OT (e.g., Hag 1:13; 2 Chr 36:15-16; Isa 40:3). Later in vv. 3-4 the messenger is pictured as a “refiner” of the priesthood; again, a prophetic figure not foreign to the OT (e.g., Isa 1:25; 48:10-11; Jer 6:27-30; 9:7; Dan 11:35; 12:10; Zech 13:9). The common element to some of these passages is that the fulfilment of the covenant is implicit in the coming of the messenger. The covenant consummation that Israel waits for is thus much connected with this prophetic figure.

Many have noted that Malachi includes many terms ascribed to covenant language. As we have described before in the Traditions chapter, referring to O’Brien’s
clarification of terms ascribed by scholars to Deuteronomy and the Priestly language, many of the terms in Malachi are not exclusive to Deuteronomy or Leviticus/Numbers, but are also shared by other prophetic writings. Nevertheless, the point made by O’Brien, and others, is that these terms are proper of covenant language, and thus prove that the theme is much in the mind of the prophet.

As an example, in Mal 3:7 we read that Yahweh reprimands Israel for their continuous disobedience to his divine statutes that traces back to the start of their journey in Exodus. The word “statute” belongs to the covenant language found in Deuteronomy (4:1, 5, 6, 8, 14, 45; 5:1, 31; 6:1, 20, 24; 7:11; 11:32; 12:1; 16:12; 17:19; 26:16). It is a key word in Psalm 119 referring to Yahweh’s statutes given at Sinai (Ps 119: 5, 8, 12, 23, 26, 33, 48, 54, 64, 68, 71, 80, 83, 112, 117, 118, 124, 135, 145, 155, 171). Clearly, the Israelites are being reminded of their long record of disobedience to the Sinai covenant to emphasise their present disobedience to the covenantal laws. They remain the same even “from the days of [their] fathers” (3:7).

But perhaps one of the clearest mention of the covenant at Sinai is the one in Mal 4:4, “Remember the law of my servant Moses that I gave him at Horeb for all Israel, decrees and laws.” Though many believe this verse is an addition to the original oracles of Malachi, nevertheless, it shows theological continuity with the rest of the book and it remains part of the book (and ultimately what God wanted to be included). The explicit mentioning of Moses at Horeb, i.e., Sinai, fits perfectly well with the covenant background exhibited in the book.

The theme of Israel’s stubborn disobedience since the Exodus is well-known to the OT: Jer 2:5, 3:25, 9:13, 14:20, 23:27, 34:14, 44:9; Lam 5:7; Isa 48:8; Ezek 2:3; Hos

10:9, 11:1-2 and 13:4-6 all attest to this fact. Most of these texts assume the establishment of Yahweh’s covenantal relationship with Israel at Sinai and highlight Israel’s lack of fidelity to such a relationship through the breaking of Yahweh’s covenantal laws. As in these texts, Mal 3:7 needs to be read against such a background.

Stuart offers a detailed outline of the covenantal blessings and curses based on the Pentateuch and that are implicit in the Prophets. There are ten restoration blessings and 27 types of curses all based on the Mosaic law (Leviticus and Deuteronomy). The sole mention of either a blessing or a curse, would remind the hearer of the entire covenantal background. So, as Stuart explains,

It was necessary only to allude to one of the Pentateuch’s 27 curses to indicate that doom awaited those who broke the covenant. It was equally necessary only to allude to one of the Pentateuch’s ten types of restoration blessings to indicate that abundance awaited those who remained faithful to the covenant.  

Stuart’s list of curses and blessings based on Leviticus and Deuteronomy enables us to graphically see the abundance of direct or indirect references to faithfulness (or lack of it) to the covenant in the book of Malachi. Stuart finds 20 references to covenantal curses and 11 references to restoration blessings in Malachi. In his opinion, given the length of the book, the proportion of both is fairly high. He concludes that this is proof of how much the book is “concerned with fidelity to the covenant and the consequences (thus curses and blessings) of keeping or breaking the law of Moses.”

The question of continuity, thus, is quite important for the post-exilic community. This feeling of abandonment and discontinuity found in Yehud during the time of Malachi is seen more clearly when we take the context into account. As we saw in the

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161 Ibid, 1261-62
162 Ibid, 1260-61.
introduction the province of Yehud was politically and religiously immersed in scepticism and doubt. The fact that the Davidic line was temporarily extinguished was discomforting (especially devastating after a successful return and rebuilding of the Second Temple). The fact that Yahweh’s presence had not yet returned to the Temple was even more distressing and depressing. Had Yahweh abandoned his people? Were the Israelites still the chosen sons of Jacob? Where did the patriarchal covenants go? It is when we consider these questions in context that we understand how powerfully captivating Malachi’s message must have been to the original recipients.

1.3 Structure and Genre

The question of what genre is the book of Malachi is a controversial one.\(^{163}\) The problem, as Taylor and Clendenen have noted, is that Malachi has a style that is unique among the Old Testament prophetic books. In general it may be described as sermonic or oracular, but its frequent use of quotations, rhetorical questions, and polemical arguments give it a distinctive character.\(^{164}\) They conclude that Malachi is a hortatory discourse. I follow Hill’s approach who bases his conclusion that Malachi is prose on the study of Andersen and Freedman.\(^{165}\) Their study consisted on a prose-particle counting method. Hill notes that the level of prose particles in Malachi (16%) compared to the 5% that is typical in poetry “corroborate the view that Malachi is indeed a prose composition.”\(^{166}\) He concludes that “Malachi must be formally understood as oracular prose (i.e. the literary texture of Malachi is a combination of prosaic and rhetorical features approaching poetic discourse but

\(^{163}\) For an extensive discussion on these attempts see Weyde’s introduction.

\(^{164}\) Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 218.


\(^{166}\) Hill, Malachi, 24.
distinctive of prophetic style.” Hill further discusses the possibility that Malachi has been understood by some as poetic rather prosaic since many literary devices used in Malachi point in this direction. In Malachi we can find, parallelism (1:6), chiasm (1:2; 3:11), simile and metaphor (4:1), synecdoche and metonymy (2:11), rhetorical questions (1:2, 13), antithesis (1:11), exclamatory utterance (1:12; 3:9), graphic diction (2:3), verbal shifts (3:9), and closure (1:6). The problem, according to Hill, is that all these literary devices cannot be exclusively attributed to poetry since most, if not all of them are also present in prose. Nevertheless, even though we may agree with Hill that the book is primordially prose, its hortatory character, as highlighted by Taylor and Clendenen is unavoidable.

As to the structure of the book of Malachi, the majority of scholars generally agree as to how to divide the book. The book is divided into 6 oracles, a superscription and an appendix (or two):

- Superscription (1:1);
- God’s faithful love (1:2-5);
- Priest’s unfaithfulness (1:6-2:9);
- God’s view on intermarriage and divorce (2:10-16);
- God’s justice (2:17-5);
- The tithe (3:6-12);
- Day of judgement (3:13-4:3 [OT 3:13-21]);
- Appendix 1 (4:4 [OT 3:22]);
- Appendix 2 (4:5-6 [OT 3:23-24]).

Whether these oracles were delivered on different occasions or followed the chronology given in the book we do not and cannot know in spite of what some have suggested. Some have noticed that these sections are organized as chiastic units with

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167 Ibid.
168 All this have been noted by Wendland but Hill notes a few more (Hill, Malachi, 38-39).
169 See e.g., G Van Groningen, Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 927, who opines that the oracles were given at different occasions.
common themes. Stuart, e.g., borrowing from Hugenberger,\textsuperscript{170} organises the book in a chiastic scheme:\textsuperscript{171}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Matching Chiastic Units”</th>
<th>Common Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superscription (1:1)</td>
<td>Summary Challenge (3:22-24 [4:4-6]). Yahweh has a message for Israel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Disputation (1:2-5).</td>
<td>Sixth Disputation (3:13-21 [3:13-4:3]). God distinguishes between the good and the wicked; the proof of his covenant love is his sparing the righteous and condemning the wicked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Disputation (1:6-2:9).</td>
<td>Fifth Disputation (3:6-12). The double assertion-questioning pattern at the beginning of each disputation; improper, begrudging offerings condemned; promise of reversal of blessing; Yahweh’s name to be great among the nations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Disputation (2:10-16).</td>
<td>Fourth Disputation (2:17-3:5). Yahweh is a witness relative to marriage fidelity; Judah is unfaithful.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This kind of approach shows that the book has not been composed randomly, but it has undergone a well-thought composition. The structure shown above shows also a thematic unity and conformity. However, as Stuart reminds us, the “pattern serves the content, not vice versa.”\textsuperscript{172}

As to the internal pattern of each dispute or oracle, all of them present a very similar pattern or outline. Each disputation starts with a statement from Yahweh immediately followed by a sceptical question or refutation from the recipients. Then a counter refutation or proof of the statement comes from Yahweh which is followed by a final statement that closes the disputation and announces the consequence of the first statement. This pattern of statement, refutation, counter-refutation and consequence is

\textsuperscript{170} Hugenberger, \textit{ Marriage as a Covenant}, 25.  
\textsuperscript{171} Stuart, “Malachi,” 1251.  
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
present in different degrees in all six oracles. The following is an outline that exemplifies this pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oracles</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Refutation</th>
<th>Counter-refutation</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; 1:2-5</td>
<td>I have loved you.</td>
<td>How?</td>
<td>I chose Jacob, hated Esau.</td>
<td>I will destroy Edom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; 1:6-2:9</td>
<td>You despise my name.</td>
<td>How?</td>
<td>By polluting my altar.</td>
<td>I will not accept your offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How?</td>
<td>By thinking the table is despised.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; 2:10-16</td>
<td>You weep because Yahweh does not accept you.</td>
<td>Why does he not?</td>
<td>Because you cheat your wives.</td>
<td>Repent and do not cheat your wives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2:17-3:5</td>
<td>You weary Yahweh.</td>
<td>How?</td>
<td>You doubt that God’s justice?</td>
<td>Yahweh will send his messenger, refine the priesthood and judge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 3:6-12</td>
<td>You have turned from me.</td>
<td>How?</td>
<td>You are robbing me</td>
<td>If you bring the tithe and obey I will bless you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How?</td>
<td>You do not bring the whole tithe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 3:13-4:3</td>
<td>Your words are strong against me.</td>
<td>How?</td>
<td>You say “it is vain to serve God.”</td>
<td>Blessing for those who hear and obey my words. But curse to those who don’t.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each oracle follows generally this pattern though each retains some distinctive elements. So, for example, oracles two and five have two refutations and counter-refutations while the others only have one.

Noteworthy to the form of the oracles is that Yahweh’s words close the disputations dismissing as invalid and ending the opponents’ refutations. Yahweh overrules their authority first by destroying their logic, i.e., showing the weakness and incongruence of their scepticism, and second, by offering the consequence of their actions. As in the manner of a court, the judge dictates sentence finishing any further discussion or research. By ending with Yahweh’s words, thus, the writer of Malachi uplifts Yahweh’s superiority over any opponent or argument giving him an underlying authority throughout the entire book.
There is little discussion about the consistency, unity and clarity of form of the book of Malachi. Each oracle has an a high degree of repeated terminology, follows a four-part outline, is chiastically designed and connected between one another with paired catchwords. The oracles also show this consistency by the use the same messenger formula, theological themes based on the Pentateuch. Stuart affirms all this and concludes that “in these ways, consistency of the book obviates any speculation about lack of integrity or multiple authorship.\textsuperscript{173}

Let us move now to the first passage of the exegesis.

2. EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

2.1 First Oracle—Mal 1:1-5.

The book starts by clarifying who is speaking: Yahweh. The first words, “I have loved you” reassures the recipients of the message that, above all, and on the first place, love defines the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people.

This reassurance goes back to the beginning of Israel history, to Jacob, implying continuity. Yahweh is not saying: “I loved you then… but I may not love you now.” It is a statement that aims to show that this love comes from long time ago persisting throughout the centuries (“His love endures forever”).

As we have seen in the political considerations, Israel’s hope faded away and sunk into despair and scepticism toward Yahweh as he seemed to have disappeared from the political and spiritual sphere. The sceptical answer, “How have you loved us?” to Yahweh’s proclamation of love toward Israel is thus concurrent and in line with the

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid, 1252.
spiritual and political situation in Yehud. Even though, Yahweh’s words could not have been more appropriate for Yehud’s situation. Yahweh’s words could be paraphrased as, *I know you doubt me, but I still love you as my chosen son.*

On a political level, as we have seen, Israel also was struggling with the question of whether Yahweh had any role in Israel’s present situation since the Persian Empire had subjugated them. The return from exile was certainly attributed to Yahweh’s political manoeuvrings as it was prophesised by the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel. However, why would Yahweh bring Israel back and discontinue the Davidic line? How could Yahweh abandon Israel on the political sphere? These sceptical questions would raise further questions, Did Yahweh really bring them back from exile? After all, Cyrus’ decree for Israel to come back was not so unique. Many exiled nations were given the chance to return to their homelands as the Cyrus Cylinder demonstrates. Israel was only one among many nations that benefited from this new Persian policy. Also, was Cyrus really moved by Yahweh to allow Israel to return as the account of Ezra says? After all, Persia benefited from such policy.

Yahweh’s argumentation that Edom was destroyed by his hand and will also be destroyed permanently by his hand was probably listened to with sceptical ears. After all, if Yahweh could destroy Edom, why not also Persia?

Yahweh’s forefront clarification on his faithfulness to Israel sets the basis for the rest of the disputations. I agree with Hill in understanding the role of this first disputation speech (1:1-5) as “a prefatory speech establishing the context (covenant relationship with Yahweh), tone (judgment), and style (hortatory discourse) of the oracles.”

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Hill, *Malachi*, 34.
2.2 Second Oracle (First Dispute)—Mal 1:6-14.

2.2.1 Translation

1:6 “A son honours his father and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me?”\(^{175}\) And, if I am a master, where is the fear due to me? says Yahweh of Hosts to you, “O priests who despise my name. But you say, ‘In what have we despised your name?’” 1:7 By presenting defiled food\(^{176}\) on my altar. But you say, ‘In what have we defiled you?’ When you say, ‘the table of Yahweh is despicable’ 1:8 And when you present the blind for sacrifice, there is no evil! And when you present the limping and the sick, there is no evil! Bring it now to your governor! Will he be pleased with you? Or, will he lift up your face? says Yahweh of Hosts. 1:9 And now, do appease\(^{177}\) God that he may be gracious to us! This has happened because of you. Will he lift up your face? says Yahweh of Hosts. 1:10 Oh that one among you would shut the temple doors so that you would not set light to my altar in vain. I have no pleasure in you, says Yahweh of Hosts, and I will accept no offering from you. 1:11 For from the rising of the sun to its setting great is my name among the nations. In every place incense is being presented to my name, a pure offering.\(^{178}\) For great is my name among the nations, says Yahweh of Hosts. 1:12 But you are profaning it when you say, ‘the table of the Lord is being defiled. Its produce is food being despised.’ 1:13 And you say ‘Behold, what a burden! And you sniff at it’ says Yahweh of Hosts. You bring in the loot, the limping and the sick as an offering.

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\(^{175}\) The noun môrā’î (“my fear”) is to be understood as an Objective Genitive

\(^{176}\) Some scholars choose “bread” instead of “food.”

\(^{177}\) According to Gesenius §110:d, the particle na when follows an imperative serves either: 1) to soften down a command; 2) to take a request in a more courteous way; 3) to strengthen a rebuke or threat; 4) to connote ridicule. In light of v. 8 and the present context, which is full of irony (“bring it to your governor!”) the last option seems preferable. Cf. Isa 47:12.

\(^{178}\) BHS editors have proposed מִנְחָת (a different form of the word) instead of מִנְחָה. No given text supports this proposition. Since the latter appears 5 times in Malachi and it is well attested in the OT (see HALOT 2:601; e.g. 1 Sam 10:27, 2 Kgs 8:8, 9; Ps 96:8; 1 Chr 32:23) there is no need for such emendation.
Shall I accept it with pleasure from you? says Yahweh. 1:14 Cursed be the cheater who, having a male in his flock, vows and sacrifices a damaged animal to the Lord. For I am a great king, says Yahweh of Hosts, and my name is being feared among the nations.”

2.2.2 Introduction

The previous oracle (Mal 1:1-5) is addressed to the entire nation of Israel as the language of Jacob versus Esau represents the nations of Israel and Edom respectively. The second oracle, 1:6-2:9, is clearly addressed specifically to the priests, who are under Yahweh’s love as well.

Mal 1:6-2:9 is divided into two speech acts Mal 1:6-14 and 2:1-9. Both of them are addressed to the priests (1:6 “O priests…”; 2:1, “…for you, priests.”). The first section, verses 6-14, presents foremost the main accusations against the priests: lack of honour and respect for Yahweh and his name. This should be understood, in light of the first oracle, as a failure to respond correctly to Yahweh’s love (1:2). The second speech act, 2:1-9, develops the consequence and judgment that could follow if the priests do not repent and change from the sins described in Mal 1:6-14, “if you do not turn to me…I will send a curse upon you…” (2:2).

The second oracle contains the strongest and hardest words against the priesthood of Israel in the entire OT. Differently to most prophets of the past who condemned the priests for compromise with other religions, Malachi accuses them on the basis of a poor performance of Israel’s religious rituals. The priests dishonour Yahweh by the kind of offerings they bring to him and their attitude toward the cult. The procedure and regulations of how and what to offer is explicitly and emphatically described in the book.

179 Compare with Hos 4:4-11 which contains a strong reprimand and complaint against the priests. The social and ethical depravation, however, contrasted with the one in Malachi, has no comparison.
of Leviticus, even though, they failed to put it into practise. Furthermore, verses 11-14 contrast Yahweh’s displeasure with the priests’ failure to honour Yahweh as his people, with Yahweh’s pleasure and acceptance of non-covenantal nations who worship him (either now or in the future). At no point in the prophetic history of Israel is pagan worship praised, neither is it considered as more pleasing to God than Israel’s worship.

The contrast with all previous prophets is strong. Most, if not all, other prophets in the OT address primarily the laymen, not the priesthood (to the exception of Ezekiel [see Ezek 34:1-10] and Jeremiah who addresses the priests as part of Israel’s leadership [see e.g., Jer 2:26; 6:13; 8:10; 14:18; 23:2, 11, 33]). In post-exilic writings, e.g. Ezra or Nehemiah, we read of exhortations and corrections toward the priests and Levites, but never to the degree shown in Malachi.

Mal 1:6-2:9 contains a strong repetition of messenger formulas (“says Yahweh”) compared to all other prophets, but even within the book of Malachi (eleven times out of twenty six in the book of Malachi). Stuart interprets this as Malachi’s only authority before the priests:

Since the priests were official religious leaders with absolute authority in many matters (including the handling of sacrifices—the very topic of the passage), Malachi’s inspired attack on their behaviour was virtually guaranteed to spur resistance. They had permanent, inherited, recognized, professional legal standing…Frequent verbal reminders of [speaking from God] were [Malachi’s] sole weapon of influence.  

We may agree with Stuart in that Malachi’s insisting words “says Yahweh” are an authoritative tool to back the authenticity and power of his words before the highest religious authorities.

The repetition of words as “defiled”, “despised” “blind” “lame” “pure” “offering” “Yahweh’s table” “food” and the like show that Mal 1:6-14 is very much concerned with

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the cultic life of Israel which the priests are responsible to regulate. It is all of Israel who is involved, but it is the priests role to teach and exercise the sacrificial practices correctly.

2.2.3 Malachi Inter-textually

As noted in the previous section TRADITIONS IN MALACHI, some passages have been connected inter-textually to Malachi. The first oracle seems to have several traditions behind itself. Num 6:23-27, Num 25:10-13, Deut 33:8-11, Deut 28:1-2, 15, Lev 26:3, 14-32 are among them. Though some of these are most likely correct inter-textual connections, I am particularly interested in the ones that appear to provide a cultic background for the passage.

2.2.3.1 Malachi & Deut 28:1-2, 15—“If you don’t obey…I will curse you”: This passage parallels much of Mal 2:1-2. The covenant formula “If you don’t obey… I will curse you” is present in many places in the OT (e.g., Lev 26:3, 14-32; Deut 7:12; 11:13, 22; 28:1-2, 15, 20, 22; 30:17), especially the Pentateuch. This only proves the covenant language employed by Malachi. The breaking of the covenant is definitely in the mind of the prophet. Nevertheless, these passages influence little, if at all, Malachi in regard to the cult.

2.2.3.2 Malachi & Deut 33:8-11—Moses Blesses Levi: Particularly interesting is the reference in Deut 33:8-11 to law teaching, incense and burnt offering on the altar; a description of the priest’s duties that echoes Malachi’s own description. Terms that
appear in both passages are: *Levi* (33:8; cf. Mal 2:4, 8); *berit* (33:9; cf. Mal 2:4, 5, 8); *ab/ben* (33:9; cf. Mal 1:6); *yada* = know (33:9; cf. Mal 2:4, 7); *shamar* = keep/guard (33:9; cf. Mal 2:9); *torah* (33:10; cf. Mal 2:6, 7, 8, 9); *sim* = put/place (33:10; cf. Mal 2:2); *mitzbeah* = altar (33:10; cf. Mal 1:7, 10); *barak* = to bless (33:11; cf. Mal 2:2); *yad* = hand (33:11; cf. Mal 1:9); *rzh* = be pleased (33:11; cf. Mal 1:8).

2.2.3.3 Malachi & Lev 22:17-33—Holiness Code: Another passage that should be highlighted and that is often ignored is Lev 22:17-33, a passage that belongs to the Holiness Code. Weyde stresses the connection on both language and structure between these two passages. 181

Much of the language used in Malachi’s second oracle proves to be familiar to the cultic language of Leviticus 22 which clarifies what is a pleasing sacrifice to Yahweh, in both manner and content (no blind, injured, bruised, or lamed animal is to be offered). Since Mal 1:6-14 deals particularly with the kind of offering that is offered in the altar, one that is detestable in Yahweh’s eyes, the thematic connection is obvious between the two passages. The following table offers a description of similar or equal terms used in both passages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALACHI 1:6-2:9, 12-13</th>
<th>LEVITICUS 22:17-33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>כֹּבֶה = to offer/present/bring</td>
<td>1:8 as a noun (offering); 3:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נֶדֶר = to vow/vow</td>
<td>1:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>עִוֵּר = blind / שׁוֹר = to make blind</td>
<td>1:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>רָצָה = to accept favourably, be pleased with</td>
<td>1:8; 2:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>כְנֵר as noun (goodwill, acceptance, favour) 22:19, 20, 21, 29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides these common terms between Malachi and Lev 22, we can find similar expressions referring to the same concept. For example, “fire-offering... on the altar” (Lev 22:22, 27) is in line with Mal 1:10 “may not light (fire-offerings in) my altar in vain.” The idea of both fire and the altar is present in both passages. Another play of similar ideas is the idea of pure and impure. Lev 22 repeats strongly the concept of animals or offering without defect (Lev 22:19, 20, 21 [x2], 25) with the words תמים or ום מ ("without defect" or "no defect"). Malachi is clearly based on this principle but uses the word רה, תמים, i.e., “pure” to connote the same idea (Mal 1:11). The word is found mainly in Exodus (about temple and priests’ clothing; cf. Exod 25:11, 17, 29, 31, 36, 38, 39; 28:14, 22, 36; 30:3, 35; 31:8; 37:2, 6, 11, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 26, 29; 39:15, 25, 30, 37) and Leviticus (about clean or pure animals or sacrifices; cf. Lev 4:12; 6:4; 7:19; 10:10, 14; 11:47; 14:4, 57; 20:25). In the Pentateuch, the word is almost exclusively referring to cleanness and purity in cultic matters (animals, offerings, temple building, etc) and almost unanimously in priestly or cultic contexts.

Undoubtedly, the accusations of Malachi 1:6-2:9 against the priests “seem to presuppose knowledge of, and to allude to, the instructions to the priests on the votive offerings in Lev 22:17ff.” The thematic similarity and dependence are undeniable as it

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182 Ibid, 121.
has been shown by our analysis of terms. In fact, Leviticus 22 stands over all other cultic passages in the OT as the passage with most terms in common with Mal 1:6-2:9 even though there are still many "cultic" words in Mal 1-2 that are not present in Lev 22 (e.g., defiled, to sacrifice, crippled animal, diseased animal, injured, flock, offering, offal, etc.) and points to the fact that Malachi alludes to other sources in the OT. In fact, there are good grounds for believing that Malachi depends strongly on Num 6:23-27.

2.2.3.4 Malachi & Num 6:23-27—The Priestly Blessing: Among others, Fishbane has underlined the key role of Num 6:23-27 in Malachi’s second oracle. Fishbane’s argument is that Mal 1:6-2:9 is an “Aggadic exegesis” of Num 6:23-27, i.e., Malachi inverts the blessing into a curse and interchanges the recipients of the blessings with the pronouncers. He says that Malachi’s second oracle

is a systematic utilization of the language of the Priestly Blessing and a thorough transformation of it...The prophet has taken the contents of the Priestly Blessing – delivered by the priests, and with its emphasis on blessing, the sanctity of the divine Name, and such benefactions as protection, favourable countenance, and peace – and inverted them.\textsuperscript{183}

This “ironic reversal of the priest’s language, actions, and hopes” he claims, “is thus textured through a series of reworkings and plays on the liturgical language of Num 6:23-27. In this way, the priest’s cultic language is desacralized and their actions cursed.”\textsuperscript{184} Instead of giving a blessing to the Israelites through the priests, Yahweh curses the priests who would take pride in being channels of blessings. The implication is that neither the priests are blessed nor are they able to channel Yahweh’s blessing to the people. Though Fishbane’s argument has been disputed, he proves most convincing.\textsuperscript{185}

\textsuperscript{183} Fishbane, \textit{Biblical Interpretation}, 332-33.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, 333-34.
We can distinguish at least thirteen words or terms used in both passages: bēn (1:6; cf. Num 6:23 [x2], 27); ’āmar (Mal 1:6; 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14; 2:2, 4, 8; cf. 6:23 [x2]); Yahweh (13 times; cf. Num 6:23, 24,25, 26, 27); pānîm (1:8; 9; 2:3, 4, 9; cf. Num 6:25, 26); šēm (Mal 1:6, 11 [x2]; cf. Num 6:27); ’wr = to light/to shine (1:10; cf. Num 6:25); šāmar = to keep (2:7, 9; cf. Num 6:24); brk = to bless/blessing (Mal 2:2; cf. Num 6:23, 24); šym = to give/to determine (Mal 2:2 [x2] ; cf. Num 6:26, 27); šālôm (Mal 2:5, 6; cf. Num 6:26); ns’ = to raise/to carry (Mal 2:3; cf. Num 6:26); hnn = to accept/to be gracious (Mal 1:10; cf. Num 6:25); ns’ + pānîm = raise face/accept with pleasure (Mal 1:8, 9; 2:9; cf. Num 6:26); ’ānî = I (Mal 1:6 [x2], 14; 2:9; cf. Num 6:27).

In addition, Malachi’s second oracle shares similar concepts using different words. For example, “Aaron and his sons” (Num 6:23) is alluded to by Malachi as priests and Levites. We can also see a play on words using opposite meanings. The verb “to curse” (‘rr; cf. Mal 1:14; 2:2) is an antagonistic word to “bless” (barak; cf. Num 6:23, 24) which is the predominant verb in the Priestly Blessing (a blessing!). In this play of antagonistic words, Fishbane’s theory of an inverted blessing present in Malachi gains its strength. But also, to Fishbane’s credit, the antagonism between “I will bless them” (Num 6:27) and “I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people” (Mal 2:9) both at the end of the passages, is noteworthy.

Repetitions of terms and concepts between Num 6 and Mal 1-2 may be due to the fact that Malachi is very familiar with the language and draws unconsciously from the general language used by the priesthood, i.e., because he is used to hear those words. Another answer to these questions is that Malachi purposively uses the Priestly Blessing.
Fishbane’s point is that the similarity between the two passages may not just be mere coincidence, but plain intentionality.

According to Stuart, the priestly blessing was a pronouncement “made many times a day – indeed, it was in all likelihood the single set of words they most often publicly said.” The Priestly Blessing was meant, in Num 6:23-27, for the Israelites: “Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his sons, “this is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ‘Yahweh bless you and keep you; Yahweh make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; Yahweh turn his face toward you and give you peace.’”’ So they will put their names on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

Malachi impacts deeper his audience by reusing the Priestly Blessing which is the priests’ daily language. In this sense, the prophet could not have caught in a better way his audience’s attention.

To conclude our analysis of the cultic background of Malachi, it should be admitted that there are obvious connections between Mal 1:6-2:9 and other parts of the OT. Lev 22 provides the thematic (cultic) background upon which Malachi builds since it is the very basis for accusing the priests, i.e., breaking cultic laws and regulations. The theme of acceptable offerings presented to Yahweh serves as the basis for Malachi’s words.

Numbers 6:23-27 (the Priestly Blessing) seems to be used deliberately by Malachi as a rhetorical tool. Malachi plays upon the Priestly Blessing, a very well known liturgy to the priests, to draw their attention and emphasise the measure of the priests’ failure: they are cursed instead of blessed. Other passages, such as Deut 25, even though they

186 Ibid, 1297.
present many similarities in vocabulary with Malachi, may not have been used explicitly by Malachi, but simply share common themes.

2.2.4 Mal 1:6

Mal 1:6a “A son honours his father and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me? And, if I am a master, where is the fear due to me? (bēn yēkabbēd 'āb wē'ebed 'ādōnāyw wē'im-'āb 'ānī 'aYYēh kēḇōdī wē'im-'ādōnīm 'ānī 'aYYēh mōrā'ī)

Moving from a general accusation to Israel in vv. 1-5, v. 6 focuses on a narrower group: the priests. This verse contains the first manifestation of Yahweh’s anger against Israel directed toward the priests. Using direct speech, Yahweh specifies what the sin is: contempt for Yahweh’s name, disrespect and dishonour. He also clarifies who the guilty party is: the priests, who are followed by the people. The following verses up to v.14 unpack this accusation in the form of pseudodialogue between the priests and Yahweh. The rest of the book builds on this second oracle in the sense that this is Israel’s main sin which then manifests itself in multiple ways (unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant [2:14-16], bad teaching [2:6-8], failure to tithe [3:8-12]…).

The simplicity of both language and ideas in this verse attest to the clarity with which Malachi speaks to the priests. The logic is the following: it is agreed by both parties that if A is true, then B follows. The discussion, then is not disagreeing with the logic, but with the accusation (“In what way is A true?”).

Two images of male authority are used to describe the relationship between Israel and Yahweh. The first one is that of father-son; the second of master-servant.
bēn yēkabbēd 'āb. Yahweh calls himself a father assuming the priests as his children, who are part of Israel. This image is a continuation of the Jacob-Esau image in verses 1-5 where brothers are loved or hated by the father, i.e., Yahweh.

The first allusion of Yahweh as the father of Israel is in Exod 4:22, “Israel is my son, my firstborn” but the relationship is not fully established (assumed by both parties) until the covenant at Sinai (Exod 20ff.). After the event at Sinai, the relationship is directly attested several times throughout the OT\(^\text{187}\) or assumed in the context.\(^\text{188}\) Noteworthy to this relationship is the fact that Yahweh, in his mercy, adopts Israel as a child. He chose them not because of anything especial in them, but because of his grace and love.\(^\text{189}\) As Taylor and Clendenen put it, it is an “exclusive relationship the Lord established with Israel by his sovereign grace in choosing them through Abraham, redeeming them from Egypt, and forming his covenant with them at Sinai.”\(^\text{190}\) Israel agreed to relate to Yahweh as a father, but it was only in response to his election and grace toward the nation.

In OT times, a son was to obey, respect, honour and submit to his father.\(^\text{191}\) The life of the son was in the father’s hands in many ways. Job, wife, land, possessions, education, etc, were all determined by the father who could dispose of his children as property. This is exemplified in 1:6 where a master-servant relationship is paralleled with the father-son one. Both son and servant owe honour to their father and master respectively. These relationships are not equal, but the son-father relationship was well

\(^{187}\) 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Pss 68:5; 89:26; Prov 3:11-12; Isa 63:16; Isa 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9.
\(^{188}\) Exod 4:22; Deut 8:5; 14:1; 32:18; Job 5:17; Pss 27:10; 103:13; Isa 1:2; Hos 11:1-4.
\(^{189}\) Exod 4:22-23; Isa 44:1-2; 63:16; Hos 11:1; John 8:41.
\(^{190}\) Taylor and Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, 247.
\(^{191}\) On regulations on the relationship of children to their parents see Exod 20:12; 21:15, 17; Lev 20:9; Deut 5:15; 21:18-21; 27:16.)
defined as one full of duties, governed by obedience and respect. In an Israelite context, the golden rule for a son was the fifth commandment: “Honour your father.” The similitude between the wording of Mal 1:6 and Exod 20:12 (cf. Deut 5:16) is self evident: bēn yēkabbēd ūāb (Mal 1:6) and kabbēd ūet-ūbikā (Exod 20:12). Mal 1:6 is a direct reference to the fifth commandment (cf. Deut 5:16).

When it comes to honouring Yahweh, kābōd carries further implications than the normal father-son relationship. The term kābōd is almost always in the Piel form (38 times) meaning ‘honour’ and ‘respect’ to Yahweh and denoting a religious attitude. In Stenmas’ words, it is

the total human response to Yahweh’s love and favour. This response ranges from the personal prayer of the individual (Ps. 86:9; Isa 25:3) through observance of the laws and commandments (Dt. 28:58; Isa 58:13) to the sacrificial cult (Ps. 50:23; Prov 3:9).”

It was a common expectation that a son would honour his father, especially the heavenly father. The priests’ failure breaks both religious (covenantal) and social expectations. wē‘ebed ūādōnāyw. Following the same logic of the father-son relationship, Israel is also accused of not relating to Yahweh as a servant should relate to his master. The conjunction waw (“and”) here serves to join the parallel expressions. 193 ‘ebed is used here as servant or subordinate, not slave. 194 The plural form of ūādōn is only used for the singular when it is used as an intensive majestic plural, 195 in Mal 1:6, referring to Yahweh. The assumption that Yahweh is Israel’s master is very well attested in the OT

193 WO’C §39.2.5.
194 CHAL 262; cf. Hill, Malachi, 174.
195 Verhoef, Haggai, Malachi, 208.
where 'ādôn is, in most cases, translated as Lord. That a servant owes kābôd to his master is implied in the omission of the verb, a device common in the OT.

In the second clause, Yahweh asks for the môrā‘î (“fear”) due to him as a Master. môrā‘î is common in the OT, “in almost 80 percent of the passages… the object of fear is God.” Here it should be understood as an objective genitive (“fear due to me” instead of the possessive “my fear”). In Mal 3:20 (4:2) we find the verb yr’ which is synonymous to môrā‘î. The synonymous masc. nom. form of yr’ (also “to fear”) appears 12x in the OT defining an important attitude every Israelite must have. Wisdom itself is defined as the fear of the Lord (Job 28:28; Pss 69:4; 110:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Isa 11:2). Those who fear Yahweh keep his covenant and remain loyal to Him through it (e.g., Deut 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24). In fact, the word fear formed part of the vocabulary used in Near East treaties demanding “exclusive allegiance.” Some translations read môrā‘î as respect; however, as Taylor and Clendenen explain, respect “does not adequately express what God’s holiness should arouse in us (see, e.g., Isa 8:13 for the relationship between holiness and fear). Respect calls for politeness…but fear results in awe and obedience.” This fear, however, is not based merely on terror or panic. Such fear comes from ignorance of the nature of the object feared. The fear of Yahweh is based on the knowledge that he is good and that he is love; indeed, the very assurance of vv. 1-5.

The simple metaphor is here used to remind the priests of the very basic duties that are implied in a father-son relationship. Such an unsophisticated role example to

196 Gen 18:27f.; Exod 4:10; Josh 7:8; 1 Kgs 3:10; Pss 2:4; 66:18; Isa 6:1, 8, 11; 29:13, etc.
197 Hill, Malachi, 174.
198 HALOT 2:560.
200 VP Hamilton, “yr,” NIDOTTE 2:523
202 Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 264.
describe the religious leaders’ failure was insulting in itself. These were the well-educated top teachers of the time. Their role was to teach Yahweh’s law (cf. Mal 2:7), including the Ten Commandments. The fifth commandment, “honour your father,” was on the priests’ lips daily. The fact that Malachi rebukes the priesthood by using their own teaching, i.e., the Ten Commandments, is most ironical and pertinent to the occasion, especially since later they are accused of bad teaching (2:6-8).\(^{203}\)

Yahweh freed Israel from slavery into voluntary servitude and, at the same time, he adopted Israel as a chosen son. He had, thus, all rights to accuse Israel on failing as sons and servants. Both honour and fear, qualities due to Yahweh, are missing in the priests.

**Mal 1:6b.** says Yahweh of Hosts to you, “O priests who despise my name (‘āmar YHWH šēbā’ōt lākem hakkōhānim bōzē šēmī).

We have already commented on the importance of Malachi’s use of the messenger formula. Suffice it to say that the formula serves here to give authority to Malachi and clarify again who is the offended party and who the accuser. The formula also gives cohesion to the oracles before and after that same repeated formula. lākem hakkōhānim bōzē šēmī. This is the first and predominant accusation against the priests. The structure of each of the oracles starts with a statement from Yahweh that is disputed later on by the recipients. The oracle 1:6-2:9 is an extension of the statement “you despise my name” which is supported by the repetition of the word *bzh* (“despise”) in 1:6 (x2), 7, 12 and 2:9.

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The word kōhānîm (“priests”) is preceded by the vocative hē’ (“O priests”). Some have defended a distinction between Priest and Levite in the book of Malachi. Such a distinction would make a division between Mal 1:6-14 and 2:1-9 since the former would be addressing the priests and later the Levites as two separate groups. However, the distinction is non-existent as O’Brien,204 among others, has successfully demonstrated. Malachi makes no distinction between the two groups.

In post-exilic times, priests assumed an extremely important political role since the province was a vassal of the Persian Empire. In Haggai priest and governor stand side by side sharing authority (1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 4), and in Zechariah the high priest is given a golden crown as if he were a king sitting on a throne (Zech 6:8, 11-13; cf. 3:1, 8).205

The verb bzh, (Mal 1:6, 7, 12; 2:9) means “to despise”206 or “be contemptible, think slightly of, despise”207 in the Qal form. Namely, “every offence against the will of Yahweh implies a bzh.”208 These words are harsh and strong. He who despises Yahweh “shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam 2:30) and is devious in his ways (Prov 14:2). In Num 15:31 an Israelite despises the word of Yahweh by wilfully breaking the covenant with Yahweh; he is to be cut off, i.e., executed; similarly, in Prov 19:16, the one who despises Yahweh will die. Generally speaking, the ones who despise Yahweh receive the same treatment from him or others (e.g., Mal 2:9; 1 Sam 2:30; Ps 73:20; Jer 49:15; Obad 2). Not surprisingly the consequences that follow the priests’ despising of Yahweh are in accordance to the rest of biblical tradition.

204 O’Brien, Priest and Levite.
205 See Meyers and Meyers, Haggai, Zechariah 1-8, 384-85.
206 HALOT 1:117.
Failure to respect or honour one’s parents is equated with despising them in Mal 1:6. The term *bzh* appears three times in this section (Mal 1:6, 7, 12) and is a familiar connection known to the book of Proverbs. He who despises (*bzh*) a parent is foolish (Prov 15:20); Prov 23:22 warns against despising (*bûz*) a mother when she is old; Prov 20:20 states that if someone curses one of his parents his “lamp will go out in utter darkness.” But perhaps the most striking punishment is expressed in Exod 21:27 where disrespect for parents deserves the death penalty (see related passages Exod 21:15 Lev 20:9; Deut 21:18-21; 27:16). Therefore, to be accused of dishonouring or despising a parent was shameful and deserved condemnation. No wonder the accused priests want to know *in what way they have despised Yahweh*; they are well aware of the consequences if the accusation is true.

According to Görg, “the opposite of *bzh* is *kābôd* ‘to honour’ (1 Sam 2:30), *yr* ‘to fear’ (Prov 14:2) and *šâmar* ‘to keep commandments’ (Prov 19:16).” The book of Malachi presents a play on all these terms. The Priests are not giving the due honour (*kābôd*; Mal 1:6) to Yahweh; therefore they are despising him (*bzh*; Mal 1:6, 7, 12; 2:9). The priests are *despisers of Yahweh’s name* (*bzh*; Mal 1:6) while a small faithful group remains *fearers of Yahweh’s name* (*yr*; Mal 3:16, 20 [4:2]; which is also a synonym of *môrāʾî* in Mal 1:6). Finally, they have failed to *keep Yahweh’s decrees* (*šâmar*; Mal 3:7). The author is clearly making a contrast between the word *bzh* and the words *kābôd*, *yr* and *šâmar*, opposite/antagonistic words that emphasise the seriousness of the situation.

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209 C Houtman, *Exodus*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Vol. 3; trans. Sierd Woudstra; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 51 who says that the “command [in Exod 20:12]...is not about the obligation of (young) children to submit to parental authority, but is directed to adult persons, those who in the patriarchal society are family heads.”

Given the juxtaposition of Jacob and Esau in the previous verses, Mal 1:6 is also an allusion to Esau’s despising his birthright (Gen 25:34). Hill explains that “the priests of Yehud, as Esau, have despised their ‘birthright’ (the covenant with Levi, 2:4) and are in danger or forfeiting their position of privilege and ministry (2:3).”

The word šēm means “name, reputation, fame.” It appears eight times in Malachi. In the Semitic world, often the object and name entail such a relation that to lose a name is to cease to exist. When it applies to Yahweh,

the name of Yahweh does what Yahweh does – dwells in a sanctuary (Deut 12:5, 21), protects people (Ps 20:2) and jealously guards his reputation (Ezek 36:22, 23). When one fights in the name of Yahweh, he fights with God’s power. When prophets were sent in his name (Deut 19:20), they carried his personal authority almost as if he were there himself. The name of Yahweh is central to worship, since it represents Yahweh. It can be praised (Joel 2:26), loved (Ps 5:11), declared (Ps 22:22), feared (Mal 4:2), waited on (Ps 52:9), proclaimed (Isa 12:4), or walked in (Mic 4:5). But it can also be blasphemed (Isa 52:5), polluted (Jer 34:16), or profaned (Ezek 36:21-23) as people rebel against God himself. Thus the name of Yahweh stands for God’s essential nature revealed to people as an active force in their lives.

In worship context, Yahweh himself determined that his name would dwell in the Temple from the beginning of its construction (1 Kgs 8:29). In 2 Ch 20:9, the presence of God’s name is in the temple which in fact signifies God’s real presence in it. Therefore, to call upon the name of Yahweh is to call upon him. Yahweh and his name are interchangeable.

Mal 1:6c. But you say, ‘In what have we despised your name?’ (wa‘āmartem bammeh bāzinū ’šēmekā)

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211 Hill, Malachi, 176-77.
214 See also where Ps 75:1 “Your name is near” refers to Yahweh’s imminent presence (Reiterer, “šēm,” TDOT 15:136). Other passages to consider are Exod 20:24; 23:20-21; Deut 12:5; II Sam 7:13; Ps 22:22; Isa 30:27.
Following the pseudodialogue pattern to be found in each oracle, the expected response from the priest is one of doubt and scepticism.

The accusation takes the religious leaders of Jerusalem for surprise as we read of their refutation in form of sceptical question: “In what?” (“Be specific, because we do not see what you say”) implying disagreement.

This may indicate either that they had lost their convictions and lowered their standards to the point of not realising of their dishonour toward Yahweh or that they questioned Yahweh’s authority. Perhaps both attitudes were present at the time which reflect Israel’s scepticism and lack of high standards. The following words, are Yahweh’s response.

**2.2.5 Mal 1:7**

**Mal 1:7a** *By presenting defiled food on my altar (maggīšîm ‘al-mizbēhî lehem mēgō’āl)*

Yahweh answers poignantly the priests’ sceptical yet insulting question in v. 6 (“How have we despised your name”). Their attention is drawn to the specific evidence upon which the accusation is based: their offerings. The priests’ lack of honour for and fear of Yahweh, which in turn resulted in a despising attitude, is reflected in how they approach the altar. We are thus moved to the specific accusation, which has ritual and cultic connotations.

Basic to verse 7 is the implication that the temple cult, including the sacrificial system, was active and running. The mention of the altar (‘al-mizbēhî), among many other cultic references in Malachi, proves that the sacrificial system was carried on since its construction at the time of Haggai and Zechariah. Nothing attests to the opposite.
The word *maggîšîm* is a Hiphil active participle meaning a continuous or habitual action when approaching the altar for offerings (cf. Mal 1:8, 11; 2:12; 3:3). Yahweh is clearly referring to an ongoing situation, not a specific event in the past.

The kind of offering referred to is explained by the word *leḥem*, which means either “bread” or “food,” i.e., anything from vegetable, grain or meat offerings. In the OT, *leḥem* appears sometimes when referring to food offerings (e.g. Lev 3:11; 21:6, 8, 21; 22:25; Num 28:2 and Ezek 44:7). In the post-exilic Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus, the only reference to *leḥem* is in Hag 2:12 meaning sacrificial meat. The context of Malachi 1:6-2:9 points strongly in the same direction since most references are to animals (Cf. Mal 1:8, 13, 14; 2:3). Furthermore, the expression “on my altar” (’*al-mizbēhî*) appears frequently in Leviticus, always meaning the altar of burnt offerings, i.e., the bronze altar, rather than the incense altar or the table of the bread of the presence.

Malachi introduces a new word, *mēgō’āl*, which depicts the seriousness of the priests’ failure more colourfully. The word *mēgō’āl* appears twice in Mal 1:6, 12 and is used as an adjective meaning “to be ritually defiled” in the Pual stem. The scene moves

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217 Meyers and Meyers think of these sacrifices as šēlāmîm (peace) offerings, i.e., freewill offerings that call on Yahweh’s blessing on the land, the animals and the people (Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, 55-56). Hill follows them arguing that the reason is implicit in Mal 3:11-12, i.e. “because Yehud still languishes under an agricultural blight” (Hill, *Malachi*, 178). But there is just not enough evidence for assuming poverty and v. 7 does not clarify what kind of offering this is. Malachi is most likely referring to the overall group of sacrifices at the bronze altar. See discussion on šēlāmîm offerings in v. 8.
218 According to the descriptions of the Solomonic temple, there were several surfaces where the Israelites would present offerings: the table of the bread of the Presence where bread was offered continually; the bronze altar where animals were sacrificed; and, the golden altar where perfumes, incenses, frankincense and oils were offered to Yahweh. The word *mizbēhāh* always refers, in Israelite cultic context, to the last two i.e., the bronze and the golden altar. Since Malachi talks of animals unfit for the sacrifice, the word *mizbēhāh* here refers most likely to the bronze altar. Therefore, *leḥem* should be taken in its general meaning as food, i.e., the whole range of food offerings presented at the altar of burnt offerings. See Hill, *Malachi*, 178-79.
219 HALOT 1:169-70
rapidly from the general to the specific: the priests are violating cultic regulations of purity. For some reason Malachi chooses the words lehem mēgōʾāl, which are not used in the priestly regulations for cultic and ritual purity, yet they mean the same, food that has become contaminated or polluted ritually.

Gordon J. Wenham explains with remarkable clarity the different animal (food) categories given in Leviticus. In Lev 10:10, the priests were instructed “to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean (cf. Ezek 44:23). Wenham explains that the opposite of “holy” is “common” and the opposite of “clean” is “unclean.” Likewise, “common” (hol) is the reverse of “holy” (qōdeš) and “to profane” (hlll) is the converse of “to sanctify” (qidddeš).

In Hebrew thinking everything was either clean or unclean, holy or common…Everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy when they are sanctified. But unclean objects cannot be sanctified. Clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted. Finally, holy items may be defiled and become common, even polluted, and therefore unclean…Cleanliness is the ground state; holiness and uncleanness are variations from the norm of cleanliness.220

In regard to animals, there was a division between the clean (edible; e.g., lamb, bull) and unclean (inedible; e.g., pig, shrimp). Among clean animals, only a handful was set apart for offerings, i.e., sanctified and made holy for the altar. These chosen animals were to be unblemished and follow a meticulous cleaning procedure according to the purity regulations in Lev 1-4. The minimum violation of these resulted in defilement.

Similarly, the priests guarded themselves from polluting the sacrifice by following numerous requirements. Priests had to be physically unblemished in order to officiate in worship (i.e., blind, lame, deformed, etc; Lev 21: 5-6, 17-21; cf. 22:19-25). Only a descendant of Levi aging from thirty to fifty could be a priest (Num 4:3). They also had an innumerable list of clothing requirements and a meticulous modus operandi for

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preparing the offering. Therefore, failure by the animal or the priest to meet any of these cultic laws defining state, and proper approach and procedure meant the defilement of the sacrifice and even the priest’s death (Exod 28:43; Lev 8:35; 16:1-5; Num 4:17-19; cf. Lev 10:1-7).

Verse 8 offers us strong reasons to believe that Malachi refers to edible animals that became ritually unclean due to being blemished or imperfect. The theory that illegitimate priests are corrupting the altar due to their non-Levite lineage is plausible in light of Ezra and Nehemiah; however, Malachi does not mention it as the cause for the defilement. Another theory is that the priests were accepting unworthy animals due to their ignorance of the laws. However, Hag 2:11-13 shows that only a few decades ago the priests had been perfectly aware of laws of purity and defilement. Indeed, v. 8 assumes common knowledge on these matters by extrapolating the situation to the local authorities (“Bring it to your governor. Will he be pleased with you?”).

Archaeological findings have proven that altars played a supremely important role in the religion of any Ancient Middle Eastern society and date millenniums back from our society. When it comes to the relationship between altars and temple, it is noteworthy

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221 Petersen and Hill have suggested that, in light of the post-exilic common theme found in Ezra and Nehemiah about illegitimate priestly genealogies, and that g’l appears in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 2; Nehemiah 13:28, 29) also in regard to illegitimate priests, the defilement in Malachi may be caused by disqualified priests whose work at the temple would result in defilement. Due to a lack of personnel at the temple, “priests with less than clear lineages may have participated in the rituals during the early second temple period.” Particularly interesting is Neh 13:29 where people had defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the Levites. As Petersen notes, not only is it striking to find the exact same word “defiled” but also Malachi talks about defiling the covenant with Levi. “Both Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi show concern for the ritual purity of the priesthood as well as purported instances in which that purity had been violated” (Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 179). Perhaps Malachi speaks so crudely to the priests because they are failing to respect the lineage and thus are defiling the priesthood, however, since nothing in Malachi specifically addresses that question, we cannot conclude that such is the reason. In fact, v. 7 gives us no explanation as to why the food is defiled, but the following verses explain that the food is inadequate because it fails to meet the standards set by the Law (see comments on 1:8). Since Malachi has no reference to priestly lineage or genealogies, we are obliged to infer that the reason why the food is defiled is because the foodstuff is defiled and unfit. Nevertheless, the priests choose those animals.
that temples could not exist without an altar, while the opposite was not true. Richard E. Averbeck informs us that

one could have an altar without a temple (or tabernacle), but not a temple without an altar...even within the temple...the altar was viewed as one half of the complex alongside the house of sanctuary of God proper and was, in some ways, endowed with the same kind of sanctity (Lev 21:23; Num 4:26; 18:3, 5).  

Altars were the connection between the transcendental and the material, this world and the other word. Their surface served the purpose of transactions between the sinful world of humans and the holy world of God. They were the channel for communication, forgiveness and worship. Interestingly enough, the bronze altar (altar of burnt offerings) was even considered “most holy” (Exod 40:10), the very name for Yahweh’s isolated presence in the Temple.  

Indeed, when Yahweh calls on the attention of the priests for defiling the altar, he is not being “picky” about technicalities. Preserving the altar undefiled was of utmost importance since it is the medium through which Israel atones for its sins and through which worship is performed. Keeping all cultic laws enabled Israel to remain in covenant relationship with Yahweh and to fulfil the purpose of their existence, “to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). In Wenham’s words,  

the [ritual] faults affect not only the individual, but the tabernacle itself, the seat of God’s presence among his people. If this is polluted, Israel’s holy redeemer can no longer dwell among them and their raison d’être is destroyed... because God dwelt in the tent of meeting, the sacrifices carried out before it on the altar are described as being performed ‘before the Lord’ (e.g., [Lev] 1:5, 11, etc).  

Similarly,  

contact with unclean objects or individuals or the presentation of unsuitable or inappropriate offerings could profane the altars, that is, rob them of their resident holiness. With the loss of holiness, they could not continue as portals to the sphere of the holy and thus were no longer

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222 RE Averbeck, “mizbēah” NIDOTTE 2:888-89.
224 Wenham, Leviticus, 5.
suitable places for offerings to Yahweh. For this reason, one of the most important priestly tasks involved maintaining and guarding the boundaries around the altars.\textsuperscript{225}

The whole nation depended on this table and the priests’ correct treatment of it. If someone polluted the altar, Yahweh would abandon them since he could not dwell in a polluted tabernacle. The covenant with Israel and the very relationship between Yahweh and his people would be at stake. Therefore, the priests have shown contempt, indifference at best, for Yahweh’s holiness at the risk of losing everything.

\textbf{Mal 1:7b} \textit{But you say, ‘In what have we defiled you?’} (waʾāmartem bammeh gēʾalnûkā)

The priests’ response carries connotations of scepticism, surprise and challenge. They disagree with Yahweh’s accusations or are absolutely blind to their own actions and attitudes.

It is noteworthy that the response “in what have we defiled you” does not match the object of defilement in the accusation “by presenting defiled food.” In light of this discrepancy, the LXX has tried to amend what appears to be a mistake; however, it needs no correction.\textsuperscript{226} The priests’ theologically correct assumption is that to defile Yahweh’s table is to defile Yahweh. Similarly, in verse 6 to defile Yahweh’s name is to defile Yahweh. Admittedly, it would be extremely difficult to defend that what is happening is a

\textsuperscript{225} Averbeck, “mizbēaḥ,’’ 2:888-89.
\textsuperscript{226} LXX (also Targum) reads “we have polluted them” (3mp) against the MT, Syriac and Vulgate “we have polluted you.” The LXX 3mp pronoun can only refer to the altar and the food. JMP Smith opts for the LXX reading (also NRSV), because he thinks the MT repeats v.6 and implies to pollute Yahweh himself “which is hardly thinkable” (Smith, \textit{ICC}, 27). However, there is a strong connection between the altar and Yahweh’s honour as shown in v. 6. To defile the former is to defile the latter (see exegesis on v 7). Though the LXX seems more adequate for the previous context, the \textit{lectio difficilior} is preferable. We should understand the LXX error as an intentional scribal emendation. The implication of the MT is that to defile both altar and its food is to defile Yahweh. I agree with Glazier-MacDonald (1987a: 50-51), Verhoef, \textit{Haggai and Malachi}, 216; Hill, \textit{Malachi}, 178; and Petersen, \textit{Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi}, 176, 179 who see the emendation as unnecessary.
violation of Yahweh’s holiness. The violation is to Yahweh’s house, implying he can no longer dwell in it.

**Mal 1:7c When you say, ‘the table of Yahweh is despicable.’ (be’ēmorkem šulhan YHWH nibzeh hâ’)**

Once again, Yahweh’s answer is sharp as a knife in presenting clear and definite evidence for grounding his accusation. A much more detailed account of the priests’ wrongdoings is to come in the following verses. The priests bring blind, limping and the sick animals to Yahweh, something that is clearly condemned in the cultic regulations.

*be’ēmorkem* is the compound term for the Qal infinitive construct and the preposition *bet* meaning “by saying” or “when you say.” The preposition *bet* is here best understood as denoting “temporal proximity of one even to another.” It shows again that we are not dealing with some singled-out event in the past. The priests are saying that the table of Yahweh is despicable.

According to Stuart, “my altar” and “Yahweh’s table” in the Hebrew “are synonymous pairs and do not indicate different concepts (see Ezek 41:22).” Malachi is the only place where *šulhan* means *mizbēah* (Mal 1:7, 12). The term *šulhan* is used in several ways within the Temple, for example, tables that held lamp stands or the table of the bread of the Presence. In Ezek 39:20 and 44:15, *šulhan* refers to the altar of burnt offerings. In Malachi *šulhan* is either an explicit mention of the altar, or the inclusion of all table and altars altogether, i.e., the table of the bread of the Presence, the altar of

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227 WO’C §36.2.2b.
229 Ernst, “šulḥān,” TDOT 15:81 only in Malachi does *šulḥan* refer to the altar (*mizbēah*).
incense and the bronze altar. Given the parallel, the bronze altar fits best the meaning of šulḥan.

One may ask why Malachi chooses to call the altar šulḥan. To this, Taylor and Clendenen prove insightful:

the Lord’s explanation relies on an implied comparison between the altar and a ruler’s table at which guests were served (see also Ezek 39:20; 41:22; 44:16)... In this paragraph in Malachi the Lord is pictured as the host, the altar is the table, the offerings are the ‘food’..., and the priests are the servants who bring the food...The table is a symbol of hospitality and relationship, and the attitude toward someone’s table would betray the attitude toward the person and the relationship.

They further explain that the meal imagery is also implied in lehem which is not used as much when referring to animal sacrifices. This depiction of Yahweh as the host is further emphasised by the suffixed personal pronoun “my.” This altar does not belong to the priests, but to Yahweh. He has every right to demand a correct usage of it.

The phrase nibzeh hû’ is translated in a variety of ways in English: “may be despised” (ESV, NRSV, NEB, NLT); “deserves no respect” (NJB); “is contemptible” (KJV, NIV); “may be slighted” (NAB); “is to be despised” (NASB). The Niphal participle nibzeh is passive and again shows ongoing circumstances. The 3ms pronoun hû’ refers to the table of Yahweh. The context demands that the meaning of this phrase causes, in part, Yahweh’s reaction. It must imply a wrong attitude, just as the English translations interpret. I group myself with those who translate it as “is despicable.”

Petersen notes correctly that no priest would ever utter these words. The power of Malachi’s message is that he puts words to their actions: “by bringing the activity of the

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230 Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 268-69.
231 See Hill, Malachi, 179.
priests to linguistic expression, the author has palpably displayed their disregard for Yahweh and his due.”

2.2.6 Mal 1:8

Mal 1:8a And when you present the blind for sacrifice, there is no evil! (wēki-taggišûn ‘iwwēr lizbōah ’ēn rā’)

The phrase wēki-taggišûn parallels the beginning of v. 7 (“when you present”), serving as a further specification of what the defilement is. The adverb kī should be understood as temporal (“when”) rather than causal or conditional (as LXX read, i.e., “if”). As in v. 7, the action of presenting is ongoing and it clearly refers to sacrifices at the bronze altar since we are told that blemished animals are the object of the offering.

That only perfect animals are fit for burnt offerings is clearly taught in the Pentateuch: “Do not offer to Yahweh the blind [‘iwwēr], the injured or the maimed…” (Lev 22:22); “If an animal has a defect, is lame or blind, or has any serious flaw, you must not sacrifice it to Yahweh your God” (Deut 15:21; cf. Num 6:14, 19:2, Deut 17:1). Of the commonly known twelve blemishes found in an animal (Lev 22:22-24; matching the twelve blemishes in a priest, cf. Lev 21:18-20), Malachi chooses five blemishes in animals for sacrifice: blind (‘iwwēr; Mal 1:8), sick (hōleḥ; Mal 1:8, 13), limping (pissēah; Mal 1:8, 13), injured or stolen (gāzûl; Mal 1:13, also “loot”) and damaged (māšhāt; Mal 1:14). Only Malachi uses hōleḥ (only appearance in the OT) and gāzûl for describing sacrificial blemishes, but these blemishes are implicit in the sacrificial regulations noted

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232 Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 180.
233 See O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 92-93.
above. The remaining terms, *īwwēr*, *piṣṣēh* and *māshāt* are explicit references to sacrificial blemishes.

According to Lev 22:23, there was an exception in the cult that allowed worshippers to sacrifice imperfect animals. We read that the Israelites “may, however, present as a freewill offering an ox or a sheep that is deformed or stunted, but it will not be accepted in fulfilment of a vow” (Lev 22:23). The freewill offering fell into the category of Peace offering (also called *šēlāmīm*, fellowship, or well-being offering). The Peace offering could be done at any time as an act of thanksgiving (Lev 7:12; 22:29-30), as a freewill offering (Lev 7:16; 22:18, 21, 23) or to fulfil a vow (Lev 7:16; 22:21). All of these were voluntary offerings, i.e., optional. When an Israelite wanted to eat one of his animals, he had to sacrifice it as a peace offering, namely the thanksgiving offering. The animal had to be unblemished. Similarly, if an Israelite wanted to make a vow, a perfect animal was sacrificed as a peace offering. We are told that the freewill offering, i.e., a spontaneous offering, allowed some imperfections even though this seems to bluntly contradict Lev 22:21, which explicitly says that animals for a freewill offering “must be without defect or blemish.” What kind of imperfection is the verse referring to?

The words *śārūa‘* (“superfluously deformed”) and *qālat* (“stunted”) are words missing in the list of blemishes even though they are clearly adjectives for less-than-perfect animals. Jacob Milgrom argues convincingly that this is most likely referring to “a shortened limb, the least of all blemishes” because this “is not inherently defective.” John E. Hartely says, “It is reasonable to imagine that a worshiper might assume that God would be more lenient in regard to the animals permitted for this class of offering. His assumption is only in regard to a freewill offering, as seen in v 23…this law covered an

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animal that was oversized or dwarfed.” And Gordon Wenham states, “In totally optional sacrifices such as free-will offerings, minor blemishes did not matter.” These imperfections, however, are not comparable to the ones given in Malachi (v. 8, 13 and 14). One may be tempted to think that Malachi fails to accuse the priests because they are performing freewill offerings that, according to the law (Lev 22:23), can accept a certain degree of imperfection. However, being blind, sick or lame are all imperfections that clearly disqualify animals from any offering.

Hill has argued that the preposition lamed prefixed in the verb lizbōah “a dative of goal or objective…implies that the prophet is referring to animal sacrifice generally.” Malachi has in view all sacrifices on the altar.

The phrase ’ên rā‘ ("there is no evil!") offers several readings attested in the English Bibles (“Is that not wrong?” [NIV, NLT, ESV, NRSV]; “Is it not evil?” [NASB, KJV, ASV]; “that is wrong” [NCV]; “there is nothing wrong” [NEB]). The naked reading is “non-existent evil” or “there is no evil.” Regardless of how it is translated, the sarcasm is implicit since it is clear, at least in Malachi’s eyes, that there is indeed evil, namely, the defilement of Yahweh’s altar.

We cannot know whether Malachi is quoting verbatim what the priests would say to the offerer when inspecting the imperfect animal (“there is nothing wrong in offering it in spite of the imperfections; it is a valid animal”). But such was their attitude.

**Mal 1:8b** *And when you present the limping and the sick, there is no evil!* (wēkī-taggišūn piṣṣēah wēhōleh’ēn rā’)

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The phrase parallels the previous one word by word to the exception that we now have two added sacrificial blemishes which enrich Malachi’s accusation with details.

Even though Mal 1:6-14 commences with the priests as the offending party, that both priest and laymen are to blame is undisputable. Commenting on Lev 22:18, Milgrom clarifies that “both the priesthood and the laity are held responsible for detecting sacrificial blemishes by the offerer, when the animal is chosen, and by the priest, when the animal enters the sanctuary grounds.” 238 The fact that no one, seeing the blemishes in the animals, could find any offence against Yahweh speaks powerfully of how watered down the priests’ teaching was and indeed how their low standards regarding holiness had permeated all of society.

Another reason as to why both priests and laymen offered clearly outlawed animals is that they benefited economically from allowing more animals to be offered. Stuart contemplates this possibility,

\begin{quote}
aside from some of the sick ones, they all tasted the same, and thus priests were cutting deals with worshipers to receive such animals with some sort of quid pro quo…The point is that God would not allow them as offerings.\textsuperscript{239}
\end{quote}

If this is true, then the priests’ greed is what is at stake, disrespecting Yahweh for the sake of their own well-being. Jeremiah spoke against the prophets and the priests who did exactly the same: “everyone from the least even to the greatest cuts off a profit. From the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely” (Jer 8:10; cf. 6:13).

\textbf{Mal 1:8c} Bring it now to your governor! Will he be pleased with you? Or, will he lift up your face? says Yahweh of Hosts (haqribēhû nā’ lépehātekā hāyiršēkā ’ō hāyiśšā’ panēkā YHWH śēbā’ôt)

\textsuperscript{238} Milgrom, Leviticus, 271.
\textsuperscript{239} Stuart, “Malachi,” 1300.
The sarcasm is implicit in the Hiphil imperative verb *haqrîbēhû* ("to bring" or "to bring near").\(^{240}\) This word is a technical cultic term for offering sacrifices, but we should not infer anything close to worship or idolatry because it is offered to local authorities (*lēpehātekā*). Gifts were offered to authorities in Ancient Near East as an act of courtesy in order to seek their favour. The particle *nā’* here enforces the imperative adding an element of irony.\(^{241}\) Neither priest nor layman would even dream of treating their *pehā* (Persian governor of Yehud\(^ {242}\)) in the same manner as they were treating Yahweh, and this demolishes any theory arguing that the priests lacked knowledge of sacrificial laws. This was common sense and practice; a blatantly obvious truth.

Hill stresses an almost unnoticed contrast of loyalties between Yahweh and the Persian governor. He highlights that "the suffixed possessive pronoun (–kā, “*your governor*”) establishes a contradistinction between the domains of Yahweh (“my altar,” v 7) and the people of Yehud (“*your governor,*” v 8), insinuating a confusion of loyalties on the part of the Levitical priesthood."\(^ {243}\) The priests’ failure has now been compared at all social levels: they honour their earthly fathers more than their heavenly father (i.e., familial level); they fear their working authorities more than their heavenly Lord (i.e., working level); and they seek to please their governmental authorities more than their King who is above all nations and powers, indeed, their “LORD of Hosts” (i.e., governmental level).

\(^{240}\) WO’C §34.4b.  
\(^{241}\) See discussion on Mal 1:9.  
\(^{242}\) Almost every scholar accepts the word *pehā* as referring to a Persian governor in charge of the province of Yehud. Some argue that this could well be Nehemiah (Torrey, “The Prophecy of Malachi;” Bright, *A History of Israel* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972], 378-79), but it remains unlikely given the time separation. For an extensive discussion on the *pehā* see FC Fensham, “Pehā in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East,” in *Studies in the Chronicler*, OTWSA 19 (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege, 1976), 44-52; see also the discussion in the INTRODUCTION.  
hāyērsēḵā ḥāyēśšāʾ panēkā ("Will he be pleased with you?" ) is best understood as a rhetorical question divided in two clauses with the expected interrogative particle hē’ suffixed at the beginning of the question. The Qal imperfect verb -yērsēḵā means to “take pleasure in, be favourable to someone.” Malachi depends notably on this word using it rhetorically to contrast the governor’s being pleased with the priests (1:8) and Yahweh’s displeasure with the priests ("I have no pleasure in you” 1:10; “Shall I accept [the offering] from you?” 1:13). The word ḥō is a coordinator that distinguishes between the two clauses. The idiom hāyēśšāʾ panēkā is widely known to the OT meaning “to receive someone in a friendly manner” or “be favourably disposed toward someone.” Here it is used as a synonym for –yērsēḵā, emphasising the irony of the question by repeating similar expressions.

2.2.7 Mal 1:9

Mal 1:9a And now, do appease God that he may be gracious to us! (wē ḥālāʾ-nā’ pēnēʾ-ʾēl wīhānēnū)

Verse 9 contains an element of confusion in that the prophet seems to include himself as authoring part of the oracle. To remove the confusion, the LXX changed the MT verb + first-person plural pronoun wīhānēnū ("that he may be gracious to us") for δεῖδητε αὐτοῦ ("make supplication to him") but the emendation is unnecessary if we understand the first-person plural pronoun –nū as referring to the whole nation, both the

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244 The LXX and the Vulgate read “will he be pleased with it?” instead. Since there are few witnesses supporting this tradition, the MT remains stronger. It is difficult, however, to surmise which of the two traditions is the original since the interpretation of both readings is the same.

245 See GKC § 150d.

246 HALOT 3:1281.

247 WO’C §39.2.6b.

248 HALOT 2:725.
priests and the people, including Malachi. The priests’ attitude affects everyone since they are the representatives before Yahweh.

Verse 9 parallels the end of v. 8 (Mal 1:8c). “Bring it now to your governor” (v. 8) parallels “And now, do appease God” (v. 9) in the imperatives that have to do with pleasing an authority. Similarly “Will he be pleased with you? Will he lift up your face?” parallels “that he may be gracious to us!” The first two ironic questions match the irony of v. 9.

The expression hallû-nâ’ pênê-’êl is an idiom common to the OT,\textsuperscript{249} meaning “to soften by caressing, to appease, flatter.”\textsuperscript{250} It belongs to “the religious language of the laity,” which designates “a gesture of respect, of worship, and of submission, performed with the purpose of seeking favour.”\textsuperscript{251} The fact that the Qal stem of hîlî means “be weak, sick”\textsuperscript{252} or “to fall sick, be ill”\textsuperscript{253} has made some scholars see a connection between hallû and hôleh, as if the priests’ attempt to appease God with sick animals sickens Yahweh.\textsuperscript{254} This fails to take the verb as part of an idiomatic expression. I agree with Stuart that the connection is “more accidental than purposeful.”\textsuperscript{255}

Who utters the words hallû-nâ’ pênê-’êl wîhānēnâ’? It would be very unlikely that this is a response by the priests as if they humbly recognized their sin. The preceding temporal adverb ‘attâ and the following words “this has happened because of you” imply

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{249} Exod 32:11; 1 Sam 13:12; 1 Kgs 13:6 [2x]; 2 Kgs 13:4; 2 Chr 33:12; Job 11:19; Pss 45:12; 119:58; Prov 19:6; Jer 26:19; Dan 9:13; Zech 7:2; 8:21, 22; all of these except Prov 19:6, have Yahweh as the object of the verb. In each case, it is the favour, blessing or mercy of God that is sought. The closest of all these is 1 Kgs 13:6 (hâl-nâ’ et-pênê-YHWH êlôhêka).
\item \textsuperscript{250} HALOT 1:317. Note also the diversity in English translations: “implore” (NIV, NAB, JPSV), “entreat someone’s favour” (NASB, ESV), “beg” (NLT), “beseech” (KJV), “implore the favour” (NRSV), “placate” (NEB).
\item \textsuperscript{251} Dommershausen, “hîlî,” TDOT 4:409.
\item \textsuperscript{252} Dommershausen, “hîlî,” 4:407-409.
\item \textsuperscript{253} HALOT 1:317.
\item \textsuperscript{254} E.g., Hill, Malachi, 182; Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 271.
\item \textsuperscript{255} Stuart, “Malachi,” 1303.
\end{itemize}
a continuity of thought. Even though Yahweh is portrayed as speaking to the priests, “says Yahweh of Hosts,” the phrase “that he may be gracious to us” is clearly not meant to include Yahweh himself! Therefore, the exhortation comes from Malachi who includes himself in the community of Yehud.

How are we to understand Malachi’s exhortation to the priests? It appears that Malachi breaks into the pseudo dialogue by exhorting the priests to turn to God and appease him by appropriate means, i.e., by repentance expressed through prayer. This approach is taken by the NEB “but now, if you placate God, he may show you mercy; if you do this, will he withhold his favour from you?” This interpretation, however, fails to see the irony in the question.

\( \text{wē 'attā} \) usually indicates a temporal shift in the argument without breaking the theme and its continuity. It tends to be accompanied by a reflection on past events and a commitment “to present or future action.” Here, ‘attā moves the priests from the unthinkable illustration of insulting their governor with despicable gifts, back to their reality, i.e., to doing exactly that with Yahweh. The illustration is connected powerfully with their actions.

When the particle \( nā' \) follows an imperative it serves either: 1) to soften down a command; 2) to take a request in a more courteous way; 3) to strengthen a rebuke or

\[\text{256} \text{ Stuart understands ḥallū-nā’ pēnē-‘ēl as a real exhortation to repentance and cry for mercy, but he fails to see the ironic nuance. The accusation has not stopped in verse 8 but unwraps until verse 14. It is very unlikely that Malachi calls the priests for true repentance right in the middle of his accusation. Indeed, the rhetorical question “Will he lift up your face?” rather than a speculative question as to whether God will actually forgive or not, implies that God would reject any attempt to appease based on this kind of offering. Stuart sees this as well (Stuart, “Malachi,” 1303).}\]


\[\text{258} \text{ I agree with Taylor and Clendenen, this word serves as an introduction to “the climax or punch line of the author’s illustration” (Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 271).}\]
threat; 4) to connote ridicule.\textsuperscript{259} Since both v. 8 and certainly the end of v. 9 are full or irony, \textit{ḥallū-nā’} is best understood as Malachi’s ironic and emphatic exhortation to appease God with polluted and unworthy sacrifices.\textsuperscript{260}

Malachi is being ironic by encouraging the priests to continue with their polluted sacrifices as if they could appease God. The situation is very similar to Amos 4:4-5 where the prophet ironically encourages the people to bring even more offerings to Yahweh. By making the point previously that those sacrifices could not even please their governor, Malachi presses on in showing their lack of honour for Yahweh.

The conjunction \textit{waw} before \textit{wīḥānēnū} is best understood as conjunctive-sequential “so that, that,” i.e., denoting purpose or result.\textsuperscript{261} The verb \textit{ḥnn} means in Qal stem “to favour someone”\textsuperscript{262} or “be gracious.”\textsuperscript{263}

By identifying himself with the priests and the wider community, Malachi shows that he speaks as an insider, not someone from afar (see the contrast with Amos 7:12) and that the entire community has lost God’s favour. The priests may try to appease God, but it is for the benefit of both the priesthood and the people.

\textbf{Mal 1:9b} \textit{This has happened because of you (miyyedkem hāyētā zō’t)}

The clause is translated very differently in English: “with such offering from your hand” (NIV, “on your part” NASB, “such gift” ESV), “this hath been by your means” (KJV), “the fault is yours” (NRSV), “is this from your hand?” (Smith), “since this is what

\textsuperscript{259} See GKC §110d (cf. §105d).
\textsuperscript{260} An example of imperative + \textit{nā’} emphasizing irony followed by a mockery is given in Isa 47:12, “Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have laboured at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror.” Note also Amos 4:4-5, where the prophet ironically encourages cultic transgressions such as sacrifices and tithes.
\textsuperscript{261} WO'C §34.6; ef. §39.2.2.
\textsuperscript{262} HALOT 1:334.
\textsuperscript{263} CHAL 334.
you offered” (Stuart), “if you do this” (Mason). *miyyedkem* (“from you hand”) emphasises the culpability of the priests and stands in contrast with *bēyād malʾākî* (“by the hand of Malachi”). The preposition *min* should be understood as marking the cause and/or means of the situation. The demonstrative *zōʾt* refers to what has been previously explained since it has a nominative function.

Disrespect for Yahweh has come through those who were supposed to speak from God. Now someone else (Malachi) speaks from God since the priests have failed. Malachi is emphasising on whose account the insult is.

**Mal 1:9c** *Will he lift up your face?” says Yahweh of Hosts (ḥāyiśṭāʾ mīkem pānîm YHWH šēbāʾôt)*

Malachi brings home the illustration in v. 8. Would the governor lift up their faces? No. Will Yahweh lift up their faces? Even less!

We could paraphrase v. 9 in the following way: “Now that you can see with this illustration what I mean when I say that you don’t honour and fear God, go ahead and try offering those gifts to God to appease him, since that is what you are doing. Do you think that he will be happy with you if not even your governor would be?”

**2.2.8 Mal 1:10**

**Mal 1:10a** *Oh that one among you would shut the temple doors (mî gam-bākem wēyısḡōr dēlāṭayim)*

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264 WO’C §11.2.11d.
265 See Hill, Malachi, 183.
The interrogative pronoun *mî*, when translated literally, means “who?” but is sometimes used to introduce a strong wish or desire. In this case, *mî* + the intensifying adverb *gam* + the Qal Jussive *wêyîsgôr* amounts to a clear expression of wish or desire. Therefore, the preferred translation by most Bibles is “Oh that one among you would shut…” (NIV, NASB, ESV. See also Smith, Verhoef, Hill) against the more literal version “Who is there even among you that would shut…?” by the KJV. The ancient versions show some ambiguity in their interpretations of Mal 1:10. The LXX reads *dioti* (“because even among you…”) and *wêyîsgôr* as “the doors shall be shut.” V omits *gam* (“quis est in vobis qui claudat ostia”); Syr reads “who is there among you who would guard my doors?”

The noun *dêlîtayîm* is the dual form of the common word for door, *delet*. The dual form appears seven times in the OT, in every instance referring to city or street gates. In Mal 1:10, the context points to gates related to the temple that had two doors (Ezek 41:23) and where the altar was. Hill argues they refer “either to the double doors of the Temple entrance from the court of the priests (so Mason [1977: 144]) or the entrance(s) to the court of the priests where the tables for sacrifices were located (so Baldwin [1972a: 227]).” Of all the ways to express his dislike for the priests’ attitude toward the cult, the expression “shut the temple doors” is noteworthy and may well be alluding to the event recorded in 2 Chr 28:24 where King Ahaz of Judah also shut the temple doors and set up idolatrous altars “in every corner of Jerusalem.” Once you shut the only means to worship Yahweh, there is only room for worshipping idols. The priests

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267 HALOT 1:224.
in Yehud would have identified this connection immediately since there is no other in the entire OT. To shut the temple doors was to shut Yahweh and all possible communication with him through worship. Yahweh prefers to shut that channel of divine communication until his honour is restored, and he compares the situation to the idolatry that led the Israelites into exile.

The Qal Jussive wēyisgōr is made from the prefixed conjugation and the verb sgr, “to shut.”269 The waw is most likely non-perfective of desire, which “denotes a desire or wish of the subject.”270 Yahweh’s desire is that someone closes down the Temple and all activities within it. In a way, the closing of the temple also parallels Ezekiel’s vision of Yahweh abandoning the temple271 five years before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC because the people had profaned Yahweh’s holiness by turning to false gods and prophets (Ezek 8). In Malachi’s time, the priests were profaning Yahweh’s holiness by insulting him with dishonour and disrespect.

Mal 1:10b so that you would not set light to my altar in vain (wēlō'-tā'îrū mizbēhî ḫinnām)

The construction wēlō'-tā'îrū is formed by the conjunction waw, the negative particle lo and the verb 'wr. According to Waltke and O’Connor, the conjunction waw with the imperfective form can carry a consequential force – in this case, translated as “so that” - and thus explains the reason behind Yahweh’s desire to close the Temple doors.272 To be more precise, Yahweh wants to put an end to the sacrifices of any kind. The Hiphil

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269 HALOT 2:742-43.
270 WO’C §31.4h; Cf. Gen 24:58; Exod 21:36; 1 Sam 21:10.
271 Ezekiel sees the glory of Yahweh move from the sanctuary to the main entrance of the temple (10:2-4), to the East Gate (10:18-19) and ending at the Mount of Olives, outside the city (11:22-23).
272 WO’C §33.4b.
imperfect -tāʿīrū means “to set light to” and is here referring to a continuous action of burning sacrifices at the altar (mizbēhî).

Another noteworthy inclusion is that of the adverb ḫinnām, which speaks of the futility of setting light to the altar in a manner that displeases Yahweh.

Fishbane has argued that ḫinnām in Mal 1:10 is another example of mocking the Priestly Blessing in Num 6:23-27. He compares it to vīhunnekā in Num 6:25 (“be gracious to you”) since both words come from the same root hēn (“favour, grace”). The priests work in vain to seek Yahweh’s favour.

The implication of Yahweh’s desire of closing the temple and ceasing all offerings is that the priests are not likely to change their attitude of dishonour. Rather than continuing with improper sacrifices, Yahweh prefers to shut the temple down. The cult carried out in vain!

Mal 1:10c I have no delight in you,” says Yahweh of Hosts, (ʿēn-lî hēpeṣ bākem...)

The term hēpeṣ means “pleasure” or “joy” or “delight.” Most translations chose the word “pleasure” (KJV, ESV, NRSV; see also Verhoef and Mason).

Literally, the expression ʿēn-lî hēpeṣ bākem means “there is no joy to me in you,” and it underlines Yahweh’s dislike and repugnancy for the priests’ activities in spite of their outward fulfilment of the traditional cult tasks. Perhaps it is important to highlight that Yahweh’s disgust is toward them (bākem). It is the wrong attitude behind the offering that pollutes the entire cult. But, in addition, they were not even meeting the

273 HALOT 1:24.
274 “for nothing = in vain” according to HALOT 1:334; cf. Prov 1:17; Pss 109:3; 119:161; Ezek 6:10; 14:23; especially Isa 1:13 “vain offerings.”
275 Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 333.
276 HALOT 1:340.
outward standards since they were bringing inferior, disqualified animals. It is one thing to obey the law but miss the spirit of the law; it is another to fail to meet both the law and the spirit! The priests were failing to meet both the correct attitude toward the cult and the standard of clean animals to practise the cult.

**Mal 1:10d** “and I will accept no offering from you.” (ûminhā lō’-’erṣeh miyyedkem)

The noun for offering used here is the expected one, minhā, which refers in general terms to any offering. Here, it is a parallel repetition of 10a, “Oh that one among you would shut the temple doors.” Closing the temple and accepting no offering from the priests means the same thing: “I wish it were over!” Yahweh rejects any offerings - and, in fact, the entire cult – if they originate from the priests. The expression *from you* (miyyedkem), which is plural, emphasises the guilty party by the repetition of the pronouns bākem and miyyedkem.

Malachi 1:10 parallels verses 8 and 9. First, there is a play on appeasing someone or seeking his acceptance through offerings that is present in all three verses. In verse 8, the priests are sarcastically told to appease the governor in order to seek his acceptance. Similarly, verse 9 is full of irony encouraging the priests to appease God in order to gain his favour. And, in verse 10, Yahweh states that, without exception, he will not accept any of the priests’ attempts to appease him. Second, there is a strong emphasis on who is guilty. Verse 8 states, “will he be pleased with you (panēkā)?” Verse 9 says, “this has happened because of you (miyyedkem)” Verse 10 says, “I have no delight in you (bākem) …and I will accept no offering from you (miyyedkem).”
In all, verses 8-10 emphasise Yahweh’s displeasure with the priests, which is reflected by their attitude to the cult.

2.2.9 Mal 1:11

Mal 1:11a For from the rising of the sun to its setting great is my name among the nations (kî mimmîzrah-šemeš wē ‘ad-mēbô’ô gādōl šēmī baggōyîm)

The NIV omits the particle kî; the NLT and NJB read it as the adversative conjunction “but” (also Smith); others, like Hill, Verhoef, and Calvin, read it as an emphatic adverb “indeed, verily.”277 Others opt for the causal particle “because” but this is an improper translation.278 The majority of Bible translations and commentators read it as a logical conjunction “for” (Stuart, NASB, KJV, ESV, NRSV, JPSV) making verse 11 the logical conclusion of the previous verse. The connection implies that Yahweh’s rejection of the offerings is due to the priests’ insults to his widely recognized great name.

The expression mimmîzrah-šemeš wē ‘ad-mēbô’ô is a merism “indicating totality (of place) via polarity.”279 The expressions “among the nations” (x2; cf. v.14) and “in every place” further clarify that the prophet has in mind the geographical expansion of the nations, at least of the known world. The expression is also known both to the OT (Pss 50:1; 113:3; Isa 59:19) and to ancient writings. The Amarna letter 288:5-7, which was written by the king of Jerusalem to Pharaoh (14th century BC), contains the expression “my lord has set his name at the rising of the sun and at the setting of the sun,”

277 See WO’C §39.3.1d.
278 See WO’C §38.4a.
279 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1306. Cf. Pss 50:1; 113:3; Isa 45:6; 59:19. Not to be misunderstood with totality of time as in Ps 113:3, i.e., all day long.
and the Mari letters (17th century BC) contain a similar expression. It should not be ignored that the ancient expression is used for kings and is not merely referring to anyone’s fame or popularity (see v. 14: “For I am a great king…”). However, the expression needs not be taken in its most literal sense, i.e., that every single nation of the earth considers Yahweh as the king per excellence – at least, that is not how the merism is used elsewhere. Neither is it implied that the entirety of each nation or even its religious facet respects Yahweh. It may only mean that there are representatives of belief in, or respect for, Yahweh’s name in almost every nation of that area of the world, something that is often ignored by those claiming universalistic or syncretistic connotations in the text.

The repeated phrase gādôl šēmî baggôyîm (”great is my name among the nations”; see also Mal 1:5, 1:11[x2] and 1:14) is an example of a verbless clause in which the verb “to be” is implied. In this instance, the omitted verb has caused a fair amount of discussion among scholars as to whether it should be translated in a present (“my name is great among the nations”; NLT; NRSV) or a future tense (“my name will be great among the nations”; NIV; NASB; KJV; ESV). While it is possible to read this phrase in the future tense, in the OT a verbless clause, in most cases, refers to present or continuous actions (LXX reads the present tense in all verbs in Mal 1:11 and in Mal 1:14 [my name is feared among the nations]). Those who choose a future tense give the context (or theological context) more weight than the grammar.

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280 Ibid.. A Phoenician inscription from Karatepe contains a similar expression. See also Å Viberg, “Wakening a Sleeping Metaphor: A New Interpretation of Malachi 1:11,” TynB 45 no. 2 (1994), 301.
281 Also Stuart, “Malachi,” 1306; Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 276-77.
282 Baldwin admits this when she says that “whether present of future tense is understood depends on the on the verb in the next clause” referring to muqtār muggāš lišnî. She also acknowledges that the participle muggāš can take either present or future tense and concludes that “the context has to be the decisive factor” (Baldwin, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 228-229). Stuart also states that the “context bears
Virtually all scholars understand the preposition *bet* in its spatial sense, i.e., marking location “within an area” or “amid a domain.” The term *gôy* in the OT “denotes a people considered either politically or racially.” There is a tendency (but not a strict rule, see e.g., Exod 33:13 or Dt 4:6, in which *gôy* and *‘am* – a term also for people but with connotations of consanguinity – are used synonymously) that *gôy* “stresses territorial affiliation and the use of a common language.” This, in modern English, is best described by the word “nation.” In the OT, especially in comparison with *‘am, gôy* has, with no doubt, “the stronger political colouring.” In fact, *gôy* is characteristic of being used in parallelism with *mamlakah* (“kingdom”). Three elements are associated with *gôy*: 1) race, even though the term *‘am* fits this purpose more emphatically; 2) some kind of independent government (normally a monarchy, but not always restricted to it; Israel wanted a king to rule them just “like the *goyim* round about” [1 Sam 8:5, 20]); and 3) the possession of a territory (Isa 36:18-20; Ps 105:44; 2 Chr 32:13). There are other relations such as religion, language or armies, but these are not explicit associations that define its meaning. Therefore, it is quite clear that Malachi is alluding to gentile nations, indeed, pagans (so NLT: “my name is honoured by people of other nations”).

The compound *gâdôt* + *šêmî* + reference to gentile nations (*baggôyîm* or *mê‘al ligbûl yiśrâ‘êl* [1:5]) is designed in the first two oracles “to remind the people of Yehud

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283 WO’C §11.2.5b.
284 Clements, “*gôy,*” TDOT 2:426-27, for all previous quotes on this paragraph.
of a truth they somehow have forgotten – ‘Great is Yahweh.’” But Malachi also craftily uses it to give a thematic structure to the first half of the oracle. The first oracle (Mal 1:2-5) concludes with “Great is Yahweh over the territory of Israel,” which is immediately contrasted in verse 6 with the priests’ disrespect for his name. The stark contrast comes again in verse 11, after a full-blown reprimand for insulting Yahweh’s name: “great is my name among the nations…In every place incense is being presented to my name…for great is my name among the nations.” This is followed by verses 12-13, which again contrast the greatness of Yahweh’s name with the priests’ despising attitude toward him, concluding in verse 14 with the majestic phrase “for I am a great king…and my name is being feared among the nations.” Without doubt, the priests’ attitude toward Yahweh needed to be contrasted with what it should have been. The least and last of all people had more respect for Yahweh’s name than the first of all people, the religious leaders. They had thought too little of Yahweh, and the prophet ensures they understand who it is they are dealing with.

The contrast that Malachi establishes between the priests, Yahweh and the gentile nations, goes beyond irony if we look back on Israel’s history and their responsibility before the nations to proclaim and testify of the greatness of Yahweh’s name. Israel, from the very beginning, was entrusted with the task to be a light to the nations (Ps 67; Isa 42:1, 4, 6; 49:6; Ezek 37:28; 38:16; 39:7, 23). Yahweh called Abraham to bless all the nations through him (Gen 12:2-3) and it is through Israel that the Messiah would be a light to the nations (Isa 42:6; 60:1-3). Israel was chosen to be holy among the nations, a special kingdom in display for the nations (Exod 19:5-6). The priests, along with the

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287 Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 276.
people of Israel, were responsible for exalting Yahweh’s name and testifying of his
greatness. Malachi says the opposite is happening: “tragically, the nations now instruct
postexilic Yehud in the ‘greatness’ of God.”

**Mal 1:11b** In every place incense is being presented to my name, a pure offering
(âbēkol-mâqôm muqtâr muggâš lišmî ūminhâ tēhôrâ)

The phrase âbēkol-mâqôm (“in every place”) underlines the fact that Malachi
means an entire geographical expansion. The preposition bêt is used here in its spatial
sense. The word kōl is used to express wholeness, universality or totality (“all”,
“every”, “whole”). The noun māqôm means “place,” forming an idiom often used in the
OT. Failing to recognize that this is an idiom, we could easily take the expression in its
most literal meaning, “in every inch of earth,” while the purpose of the expression is to
denote a vast territory expanding in all directions (see also exegesis on the merismus in
1:11a). The same expression is found in Amos 8:3 where the prophet warns that there
will be dead bodies thrown “everywhere” (bēkol-māqôm). What the prophet means,
geographically speaking, is throughout the country and probably the nations surrounding
Israel or on the way to Babylon. In Malachi’s case, bēkol-māqôm speaks of every place
where worshippers reside, i.e., where there are people who offer ūminhâ tēhôrâ (see next
clause).

Hill and others have argued that, since Yahweh is Creator, “it is only natural that
all creation should extol his universal glory,” and they refer to Ps 148:5; 11-12. But
these scholars fail to see that Mal 1:11 refers to worshippers, not to creation. Psalm 148 is

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288 Hill, Malachi, 187.
289 WO’C §11.2.5b.
290 Hill, Malachi, 189.
a call to worship, not a description of what is truly happening. It is one thing to say Yahweh *deserves* the worship of every living creature, and another that they *do so* (similar Psalms are Pss 67; 96; 117).

The phrase *muqtār muggāš lišmî ūminhâ ūhôrâ* is a difficult one. The two Hophal participles *muqtār* and *muggāš* have caught the attention of many a scholar who have offered all kinds of emendations to the text in order to remove its awkwardness.291 *Muqtār* is seen by most as a noun meaning “incense” (or frankincense292); LXX reads “incense offering” [*thumiáma*293 which is usually the word for *qētôret* [the most common word for incense in the OT]]. Stuart has argued that “Hebrew words from the root קטר refer to offerings that are allowed to burn up in their entirety rather than those eaten after cooking. This can include, but is not limited to, ‘incense’.”294 On a similar note, Verhoef has also pointed out that “the offerings of the text do not concern incense and grain only but apply to offerings as such”295 and Paul Heger in *The Development of Incense Cult in Israel* affirms that *muqtār* does “not specify the substance which was burnt...[it] is still an open issue.”296 It is what is turned into a fragrance through fire.

The Targum spiritualises the term *muqtār* as prayer, “for from the rising of the sun even to its setting my name is great among the nations, and *on every occasion when you fulfil my will I hear your prayer and my great name is hallowed because of you,* and your prayer is *like a pure offering before me,* for my name is great among the nations,

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291 See Hill’s summary of emendations to the text (Hill, Malachi, 188).
292 So HALOT 1:627.
294 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1306.
295 Verhoef, Haggai, Malachi, 229.
This relation between incense and prayer is **not** just an external interpretation, but it is also found in Ps 141:2: “May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.” The Dead Sea Scrolls also contain the spiritualization of sacrifices as prayer (1QS 9:4f.; 10:14). Therefore, it is completely within the boundaries of the word to interpret prayer, instead of physical offerings.

The Participle *muggāš* has been understood in the present time (“is offered” or “is being presented”; e.g., NRSV, NLT, Hill, Mason, Verhoef, Smith) or in the future time (NIV, NASB, KJV, ESV, Stuart, Taylor and Clendenen, Baldwin). Admittedly, the participle admits both, hence the controversy. The discussion runs at two levels: the grammatical and the theological. Purely based on grammar, *muggāš* is best translated not as a future prescription (see above about Malachi’s usage of the *futurum instans* participle), but as a present description addressing contemporary events to Malachi. It should be noted, as Viberg has, that this term is uncommon in the OT in the Hiphil. Out of 8 occurrences (4 are in Malachi) the word is never used for offering incense.

The word *minhā* is an all-inclusive term for offerings or gifts. BHS editors have proposed *מִנְחָה* (no *waw*) instead of *וּמִנְחָה*, but no given text supports this proposition. Since the latter appears 5 times in Malachi and is well attested in the OT (e.g. 1 Sam 10:27, 2 Kgs 8:8, 9; Ps 96:8; 1 Chr 32:23), there is no need for such emendation.

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299 HALOT 1:601.
Mal 1:11 is the only instance in the OT where tēhôrâ concerns offerings.\(^ {300}\) It is always used of cultic purity (Lev 10:10; Deut 12:15; Job 14:4). But even though it is used distinctively in Malachi, we ought to still infer the meaning from its cultic (theological) context, where it means “pure” or “ritually clean.” Leviticus and Deut 14 explain the difference between pure and impure offerings (see exegesis on verse 7 in regard to ceremonial cleanliness). Suffice it to say that any offering presented outside of Israel or on other altars was, by definition, impure or contaminated.

Some commentators see here an allusion to nature recognising the Creator God; however, this view is weakened when we consider that incense is the particular worship offered to Yahweh. Malachi is not talking about the creation and its recognition of its creator, but rather of human beings who are free to choose to worship whatever they want.

**Mal 1:11c For great is my name among the nations,” says Yahweh of Hosts**

The prophet states four times in the first 14 verses that Yahweh is great (5, 11x2 and 14). Without doubt the contrast is between the priests dishonouring Yahweh’s name and the prophet exalting Yahweh. The priests are no longer worthy of wearing Yahweh’s name (Num 6:27).

As in v. 11a, the clause starts with the logical conjunction kî, which once more emphasizes the reason why the priests are to honour Yahweh’s name – for it “is great among the nations.” It should be noted (see also exegesis on v. 14b) that verse 11 and verse 14 come at the end of two parallel units (6-11 and 12-14) and start with the particle

Both of them come as a logical conclusion of the “priests’ criticism+Yahweh’s reaction+basis of the accusation” pattern. Both clauses are the basis for the accusation; they use similar language and transmit basically what is often proclaimed in the Psalms (Pss 47:3, 8, 9; 95:3; 96:4), i.e., that Yahweh is king of all the earth.

2.2.9.1 Theology of Mal 1:11: Many articles and commentaries have attempted to decipher what Mal 1:11 means since it is one of the most difficult verses in the OT, not to mention the book of Malachi. What follows is a short summary of the issues at stake and my interaction based on the previous exegesis.

Part of the confusion in verse 11 is due to the difficulty of translating the verbless clause "kî mimmizrah-šemeš wè ‘ad-mēbô’ô gādôl šĕmî baggŏyîm" since it can be translated both in the present (“my name is great among the nations”; NLT; NRSV) and the future tense (“my name will be great among the nations”; NIV; NASB; KJV; ESV), though in the vast majority of cases, it is translated in the present tense. Added to this, we ought to ask whether the idiom “from the rising of the sun to its setting” (and the other geographical expression in v. 11) refer to the entire world or whether it could qualify as a reference to the known civilized world of Malachi.

Another element is found in the expression baggŏyîm (“among the nations”) and whether it could mean the nations as such, Jews in those nations, and/or proselytes in those nations. While the text does not make any separation between inner groups or

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individuals, the history of interpretation of Mal 1:11 recalls many voices in support of the last two options.

The word muqtār + āminhā tēhōrā adds to the confusion. Is Malachi saying that Yahweh treats offerings presented outside Israel as pure? Isn’t the prophet standing against the exclusivism that characterizes Yahweh’s cult? Not to speak of the innumerable protests against gentile idolatry in the OT, even Malachi? A pagan sacrifice is by definition the opposite of what tēhōrā stands for.

The last element of ambiguity is found in the verb muggāš (“to offer, to present”), which translators read in both present and future. Those who choose the first clause in the present tense are consistent in translating muggāš lišmî āminhā tēhōrā as “in every place incense is being presented (or “is presented”) to my name.” Those who read the first clause as eschatological (future) translate the second clause as “in every place incense will be presented to my name.”

Depending on how scholars interpret these issues, we can classify at least five main views: 1) The worship of pagan nations was pleasing to God since in those days there was an increasing belief in the one High God or an acknowledgment of the “God of Heavens.” Many have criticized this view on different grounds. In the OT, pagan sacrifices are never either acceptable to Yahweh or considered clean; rather, they are consistently condemned as idolatrous (e.g., Isa 40:19-20; 41:7; 44:9ff.; 45:20; 46:1-2). Malachi also shows antagonism to other religions in Mal 2:11 where he speaks strongly against marrying “the daughter of another god.” Not only would this interpretation make

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Mal 1:11 stand in stark contrast with the rest of the OT, being the most syncretistic and universalistic text known to the Hebrew Scripture, but additionally the text explicitly states that the offerings are presented to Yahweh’s name (lišmî). Malachi is talking about Yahwism, not just monotheism; 2) The Jews in the Diaspora (Asia, Africa, Europe) are the ones offering incense to Yahweh “around the world.” Their offerings would have been limited only to incense in synagogues, but, still, they were more honouring to Yahweh than all the sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. 3) Justin Martyr, in his Dialogue to Tryphos, addresses this view, held by contemporary Jews of his time, as false since at the time there were no Jews “in every place.” He says, “at the time when Malachi wrote this, your [the Jews’] dispersion over all the earth, which now exists, had not taken place.” But this is based on the assumption that Malachi refers to the globe. Another argument against this interpretation is voiced by Viberg, who says that identifying groups within the nations (Jews or proselytes) goes against a smooth reading of the text which does not make such distinction. On the contrary, it emphasizes that it is “the nations” who offer pure offerings (incense) to Yahweh. 3) The ones who offer incense to Yahweh are Jewish proselytes among the nations, who made offerings to Yahweh on their own soil, rather than in Jerusalem. 4) Mal 1:11 does not describe a present reality but a future one. The nations around the world will one day acknowledge Yahweh as the one true God and will worship him

303 Utzschneider, Künfer oder Schreiber? 56ff., understands haggêyîm as referring to Jews among other nations, i.e., the dispersion. As referred to in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 147.
304 Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, chapter CXVII as found in http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyrdialoguetrypho.html
305 Krieg, Mutmaßungen über Maleachi, 146f.; W Rudolph and HG Reventlow, for whom the phrase “among the nations” refers to non-Israelites who present offerings to Yahweh (W Rudolph and HG Reventlow, Die Propheten Haggai, Sacharja und Maleachi, 142); Rudolph, Haggai–Sacharja–Maleachi, 263 as referred to in Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 147. See also Th Chary, Les prophètes et le culte à partir de l’exil (Paris: Desclee, 1955), 242.
universally. This is the eschatological view that finds plenty of support from all the other prophets. Hill, among others, believes this interpretation makes Malachi’s argument lose strength since the comparison is not real, but future. Besides, reading v.11 as only referring to the future goes against the principle that prophets are mainly concerned about their time (more on this below). 5) Verse 11 is a metaphor serving the purpose of portraying Yahweh as “supreme in the area of cultic life” based on the statement “For I am a great king” in v. 14. A similar view is taken by others who understand the verse as a hyperbole: “the nations are more sincere in their pagan worship than you.” This less literal view has gained few supporters.

In my opinion, Mal 1:11 has to be addressing the present situation. To say that the prophet is only referring to eschatological times diminishes the strength of his argument against the priests and seems to ignore the general rule that prophets are mainly preoccupied with their present situation. Besides, the language is more in favour of the present tense. Verhoef explains that there is a sound “hermeneutical principle that the prophets are first of all concerned with the people and the circumstances of their own time.” If we apply this principle, the best explanation is that the prophet alludes to contemporary worshippers of Yahweh – hence the strength of the comparison with the priests’ attitude toward the cult. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that Malachi is also bearing in mind the eschatological side but justifies first the search for a present application of the text.

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306 Among holders of this view are Baldwin, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 229-230; Verhoef, Haggai and Malachi, 222ff.; Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 275-79; Stuart, “Malachi,” 1305-1307.
309 Verhoef, Haggai, Malachi, 230.
Even though the majority of scholars read geographical expressions such as “from the rising of the sun to its setting,” “among the nations” and “in every place” as universal, I have shown that it needs not be read in that sense. Other examples have shown that the idiom is used to express vastness, not necessarily universal expansion. Malachi could perfectly well be alluding to the known civilized world of the recipients of the message (i.e., Europe, Middle East, North Africa, Asia…). Granted this, Justin Martyr’s argument that the Jews had not expanded *all over the world* loses its force.

It is not difficult to understand Malachi’s claims that the name of Yahweh is great among the nations. First of all, he deserves that respect for he is the creator, though it doesn’t follow that he is necessarily receiving that respect. But second, in recent chapters of history, at least two of the emperors of both Babylonian and Persian Empires made explicit exaltations of the God of Israel that were spread through the whole Empire. King Nebuchadnezzar testified of the Most High God of Daniel before the whole Babylonian empire, which was a world in itself and a compound of many nations (Daniel 4 and 5). Similarly, Cyrus the Great made a proclamation throughout the even bigger Persian empire about Yahweh, the God of Israel, as the God who gave him the power over all the kingdoms (Ezra 1:1-2). Also king Solomon, after the temple was built, takes for granted that people will come from far countries due to the fame and grandiosity of Yahweh. Through Israel, they will “hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm” (1 Kgs 8:41-42). Regardless of what the political status of Israel was at the time, it is comprehensible that in many nations (not necessarily many people) gentiles converted to Yahwism and joined the Diaspora in worshipping Yahweh.
Who offers incense to Yahweh? The traditional view is that Jews in the Diaspora did (so Targum and Rashi), but it could well be that Malachi refers to both Jews and proselytes. The problem with this view is that whether Jews or proselytes offered incense outside Jerusalem, Yahweh could not be pleased with offerings on polluted soil unless the entire nation was converted and the soil made holy. Only in *Terra Sancta* could offerings be presented to Yahweh. To state the contrary would defile the whole of Malachi’s criticism on the priests for not obeying explicit laws of purity and cleanliness. A pure offering would have to meet those same standards Malachi was exhorting them to obey.

This dilemma, however, should not be a problem if we acknowledge the metaphorical usage of incense. The exegesis has shown that the term *muqtâr* is ambiguous, causing many to emend the text; the term *muggāš* is only used by Malachi in connection with offering incense, and, added to this, the term *tēhōrā* is uniquely used in verse 11 in connection with sacrifices. According to Viberg, “this unusual use of terminology indicates that the author is trying to convey something other than a portrayal of the presentation of acceptable sacrifices.”

Though Viberg’s conclusion is that the entire verse is a metaphor for claiming Yahweh’s supremacy in cultic life, a view that has not gained many adherents, I agree with him on the fact that the language echoes figurative language which may account for reading incense in a metaphorical sense, i.e., prayer (whether present, future or both). Had the author wanted to say “incense is being offered, a pure offering” to mean literal incense that is pure, he would have chosen

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Malachi is talking about offerings to Yahweh that do not quite fit into the regular offering as described in the Pentateuch.

Therefore, Malachi is comparing the priests’ performance of the cult with the most similar offering he could find among gentiles (proselytes and/or Diaspora). Obviously, it would be anathema to say that animal offerings are being presented to Yahweh’s name outside Jerusalem. There would be no possible way to harmonise that with any of the OT teachings. Rather, he chooses a strange way, a metaphor of the cult, to compare the priests’ offerings (animals) with outsiders’ offerings (prayer).

At the same time, the character of v.11 is much in line with the universalism preached by the prophets, including Malachi. If we failed to recognize this eschatological tone that is implicit in these references to gentile nations, we would not be fair to the book. Malachi refers to the future when he predicts in 1:5 that the people of Israel will one day see how great Yahweh is “over the territory of Israel”; in 3:1-5 when the messenger will prepare the way for the Messiah in the day of judgment when people will “present offerings in righteousness” and “the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to Yahweh like in the days of past times”; when he warns that “the day is coming,” a day which burns like an oven. In that day the “arrogant” and the “evildoer” will be devoured; this is the “great and terrible day of Yahweh,” a day predicted my most prophets preceding Malachi.

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312 Viberg says, “the author found it too disrespectful to use conventional sacrificial terminology in this figurative sense, and therefore selected synonymous forms that did not bear the same connotations as the more technical terminology. This same reticence is also seen in the author’s reference to incense offerings instead of cereal and meat offerings. The author considered improper to use the latter sacrifices in his metaphor. Another adjustment is found in the passive construction that the author uses to describe the sacrificial act. The author refrains from explicitly stating that the nations perform the sacrifices, though this conclusion is clearly implicit in the metaphor” (Viberg, “Wakening a Sleeping Metaphor,” 314).
Even though, as a general rule, we must find an application of the oracle in Malachi’s time, it would be naïve to ignore that many OT prophecies apply to both present and future (eschatological) times. In the OT, the foreshadowing of the messianic era speaks of a time where all nations will worship Yahweh without offerings and without boundaries (Pss 67:7; 86:9-10; 96; 102:22; Isa 2:1-4; 11:10-12; 19:19-23; 25:6-9; 42:1-9; 45:1-3, 22-23; 66:23; Jer 3:17; 16:19-20; Dan 7:14; Amos 9:12; Mic 4:1-4; 7:16-17; Zeph 2:11; 3:8-9; Hag 2:7; Zech 2:11; 8:20-23; 14:16; Tob 13:11; 1 Enoch 90:30-36).

I agree then, with Verhoef, when he argues that the text addresses both present and future realities. In Malachi’s day, there were people outside Israel who could be compared to the priests and with whom Yahweh was more pleased. At the same time, Yahweh is foreshadowing the eschaton where all the nations of the world, every single worshipper, will bow down to him and fear his name as the great king. In this sense, the verse is not just a contrast between Yahweh’s worshippers in Malachi’s day, but “a future contrast to the present reality.” 313 I find this view to be the most comprehensive view of all.

To summarise, Malachi draws a comparison between Jews and proselytes’ prayers and the priests’ sacrifices at Jerusalem. The former are more pleasing to Yahweh than the latter, they are purer and more honouring even though they are not performed at the Temple, but in the land of the heathen. This is, however, Malachi’s contemporary comparison which in itself has tremendous strength against the priests’ attitude. On the other hand, Malachi is clearly alluding to a reality that would have been more than obvious to the priests: The day was coming when every living person would worship Yahweh without the need of sacrifices or of being in Jerusalem. Malachi uses this

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313 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1306.
argument also to contrast the perfect, universal and pure worship that Yahweh will receive one day. In that day no one will despise his name because his name will be great among every single worshipper. Such contrast between the priests’ and the universe’s worship must have given them a wider perspective on the kind of the God they insult.

2.2.10 Mal 1:12

Mal 1:12a But you are profaning it, (wē’attem mēhallēlim ’ôtô)

Almost every word in verse 12 parallels the end of verse 7, restating the main points, namely, that the priests insult Yahweh and profane his name by the way they treat and approach the cult.

There is a purposeful contrast between this verse and the previous one (v. 11). The waw is disjunctive and, in conjunction with ‘attem, changes the focus from the “pure offerings” of the nations, present and future, to the unacceptable worship of the priests. Malachi, following his pattern of discourse, again uses the personal pronoun ‘attem (2mp), as in the past (Mal 1:2; 6, 7), to highlight the subject of the action, the priests. This usage of ‘attem “further heightens the contradistinction between Yahweh (‘ānî, v 6) and the priests and continues the foil established between Yahweh and Yehud in the opening disputation (cf. 1:2).”

mēhallēlim is a Piel participle denoting a continuous action: “you are profaning.” The word also appears in 2:10 (Piel infc) “profaning the covenant of our fathers” and 2:11 (Piel) “Judah has profaned the sanctuary that Yahweh loves.” What are the priests profaning in verse 12? The word ’ôtô can mean “his sign,” “it” or “him.”

314 Hill, Malachi, 189.
315 HALOT 1:319.
The majority of English translations and scholars translate it as “it” referring to Yahweh’s name, the object in the previous verse. When someone profanes the name of Yahweh, he is not just insulting him. According to Wenham, it means to desanctify, treat something holy as unholy, something uncommon as common or worthless. The way the priests are treating Yahweh’s name goes beyond an insult. Taylor and Clendenen explain that to profane “could convey the idea of bringing dishonour or disgrace to someone by associating their name with something shameful.” This disgrace could be compared to “removing the insignia of rank from a military officer, publicly demoting him in disgrace.”

The OT consistently speaks very highly of the name of Yahweh (1 Sam 12:22; Pss 23:3; 79:9; 106:8; Isa 48:9; Jer 14:21; Ezek 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 36:20-23; Dan 9:19 to mention a few), yet the priests have consider it a disgrace.

Mal 1:12b “when you say, ‘the table of Yahweh is defiled, its produce is food being despised’” (beʾemorkem šulḥan ʿādōnāy meḡōʾāl ḫû wēnībō nibzeh ʿoklô)

The words beʾemorkem šulḥan ʿādōnāy meḡōʾāl ḫû parallel verse 7: beʾemorkem šulḥan YHWH nibzeh ḫû. The different divine names and verbs make no theological difference and are most likely used by Malachi to repeat the same idea with synonymous words (see exegesis of v.7).

The relationship between Yahweh’s name and Yahweh’s table (šulḥan ʿādōnāy) is laid out in Lev 22:2, “Tell Aaron and his son to treat with respect the sacred offerings the Israelites consecrate to me, so they will not profane [hll] my holy name. I am Yahweh.” The temple, the utensils, the altars, even the priests themselves, were made holy because Yahweh’s holy presence inhabited the place (Lev 22:9) and because they

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316 Wenham, Leviticus, 18-25.
317 Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 280.
belonged to him (Lev 21:23). Defiling any of these desanctified not only “the participants, it also defiled Israel and the sanctuary of God’s dwelling place and disgraced his name.”

The expression “the table of the Lord is defiled” (mēgō’āl hû’) needs further clarification. Are the priests describing the table because they are aware the altar has been contaminated by their cheap offerings? The prophet portrays them as ignorant, hence the back-and-forth questioning “In what...?” (bammā, see exegesis on v. 2, 6, 7). He leaves us no room for interpreting this phrase as a description; rather, it describes the priests’ belief of what the altar is worth and consequently what the name of Yahweh is worth. The prophet is merely wording out their disdain toward the God they think they worship.

Due to the difficulty of translating the phrase וֹ מֶטֶג כְּלָל הָעֵרָמִי (lit. “and his/its fruit/produce despicable his/its food”), the proposed simplified version נִבְזֶה כְּלָל הָעֵרָמִי (“it is despicable food”) which may have arisen as an emended dittography of נִבְזֶה נִבְזֶה resulting in נִבְזֶה וֹ נִבְזֶה, is defended by Driver, J.M.P. Smith, Rudolph, Petersen, Stuart, and supported by the NJB, NEB, NRSV, RV95. The problem arises from the strange syntactical structure [3ms/3ns poss. pron + noun] + verb in participle + [3ms/3ns poss. pron + noun]. Also נִב appears only in Isa 57:19 where the metaphorical meaning (“fruit of the lips”) does not clarify Mal 1:12. Further, the MT is not only in conflict with the LXX καὶ τὰ ἐπιπληθεμένα ἔξουσισθεντοι βρῶματα αὐτοῦ (“and his foods placed upon it are treated with contempt”) but also with the Targum, Peshitta and some

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318 Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 280.
320 Smith, ICC, 43.
321 Rudolph, Haggai-Sacharja-Maleachi, 251.
322 Petersen, Zechariah 1-9 and Malachi, 176.
Hebrew manuscripts which read “its food is contemptible.” Stuart states that the “only explanation that is even remotely plausible for this admittedly difficult wording”\(^{324}\) is that וְנִיבֹ was in the first place a dittography of the first two consonants of נִבְזֶה that was afterwards converted into the word the MT has. However, the opposite is also plausible. The witnesses against the MT may have arisen from a text that included haplography of the longer version resulting in a shorter one, i.e. omitting ניב. I side with those who choose the MT (NIV, NASB, KJV, ESV, LBLA).\(^{325}\)

Similarly, the editors of BHS have proposed וְנִיבוֹ ('olkô) instead of וְניב. Though the proposed variant reading would better fit the context and would alleviate some of the syntactical problems at the end of v.12 (“all of its fruit are despicable”), no ancient witness or manuscript is given to support it. The appearance of the word וְנִיב in 3:9 has little weight as a valid support against the MT in v. 12.

Verse 12 is therefore a repetition of what verse 7 says with the additional emphasis on the degree of pollution and profanation that is happening. The synonymous words הַלְל (“profane”), ג’ל (“defile”) and בּז (“despise”) help on this matter, by repeating the concept of ritual pollution three times.

### 2.2.11 Mal 1:13

**Mal 1:13a** And you say, “What a burden! and you sniff at it,” says Yahweh of Hosts (wa’àmartem hinnēh mattēlā’ā wēhippahtem ’ôtô)

The conjunction waw is not used in the disjunctive sense (“but”); instead, it continues the purpose of verse 12: “But you are profaning…and you say…” In addition

\(^{324}\) Ibid.

\(^{325}\) Also Hill, Malachi, 190; Glazier-McDonald, Malachi: the Divine Messenger, 62; Verhoef, Haggai, Malachi, 232.
to profaning Yahweh’s name, they also complain about the table and its sacrifices (see exegesis below on 'ôtô).

According to Waltke and O’Connor, exclamatory phrases that start with hinnēh usually fall into the category of “presentative exclamations,” which “introduce exclamations of immediacy and fuller exclamations of perception, cause, circumstance, etc,”326 and Lambdin explains that hinnēh serves to “introduce a fact upon which a following statement or command is based.”327 Most English translations merge hinnēh into the interrogative particle mā (“what?”) of mattēlā’ā recognising it as an exclamatory question (“what…!”).328 This usage of mā is the one that introduces an exclamation “of indignation”329 (other examples are Gen 3:13; 4:10; 20:9 and 31:26). As in other instances, the omission of the predicate is this exclamatory clause adds “excitement of the speaker.”330

The word tēlā’ā means “tribulation” or “hardship”331 and is derived from l’h which means “to become weary.” There are few instances in the OT where we can find this word. Levine explains the term refers to “the effects of exhaustion, weariness,”332 which marks the exclamation as a complaint for an activity that requires some kind of effort or obedience. In Exod 18:8 and Num 20:14 tēlā’ā refers the hardships that Israel had to endure under the oppression of Egypt. In Lam 3:5 Jeremiah complains about being under the oppression of the Assyrians, who have besieged the city of Jerusalem. In fact,

326 WO’C §40.2.1.
328 See WO’C §18.3f; cf. GKC §148.
329 GKC §148.
330 GKC §147c.
331 HALOT 2:1736; “trouble” according to CHAL 390.
the word tēlā’â is still associated with pagan oppression in post-exilic times. Nehemiah uses it when he asks Yahweh not to forget all the tēlā’â they have experienced “from the days of the kings of Assyria until today [under the Persians].” It should not go unnoticed that the priests complain about Yahweh using the same word. He and his stipulations are a hardship, just like the hardships under Egypt or the Assyrian Empire.

From a cultic perspective, the term tēlā’â probably alludes to a similar time when Yahweh complained about the burden that Israel’s sacrifices were for him. Isa 1:14 says, “Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary [l’h] of bearing them.” And in Isa 43:22 Yahweh recalls the same situation as in Malachi: “You have become weary [l’h] of me, O Israel!” (NASB).333

The following phrase wēhhipaḥtem ḥatô has been translated in a variety of ways (NIV: “and you sniff at it contemptuously”; NASB: “and you disdainfully sniff at it”; ESV: “and you snort at it”; NRSV: “and you sniff at me”). The ancient versions change the subject of the phrase to mean that Yahweh is the one who scorns at them (e.g., LXX: “and I have scorned them” [καὶ ἔξεφύσησα αὐτὰ]) in order to soften the strong accusation against the priests. The Qal stem of nph means “to blow” or “breathe.”334 Admittedly, wēhphpaḥtem is an ambiguous term. The only instance where nph appears in the Hiphil stem is in Job 31:39, where it means “to cause the death” of someone.335 The more metaphorical translations given by lexicons are “to put in a rage” or “to undervalue,”336 but it remains speculation. These are attempts “to find the most logical

333 Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 282.
334 HALOT 1:709; Cf. BDB 656.
335 See discussion on Stuart, “Malachi,” 1308.
336 HALOT 1:709.
connection to “a negative expression related to movement of air that might fit the context.” Most versions prefer “you sniff at it [in contempt; disdainfully; contemptuously]” (NIV; NASB; NRSV [though it renders the personal pronoun “me”]; Hill; Verhoef). Whatever translation we choose, it is clear by the context that ṭēhippahṭem is a “gesture of insolence and derision.” The priests were fulfilling the sacrificial duties without passion. They did not esteem or value the cult to Yahweh.

The word ṭōṭō is one of the sixteen Tiqqun Sopherim in the OT. The scribe(s) understood the text as saying either “you sniff at Yahweh” (considered insulting to use “it” in reference to Yahweh) or “you sniff at the sacrificial system” (considered too harsh against the Levitical priesthood). The Syriac reads “and I have sniffed at it,” the LXX καὶ ἐξεφύσησα σὺτὰ (“and you blew them away”), Vulgate has et exsusflastis illud (“and you puffed it away”). Considering that the ancient witnesses do not refer to Yahweh, we should ask whether the text refers to Yahweh, his name, the sacrifices, the food, or the altar. The sacrifices are preferred in light that the priests consider them “burdensome”; i.e., it implies some effort or obedience. Taylor and Clendenen have underlined the “close association in the passage between the Lord, his name, and his ‘table’ [which] makes the end result the same.” I follow Taylor and Clendenen, Hill, R. L. Smith, Merrill and Stuart; cf. NIV, NASB, KJV, ESV, LBLA, NRSV), who choose the neutral pronoun “it” instead of “me.”

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337 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1308.
338 Hill, Malachi, 191.
339 Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 282.
340 Hill, Malachi, 191.
341 RL Smith, Micah-Malachi, 308.
342 Merrill, An Exegetical Commentary, 399.
343 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1308.
Malachi 1:13b You bring in the loot, the limping and the sick as an offering (wahābē’tem gāzūl we’et-happissēah we’et-hahōleh wahābē’tem ’et-hamminhā)

wahābē’tem is the Hiphil form of the verb bw’ and it parallels the verbs taggišûn (“present”) in v. 8 and muggāš in v. 11. (“present”; v.11). The verb bw’ has been described by Preuss as a “fixed term in cultic terminology, and is used to denote the bringing of sacrifices, firstfruits, etc, by men in general, and the bringing of sacrifices by priests.”

Malachi 1:6-14 includes five blemishes in animals for sacrifice: ‘iwwēr (“blind”; Mal 1:8), hōleh (“sick”; Mal 1:8, 13), pissēāh (“limping” or “lame”; Mal 1:8, 13), gāzūl (“injured” or “stolen”; Mal 1:13, also “loot”) and māshāt (“damaged”; Mal 1:14). Only Malachi uses hōleh (only appearance in the OT) and gāzūl for describing sacrificial blemishes, but these blemishes are implicit in the sacrificial regulations noted above. The remaining terms, iwwēr, pissēāh and māshāt are explicit references to sacrificial blemishes. The terms “blind,” “lame,” “sick,” “seized” and “spoiled,” all found in Deuteronomy, are characteristic of unfit animals for sacrifice (see exegesis v. 8 and TRADITIONAL SOURCES REGARDING THE CULT IN MALACHI). With no doubt, the priests’ offerings are without motivation and very poor in quality.

In order to further specify in what ways the priests are dishonouring Yahweh and profaning his name and the altar, Malachi proceeds to cite further failures to keep the standards of the cult. The Qal passive participle gāzūl comes from the verb gzl meaning “rob, seize violently, loot.” Most translations read “stole” (NLT [“stolen”], JPSV, NJB, Petersen, Hill, Verhoef), “seized” (NAB), “taken by violence” (ESV, NRSV), “taken by

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344 Preuss, “bô’,” TDOT 2:25.
345 See O’Brien, Priest and Levite, 92-93.
346 HALOT 1:186.
robbery” (NASB). Based on the fact that the priests could not know whether the animal was stolen or not, some translations prefer words such as “mutilated” (Glazier-McDonald, Mason), “injured” (NIV, Stuart), “that which was torn” (KJV, Smith). However, Schüpphaus defines the term as denoting “a powerful, unlawful snatching away or stealing.”

Whether the ones robbing the animals were the priests themselves or the people of Yehud, Malachi’s reprimand did not surprise the priests. They knew about it and did not complain since it was for their own benefit, i.e., for their stomachs. And, even though nowhere in the OT is it specifically said that stolen animals cannot be offered at the altar, theft and robbery were obvious sins, not to mention legal infractions. Besides, what would be the value of offering another man’s animal when the whole purpose of offerings was to give from what Yahweh has given you?

For the terms pīṣēʾāh and ḥōleḥ see notes on Mal 1:8. Suffice it to say that Deut 15:21 explicitly prohibits to offer limping animals. These animals were not even fit for daily meals outside the cult (Lev 7:24; 17:15; 22:8; Ezek 4:14; 44:31), yet the priests did not have a problem offering them to Yahweh. What they could not use they gave to Yahweh.

Mal 1:13c Shall I accept it with pleasure from you? Says Yahweh (ḥāʾerṣēh ’ōṯāḥ miyyedkem)

The phrase is parallel to v.10 (“I have no pleasure in you” and “I will accept no offering from you”), making verses 10-13 a literary subunit. Hill rightly points out that in both verses the interrogative particle ḫē’ is used both in the rhetorical sense (“Shall I accept it…?”) and the exclamatory sense (“And I will accept no offering…!”).

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348 Verhoef, Haggai, Malachi, 233
“Tragically,” Hill adds, “and ironically, Zerubbabel’s Temple was erected so that Yahweh ‘might be pleased with it’ (wē’ěrešh-bô, Hag 1:8). By the time of Malachi, Yahweh can take no pleasure in his Temple because the ritual sacrifices the corrupt priesthood are offering are unacceptable (lō’-ěrešh-bô, v. 10).” The priests had lost any sense of joy over having recuperated the appropriate practice of the cult, i.e., the temple and the worship within its doors. Only a few decades had passed since it was rebuilt, but it was enough to let their love for Yahweh die.

The omission of šēbā’ôt (“hosts”) has been understood by some as a copying error; however, as Hill argues, the lectio brevior principle should be applied here. The MT is more likely superior, breaking the monotony of the disputation formulas.

2.2.12 Mal 1:14

Mal 1:14a Cursed be the cheater (wē’ārû́r nôkêl)

There are six occurrences of the stem ’rr (“to curse/curse”) in Malachi (1:14; 2:2 [x3]; 3:9 [x2]), and five of them are Yahweh’s own words against the priests. In OT theology, an accursed person was under God’s condemnation and punishment. The intention of someone uttering a curse was “to vigorously keep himself aloof from that person and his action.” Usually, the cursed one is subordinated to the one cursing who would experience “been expelled from a community relationship where he had enjoyed security, justice and success.” Therefore, curses were not just bad wishes or insults but

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349 Hill, Malachi, 193.
351 Ibid, 1:409.
were intended to “affect the whole realm of life,…to deliver over to misfortune,” banning the recipient from any possible benefit.

Sometimes the 'arur-formula is used to discourage future transgressions of the covenant, but in this case the curse takes place if the transgression is enacted. Mal 1:14 does not fit this curse category. Rather, the prophet is, as in the rest of the book, describing a present situation within the worshipping community for which the priests are ultimately responsible.

The Qal participle nôkêl is unique in the OT. The root of the verb is nkl, meaning to “act slickly, deceptively.” Scholars recognise this meaning by choosing terms such as “cheat,” “cheater”, “deceiver” or “swindler.” The stem appears only three times elsewhere. In Gen 37:18 it is a well-prepared and thought action by Joseph’s brothers who “conspire” against him to kill him. The following verses narrate how they deceive him in order to do so. Num 25:18 also shows that this is a conscious deceit, “for they have harassed you by the trickery with which they deceived you in the affair of Peor.” Lastly, Ps 105:25 uses the word to describe how the Egyptians dealt “craftily” with the Israelites. It is clear then that this is a conscious and wilful action against Yahweh that the priests have allowed. Hill points out that the meaning of the word is not to be misunderstood for cleverness, but deceit. He also notes that the “relative participle is anarthrous,” which, according to Waltke and O’Connor, implies “indefiniteness of class” (“Cursed be anyone who cheats”).

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352 Ibid, 1:409-411.
353 Ibid, 1:409.
354 HALOT 1:699, or also “act deceitfully” according to CHAL 238.
355 Hill, Malachi, 194.
356 WO’C §13.2b, 27.5.
Because Malachi addresses the cheater, rather than the priests, some have considered that this passage (verses 11-14) is addressed to both the priests and the people. This, however, is not the case since there are several explicit references to priests; however, Malachi is implicitly criticising all worshippers that come to the temple – after all, the priests offer the people’s sacrifices. To infer that Malachi is only criticising the priests’ own sacrifices for their purity and sanctification is too narrow an interpretation, especially in light of the general cultic accusations, such as the one in v. 14.

Even if the worshippers are taken into account, Mal 1:6-2:9 is clear in presenting the priests as the ones ultimately responsible for what is going on. After all, it was their responsibility to teach appropriate cultic regulations to the people, their responsibility to scrutinise every animal in minute detail in case any defect had passed unnoticed to the worshipper or in case he was ignorant of the standards of purity and cleanliness. Added to this, as we saw in the chapter on socio-historical aspects of Malachi, the post-exilic priests acquired a certain degree of political power over Yehud. This would have made them even more responsible for what happened within the walls of Jerusalem.

**Mal 1:14b** having a male in his flock (wēyeš bē‘edrō zākār)

The literal translation of the existential particle yēš is “there is,” which here refers to possession of an animal. bē‘edrō is a compound of the preposition bêt, the noun ‘ēder and the third person masculine singular possessive suffix. The preposition is used in the

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357 E.g., Tate, “Questions for Priests and People”, 397.
spatial sense (“in his flock”). The noun ‘ēder means “herd”\(^{358}\) or “flock”\(^{359}\) referring to cattle, sheep or goats. The possessive suffix alludes to the cheater’s flock.

Another category of animal is introduced by the term zākār, which means “male animal.”\(^{360}\) Some scholars have thought it appropriate to emend the term רִזְגֶּר רִזְגֶּר (“pure” or “with no defect”) thinking that the prophet may have meant “having an animal without defect in his flock.” This emendation is unnecessary and purely based on a “desire for overt symmetry of antonyms.”\(^{361}\) Male animals were specifically required for Passover sacrifices (Exod 12:5), burnt-offerings (Lev 1:3, 10), sin-offerings (Lev 4:3, 23) and votive sacrifices or free-will offerings (Lev 22:19).\(^{362}\) This last offering is the one the verse mentions since it involves a vow (see exegesis below).

**Mal 1:14c** vows and sacrifices a damaged animal to Yahweh (wĕnōdēr wēzōbēah mošḥāt la’dōnāy)

The two participles wĕnōdēr wēzōbēah with the coordinating waw form either a sequence (“vows and then sacrifices” so NIV) or a disjunction (“vows but sacrifices” so NAB). The participle wĕnōdēr comes from the root ndr meaning “to make a vow” or “vow.”\(^{363}\) The term wēzōbēah is the Qal participle form of zbh (“to sacrifice”) and has already been discussed in Mal 1:8.

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\(^{358}\) HALOT 1:793.

\(^{359}\) CHAL 266.

\(^{360}\) HALOT 1:271, “especially a ram.”

\(^{361}\) Stuart, “Malachi,” 1309.

\(^{362}\) Clements explains that it is not clear why male animals are preferred over female animals. He concludes that “the tendency to establish a restriction to the male in many cases suggests that at one time males must have been regarded as more valuable to God and more filled with vital energy” (Clements, “zākhār,” TDOT 4:84). A different opinion is the one of Stuart who understands Yahweh’s preference for males as “an accommodation of kindness by God to an agrarian society.” Stuart explains that “flocks and herds need all the females they can get because the females give the milk and bear and nurse the young. Any flock or herd needs a few males for breeding, but most males can be separated out for eating. Males were, in other words, less valuable on average to farmers than were females” (Stuart, “Malachi,” 1309).

\(^{363}\) CHAL 229.
The Hophal participle mošhāt is practically unknown in the OT, appearing only here and in Prov 25:26 where it means “corrupt” (KJV, ASV) “polluted” (NIV, NASB, ESV, NRSV) or “rotten” (MKJV). The Hophal stem means “ruined” but in Malachi the meaning of the participle is not completely certain. Ancient versions read the word as “sick” or “weakly” (LXX reads διαπτομένων; Vulgate has debile; Peshita translates it as dakrīḥ [“ill” or “debilitated”]). Modern translations interpret it as “blemished” (NRSV, NIV, NASB, ESV; also Hill, Smith, Verhoef), “corrupt” (KJV) or “damaged” (NEB; also Mason). Even though we cannot stand on firm ground as to knowing the exact meaning, the antagonism with a male animal that is fit for a votive offering makes the semantic range of the word, in this context, limited to “blemished” or “damaged” – certainly, an animal that does not meet sacrificial requirements.

The fact that the worshipper makes a vow before presenting his offering clearly puts the sacrifice under the category of votive offerings. Vows in the OT were promises to give God a particular gift or offering in the future, whether because of economic depression or because of other circumstances. These gifts could not include what Israelites were already obliged to give to their God, e.g., the tithe. There were vows of people (Lev 27:1-8), animals (Lev 27:9-13), houses (Lev 27:14-15), inheritances or family land (Lev 27:16-21) and any land or non-family land (Lev 27:22-25). Some have compared these vows with “practising a kind of ‘credit card’ act of worship.” Keil and Delitzsch helpfully explain that

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364 HALOT 2:1472.  
365 Examples of other votive offerings are also the Nazarite vow (Num 6:14) or a gratitude vow (Num 15:5-8; 2 Sam 15:7-8; Ps 50:14; Prov 7:14; Eccl 5:4).  
a vow was a promise made by any one to dedicate and give his own person, or a portion of his
property, to the Lord for averting some danger and distress, or for bringing to his possession some
desired earthly good.\textsuperscript{367}

Lev 27 seems to serve the purpose of warning against rushed and foolish promises to God
in those times of need by laying the cost of such vows and the penalty for not fulfilling
them. Other passages also include similar warnings: Eccl 5:4-5 (3-4) says, “When you
vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you
vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay” (Cf. Deut
23: 21-23 [22-24]). Similarly, Prov 20:25 states that “it is a trap for a man to dedicate
something rashly and only later to consider his vows.”

If the worshipper wanted to redeem what he had vowed to God, the law provided
a reversion of the vow by making the offerer pay the value of the animal with an
additional 20 percent (Lev 27:13), but this only applied to unclean animals that could not
be sacrificed under any circumstance (Lev 22:11). Unclean animals could be of use to the
priests or they could be sold and the money used for temple maintenances.\textsuperscript{368} The fact
that Malachi explicitly states that sacrifice takes place clarifies that this is not a votive
offering of unclean animals but the kind that requires a perfect male fit for sacrifice:
hence the deceit of the worshipper. Even though the temptation was always to renege on
the promised gift and replace it with something less valuable, such substitutions, when
captured, resulted in a costlier payment, i.e., the loss of both the original and the cheaper
offering (Lev 27:10, 33).

\textsuperscript{367} CF Keil and F Delitzsch, \textit{Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament} (trans. by J Martin; Vol.
2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 480.
\textsuperscript{368} Wenham, \textit{Leviticus}, 339. Bamberger noted that, in the Halakha , vowed goods or money were
used in the maintenance of the Temple (Bamberger, III, 306, as quoted in B Deffinbaugh, “Leviticus” in
Lev 27:9-12 explains that once “an animal that is acceptable as an offering” is vowed, it “becomes holy”, i.e., Yahweh’s property (v.9). The animal cannot be exchanged or redeemed, neither can the worshipper “substitute a good one for a bad one” (v. 10).

There were exceptions when animals with defects could be offered (though never sacrificed). In Lev 22:23, a lamb with disproportionate members could be offered for a freewill peace offering, but not for a votive peace offering. Votive offerings demanded unblemished male animals, even though this kind of offering was voluntary.

Mal 1:14d “For I am a great king” says Yahweh of Hosts (kî melek gādôl ʾānî)

As in verse 11, the expression kî melek gādôl ʾānî starts with the conjunction kî which functions as a logical marker setting the reason of the previous complaint (“It is because I am a great king and…”). The expression melek gādôl ʾānî (“I am a great king”) carries a stronger and more meaningful connotation in Hebrew than in English. Stuart points out that these words are not just stating that Yahweh is a great king, but something like “‘I am the royal suzerain and all other kings and people are my vassals.’”369 In the ancient Near East context, “a great king was a supernational emperor who held sway over lesser kings”370 and everyone had to recognise his authority (Cf. Pss 10:16; 47:3[2]; 95:3).

The comparison between Malachi and other authorities is now culminated having him as king. In Mal 1:2 and 6, Yahweh is the Father who does not receive the appropriate respect. In Mal 1:8, their local authority, the governor, receives better treatment than

Yahweh. And even as a suzerain king over all the earth, the priests fail to respect and honour his name, instead insulting it, despite the grandiosity and greatness of their God.

**Mal 1:14** and my name is being feared among the nations (ûšēmî nôrâ’ baggôyîm)

As in verse 11,ûšēmî and baggôyîm are put together to remind the priests, and all the people, how great and universal the name of Yahweh is (Cf. Pss 9:21 [20]; 102:16[15]). The participle nôrâ’ (“is being feared”) can be translated in both present and/or future tense. However, as discussed in verse 11 (see exegesis), from a grammatical point of view, the translation that best fits the Hebrew is the English present.  

Mal 1:14 concludes the subunit vv. 11-14 with the comparison of the poor and insulting attitude of the priests toward Yahweh and the greatness of Yahweh’s name among the nations. It also concludes the first disputation of the second oracle of Malachi (1:6-2:9). Most commentators recognise the climactic tone of vv. 6-14. Hill highlights the “complementary relationship between the rhetorical questions of v 6 and the divine pronouncements of verses 11 and 14.” The phrase “where is my honour [kēbōdî]?” (v. 6) is contrasted in v. 11 with “great [gādōl] is my name [ûšēmî] among the nations [baggôyîm].” The question “where is the fear [môrâ’î] due to me?” (v. 6) is contrasted with “I am a great [gādōl] king and my name [ûšēmî] is being feared [nôrâ’] among the nations [baggôyîm]” in v. 14. We see, then, a skilful play on words serving the purpose of contrasting the present reality at Yehud and what it should look like.

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372 Hill, Malachi, 196.
2.3 Second Oracle (Second Dispute)—Mal 2:1-9

2.3.1 Introduction. The second disputation of the second oracle, i.e., Mal 2:1-9, elaborates on the accusation framed in the first disputation. According to Stuart, “these words introduce the oracle’s ‘judgment sentence’.” It is no surprise that the first lines of this second disputation are probably the hardest in the entire OT against the priests. I will briefly examine the following references, Mal 2:3b and Mal 2:11-13, where we can find brief allusions to the cult of Israel.

2.3.2. Mal 2:3

Mal 2:3b and I will spread offal on your faces, the offal of your festivals (wēzērīṯ pereš ‘al-pēnēkem pereš ḥaggēkem)

Nowhere in the OT do we find such harsh words against the priests as we do in verses 2 and 3:

“If you will not listen and if you will not set your heart to give honour to my name, says the LORD of Hosts, “I will send against you the curse, and curse your blessings. Indeed I have cursed them because none of you have set your heart. Behold! I am rebuking your seed and I will spread offal on your face, the offal of your festivals; and he will lift you up to it.”

Verse 3b is particularly explicit and graphic. The verb zrh in the Piel means to “scatter” or “spread”, which some translate more metaphorically as “splatter” (NLT), “smear” (Smith, Glazier-McDonald), “sprung” (Stuart) or “throw” (NJB).

What is actually spread on the priests’ faces? The term pereš always appears in contexts of ritual animal sacrifice, though there are only five more instances in the OT (Exod 29:14; Lev 4:11, 8:17, 16:27; Num 19:5). The noun is translated in the technical sense as “offal” (NIV) but most English translations choose the word “dung.” The term

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373 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1310.
374 HALOT 1:280; so the majority of English Bibles.
means “fecal matter”\textsuperscript{375} or “contents of stomach.”\textsuperscript{376} In the technical sense, pereš refers to the “undigested contents of the stomach not normally burned on the altar from considerations of delicacy.”\textsuperscript{377} The cultic laws were precise as to what parts of the body had to be burned outside the camp (later on the city): the skin, the flesh, the head, the legs, the entrails and the dung (pereš; see Lev 4:11-12, 8:17, 16:27). According to Hill, there is “certain irony in the prophet’s condemnation, in that the priests have shown decorous sensitivity in the handling of offal but have failed to accord equal respect to Yahweh himself (cf. Levine [1993: 462]).”\textsuperscript{378} Yahweh turns that ironical detail in the priests’ own faces to show them such “respectful” consideration mean nothing to him in light of how they treat the whole altar (cf. Mal 1:12).

The metaphor portraying Yahweh spreading (or even throwing!) excrement over the priests’ faces is indeed repugnant and humiliating, especially if the prophet was uttering this curse publicly. OT prophets usually did. Stuart explains that the metaphor must be read against the background of priestly cleanliness: “Priests had to be cleaner than anyone else. Their cleanliness symbolized their holiness before a holy God. Dung was about as unholy as a substance could be.”\textsuperscript{379} It is no surprise, then, that the Targum takes out the metaphor and replaces it with “I will make visible on your faces the shame of your crimes.”

But perhaps it is more interesting for our purposes to examine what the prophet refers to when he specifies where the pereš comes from. The word haggēkem is a compound of the noun hag and the 2mp possessive pronoun. As for the hag, in Malachi it

\textsuperscript{375} “peresh,” TWOT 2:740.
\textsuperscript{376} CHAL 299, especially of ruminant animals; Cf. HALOT 2:977.
\textsuperscript{377} Levine, Numbers 1-20, 462.
\textsuperscript{378} Hill, Malachi, 201.
\textsuperscript{379} Stuart, “Malachi,” 1314.
refers to “festivals,” though it literally means “procession,” “round festival” or “festival.” There were three main festivals in the Israelite calendar: Passover, Pentecost and the Tabernacles. These periods were national holidays lasting approximately one week, during which the crowds would gather to celebrate and, most importantly, to present offerings to Yahweh. Yahweh was not merely intending to spread some dung on their faces, but, metaphorically speaking, he would wait for the festivals during which the amount of excrement was by far the most voluminous. The phrase “the offal of your festivals” thus serves the purpose of adding the connotation of quantity.

2.4 Third Oracle—Mal 2:10-16

2.4.1 Translation

2:10 Is there not one father to all of us? Did not one God create us? Why does one deal treacherously with his brother profaning the covenant of our fathers. 2:11 Judah has dealt treacherously and an abomination has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the sanctuary that Yahweh loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 2:12 Yahweh may cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does it, witness and answerer, even though he presents offerings to Yahweh of Hosts. 2:13 This is another thing you do: cover with tears the altar of Yahweh weeping and groaning because there (no longer) is still no attention turned to the offerings or acceptance with pleasure from your hands...

2.4.2 Introduction.

The third oracle of Malachi, Mal 2:10-16, deals with unfaithfulness in three ways: marriage with pagan women, corrupted (even pagan) worship, and divorce. The literary
form of the oracle is similar to that of other oracles following the question-answer-refutation pattern with the exception, as with the fifth oracle, that it is the prophet who begins the oracle and not Yahweh himself. The oracle is addressed to the community of Yehud in totto. Key repeated terms like bqd (“to be unfaithful;” 5x) and 'ehad (“one;” 4x) show how Malachi’s concern is the unity and loyalty of the community as Yahweh’s children. Yahweh is called the one Father of everyone (2:10 says, “Is there not one Father [.‘āb] to all of us [lēkullānū]?”). The accusation is to those betraying their own brethren (“Why does one deal treacherously with his brother [bē’āhîw]…?”). It is not the priests who are accused, but Judah (2:11) who “has dealt treacherously…and profaned the sanctuary that Yahweh loves.”

There are scholars who understand this oracle as a condemnation of idolatry. Such scholars interpret “daughter of another god” (2:11) as a direct reference to unfaithfulness to Yahweh via worshipping other gods. I side with the majority of scholars who understand this section in the context of inter-faith marriage and not idolatry. It has been pointed out that the history of Israel proves that when inter-faith marriage takes place, idolatry follows but one must consider that the picture might be different after the exile. In part, this is corroborated by the non-existent archaeological findings of post-exilic pagan worship in the land of Israel (see INTRODUCTION).

2.4.3 Mal 2:12

**Mal 2:12** Yahweh may cut off the man who does it, every single one from the tents of Jacob even though he presents offerings to Yahweh of Hosts (yakrēt YHWH lā’îš ‘āšer ya’āsennā ‘ēr wē’ōneh mē’āhole ya’aqōb umaggiš minhâ laYHWH šēbā’ōt)

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381 See notes on the INTRODUCTION. Cf. M Zehnder, “A Fresh Look at Malachi II 13-16,” VT LIII 2 (2003), 229-30; Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 198-200 (who emends ‘āšer ‘āhēb to ‘āšērå ’āhēb (“he loves Asherah”)).
For the purpose of this thesis, it is not necessary to exegete the whole verse. Suffice it to describe how the verse is generally understood by most scholars and whether it has any relevance concerning the Israelite cult.

Malachi 2:12 is Malachi’s prayer to Yahweh about excommunicating from the community of Yehud the man who marries a foreign woman (“the daughter of another god” = *bat-*el nēkār). Some debate exists as to whether in the Pentateuch “to cut off” a person meant to excommunicate from the community or to actually kill the person. Whether the verse is interpreted one way or another, Malachi is praying for the most severe punishment an Israelite could deserve (cf. Ezra 9:3 and Neh 13:25-29). It is clear from the context that the expression *lāʾîš ʾāsher yaʾăšennā* (‘the man who does this’) refers to anyone who is guilty of illicit divorce and remarriage.

The two Qal participles *ēr weʾōneh* have generated discussion among scholars, who show a wide disagreement as to how to translate them. Part of the difficulty in translation is due to the highly idiomatic nature of the expression. There is some consensus in that the expression is a merism that aims “to denote totality by means of two

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382 For a discussion on “cut off” see Wenham, *Leviticus*, 241-242. See also Wenham, *Leviticus*, 125 where he explains that the phrase “cut off from his people” denotes “direct divine judgment, usually death” and “it is attached to various sins, mainly of religious and sexual kind.”

383 Ancient witnesses disagree: LXX reads “until” (ἐώς) which comes from the Hebrew ‘ad, as a result of what could be a consonantal copying error; one medieval manuscript and 4Q12a also has a dalet instead of a res. Syriac and Targum have “son and grandson” (cf. ESV). Vulgate has “master and scholar” (cf. Luther, KJV). It is not a surprise, then, to find the immense variety of translations present today: Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 148-50; cf. NEB) “nomads or settlers;’ RL Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 319-20 “the one who is awake and answers” (cf. Smith, *ICC*, 50-51; NASB). Some emend the pointing of the Hebrew text and arrive at translations like “the aroused one and the lover” (Glazier-McDonald, “Malachi 2:12: ʾēr wēʾōneh – Another Look,” *JBL* 105 [1986], 295-98) or Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 194-95 “nakedness and improper cohabitation.” These are plausible but less probable usages of the words since they seem to elude the context. The context talks about divorce and marriage, not so much about the sexual intercourse. For extensive discussions see Hill, *Malachi*, 234-235; Smith, *ICC*, 50-51; Glazier-McDonald, “Malachi 2:12,” 295-98; Stuart, “Malachi,” 1334.
opposite categories” and are related to the life of a community ("from the tent of Jacob"). Similarly, many scholars agree in that the resh is a copying error where a dalet is expected (this being one of the most common copying errors) resulting in ‘ēd which means “witness.” Other similar Hebrew idioms that denote totality are the following: “root and branch” (Mal 4:1), “slave and free” (1 Kgs 14:10), “head and tail” (Isa 9:14), “all who come and go” (Ezek 34:7), “good and evil” Gen 3:5). There is probably the intention of also including those supporting the illicit marriage (“witness and answerer”), whether in a legal or cultic sense. So Hill argues that “the idiom probably has legal connotations, perhaps related to the juridical procedure requiring two witnesses…” in line with what Deut 17:6 and 19:15 teach. The implication is that the “culpability extends beyond those who have divorced their Hebrew wives and remarried non-Hebrews,” i.e., to the “aiders and abettors of those in Yehud practicing intermarriage with non-Hebrews.” Due to the ambiguity of the couplet, it is probably better to translate the expression in an idiomatic way as “every single one” (Stuart), bearing in mind that the most literal translation is “witness and respondent.” Therefore, the text refers to the act of illicit marriage and it involves all the people supporting the legal contraction, including witnesses, priests and the groom.

What is the contextual significance of the key phrase ḫmaggīš minhā laYHWH šēbā’ōt (“and presenting offerings to Yahweh of Hosts”)? The waw before maggiš is best understood as emphatic (“even”) in line with the disputational character of Malachi’s

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385 NRSV; Hill, *Malachi*, 221; Stuart, “Malachi,” 1334, who justifies the emendation based on the LXX, Syriac, Targum, 4Q12a and a medieval manuscript.


387 Ibid.
words. Stuart understands this phrase as a reference to pagan influences in post-exilic Israelite worship. He contends that the notion of appeasing a god in order to gain his favour, regardless of what crimes or sins the worshipper had done, belonged to pagan understandings of a god that needed to be fed by human offerings and thus owed the worshipper some benefits. The god would overlook any immorality of ethical misbehaviour and grant forgiveness or blessing on the offerer. Admittedly, this departs drastically from the biblical teaching of offerings. For Israel, worship, offerings and anything related to the cult was “an obligation of gratitude to God, not a means of controlling God’s behaviour (Amos 5:21-27; Mic 6:6-8; Mal 2:13).” Whether the children of Israel had been so influenced by pagans during the exile, or whether they were under the influence of their contemporary neighbours, the divine bribing alluded to in Mal 2:12 (and v. 13) shows deep deviations from a biblical understanding of Israel’s God and his worship.

There is general agreement that ûmaggîš minhâ is an attempt by those breaking the marriage covenant to appease Yahweh in spite of their disobedience. The Israelites were trying to appease God by bribing him with offerings for they were perfectly conscious that divorcing Hebrew women in order to marry foreigners was utterly condemned by the law. The priests consented to this “bribing” by participating in the hypocrisy.

2.4.4 Mal 2:13

**Mal 2:13a** *This is another thing you do: (wēzō’t šēnît taʿāšū)*

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388 Hill, Malachi, 236; cf. WO’C §39.2.1b.
The *waw* in *wēzō’t* (“this”) joins the previous actions from verse 11 with the ones to follow in verse 13. The demonstrative pronoun *zō’t* acts as the predicate adjective in the clause. The feminine ordinal adjective *šēnūt* (“second”) points out that there is an additional practice that displeases Yahweh. *wēzō’t* *šēnūt* can refer either to what has just been alluded to in Mal 2:12, i.e., presenting offerings ("[presenting offerings] is another you do..."), or it can refer to something different in addition to presenting offerings and marrying foreign women. Most commentators understand verse 13 as introducing a new practice, i.e., “weeping and sighing,” which is condemned by Yahweh just as the previous practice of divorcing and remarrying. However, since “covering the altar with tears” is not an isolated practice but one that accompanies the sacrifice offered at the altar, we may ask whether verse 13 is an elaboration on how the offerings of v. 12 were performed (see exegesis below on v 2:13b).

The Qal imperfect *ta‘āšū* means “you do” or “you are doing” and conveys the idea of an ongoing action. Markus Zehnder explains that this conjugation may indicate a “durative or iterative situation (“that is the second thing that is taking place constantly/repeatedly among you”).” As with most verbs in the book, the prophet speaks of their daily practises.

**Mal 2:13b** cover with tears the altar of Yahweh weeping and groaning (*kassôt dim’ā ’et-mizbah YHWH bēkî wa’ānāqā*)

The Piel infinitive construct *kassôt* comes from the verb *ksh* and means “to cover.” It is used here figuratively, in conjunction with *dim’ā* “tears,” to describe a
notorious crying over the altar of Yahweh. What Malachi is alluding to by *kassôt dim'â ’et-mizbah YHWH* is literal “crying” at the foot of the altar. The fact that such an emotional display takes place at *mizbah YHWH* (“the altar of Yahweh”) implies that the crying is tied to the offering. It would make no sense to present oneself before the altar with empty hands since sacrifices were the gate for any communication with the divine. There is the possibility, as J.M.P. Smith argues, that the language is figurative and irrespective of the proximity to the altar. However, how and where would a worshipper express “repentance” but at the temple?

This apparent display of repentance is further emphasized by the couplet *bêkî wa’ânâqâ*. The first word, *bêkî* (“weeping”),\(^{394}\) is found elsewhere in cultic contexts where it can have many religious connotations.\(^{395}\) Num 25:6 addresses the event when “the children of Israel” were “weeping before the door of the tabernacle” (*bkh*) due to the plague the Lord had sent over them. Ezra 3:12-13 depicts old priests and Levites who “wept with a loud voice” (*bkh*) at the sight of the inferiority of the second Temple. Ezra 10:1 describes both Ezra and the whole congregation who “wept very sore” (*bkh*) out of repentance after hearing the Law read out loud. Joel 2:12 says, “return to me with all of your heart, with fasting, with *weeping*” (*bêkî*). These were examples of honest crying that was acceptable to Yahweh since it was the natural outcome of a contrite heart. However, the text in Malachi has different connotations (see Mal 2:13c).

The term *‘ânâqâ* (literally “sighing”)\(^{396}\) adds an importance nuance to the interpretation of the verse. The only appearances of this word in the OT are in Ps 12:5 (“For the oppression of the poor, for the *groaning* of the needy”), Ps 79:11 (Let the

\(^{394}\) HALOT 1:130.  
\(^{395}\) Hamp, “*bâkhâh*,” TDOT 2:119-120.  
\(^{396}\) HALOT 1:72.
“groaning of the prisoner come before thee”) and Ps 102:20 (“To hear the groaning of the prisoner”). Most translators choose the less literal interpretation groaning (NAB, NRSV, Stuart, NASB, NLT), crying out (KJV), wailing (NIV, NJB, Hill, Verhoef) or moaning (ESV, JPSV, NEB) in light of how the word is used in the Psalms. But the most important aspect of this word is that it is never used in Israel’s cult; even less do we read of tears (dimʿā), weeping (bēkî) and groaning (ʾānāqâ). What this awkward triple expression does to the reader is turn the attention to the action itself, i.e., the intensive cry to God. But what are we to make of it and why is such a practice rejected by Yahweh? Did such emotional displays have any place in Israelite worship or is this pagan influence in Yehud’s cult to Yahweh? There are at least three possibilities:

1) Women who weep for Tammuz or Adonis, just as some did in the time of Ezekiel.
2) The divorced Hebrew wives who cover the altar with tears due to the injustice they found themselves in; after all, they had every right to cry to Yahweh for vindication.
3) The offenders of the marriage covenant (including priests, witness and groom), who cry out to Yahweh influenced by pagan worship styles, such as groaning and exaggerated emotional displays, in order to recover Yahweh’s favour lost because of their iniquities.

The first option, worship of Tammuz or Adonis, assumes that Malachi is not referring to marriage issues but ritual ones (see the discussion on v. 12 about literal or figurative interpretation of “daughter of another god”). It assumes that kassôt dimʿā ’et-mizbah YHWH refers to a “part of the ritual of the dying God” because it is a similar

397 CHAL 23.
phrase to that of Ezekiel when he protests against the “women weeping for Tammuz” (Ezek 8:14) and also Jeremiah’s words “they shall not lament for him” (Jer 22:18). This view has been rejected by J.M.P Smith and others as “a curiosity of interpretation.”

The second option has been defended, among others, by Markus Zehnder. The verse is understood as referring to the Hebrew divorced women who weep at the altar due to their disgrace. J.M.P. Smith has pointed out, against those who reject this interpretation on the basis that women could not approach the altar, that “the covering of the altar with tears is figurative in any case and the legitimacy of the figure does not depend upon the proximity of the women to the altar.” However, not only does v. 13 have to be interpreted figuratively but méén would need to be translated in a less straightforward fashion (see exegesis below on v. 13.c). Zehnder says, “it has to be assumed that [méén] does not necessarily mean ‘because…not’, but rather can also be used to express a negative consequence, ‘so that…not’.” In addition, instead of reading “you cover with tears,” one would have to read v. 13 as “you cause Yahweh’s altar to be covered with tears” (i.e., the tears of the divorced Hebrew women). The emphasis of v. 13, however, is not on who is doing the crying but on what and how it is being done. The emphasis is on the action itself: crying, weeping and groaning.

The third option seems the most plausible. First of all, the connection with presenting offerings fits well with v. 12. Secondly, some scholars have highlighted that

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398 JG Matthews, “Tammuz Worship in the Book of Malachi,” Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society 11 (1931), 47. Note that in order to arrive at this interpretation Matthews emends the text in many places.
399 Smith, ICC, 50ff.
400 Other supporters of this view are Targum or Jerome.
401 Smith, ICC, 51ff.
403 RL Smith, Micah-Malachi, 323, disregards this interpretation.
the triple reference to crying (crying, weeping and groaning), especially the word ’ănāqâ, centres the attention on the action/practise itself, one that is unknown to Israelite practices. The wording of v. 13 thus tells us that there is something unusual happening at the altar. Stuart writes,

[Malachi’s] usage of the term groaning (’ănāqâ) demonstrates that temple worship in the 460s B.C. went far beyond a simple (and acceptable) attitude of contrition. It was pagan worship, emphasizing manipulative mourning and misery (Hos 7:14).\footnote{Stuart, “Malachi,” 1334.}

Thirdly, the fact that the practice is rejected by Yahweh, when it should be one of the honest and most humble expressions of repentance before a compassionate God, tells us that such a practice was evil or wrong in itself. Indeed, what makes better sense is that the offenders of the marriage covenant were influenced by foreign rituals and were using them to appease God for their actions. This is the way F. F. Hvidberg understands it when he says that “this passage is an attack on foreign cultic weeping in Jerusalem by which the temple was being profaned.”\footnote{FF Hvidberg, Weeping and Laughter in the Old Testament (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 120.}

The connection with presenting offerings at the end of v. 12 is clear here. As an attempt to appease Yahweh and seek his blessing for disobeying matrimonial laws, the offenders tried their best to show Yahweh how much zeal they had for him. The reason why the worshippers are laying such an emphasis on seeking Yahweh with great zeal and emotion is that they are perfectly aware of the significance of their actions in divorcing Hebrew women in order to marry pagan women. Why would they exaggerate their approach to Yahweh then? Malachi was not dealing with the sin of ignorance but with
conscious disobedience to Yahweh’s stipulations. None could justify himself by claiming ignorance over the matter.\(^{406}\)

**Mal 2:13c** because there (no longer) is still no attention turned to the offering or acceptance with pleasure from your hands (\(mē’ēn ʿōd pēnōt ʿel-hamminḥā wēlāqaḥat rāṣōn miyyedkem\)).

\(mē’ēn\) can either mean “without,” “there is no longer,” “so that…not/because…not.”\(^{407}\) If we emend the pointing to ʿ\(p\) ʿ\(w\) we may read “where (?)” If we emend the consonants we may read “he refused” from the Hebrew ʿ\(p\) ʿ\(w\). The result clause is found in the Vulgate (“so that”) and is followed by the KJV, RV95 and Zehnder. The causal clause is found in LXX (\(ēk κόπτων = “because of troubles” = ʿ\(p\) ʿ\(w\); cf. 4Q12a) and Syriac (“because”) and has been adopted by the majority. A causal connotation fits the context better because of Yahweh’s displeasure with the priests.\(^{408}\) The weeping at the altar is thus caused by the fact that Yahweh rejects the husbands’ attempt at bribing him with offerings. As to the rest of the verse, see notes on verses 1:10 and 1:13. Suffice it to state that Yahweh has no pleasure and does not accept any offerings from those addressed in v. 12.

Therefore, the second offence committed by the men of Yehud, with the agreement of the priests and the community, was the “desecration of Yahweh’s altar with hypocritical laments (decrying Yahweh’s intransigence over the divorcement of legitimate Hebrew wives due to this intermarriage).”\(^{409}\) Yahweh will not listen to


\(^{407}\) HALOT 1:42; cf. GKC §152y.

\(^{408}\) This is shown in most translations; cf. Hill, *Malachi*, 221: “because there is no longer;” Stuart, “Malachi.” 1326, 1335: “because…no longer;” Smith, *ICC*, 59: “because.”

emotional displays of piety from those who ignore his laws; he will not accept sacrifices from worshippers who do not repent.

2.5 Fifth Oracle—Mal 3:6-12

2.5.1 Translation

3:6 Because I, Yahweh, do not change, so you, sons of Jacob, are not finished (destroyed). 3:7 “Since the days of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me that I may return to you” says Yahweh of Hosts. “But you ask, “In what will we return?” 3:8 Will a human rob God? Surely you are robbing me, but you say, “In what have we robbed you?” Tithes and offerings! 3:9 You are being cursed with a curse. It is me you, the whole nation, are robbing me! 3:10 Bring in the whole tithe to the temple storehouse that there may be food in my house. Test me now in this! Says Yahweh of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and I pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need. 3:11 And I will rebuke for you the grasshopper and it will not destroy the fruit of the ground for you, and the vine of the land will not be barren for you” says Yahweh of Hosts. 3:12 All the nations will call you blessed for you will be a land in which one takes joy” says Yahweh of Hosts.

2.5.2 Introduction

Most scholars narrow the fifth oracle of Malachi to Mal 3:6-12, Verses 6 and 7 are understood by some as belonging to the previous oracle 2:17-3:5. First, v. 6 starts with kî, which is often translated as “for” or “because,” which usually comes as a conclusion to what precedes. Similarly, the first half of v. 7 fits seamlessly into the context described in 3:5. It is more likely, however, that these verses belong to the fifth
oracle. Mal 3:5 ends with a summarising statement and the divine formula “Yahweh of Hosts.” The particle קִי can also be translated as emphatic, i.e., “indeed.” But even if it is used in its explicative form, “for,” it needs not refer to previous sentences but to the following section (thus Stuart, “Since I, Yahweh have not changed, you, children of Jacob, are not destroyed”).

One should also note the repetition of terms present in the fifth oracle. The word קָב (“rob”) appears four times (v. 8, 9); סְעָב (“return”), three times (v. 7); וַאֲמַרְתָּם (“but you say”), two times (v. 7, 8); זָעֵמָה (“in what?” or “how?”), twice (v. 7, 8); רְר (“curse”), twice (v. 9); מַאֲשֶׁר (“tithe”), twice (v. 8, 10); בָּיִת (“house”), twice (10); גּוֹי (“people”), twice (9, 12); the expressions “says Yahweh of Hosts”, four times and the expressions לֶקֶם or לָקֶם (“to you” or “for you”), six times (7, 10, 11, 12). On the whole, and compared to other prophecies, the fifth oracle proves to be a well-thought, coherent elaboration. Contributing to this cohesion is also the fact that the last two verses (seven last clauses) are highly structured and joined stylistically in the following pattern: verb + second person pronoun + the rest of the clause.410

Mal 3:6-12 follows perfectly well the repeated pattern of Malachi’s oracles, though in a more complex manner; i.e., instead of opening with one statement, it opens with two statements (“I have not changed…” and “Return to me…”). Also, instead of containing just one refutation + counter-refutation, it contains two (“In what shall we return?” + “You are robbing me” and “In what are we robbing you?” + “Tithes and offerings!”). Apart from that difference, the structure is equal to the rest of oracles: statement (in this case a compound statement; 3:6-7b), refutation(s) (double; 3:7c; 3:8b), counter-refutation(s) (3:8a; 3:8d) and consequences (3:9-12). The oracle also parallels the

second oracle (Mal 1:6-2:9). Both oracles start with a double-assertion-questioning pattern, followed by a condemnation of improper offerings, the promise of the reversal of blessing, and an exaltation of Yahweh’s name among the nations. The following is a detailed comparison between the two oracles based on Stuart’s own comparison.\footnote{Stuart, “Malachi,” 1362.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mal 1:6-2:9</th>
<th>Mal 3:6-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate offerings: animal sacrifices</td>
<td>Inadequate offerings: tithes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple (1:10)</td>
<td>My house (3:10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nations (1:11, 14)</td>
<td>The nations (3:12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheat (1:14)</td>
<td>Rob (3:8, 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curse (1:14; 2:1-2)</td>
<td>Curse (3:9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessing (2:2)</td>
<td>Blessing (3:10, 12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decimation [threatened] (2:3)</td>
<td>Decimation [forestalled] (3:6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appeal to patriarchal age (2:4-6)</td>
<td>Appeal to patriarchal age (3:6-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant law (2:4-6, 9)</td>
<td>My decrees (3:7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the main differences between these oracles is that Mal 3:6-12 is addressed to the whole community, not just husbands or priests. Another difference is that the fifth oracle promises blessings while the second oracle knows no such promise. Perhaps the main difference is that the second oracle is a warning against disobedience, showing the consequences in full, i.e., curses, while the fifth oracle is an invitation to obedience showing the benefits, i.e., blessings. Some argue that another difference...
between these two oracles is that Mal 1:6-2:9 is about worship while the fifth is about temple support.\footnote{Stuart, “Malachi,” 1362.}

For the purpose of this thesis, I will only examine verses 8, 9 and 10, which deal more directly with the offering aspect of the cult.

\subsection*{2.5.3 Mal 3:8}

\textbf{Mal 3:8a Will a human rob God? (hāyiqba‘ ʾādām ʾēlōhîm)}

The question-and-answer style of Mal 3:6-12 is similar to the style of previous oracles. First come the assertions: “I do not change” and “you have turned away from my decrees [you also don’t change]” (v. 6-7). Then comes the sceptic question from the accused party: “In what will we return to you?” (v. 7), followed by another question that serves as the beginning of the explanation: “Will a human rob God?” (v. 8; see a similar example in Mal 1:2, “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?”).

The interrogative mark \( hē’ \) is used rhetorically,\footnote{WO’C §40.3.} as in previous examples, to unwrap his accusation against the people. No one would have bothered answering such an obvious question. Such a brief retort (“Will a human rob God?”) leaves the accused party in need of further clarification which forces them into asking additional questions and thus are awakened from their apathy (or ignorance) to preoccupation. We must also keep in mind that, although it is posed as a question, the aim of this retort is to answer the query, “\textit{In what will we return [šûb]?}” (v. 7). Robbing God is one of the things in which they have turned away from Yahweh.

The Qal imperfect \textit{yiqba‘} comes from the stem \textit{qb‘}, the meaning of which is disputed between “to walk behind one another” (more metaphorically “to betray”) or “to
rob or steal.” Many scholars emend the text to הֲיַעֲקֹב in order to parallel v. 6 (“Jacob”), which is supported by the LXX ἐὰν περνῇ (“Shall [a man] stomp on”). Based on the principle of lectio difficilior the MT is preferred. However, whether one follows the LXX or the MT, the exegesis of this phrase remains basically the same. The people are deceiving Yahweh concerning economic matters (the tithe), i.e., they are stealing from God.

The word 'ādām can mean “mankind,” “people,” “individual man.” Hill interprets the word as “a collective singular designating a class or a group” (“human beings” or “humankind”) but chooses to interpret the word in a non-conventional way; i.e., “to express the pronominal idea ‘someone, anyone’” as in Jer 16:20, where a similar expression contains 'ādām according to this usage (“Will anyone craft gods for himself?”).

According to Stuart, 'ādām is used here to make a clear differentiation from the word ish (“a man”). Translations such as “Will man rob God?” (RSV), “Will a man rob God?” (NIV) or “Will anyone rob God?” (NRSV) are misleading, stemming awkwardly from the desire to be politically correct...[t]he question is not about ‘anyone’ robbing God...[but] about the outrageous presumption involved in the idea that human beings could think themselves justified in stealing from their own Creator.

It seems more likely that Malachi is contrasting Yahweh with human beings. In the book of Malachi, the prophet uses the word ish when addressing a specific man or a group of men within a group (Mal 2:10, 12, 3:16, 17). The fact that this is the first and only

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414 Editors of HALOT 2:1062 see “to betray” as more acceptable than “to rob” in Mal 3:8 since it better fits the context. 415 See discussion in Hill, Malachi, 303-4. 416 So Baldwin, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 246; Hill, Malachi, 303-4; Rudolph, Haggai-Sacharja-Maleachi, 282; RL Smith, Micah-Malachi, 331; Verhoeef, Haggai and Malachi, 302-3; Glazier-McDonald, Malachi, the Divine Messenger, 187-88; NAB, NIV, NRSV, RV95, LBLA, KJV, ESV. 417 Stuart, “Malachi,” 1367.
instance where Malachi uses the term 'ādām makes it reasonable to interpret that he does so in order to convey a different idea, i.e., human beings. And this fits well the human/God antithesis that Malachi uses in this passage.

Malachi’s election of the word 'ēlōhīm instead of YHWH further supports his intention of contrasting the greatness of God with the insignificance of humans. The juxtaposition of 'ādām and 'ēlōhīm echoes the Creation in the first chapters of Genesis, thus drawing a clear distinction between creature and Creator. The antithesis works better with 'ēlōhīm because, as opposed to YHWH, which carries connotations of lordship, the term 'ēlōhīm is grammatically “classified as a unique appellative and is used for the Hebrew deity Yahweh in an honorific or superlative sense.” Such a contrast, as in previous oracles, serves to heighten the seriousness of the accusation.

Malachi, 3:8b Surely you are robbing me (kî 'attem qōbēʾîm 'ōtî).

Some interpret the adverb kî in the adversative sense “but” or “yet” (NIV, NJB, NRSV, NAB, RSV, Verhoef, Stuart, Taylor and Clendenen). Others have chosen the less likely causal sense “because” (LXX, Vulgate, Calvin). I side with those who read kî as an emphatic “indeed” or “surely,” given the sceptic and rhetorical context in which the prophet speaks. His audience was not convinced of his accusations (see exegesis below on 3:8c).

The verb qōbēʾîm is a Qal participle. As in previous accusations, the audience’s fault is described in ongoing present terms. Similarly, the pronoun 'attem is once more used to emphasise the identity of the guilty party (see other examples in Mal 1:12; 2:8; 3:9[x2]).

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418 Hill, Malachi, 304. See WO’C §7.4.3b; 14.4b.
Following the rhetorical format used in the past, the audience once more seems to be unaware as to the nature and specifics of their failure. They do not deny that to rob God is wrong (or impossible!) but they are unable to connect those truths with the reality of their lives. What could have caused this unawareness or ignorance? Verhoef suggests that such ignorance could be caused by the lack of instruction in the law (Mal 2:6, 8). After all, mainly (if not only) the priests had access to the Law and the authority to teach the laymen about cultic matters. This, however, is difficult to believe since the priests where the ones that benefited most economically from the tithe: it was their salary! How could the priests not want to teach the people of Yehud to tithe if their income depended directly from those sources? It seems, then, that the reason why the people are not tithing is not so much because they are not told to do so by the priests, but because of their lax and poor respect for Yahweh.

Yahweh’s response is strikingly short, adding a sense of immediacy (perhaps also exclamation), terseness and preciseness. The fact that both nouns carry the definite article in front of them shows that the prophet has specific types of offerings in mind.

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419 Some ancient witnesses add a clarifying preposition “in” (Targum, Vulgate, Syriac) or even phrase “are still with you” (LXX = μεθ’ ὑμῶν ἔσται; cf. RL Smith, Micah-Malachi, 301). Most English modern translations opt for including the prep. “in” (NAB, NEB, NIV, NJB, NRSV). However, this may be one of the multiple cases where LXX and other ancient manuscripts add to the MT in order to clarify (see Stuart, “Malachi,” 1368). Though the prep. does not alter the significance of these two words, it does alter the literary intensity and power that the short answer conveys (see Hill, Malachi, 307 who understands the pair of words elliptically and emphatically and as even calling for exclamation). I affirm the MT defending its powerful literary device in giving an elliptical answer to the priest’s ironical question.
rather than generic offerings of all sorts; i.e., according to Verhoef, the tithes and offerings prescribed in the Mosaic Law.420

2.5.3.1 ħammaʾāšēr: The term maʾāšēr is a cognate of the verb ‘āšar (“to tithe”) meaning “a tenth part”421 or “one tenth.”422 The tithe was an offering (10 per cent of one’s earnings), to a deity in most cases.

Ancient cultures practised tithing (e.g., Egypt, Syria, [1 Macc 10:31; 11:35], Lydia [Herodotus i.89], Babylon and Assyria). Archaeology has shown that, in other cultures, all kinds of objects were considered apt for tithing (wool, cloth, wood, weapons, gold, silver, donkeys…).423 In the OT, before the Law was given, tithes are first mentioned in Gen 14:20 when Abram gives voluntarily his tithe to Melchizedek and in Gen 28:22 when Jacob promises the tithe of everything he has to God. It was only after the Law that tithes became compulsory for every Israelite, thus acquiring a different connotation and usage than during the patriarchs’ lifetime.

The Pentateuch is much more explicit as to how Israel was supposed to tithe. It was every Israelite’s duty to apply the tithe to everything he possessed. The book of Leviticus ends precisely on this note: “a tithe [maʾāšēr] of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to Yahweh; it is holy to Yahweh” (Lev 27:30). And Lev 27:32 says, “The entire tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to Yahweh.” Presumably, Israelites tithed on grain, new wine, olive oil, fruit, cattle, sheep, etc. Some

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420 Verhoef, Haggai, Malachi, 303.
421 HALOT 1:617.
422 CHAL 208.
have argued that the Sabbath was also considered a “time” tithe. In any case, the tithe in the OT is set within an agricultural context and only applied to the annual earnings (increase of produce), not to the capital. This is the consistent teaching found in all periods of Israel’s history.

It is also significant that the tithe is mostly tied to the cultic context; i.e., it was part of the cult of Israel in that it supported every activity within the Temple by providing a salary for both Levites and priests.

The fact that we see different tithes in the Pentateuch has created some dispute about whether the Pentateuch is consistent in its teaching about one tithe or whether it discusses different tithes. Late Judaism understood the Pentateuch as speaking of several tithes due to apparent incongruence within the teaching of Lev 27, Num 18 and Deut 12, 14, 26. Traditionally there are three tithes: the tithe for the Levites (an annual tithing of all earnings); the tithe for the Eucharistic meal, which consecrated the payment of the tithe that was consumed by the offerer (Deut 14:23; cf. vv.22-27); and the tithe for the poor, also called “charity tithe” (Deut 14:28, 29; 26:12). In fact, the so-called tithe for the poor was actually the first tithe with a varied location in the third year in order to benefit the landless (poor, alien, widows and orphans). The first and third tithes were given to the Levites but the second one was shared with others as well. In both cases, the tithe remained the same for the offerer, and he, with his entire family, would participate in the celebration meal. In the case of the tithe for the meal, it is questionable whether we should consider this a separate tithe since it was part of the annual tithe.

There are several reasons for the establishment of the tithe. Leviticus reflects a cultic perspective, which considered the tithe as the salary of the landless priests and
Levites (Num 18:21, 24). Deuteronomy evidences a social perspective, which showcases the tithe as a provision, not just for the Levites, but for those in need and without opportunity. But perhaps the main reason for the tithe was humankind’s tendency to forget that there is a creator, sustainer and provider upon which it depends. In the OT, God is portrayed as the creator of all things, including the land and its produce. Further, he is the one who sustains and nourishes such life, continually providing for it. Humans are mere stewards of God’s property (Gen 1:28; Exod 19:5; Lev 20:26; 25:23; Pss 24:1; 50:12). Similarly to the festivals, the Sabbath, the year of Jubilee and all the offerings and sacrifices, the tithe served as a reminder of such truth. The tithe, then, was a mere return of what belonged to Yahweh.

Throughout the OT, whether in Mosaic, pre-exilic or post-exilic texts, the tithe is never considered voluntary but mandatory. The Pentateuch is clear about this (see discussion above). Amos 4:4 seems to favour the view that tithes in those days were voluntary. However, given the prophet’s irony, the reader is left doubting as to whether this was really the case or was a sarcastic or exaggerated criticism of an erroneous practice. In the reform of Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:4-5), the king imposes the tithe on the people because it had been abandoned at the time. It is surmised that it was everyone’s responsibility to tithe. In Nehemiah (Neh 10:37 (2x), 38; Neh 12:44; and Neh 13:5, 12), the term is used in the same way that it is in Leviticus: as a salary for the Levites. We also see that the tithe is obligatory for everyone (including the Levites) and that Nehemiah does everything in his hand to compel people to tithe. Not only were the Israelites forced to tithe, but they were also enforced to pay a third of a shekel as yearly tax (Neh 10:32) and to bring wood in addition to the tithe. This tax paid for the service at
the Temple (Neh 10:33) and was necessary because, according to Hamrick, the Persians’ subsidy was not enough. Another difference present in Nehemiah’s day was that the Levites, accompanied by priests, are described as going out to the towns to collect the tithes. This was not the usual case, for in all previous times the lay men brought the tithe to the Levite.

In Malachi’s time the people faithfully gave the tithe since they understood it was compulsory and not voluntary. Proof of it is that the Temple priests and Levites had a salary that enabled them to fulfil their cultic tasks even though they were doing a terrible job. The question was not that people forgot about tithing. The problem was a lack of respect for Yahweh, as they were only partially faithful to tithing.

Jagersma has pointed out that in the priestly writings (Leviticus, Numbers), Malachi, Nehemiah and Chronicles there is a contradistinction to Deuteronomy. He says that as opposed to Deuteronomy where a meal was always a present element in tithing, this element is non-existent; the tithes “have become, however, mere taxes.” He disagrees with Eissfeldt’s supposition, who saw such development as a reflection of a “greater respect for and a higher status of the cult personnel, caused in particular by the exile during which tithes could only be given to the cult personnel as a gift.” This view is criticised by Jagersma, who defends that the only difference between pre and post-exilic tithing was that the former was “perhaps more of a custom” while the second became more of “an obligation.” Most texts after the Law and the centralization of the cult seem to imply that the tithe was in some sense a requirement to every Israeliite.

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426 Ibid, 122.
427 Ibid, 122.
Jagersma concludes, “everybody personally or the people as a whole was obliged to give tithes.”

It should also be mentioned that the context of tithing was one of thanksgiving as the offerer and his family showed gratitude to Yahweh who had remembered them by blessing their land (Cf. Mal 3:10). Deut 14:26 makes explicit that one was to rejoice with all the family in partaking in the giving of the tithe. But what a disgrace if the whole family, children included, would witness how the head of the family dishonoured Yahweh in only thanking him partially, while retaining part of the tithe.

In Malachi, we are also told that the tithe is brought into the “storehouse” (Mal 3:10; see exegesis on v. 10) so that there is food “in [Yahweh’s] house.” Such Temple rooms were part of Solomon’s Temple and, assuming a similar construction of the Second Temple, there would have been some rooms set aside for a similar use in post-exilic times. These rooms stored agricultural perishable goods such as grain or oil, which were then administered among the priests or the Levites. There is little doubt, then, that Malachi is referring to the annual tithe (it is irrelevant whether he refers to the first-, second- or third-year tithe), i.e., 10 per cent of a year’s earnings.

2.5.3.2 wēhattērûmā: The term tērûmā is well known to the OT, especially Exodus, Numbers and Ezekiel. Scholars do not agree whether the term derives from rûm hif. (“to lift up, select, offer”) or from Akkadian rm (riāmu[m], rāmu, “to present, give as a gift”). Its most accepted literal translation is “lifting” or “raising”. According to Rudolph, “lifting, raising indicates a part or a portion which has been lifted from a greater

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428 Ibid, 125.
429 HALOT 2:1788.
whole for another purpose (usually within the cult) … and has thus been separated."430 However, since the word is mainly used in cultic contexts “it is advisable to adopt a rendering (over and above the literal translation) of consecrated gift, or simply offering, contribution.”431 The preferred translation by HALOT is “contribution…but without abandoning the idea of offering wherever that appears to be appropriate.”432

Traditionally, the word tĕrûmâ was connected to rûm and translated as “heave offering” which suggests that the offering was lifted up to God. A similar word that often accompanies tĕrûmâ is the word tĕnûphâ, which has also been understood as an offering that is moved forward and backward (“wave offering”). This view was supported by rabbis but today only by a few scholars.433 Texts like Ezek 45:1, 6-7 and Ezek 48:8-21 show that tĕrûmâ does not necessarily require a lifting since they talk about land.

There are at least two ways in which the word tĕrûmâ is used. The first type is a specific offering distinguished from all others (Exod 25:1-7; 29:27, 28; 30:11-16; 35:4-36:11; Lev 7:14, 32, 34; 10:12-15; Num 6:20; 31:25-54; Deut 12:6-17; 2 Chr 31:12; Ezra 8:25). The second type is the general one (Lev 22:2, 3, 12, 15; Num 5:9; 15:17-21; 18:8-20). There is possibly a third way the word may be used in some instances where it seems that there is some kind of ritual of lifting or waving up and down the offering (Num 6:20). H. P. Stähli says about tĕrûmâ,

It may have originally referred to a particular kind of sacral presentation of which a portion was consecrated and symbolically transferred—not burnt but placed at the priest’s disposal—through tĕrûmâ ‘elevation,’ i.e., by being lifted high before the altar of Yahweh…[but it also] appears in the OT as a general term for various cultic contributions that go to the priests (Lev 7:14, 32; 22:12;

430 Rudolph, Haggai-Sacharja-Maleachi, 284 as quoted in HALOT 2:1789.
431 HALOT 2:1789.
432 Ibid.
433 Among them, JI Durham, Exodus, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987) 349, 393 who understands both terms as offerings or gifts that are waved in some way.
Num 5:9; 18:8, 11, 19, 28; Ezek 44:30; 2 Chr 31:10, 12, 14; perhaps Mal 3:8) and the Levites (Num 18:24), in Ezek also to the prince (nāṣî’ Ezek 45:16).434

In fact, the word is used in many different ways throughout the OT and only the context can determine the meaning in most cases.

The fact that both the ma‘āšēr and the tērūmā are paired in Malachi is significant. Elsewhere, the two words appear together only in Deut 12:6, 11 and 2 Chr 31:12. In Deuteronomy, tērūmā is a specific type of offering distinguished from burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes [ma‘āšēr], votive offerings, freewill offerings, and the firstborn. In 2 Chr 31:12 the term is also clearly distinguished from the tithe (“they faithfully brought in the contributions and the tithes and the consecrated things”).

Another key text for understanding the relationship between tērūmā and ma‘āšēr is Num 18:8-24. There we are told that the priests are given the tērūmā offered to Yahweh (v.8), which includes the grain offerings; the sin offerings; the trespass offerings (v. 9); the wave offerings (tēnûphâ; v. 11); the best of the fresh grain, oil and wine; Israel’s firstfruits (v. 12), the first ripe fruits of all that had been planted throughout their land (v. 13); every devoted thing in Israel (v. 14); every first issue of the womb, whether man or animal (if man or unclean animal, it had to be redeemed, v. 15) except oxen, sheep and goats (v. 17); the breast of tēnûphâ and the right thigh (v. 18). The key verse is the summary that comes at the end of this list of priestly earnings: “All the offerings [tērūmā] of the holy gifts, which the sons of Israel offer to Yahweh, I have given to you” (v. 19). In other words, the tērūmā is the salary of the priest and it refers to almost every kind of offering to the exception of the tithe [ma‘āšēr]. This is the most general and

comprehensive usage of the word which includes all offerings except the tithe, and would be best translated as “contribution” or simply “offering.”

Further on in Num 18:24 we read that what belongs to the Levites is the tithes of the sons of Israel (“For the tithe [ma‘āšêr] of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering [tērûmâ] to Yahweh, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance”). But, to complicate the matter, these tithes are designated as tērûmâ! Furthermore, after receiving the tithes, the Levites are encouraged to “present an offering [tērûmâ] from it to Yahweh, a tithe [ma‘āšêr] of the tithe [ma‘āšêr]” (Num 18:26). The priests receive both offerings [tērûmâ] from the people and tithes [ma‘āšêr] from the Levites, which are also called tērûmâ.

The conclusion, according to how Numbers uses the term, is that tērûmâ is best understood as a general term for offering or contribution that was explicitly linked to the sustaining of the Temple personnel and that was mandatory in order to support the Temple’s maintenance. And, equally important, everything points to the fact that it was a compulsory offering, at least from the part of the Levites.

There are other usages of the word, however, that expand its semantic range. Exod 25:1-7 speaks of it as a voluntary gift. Similarly, Exod 35:5ff narrates how Moses asks “everyone who is willing is to bring to Yahweh an offering” to give, voluntarily, all kinds of gifts: gold, silver, bronze, scarlet, wood, goat hair, skins, olive oil, spices, incense, onyx stones, gems. That the tērûmâ was voluntary is also clear by 35:21, “all who were willing, men and women alike.” These offerings are equaled to free offerings in Exod 36:3 (“And the people continued to bring freewill offerings”). Num 31:25-54 speaks of the tērûmâ as spoils and booty of war that is given by the captains of Israel to
Yahweh. In Ezra 8:25 tērûmā has nothing to do with Temple taxes or the priests’ salary. It was a contribution of “the silver, the gold and the utensils, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes and all Israel present there had offered.” Here it was a voluntary gift for the restoration of the Temple. It had nothing to do with “heave offerings” or taxes or tithes.

All these possible meanings make it rather difficult to interpret what Malachi refers to in the context of post-exilic Yehud. It may be that Malachi is using hamma’āšēr wēhattērûmā to be all inclusive of all offerings and tithes brought to the temple. However, nothing in the context supports this. Neither is it possible to know if the prophet refers to the “tithe of the tithe” that the Levites were supposed to pass on to the priests (Num 18:16). Glazier-McDonald defends this interpretation, translating the word as “levy,” as he assumes a direct connection between Mal 3:8 and Num 18:26.

It is important that when the prophet further explains how the people are to emend their cultic inefficacy, he urges them to bring “the whole of hamma’āšēr” (v. 10) but does not mention the hattērûmā. The emphasis is clearly laid on the tithes, but what does it say about the tērûmā?

Hill has pointed out that tērûmā is not just a general term for offerings, since it “extends the notion of offering to include gifts of material goods (e.g., construction supplies, garments), valuables (e.g., gold silver, precious stones), personal services, booty, etc.”

He reads the paired words as “the tithe, the tithe tax!” understanding, like Petersen, that hamma’āšēr refers to the “general tithe” while hattērûmā refers to the tithe.

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435 Hill, Malachi, 306.
436 Ibid, 291.
tax “sent to Jerusalem to provision Yahweh’s Temple (cf. J.M.P Smith [1912:74]).” ⁴³⁷
There is yet little evidence provided by the text for such a precise interpretation.

In my understanding we can only surmise that, since there is special emphasis on the tithe, what is at hand is a lack of giving in all kinds of offerings but, more specifically, a particular lack of attention to the tithes. Perhaps the allusion to the tērūmā signifies that not only were the people failing to provide for the Levites with the tithes, but also the Levites were failing to tithe in order to sustain the priests. Whatever is meant by hamma’āšēr wēhattērūmā, it must be surmised that it is an all-inclusive expression referring to the contributions made at the Temple, with a particular emphasis on how the Temple personnel were lacking resources, a problem that reappeared a few decades later at the time of both Ezra and Nehemiah.

2.5.4. Mal 3:9

Mal 3:9a You are being cursed with ⁴³⁸ a curse (bammē’ērā ’attem nē’ārīm).

The scholar Sharbert proves helpful in describing the noun me’era as “a ‘curse’ in the sense of a misfortune which has already struck, and not in the sense of a curse formula or a word of curse.” ⁴³⁹ The term appears also in Mal 2:2 (“I will send against you the curse [me’era]”) and elsewhere only in Deut 28:20, 27 and Prov 3:33. It is commonly understood as “curse” or “malediction.” ⁴⁴⁰ The prefixed preposition bet is best

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⁴³⁷ Ibid, 306.
⁴³⁸ Perhaps “according to the curse” instead of “with a curse.”
⁴³⁹ Scharbert, “’rr,” TDOT 1:413.
⁴⁴⁰ CHAL 181.
understood in a non-animate circumstantial way (“with” rather than “according to” or “by”).

The participle Niphal 𐤃𐤓𐤇𐤓𐤃 of the verb 𐤃𐤏 means “laid under a curse” and it appears only in Malachi as such. The stem 𐤃𐤏, however, is well attested in Malachi (1:4, 14; 2:2 [x3]; 2:8; 3:9 [x2], 4:6) albeit solely in the Qal form and normally used in a curse covenant formulas rather than in descriptions of present situations. The participle emphasises that the curse is taking place. Petersen translates it as “you are now being afflicted with a curse,” denoting a present continuous action. Because of such ongoing connotations, Weyde, along with most scholars, also concludes that “a curse is in force.”

What might this curse be? Verse 11 hints that the curse might have been related to lack of produce from the land (“it will not destroy the fruit of the ground for you, and the vine of the land will not be barren for you”), in line with the curses prescribed in Deuteronomy (Deut 28: 20-21,38, 42).

Hill has aptly noted that “the construction 𐤃𐤃𐤀𐤄 𐤃𐤇𐤃 is an internal cognate accusative (‘with the curse you are being cursed,’ cf. WO’C §10.2.1g)” that could be translated emphatically. However, he fails to see the resumptive Hebrew style as most translations do (NASB, KJV, ESV, ASV, Hill, et c). Translations such as “You have been cursed” (Stuart) or “you are under a curse” (NIV) are preferable in English.

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441 WO’C §11.2.5d.
442 HALOT 1:91.
443 Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 326.
444 Hill, Malachi, 307.
445 Stuart condemns the literal translation as a “failure to appreciate the resumptive style common to Hebrew” (Stuart, “Malachi,” 1368).
Mal 3:9b Yet you are robbing me, the whole nation! (wēʾōtī ʿattem qōbēʾīm haggōy kullō).

According to Verhoef, the waw is adversative (contra Hill who reads it epexegetically and emphatically, “yea”) and very unlikely causal (“because you are robbing…”).\(^{446}\) The phrase is meant to expand upon the previous accusation, “yet you are robbing me,” by pointing to further charges against Israel; i.e., in spite of being already under Yahweh’s curse and discipline, the people of Yehud insisted on continuing with their actions: stealing from what belonged to God. The continuous character of the participle qōbēʾīm shows that this is an habitual practise. Just as land was denying the Israelites the expected produce, so the Israelites were continually denying Yahweh what they owed him: above all, honour and fear, in practise, tithes and offerings.

In previous oracles, only the cheater (1:14), the priests who didn’t honour Yahweh’s name (2:2), the marriage infidels (2:10-16) or the evildoers (2:17-3:5) were under a curse or under Yahweh’s admonition. But now it is “the whole nation” that is under Yahweh’s curse. The appositive of measure kullō expands Yahweh’s indictment from smaller group categories within Yehud to “all of” the people.\(^{447}\) Mal 3:8-9 develops an ironical argument that is self-evident: “no single man can rob (v. 8)…yet the whole nation is doing it (v. 9).”\(^{448}\)

Some have argued that Malachi’s unexpected usage of haggōy (“people, nation”) is meant to transmit the pejorative idea that Israel is seen as a pagan nation since it relates to Yahweh as such. Admittedly, in Mal 1:11ff. all appearances of gōy refer to gentile nations which would make us expect a similar usage of the word in Mal 3:9 (see exegesis

\(^{446}\) Verhoef, Haggai, Malachi, 305, 306; cf. Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 419.
\(^{447}\) WO’C §12.3d.
\(^{448}\) Hill, Malachi, 308.
on Mal 1:11). This is not the case. Scholars have proven that the term haggôy is repeatedly used for Israel in the OT in a positive way (Gen 15:14; 17:20; 18:18; 21:13, 18; 46:3; Exod 19:6; 32:10; Num 14:12; Deut 9:14; 26:5; Josh 3:17; 5:6-8; Isa 9:2 [3]; 26:2, 15),\textsuperscript{449} and in Mal 3:9 it does not necessarily carry pejorative connotations. Perhaps the reason why Malachi opts for gôy instead of ‘am is to remind the people that Yahweh has mercifully brought them back from exile and formed them, again, into a nation. The view that gôy serves to equate Yehud with the surrounding nations is possible but dubious.

2.5.5. Mal 3:10

Mal 3:10a Bring in the whole tithe to the temple storehouse (hābî‘û ‘et-kol-hamma‘āšêr ‘el-bêt hā’ôṣâr)

After elaborating a rhetorical answer formulated in a question-and-answer style (vv. 7-9) to the original question “in what will we return?” the prophet answers more explicitly with a command to bring the whole tithe. This is the way in which they must exhibit their true repentance, changing their actions and attitude toward Yahweh through the tithe.

The imperative (Hiphil, masculine plural) hābî‘û means “bring” or “bring in”\textsuperscript{450} and is used in similar ways with respect to the tithe in Deut 12:6, 11; Amos 4:4; Neh 10:38; 2 Chr 31:5, 6, 12. There is an implicit comparison between the command to bring offerings to the Persian governor in Yehud (Mal 1:8, though a different word is used), who will not accept the offering, with the command to bring offerings to Yahweh, in this case tithes, who will delightfully accept them and reward the giver (Mal 3:10bff). Also, Mal 1:13 says, “You bring in the loot, the limping and the sick as an offering” followed

\textsuperscript{449} Stuart, “Malachi,” 1306-07; Hill, Malachi, 308; Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, et al.  
\textsuperscript{450} HALOT 1:114
by the negative remark that Yahweh will not “accept it with pleasure… [Yahweh] will accept no offering from [them].” Only in Mal 2:2-3 we can recognize that this is an admonishing and a warning: “If you will not listen and if you will not set your heart (decide) to give honour to my name” says Yahweh of Hosts. “I will send against you the curse.” Similarly, Mal 3:10 explains that Yahweh will turn to the people if they listen to him by bringing the tithe. The tone of the fifth oracle is different to the second in that they are not warned with a curse, but encouraged by a blessing.

The expression 'et-kol-hamma'āšēr may be alluding to the explicit verses in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy that emphasise that the “whole tithe” belongs to the Levites. The word kol means “all”, “the full” (JPSV, NJB, NRSV) or “the whole” (NAB, NIV; see also exegesis on kullō [v. 9]). There is a play on words between “the whole nation” (haggōy kullō) and “the whole tithe” (‘et-kol-hamma’āšēr). Two options are plausible as to why this is. Either some people were not giving the tithe at all while others were faithful to the task, or all of the people were fulfilling the task only partially. The latter option seems more in line with other oracles in Malachi that show a partial fulfilment of the cult or other covenantal aspects, e.g., the offering of inferior animals (Mal 1:6-14), mediocre teaching (2:6-8) and a general feeling of resentment while semi-obeying Yahweh (1:13; 3:14-15). Keil and Delitzsch note that the syntax of Mal 3:10 puts an emphasis on the term “whole” and thus favours the interpretation that each individual was bringing only part of the tithe owed to Yahweh. 

451 The phrase echoes Lev 27:30, “every tenth [kol ma'âšēr] of the land’s produce” (cf. Lev 27:32) and in Num 18:21, “every tenth [kol ma’âšēr] in Israel” (cf. Num 18:28). The only difference between these two instances is Malachi’s addition of the direct object marker (‘et-) and the definite article (ha-). In Deut 26:12, only the article is missing (cf. Deut 14:28, “bring all the tithe”). The article is also missing in 4QXII but present in the LXX (πᾶντα τα ἐκφορία).  

452 Keil and Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, 2:463. See also RL Smith, Micah-Malachi, 72; Verhoef, Haggai, Malachi, 306.
only mentions the tithe and ignores the *tērūmā*, as I concluded in verse 9, shows that, at this point, he was more concerned with the tithe than with all other contributions.

Because Malachi’s audience are in apparent agreement that the land is under a curse (Mal 3:9; Cf. Mal 3:10-12) it seems obvious that the agricultural situation was not at its best at the time of Malachi. This however, does not necessarily mean that the people were poor as some might have us believe (see INTRODUCTION chapter where I discuss Yehud’s economy), but it would be fair to conclude, as Stuart does, that the economy was “far from ideal.” But this does not affect so much the giving of the tithe, which is a tenth of the earnings, not a fixed price. The tithe was proportional to the earnings and thus adjusted to both economic crisis and boosts. So the problem was not so much the status of Yehud’s economy but direct disobedience: the people of Yehud chose not to give all that was required by Yahweh.

One can imagine how easy it was for anyone to lie in regard to the tithe. Stuart skilfully helps us depict the situation:

The animal quality rules pertaining to the second disputation might well have been more often obeyed than the tithe law. After all, animals brought for sacrifice were always subject to inspection, no matter how corrupt the inspection practise may have become, so one would assume that not all the animals brought were of poor quality, but only a significant percentage. By contrast, tithing was a much harder thing to enforce. An individual’s actual income was a more private matter, and certainly not one that the priests would have actual jurisdiction to determine…Any fellow Israelite or honest (or dishonest) priest could tell a glance whether a sacrificial animal was fit for the altar, and surely people looked at each other’s animals as they entered the temple area and waited in line for the priestly inspection. But evaluating the degree to which one’s neighbor’s wagon or pack animals were actually carrying a full tenth of his or her income—that was much more difficult to determine, especially if it was not brought all at once, but in repeated trips, or brought in various portions at the various festivals throughout the year.

Malachi’s words to bring “the whole tithe” must have put to shame and surprised anyone at the time due to their insightful and personal character. After all, no one would have expected such corrections in such personal (perhaps hidden or secret) matters. Different

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to the time of Nehemiah when the tithe was not brought at all which was recognise quite obviously by the fact that the Temple was left without staff, in the time of Malachi, the Levites had enough to stay in their duties. Proof of it is that the Temple was running. What is at stake in Malachi is an admonition against secret cheating since only the owner and his workers (perhaps the family also) could really test the integrity of the offerer. It was a personal matter, but Yahweh could see the real picture.

2.5.5.1'el-bêt hāʾōsār: The expression 'el-bêt hāʾōsār means literally “house of supplies” or “house for storing” since the verb āšar means “store up.” The expression is not original to Malachi. Zech 11:13 may be a good parallel phrase, if we accept the logical emendation of the MT hayyoser for hāʾōsār. In Zechariah the term may be translated as “treasury” referring to “one of the storage rooms used specifically for housing precious metals, as a type of bank vault or depository.” In Josh 6:24 ‘ōsār bêt YHWH refers to a tabernacle chamber or tent where the booty was stored. 1 Chr 29:8 uses the same phrase for a place to store gifts (“precious stones”) for the Temple. Dan 1:2, (“he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god [bêt hāʾōsār]”) refers to a place (a room or a building), within the pagan temple where religious utensils and all kinds of relics from many cultures where stored. Neh 10:39 [38], speaks of bringing the “contributions of grain, new wine and oil to the storerooms where the articles for the sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers stay.” Here again, the reference is to a Temple storehouse, particularly a place where food (for priests and Levites) is kept.

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455 HALOT 1:82; cf. CHAL 26.
456 According to Hill, Malachi, 309, this is a “widely recognized emendation.”
457 Ibid, 309.
There are several passages that give us a clearer and broader picture of what the Temple storehouse looked like. Hill proves helpful in his summary,

depending on the kinds of goods stockpiled, the ‘ôšār may have constituted a ‘wardrobe’ (Jer 38:11) or an ‘arsenal’ (Jer 50:25), an official ‘treasury’ (cf. 1 Kgs 14:26; 15:18) or simply some type of ‘warehouse’ or ‘storehouse’ (Joel 1:17). ⁴⁵⁸

If the Second Temple was any similar in its floor plan to Solomon’s Temple, its storerooms were 30 chambers within a hallway built around the sanctuary (1 Kgs 6:6-8; cf. Ezek 41:5-11). ⁴⁵⁹ Neh 10:37-40 [36-39] shows that what these chambers stored in the days after Malachi was the tithe and contributions (Neh 12:44; 13:5, 12) which included grain, wine and oil; a practice that was also present in the time of Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:11).

Mal 3:10b that there may be food in my house (wîhî ṭerep bēbêtî)

The fact that Malachi (and the OT) employs the word bêt for a Temple chamber or hall (x2: “’el-bêt hā’ôšār” and “bēbêtî”), even though it may not have been a separate place of its own, should not cause any problem. Hoffner explains that it was common to designate as bêt chambers or halls within the temple. Especially if the Temple was large, “each building (and sometimes each room or hall) in the complex could be called a [bêt].” ⁴⁶⁰

In Nehemiah, not to bring the tithe into the house of God (the storehouse) is interpreted as neglecting the very house of God (“neglect the house of […] God”).

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⁴⁵⁸ Hill, Malachi, 310.
⁴⁶⁰ Hoffner, “bayith,” TDOT 2:113. Some examples are found in Jer 36:22; Amos 3:15; Esth 2:3; 7:8; Deut 5:6. See also 1 Mac 4:38 where “the priests’ chambers” may refer to the storehouse where the tithe and contributions were kept for them.
implication is the same in Malachi: “bring the tithe so that my house is not empty…in return I will fill your land with produce.”

The consequential force “so that” is clearly intended in the expression wîhî which includes the non-perfective of possibility of the verb hâyâ (“to be”). The expression wîhî is thus best translated as “that there may be” or “so that there is.”

The term terep misguides us if we read it in its broad sense “prey” with reference to wild animals or people who become prey of others. Malachi’s usage of this word, however, must be understood in the same way of Job 24:5; Prov 31:15 and Ps 111:5, as “food” or “nourishment.” The term is here equated with the tithe, and it moves the emphasis from just bringing the tithe to the Temple as a way to honour and obey Yahweh, to bringing the tithe in order to take care of the Temple staff. After all, the food stored at the Temple was not for Yahweh to eat, but for the priests and Levites (Deut 14:29). Taylor and Clendenen explain that “this is clearly the background for the twin purposes of ‘food’ (or ‘nourishment’) in Mal 3:10a and a divine blessing in vv. 10b-12.”

We could easily think of the obvious practicalities of bringing food to the Temple: there would be no Temple usage if the staff had no salary. But there is an even more important lesson here. Taylor and Clendenen, quoting from Millar, explain that a Levite’s purpose was not just to fulfil his cultic duties but was a spiritual example for the whole nation of what it meant to be totally dependant on Yahweh.

the function of a Levi in the land is to remind Israel that her ultimate calling is not merely to enjoy its produce, but relationship with him…If the Levites are neglected, it is not simply a sign of disobedience, but of a falling away from the relationship which the Levites themselves model.

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461 WO’C §33.4, 34.6, 39.2.2.
462 WO’C §31.4e.
463 Gen 49:9; Num 23:24; Isa 5:29; 31:4; Ezek 19:3; 22:25; Amos 3:4; Pss 104:21; 124:6, etc.
In this sense, the life of a Levite was not just cultic, but relational.

The following is a summary of all our findings about the cult in Yehud at the time of Malachi. Some conclusions will be drawn in light of the exegesis.

3. SUMMARY OF EXEGESIS

3.1 Summary

The book of Malachi proves that the cult continues to be active decades after the Second Temple was built around 516 BC. Malachi portrays a post-exilic community that enjoys all cultic privileges as it did before the exile. We learn about this because Malachi’s primary concern is the priesthood and its cultic activities. The priests are accused of disrespecting, dishonouring, despising and defiling Yahweh, and they question his accusations as if he either lied or was ignorant. But the principal way they despise and defile Yahweh day after day is through deficient and unacceptable offerings. This is not a single event, but a continuous negative attitude toward the cult and Yahweh.

What kind of offerings and sacrifices does Malachi refer to in his accusations against the priests? The following is a summary of our findings about all rituals mentioned, alluded to or implicit in the text:

Malachi majors on animal sacrifices when he criticises offerings, i.e., burnt offerings. In the post-exilic Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus, the only reference to leḥem is in Hag 2:12 meaning sacrificial meat. The context of Malachi 1:6-2:9 points strongly in the same direction since most references are to animals (Cf. Mal 1:8, 13, 14; 2:3). Furthermore, the expression “on my altar” (‘al-mīzḇēḥī) appears frequently in Leviticus, always meaning the altar of burnt offerings, i.e., the bronze altar, rather than
the incense altar of the table of the bread of the presence. Explicit references to animals corroborate this (blind, lame and sick animals, all condemned in the cultic regulations). It is possible that Malachi refers to freewill offerings (under the category of šēlāmīm offering) which were votive offerings, i.e., voluntary. In those offerings, a certain degree of imperfection was allowed; however, since there is no particular mention of such an offering until v. 14, Malachi is most likely referring to all animal sacrifices.

The kind of offering alluded to in Mal 1:14 is, with little doubt, a reference to votive offerings, i.e., voluntary offerings in petition of God’s blessing, protection or rescue. Malachi treats this type of offering separately, i.e., as a different type to what he describes previously, thus further supporting that previously he has been addressing all animal offerings.

Mal 2:2-3 sheds light on how precise the priests were in carrying out the sacrifices. To remove the offal of the animal involves a certain degree of commitment to the task as laid out in the cultic regulations of Leviticus. The priests were separating and cutting the animals into pieces and putting away the parts that were to be burned outside the Temple. The irony is that they were scrupulous in this particular task but completely relaxed when it came to finding blemishes. But perhaps what is most significant is Malachi’s reference to the festivals, which shows that the cultic calendar was followed. Here Malachi is very likely alluding to the three main festivals, i.e., Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of the Tabernacles. The picture of Yahweh spreading the offal on the priests’ faces is intensified by the fact that it was the offal of their festivals, since this was the time of the year when the amount of sacrifices was at its peak and, the more sacrifices, the bigger the amount of excrement (offal) in the priests’ faces. We can
surmise that, in order to be a valid threat, the festivals must have been widely attended for there to be bigger amounts of offal. If not, Malachi’s words had little emphasis if any.

Malachi 2:12-13 is most likely a condemnation of pagan practices contaminating the cult to Yahweh. Weeping and groaning were some of the most honest and humble expressions of repentance but a repugnancy to Yahweh when used to manipulate him. The consciously disobedient worshippers that divorced Hebrew wives in order to marry foreign women felt Yahweh’s rejection of their offerings. These offerings served as a bribe to appease Yahweh for their disobedience and, because Yahweh rejected them, they over-exaggerated their approach to God with weeping and groaning so that he would pity and accept them. The hypocritical lament did not change Yahweh’s attitude toward them because it was not based on true repentance and obedience.

The term *ma’aser* in 3:8 refers to the annual tithe, a tenth of all earnings that was given to the cult personnel. From vv. 3:8-10 we learn that the tithe (all tithes) was being brought by the whole nation, but only partially. The cheating attitude that we encountered in the second oracle is not just present in votive offerings and sacrifices but also in keeping part of the tithe which belonged to Yahweh. The mention of storehouses shows that enough was given to be stored and to maintain the priests and Levites’ salaries, in contrast with Nehemiah where the Temple personnel were forced to seek other means for their subsistence. The emphasis on the nation’s failure is on tithes, though other offerings are in mind, for example, the ones mentioned in Mal 1:14 (the meaning of *teruma* is difficult to pinpoint given the many usages in the OT). Tithing was a highly privatised aspect of a worshipper’s life since few of those close to him would know exactly what he
owed. Malachi’s public condemnation of this sin shows that the malpractice was common to everyone and no secret in the streets.

What is the general picture, then, about the cult in Malachi’s day? The cult seems to be highly organised, with an active, extensive and accessible sacrificial system for the whole nation (hence the general accusations). The text probably speaks of both burnt offerings (with all of their sub-kinds) and votive offerings. The way the cult personnel handle the animals is also scrupulous, involving the separation of parts to be burnt in and out of the Temple. The festival calendar is also kept and we can surmise from the text that worshippers attend it faithfully (hence the bigger amount of offal). The whole nation tithes, though partially, but being able to sustain the entire maintenance of the Temple – all expenses covered. There is, however, a certain practice that is foreign to the cult, at least in the way it is being used before Yahweh: weeping and groaning (ḇēḵî waʾănāqā). We can certainly attribute the origin of this practice to pagan influences, for nowhere in the OT do we see Israelites practising it. On the contrary, it is people like Baal’s prophets who use this practice to appeal to their god/s, in stark contrast to the prophet of Yahweh who only prays.

This is as far as we can get in our description of the cult of Yehud at the time of Malachi. Let us now summarise our findings as to the attitude toward it.

3.2 Priests’ Attitude Toward the Cult.

The priests’ attitude can be summarised using Malachi’s own words: contempt. The priests failed Yahweh by bringing defiled animals, i.e., clean animals (the right kind for sacrifice) that had become or were common (not holy). These animals were never
meant for sacrifice, not just according to Yahwistic standards, but also by pagan or political ones. Even a pagan governor would be insulted with such offerings in spite of having much freer cultic standards. For this reason, it is very difficult to defend the theory that the priests were ignorant of cultic laws and thus were acting out of ignorance. Their sacrifices were clearly short of any ANE standard, even in the case of votive offerings where the animal was allowed to have certain degree of imperfection.

Malachi’s mention of five types of blemishes present in the animals being offered by his contemporaries shows how poor the quality of the offerings are, matching the priests’ verbal disdain for the cult, the altar and Yahweh. Particularly insightful is the fact that people are offering stolen animals. It is in vain to sin and break the laws of the land in order to “please” God by offering stolen animals. The only possible reason why a worshipper might do this is due to his lack of understanding of the nature of the offerings and the misconception that Yahweh cares only about the ritual and not what motivates it. Only a worshipper with a superficial understanding (as in pagan sacrifices) would steal an animal in order to offer it to the all-knowing, all-seeing God of Israel. Malachi 1:9 clarifies very strongly that the fault came from the hands of the priests. True, offerings (stolen, defiled, etc) were brought by laymen as well, but here the guilt felt mainly upon the priests who supervised and taught the offerer what to bring and how to choose it. By opening the Temple doors to animals with almost any kind of blemish, the priests also taught the laymen, indirectly, that it was completely acceptable to bring disqualified animals. The lay person depended on the priests’ teaching and guidance to know how to behave within the community – whether in matters of worship, marriage, ethics or finances. The fact that neither priest nor layman found blemishes in the animal speaks
powerfully as to how watered down the priests’ teaching was and indeed how their low standards regarding holiness had permeated all society.

It is difficult to assess why the priests were overlooking the animals’ imperfections. Stuart suggests that the reason the priests were “looking away” and ignoring the animal blemishes is because of the economic gain in each offering. The more animals they accepted, the more their income increased. Both blemished and unblemished animals tasted the same and their skins and meat had little difference, if any. This is perhaps the best logical explanation we can surmise from the little information we have, yet it should not be defended dogmatically.

From Malachi 1:13 we deduct that the priests are tired of the cult and see it as a hardship and burden. They have no energy left for it and it is not worth the effort. Further ahead they also complain that to serve Yahweh is useless. The same situation is recorded in Isa 43:22 where Yahweh complains to the Israelites about how weary they are of him. This attitude helps us understand how superficial the priests’ performance of the cult was in the time of Malachi. Their heart was not in their actions, and sacrifices had become mere rituals devoid of depth or passion. It is because if this passionless, superficial attitude that sins like stealing animals or lying when voluntarily vowing valuable animals to Yahweh were common things within the community of Yehud. Once the heart was not in the actions, these became mere activities. If the cult was seen as a ritual activity, it is easy to understand how the standards of the community would decrease.

The expression ‘ên-lî ḫēpes bākem (v. 10) means “there is no joy to me IN YOU,” and it underlines Yahweh’s dislike and repugnancy toward them (bākem). It is the wrong attitude behind the offering that pollutes the entire cult. But the Israelites were not even
meeting the outward standards since they were bringing disqualified animals. It is one thing to obey the Law but miss the spirit of the Law; it is another to fail to meet both the Law and the spirit! The priests were failing to meet both the correct attitude toward the cult and the standard of clean animals to practise the cult.

The priests’ attitude toward the cult was therefore one of contempt and disrespect, even though they were committed to most cultic regulations and followed stipulations such as the festival calendar, different types of offerings, separation of the parts of the animal that could not be burned inside the Temple, and tithing. The picture is one of following the rules superficially but failing to have the heart in the right place. Some pagan influence did come into their understanding of how to please God (weeping and groaning) but this should not be understood as idolatry, but rather as worldly influences in their relationship with the divine – which ultimately reduces the God of Israel to a lesser god.

3.3 Prophet’s Attitude Toward the Cult.

In contrast with pre-exilic prophecy, the ethical realm does not seem to take over the cultic. Admittedly, Malachi, as any other prophet, is also interested in a moral life and condemns any immorality, but he is not contrasting the ethical with the cultic. Rather, he encourages priest and worshipper to perform the cult correctly. The refining of the Levites and the call for bringing the right animals and the whole tithe is far from being negative words against the cult, but Yehud’s intermarriage with pagan women, their cheating, lying, etc, does not escape the prophet’s eye either.
Of particular interest is Yahweh’s own rejection of the cult by wishing there would be one priest willing to shut the Temple and interrupt all cultic activity. This is perhaps the closest post-exilic statement to pre-exilic anti-cultic ones. And perhaps Malachi’s passage is stronger than any other for there is no more exile; i.e., the closing of the Temple is an isolated wish of Yahweh against the cult, not part of the punishment of Israel. Since Mal 3:1 (and other places where the Levites are refined) speaks of the Temple in the future, it is then not a rejection of the cult, but a dialectical negation to show how disgusted he is with the present cult. To shut the temple doors was to shut the people from Yahweh and all possible communication with him through worship. Yahweh prefers to shut that channel of divine communication until his honour and fear are restored, comparing the situation to the idolatry that led the Israelites into exile.

It is important to notice one emphasis in Yahweh’s rejection of the cult in Malachi (shutting the Temple and accepting no more offerings). Time and again Yahweh is rejecting their cult and their practices, but not the cult in general. Verse 8 states, “will he be pleased with you (panēkā)?” Verse 9 says, “this has happened because of you (miyyedkem)” Verse 10 says, “I have no delight in you (bākem) …and I will accept no offering from you (miyyedkem).” Yahweh rejects their cult, not the cult per se. And this echoes much of the criticisms in pre-exilic prophecy. Given how the nation is insulting Yahweh with the way they treat his table, it would be better for the Temple to be shut than continue to host such disrespect for Yahweh.

As we have already seen, Malachi condemns pagan influences within the cult such as weeping and groaning. However, there is no mention of other gods (apart from marrying foreign women). The community of Yehud could not be accused with charges
of idolatry for there was none. However, their view of Yahweh was indeed idolatrous for they had reduced him to a god that deserves no honour or respect to the point that their actions reflected very well the indifference they had for him. The prophet attacks such indifference and insulting attitude which did not correspond to the kind of god Yahweh was. As we saw in the beginning, archaeology confirms the absence of idolatry after the exile and this is one of the main differences between the pre-exilic and post-exilic cultic life of Israel.

What is very unique to Malachi is his affirmation of the cult and all offerings. The prophet does not condemn the cult anywhere, what is more, he speaks of its future refinement in addition to encourage worshippers to correct their practices. It is implicit in his protests that by bringing the right animals Yahweh’s honour and fear would be restored. The priests are encouraged to obey Yahweh’s law and the people are encouraged to bring all of the tithe and not just part of it. All this affirms the value and necessity of the cult for the covenant relationship with Yahweh.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim of the Chapter.

The primary concern of this study is discovering *in what way* the offering aspect of the cult is significant in Malachi especially when compared to former prophets who focused on the cult’s spiritual and ethical aspects rather than on the offerings.

1.2 Setting of the Conflict between Pre- and Post-exilic Prophetic Cultic Statements

Anti-cultic statements present in the writings of pre-exilic prophets differ quite strongly from the pro-cultic statements found in the writings of post-exilic prophets, and more particularly Malachi. For some, such as E. W. Heaton, the “heated debate” regarding the pre-exilic anti-cultic emphasis will never be concluded because “all our evidence is indirect and ambiguous.” In contrast to this position, John Barton offers his explanations on the hostility of the anti-cultic statements. He notes that among pre-exilic prophets only Micah speaks with hostility against the sacrifice for sin (Mic 6:6). All other pre-exilic anti-cultic statements seem overwhelmingly concerned with the kind of sacrifice which accompanies feasting, probably the $\text{š}lā\text{ā}mîm type, offered with rejoicing and thanksgiving in mind... that could mean that at least some of the anti-sacrifice polemic… is linked to their disapproval of feasting and self-indulgence, rather than to questions of what for us would be strictly questions of religious ritual observance.

While Barton is correct in pointing out that there is an element of festival condemnation, he seems to disregard the many passages that not only speak about festivals, but also

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467 Barton, “The Prophets and the Cult,” 119.
about offerings of many types, including tithes, votive offerings, Sabbaths, fasts, and many others. It cannot be avoided that most anti-cultic statements speak in general terms about the cult (we will see this as we survey the texts themselves) and we are still left with the need to understand the nature of their criticism is.

Barton addresses the issue of contradictory attitudes of the pre- and post-exilic prophets toward the sacrificial (including offering) aspect of the cult, asking what the prophets thought about the practice of the cult in both pre- and post-exilic times and how involved they were in Israelite cult in the various periods. In his attempt to answer these questions, Barton does not agree with those who argue, following A. R. Johnson, that post-exilic prophets were “cultic prophets,” considering this view “desperately uncertain” and based on conjecture. Instead, he concludes that each book must be explored in its own context:

Justice needs to be done to this at least apparent diversity, and this is surely best achieved by considering each book on its merits, and not, for the sake of a unified ‘prophetic message’, adopting a Procrustean approach which forces either pre-exilic or post-exilic classical prophets to conform to the image of the other.

To group all pre-exilic prophets into one category and all post-exilic prophets into another as if they were simply two opposing groups does not do justice to each prophet. Similarly, to try to reconcile both groups as having a similar emphasis on the cult may prove misleading. Nevertheless, I will look for unity and continuity between all prophetic books, in spite of their different nuances in respect to the cult.

Some of the strongest pre-exilic prophetic texts, such as the ones in Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah and Micah, seem to favour very strongly the abolition of the cult. Their interest seems far more concerned with the spiritual and ethical life of the nation. This is further

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469 Barton, “The Prophets and the Cult,” 118.
470 Ibid.
dramatized by Amos’ reasoning in Amos 5:21-26 that there was no cult to Yahweh in the time of the Wilderness. In fact, scholars have argued that Israel’s worship system was not divinely given, but was a mere loan from Canaanite cultures when Israel first arrived to the Promised Land.\footnote{R de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* (Wales: University of Wales, 1964), 50; as quoted in DR Jones, “Exposition of Isaiah Chapter 1 verses Ten to Seventeen,” *SJT* 18 (1965), 462.} Archaeology can be used to support this theory since the discoveries of Canaanite rituals. Jones explains that the Canaanites, the Moabites and the Aramaeans from Damascus certainly had the holocaust, the communion sacrifice and the cereal offering and there is sufficient evidence of common technical terms at fourteenth century B.C. Ugarit to make it clear that elements of the system were not original to Israel.\footnote{Jones, “Exposition of Isaiah,” 462.}

The fact that there are obvious parallels (even loans) from surrounding nations does not necessarily mean that the prophets were rejecting the cult altogether. If we acknowledge that worship always takes place within a cultural setting, it would not surprise us that people who share similar ways of communicating and understanding paradigms of reality, including the supernatural, are going to express and communicate in those same paradigms. It might be that the Israelites borrowed their forms from their neighbours, though there are very significant differences between pagan religions and Israel’s (treatment of blood; approach to the altar; understanding that Yahweh is not fed; and, above all, a highly ethical life to such a degree that it is foreign to other religions), but the God of the Bible is described as one who enters into our culture, using our language, plausibility structures, and even human form (Gen 3:8, God walked with Adam and Eve; Gen 18, God ate with Abraham following ANE manners). We can see this in the OT, and with no doubt in the NT in the person of Jesus Christ. There is no contradiction here. If Yahweh gave the Israelites a system to approach him, he did so considering how this approach would take place in their time, language and culture.
But perhaps there is more to discuss here than whether Israelite worship is borrowed from other cultures or not. An assumption that goes hand in hand with the thesis that Israel’s worship was man-made and man-borrowed is that prophecy preceded law. One century ago, especially when higher criticism reached its pinnacle, it was believed that all anti-cultic pre-exilic statements in the OT corroborated the thesis that there was no organized or complex cult in Israel. Yahweh’s revelation at Sinai was but a theological “parable” or story on the origins of Law and the prophets’ reaction against the cult was seen as evidence of a reaction against the priests’ intention to supersede old religious traditions in order to implement a more regulated cult in which they would exercise their authority more openly. The old ceremonials consisted of a more ethical faith and less ritualistic (even legalistic) character. Today this thesis, along with other assumptions of higher criticism, is highly questioned. John N. Oswalt, among others, explains that

there is every reason to believe, as Scripture claims, that Israel had a complex cult long before the age of the prophets and that what the prophets opposed was not the existence of the cult but rather the attempt to use cult in magical, manipulative ways without reference to the character and attitude of the worshipper.\textsuperscript{473}

Oswalt supports his opinion through other scholars such as Schungel-Straumen,\textsuperscript{474} R. E. Clements,\textsuperscript{475} Delitzsch, Bentzen, Kaiser, D. R. Jones,\textsuperscript{476} J. P. Hyatt,\textsuperscript{477} D. E. Gowan\textsuperscript{478} and others who have, in different forms, described as simplistic or erroneous the thesis that Israel had no complex cult.

\textsuperscript{473} JN Oswalt, \textit{The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39}, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 94-95.
\textsuperscript{474} H Schungel-Straumen, \textit{Gottesbild und Kultkritik vorexilischen Propheten} (Stuttgart, 1972).
\textsuperscript{476} Jones, “Exposition of Isaiah,” 457-471.
2. SACRIFICES IN THE CONTEXT OF A COVENANT WITH YAHWEH

The purpose of sacrifices was “to provide a means of approaching the Lord in his place of manifest presence in Israel (e.g., Lev 1:2) and to maintain that presence by preserving the purity and holiness of the sanctuary (e.g., Lev 15:31).” What was crucial about sacrifices, and the cult in general, was whether Yahweh accepted them or not. It is noteworthy that several times the emphasis is put not so much on the nature of the sacrifice, but on the attitude of the worshipper (e.g., Lev 16:29-31). For example, in the story of Abel and Cain, God first looked at the man and then at the offering (Gen 4:4-5). It was Cain’s attitude that displeased God, and consequently Abel’s heart that pleased him, which settled God’s decision as to who was approaching him correctly and who was not. In such a case, the better offering (or more expensive – fruit against animal offering) represented the better heart attitude of the worshipper.

The cult also provided the means for the worshippers who needed atonement for their sinful nature. In this sense, the cult gave the worshipper a right to stand before God and please him. Wenham explains how the laying of hands in the act of sacrifice symbolised the worshipper’s sin atonement as the animal died. Wenham also explains that the atonement was achieved not just by the external rite, but by the internal attitude of reverence and repentance. The laying of hands is also associated with prayer as we see in Lev 16:21 (cf. Deut 21:6-9 and others) and most likely the prayer identified not only the animal with its owner but the victim with the worshipper in a vicarious way, i.e., as if the animal was in the worshipper’s place paying for his sin. In this sense, the

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worshipper’s prayer was an acknowledgment of such a substitution. As we have seen in Ps 51:17-19, a sacrifice is worthless if it is not accompanied by a broken and contrite heart (cf. Ps 34:18). Rowley defends that

It is true that many in Israel thought [Israelite sacrifice’s] efficacy lay in the due performance of the ritual act, and there were sacrifices which encouraged such a notion. But it is also true that the efficacy of the ritual act was believed to depend on its being the expression of the spirit of the offerer.

The Israelites were not just supposed to perform the rites and pray, but also to truly seek restoration and a change of direction in their sinful ways (cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Pss 40:6-8, 50:7-15, 51:16f., 69:30f.; Isa 66:3; Jer 6:20, 7:21-23; Hos 6:6, 8:13; Amos 4:4, 5:12-25; Mic 6:6-8). Hence proper atonement includes sacrifice and genuine repentance demonstrated in faith and obedience. Paul Ellingworth summarises this concept:

Neither sacrifice, nor even prayer, would be effective as long as Israel was in a state of rebellion against God (most clearly Is. 1:15); conversely, animal sacrifice is contrasted with doing God’s will (1 Sa. 15:22; Je. 7:23; Ps. 40:8), justice (Is. 1:17; Am. 5:21) and a right relationship with God (Hos. 6:6b; Pss. 51:17; 69:30f.).

Ethics plays a major part in prophecy to the point that many assume this is what is required and not rituals. But what we must keep in mind is that ethics is stressed against rituals in order to break the dichotomy between these two in ancient Israel and to bring into perspective the whole picture of Yahwism, which was quite different to pagan religions. Clements points to this relative rejection of the cult:

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480 Wenham, *Leviticus*, 61 suggests that “laying” is a rather weak translation of *samak* and proposes “press” as much more preferable (cf. Isa 59:16; Ezek 24:2, 30:6; Amos 5:19). If Wenham’s suggestion is true, then this substitution was not a mere “laying of hands” but a tense and almost violent moment when the worshipper identified himself very significantly by “pressing his guilt” on the animal. The picture is full of strong symbolism and identification.

481 The difference between an attrite repentance and a contrite repentance lies in this. The former is just an acknowledgment of the sin, but the repentance is only based on what the sinner has lost or the consequences of his sin (e.g. Esau’s grief that he had lost his birthrights). The latter is a true repentance for having offended either God or someone, and it seeks forgiveness and restoration.


It is clear that what [the pre-exilic prophets] rejected was not the cult as such, for its own sake, but the cult which had become divorced from righteousness and obedience to Yahweh. The very fact that the prophetic criticisms stress righteousness and justice over against the offering of sacrifices, points to the relative, rather than the absolute, nature of their opposition to the worship of the sanctuaries. They did not oppose all cult as such, in favour of a non-cultic religion, but they opposed the cult which they found because it no longer expressed the ethical nature of true Yahwism.\footnote{Clements, \textit{Prophecy and Covenant}, 95.}

Rowley expresses similar ideas when he says that

\begin{quote}
[the prophets] saw men offering splendid sacrifices yet violating the law of God in their lives, and condemned the worship because it was not the expression of the real spirit of the worshippers. To honour God in word but not in deed was not to honour him at all, and he who penetrated to the hearts of men must repudiate their meaningless worship.\footnote{Rowley, “The Forms and Meaning of Sacrifice,” 132.}
\end{quote}

Sacrifices and offerings had different roles within the cult. For example, there is a distinction between sin, high-handed sin and uncleanness. Sins that were committed ignorantly, unknowingly or simply out of weakness were taken care of by sacrifices, whether by the sin or guilt offerings or by the Day of Atonement. But the rituals were not meant to be “magic” in and of themselves; they were but the outward expression of the worshipper who sought forgiveness and restoration and duly recognised and confessed such sins. High-handed sins are the ones alluded to in the Mishnah, i.e., sins that are knowingly and willingly committed as an act of direct rebellion against God. A premeditated murder or adultery fell into this category. For such sins there was no atonement possible but only punishment ("to be cut off from the community of Israel"). However, David, having committed both adultery and murder, was forgiven only on the basis of his repentance and confession (2 Sam 12:13), which might be the reason why even with high-handed sins there might still be room for forgiveness on the basis of repentance, but not sacrifice. The third category can be easily misunderstood as sin but this is far from what the Law teaches. Uncleaness needed of sacrifices to be purged so, if a woman had a child, she was unfit to visit the Temple, for she had been contaminated.
by her fluids. Sacrifice was needed but not to atone for sin, for bringing a child into the world could hardly be thought in this way. This, and other cultic requirements, needed sacrifices which did have an automatic or formal effect on the worshipper. On the other hand, the expiation of moral transgressions required more than mere rituals; it required true repentance and confession.

Now, some offerings had nothing to do with sins, like thanksgiving offerings that were free will or petition offerings which asked for something from God. In pagan religions, it was assumed that such offerings put the deity under obligation in exchange for food, but this had nothing to do with Yahwism, even though such views did influence and corrupt the Israelites. Rowley explains that the Yahwist worshipper

was never encouraged by the true leaders of Israel’s religion to think that he was entitled to what he asked for. God was not to be coerced by magic, and the note of pleading in the psalms of petition sufficiently indicates that the worshipper was not encouraged to think he was entitled to command God’s gifts.\(^487\)

Yahwism stripped all “magic” from its cult, and it was every deviation from this magic-free cult that the prophets fought against.

I contend that none of the prophets rejected the cult \textit{per se}, since the cult was not a compilation of mere rituals but a covenantal expression of Israel’s worship that could not be divorced from the ethical life. Instead, they criticised corrupted forms of a cult which had been handed down long before any of the classic or great prophets of the OT made act of presence.

The following is an analysis of pre-exilic anti-cultic statements. My final aim is to discover whether Malachi’s message on the offering aspect of the cult is distinctive when compared to its predecessors. I will pay special attention to the cultic terms in anti-cultic

\(^{487}\) Ibid, 141.
passages and analyse whether the prophets were rejecting the cult as prescribed in the Pentateuch or some corruption of it. A brief exegesis will be provided in order to understand the nature of the prophet’s complaint, concluding with a comparison with Malachi’s criticism.

3. ANALYSIS OF ANTI-CULTIC PRE-EXILIC STATEMENTS

3.1 The book of Samuel: 1 Samuel 15:22-23—“to obey is better than sacrifice”

In 1 Sam 15:22-23 we read that the Lord commanded Saul, through the prophet Samuel, to annihilate all Amalekites, including animals. Saul did kill every inhabitant except the king and elite animals in order to sacrifice them to the Lord. These are the words that the prophet Samuel says to him after his victory:

22 “Does Yahweh delight in burnt offerings [‘ōlāh] and sacrifices [zebah] as much as in obeying the voice of Yahweh? To obey is better than sacrifice [zebah], and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh, he has rejected you as king.”

Saul misunderstood the role of sacrifices. While willing to sacrifice to Yahweh hundreds of animals, at the same time he was insulting him with the disobedience of his heart, which made him lose his royal privileges. Note that sacrifices [‘ōlāh] and burnt offerings [zebah] are not rejected; rather, they are put second to obedience. Yahweh delights more in obedience than in burnt offerings, and to obey is better than sacrifice. No ceremony can replace the submissive heart and no ritual can atone for a rebellious attitude toward Yahweh. Some scholars would defend that the prophet is denigrating the levitical institution, namely the sacrificial system, but how could he if he himself was dutifully devoted to sacrifices as 1 Sam 9:13 shows?
It would be awkward to identify these sacrifices with Israelite festivals. Rather, the sacrifices alluded to here are those that come as thanksgiving after a military victory. But most importantly for our study, the focus is not on indulgencies or peripheral activities around the cult, but on the fact that obedience to Yahweh’s word is more important than sacrifices (in the general meaning of the word). To be sure, Barton’s argument about festivals\footnote{Barton, “The Prophets and the Cult,” 119.} does not apply to this passage.

3.2 The Book of Psalms

This early account of Samuel and Saul sets the context for some of the royal Psalms. It is believed that this passage is alluded to in Pss 40:6-8, 51:16ff. and 69:30-31. Each of these passages speaks negatively about sacrifices and contrasts the weight of true obedience, thankfulness and ethics over the cult.

3.2.1 Ps 40:6-8—A Royal Liturgy of Supplication.

6 Sacrifice [zebah] and offering [minhā] you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced [you have made me obedient]; burnt offerings ['ōlāh] and sin offerings [haṭṭā‘] you did not require.

7 Then I said, "Here I am, I have come— it is written about me in the scroll.

8 I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

Probably written by King David (the Psalm is in first person [“the one”] in contrast with the nation [“great congregation”]), scholars argue that these rituals must be conceived as a “royal liturgy of supplication”\footnote{Eaton, \textit{Kingship and the Psalms}, 42–44, as quoted in PC Craigie, \textit{Psalms 1-50}, WBC (electronic ed. Logos Library System; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 314. Cf. Johnson, \textit{The Cultic Prophet}, 399–412;} and thus interpret the criticism in such context. Peter C. Craigie explains the kings carried the responsibility of the nation before
Yahweh and thus had a privileged role of interceding for them through the royal liturgy of supplication, in this case, for the salvation of the people (v. 14). The king could only participate in such liturgies “after having faithfully performed all his royal tasks as king, which included the offering of appropriate sacrifices.” The offering in itself was not enough. The emphasis on obeying (“you have pierced my ears”) and the desire to obey God’s law that is “written in the scroll” and “within [the kings’] heart” alludes to the law of the kings found in Deut 17:14-20, which in itself includes the whole Deuteronomic law and its cultic requirements of kings. The main goal of the law of kings was to make sure the king learned to fear Yahweh, to obey every single word from God so that he did not “turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left” and to humble himself to the same degree as any other Israelite citizen.

The anti-cultic statements of this Psalm are but a remembrance that sacrifices not accompanied by the due obedience and submissive attitude are useless. To put it in Michael Wilcock’s words,

Against the background of such a fearful warning, David and every subsequent Israelite king knew perfectly well that in the heart attitude of Psalm 40:6-8 lay their only guarantee of blessing. It was God himself, of course, who had imposed on Israel the system of sacrifice; but sacrifice per se was not what he wanted – he was looking for the inward grace of which sacrifice was the outward sign.491

Barton states that only Micah speaks negatively about the sin offering,492 but here the sin offering forms part of the rejected offerings (v. 6). Regardless of what type of offering, Yahweh prefers a worshipper who does his divine will.

490 Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 315.
492 Barton, “The Prophets and the Cult,” 119.
**3.2.2 Ps 50:7-15—A Reminder and Renewal of the Covenant.** This Psalm also shows how unnecessary sacrifices are to God, even though the Israelites were fulfilling every aspect of them. In fact, God would accept an attitude of thankfulness and fulfilment of vows rather than have animals offered to him as if he needed them.

8 I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices [zebah] or your burnt offerings [‘ôlâh], which are ever before me.
9 But I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens,
10 for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.
11 I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine.
12 If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.
13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?
14 Sacrifice [zâbah] thank offerings [tôdâh] to God, fulfil your vows [neder] to the Most High.

The psalm differs from most other psalms because of its prophetic character (cf. Ps 81; 95). Some commentators see in this psalm a liturgy “associated with the ceremony of the renewal of the covenant in ancient Israel.”\(^{493}\) Whether a ceremony or not, the theme is indistinguishably related to renewing the covenant and reassuring Israel’s loyalty to Yahweh.

It is likely that this Psalm was used in worship at Jerusalem (“Zion” in v. 2) since the first six verses are uttered by one spokesperson who summoned the congregation. Craigie presumes that this ritual was part of a larger one that unfolded throughout the day, perhaps during the Feast of Tabernacles. The mention of vows and sacrifices as something yet to happen (v. 14), added to the recitation of covenant stipulations (v. 16),

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\(^{493}\) Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 363. Craigie also states that it is possible “the liturgy took place at dawn” due to the reference to the “rising of the sun” and a reference to God having “shone forth.”
supports the idea that the people prepared for a “more formal act of making and renewing the Covenant.”

It seems that before renewing the covenant and making vows and offering sacrifices, the psalm reminded the people, using a caricature of God, of the role of sacrifices. Note that the very first statement in verse 8 clarifies that Yahweh has no complaint about the contemporary cult that is dutifully presented to him every day. In fact, nowhere in the psalm are sacrifices or burnt offerings condemned. The Israelites are merely reminded that Yahweh does not need them. He does not “eat” the meat of their sacrifices like other neighbouring idols and, if he ever would (v. 13), he could dispose of anything he wanted (vv. 10-11), for he owns the whole of Creation (also a striking contrast with the idols of the day). Once this is explained, the Israelites can proceed with their sacrifices. Craigie reflects on the significance of this psalm saying that the

essence of the whole sacrificial system was to be found in “thanksgiving” and the fulfillment of “vows” (v 14); for at root, the covenant community did not exist for the temple, but the temple and its cult existed only as an avenue through which the worship and thanksgiving of the covenant people could be directed to God. Covenant was a relationship with God; thanksgiving to God could be expressed through the sacrificial cult, thereby enriching the relationship.

But what does the psalmist mean by “thanksgiving offerings” [tôdâh] and “vows” [neder]? Just as in Mal 1:14, the term neder refers to votive offerings, so here it means a promise to God of a particular gift or offering. A vow was often made before collecting the fruit of the land. Thanksgiving offerings, as well, were votive offerings. The psalm is most likely presented in the context of a voluntary ritual.

An Israelite worshipper had to recognise that all he had belonged to Yahweh and that he could please him not with rituals, but with the gratitude that first comes from

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494 Ibid. Note also the similarities with Deut 5:1 and 6:4, which is reminiscent of covenant language.
495 Ibid., 365.
within after experiencing Yahweh’s grace. Only after a thankful attitude to God emanated could there be room for sacrifices or vows. To renew a covenant, whether for the first time or the twentieth, involved what is mentioned here – thanksgiving, vows and recitation of the law – but this was only a one-way ceremony. Yahweh was not required to renew anything, for his faithfulness was a given: “the ritual was for the sake of the people, rather than God. While God was the ever faithful covenant partner, it was in the nature of human beings to forget that the fundamental meaning of their individual lives and national existence was rooted in the relationship with God.”  

3.2.3 Ps 51:16-19—True Repentance and Confession Over Sacrifice. This Psalm treats having a contrite heart and a broken spirit as much more valuable than sacrifices and offerings. The Psalmist, presumably David himself, admits that because of this truth he does not even bring sacrifices to God, since God does not take pleasure in them.

16 You do not delight in sacrifice [zebah]
   or I would bring it;
   you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings ['ôlâh].
17 The sacrifices [zebah] of God are a broken spirit;
   a broken and contrite heart,
   O God, you will not despise.
18 In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;
   build up the walls of Jerusalem.
19 Then there will be righteous sacrifices [zebah],
   whole burnt offerings ['ôlâh] to delight you;
   then bulls will be offered on your altar.

This emphasis on ethics, the inward attitude and thankfulness which seems to reject sacrifices and offerings as second class, is but a repetition of the same attitude encountered in the other psalms. Psalm 51 has historically been understood to be a penitential psalm (cf. Pss 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) because of the superscription, its

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496 Ibid., 367.
confessional nature, and its spirit of contrition and prayer. It is believed that David wrote the Psalm as a lament over his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1-12:25). But whether it represents David’s sin or the nation’s, the Psalm deals with true repentance and seeking God’s grace.

The offerings alluded to in this passage, zebāḥ and ʿōlāh, have been discussed before. But here they are more related to sin-offerings than in other instances given the genre of the Psalm.

That the cult is not what is rejected should be clear by verse 19 where it explicitly says that burnt offerings and sacrifices will delight God. There is either a direct and clear contradiction within the Psalm, namely v. 16 (“You do not delight in sacrifice”) and v. 19 (“righteous sacrifices⁴⁹⁷, burnt offerings to delight you”) or v. 16 alludes to a misuse of them.⁴⁹⁸ Verse 17 has the key to understanding this dilemma: “The sacrifices [zebāḥ] of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart.” The Psalmist acknowledges that sacrifices and offerings are subordinate to confession and true repentance that begs for grace and mercy; only when the latter takes place is forgiveness possible. Tate puts it this way,

The confidence of the worshiper is placed in that which God will certainly accept, “a broken and contrite heart” (vv 18–19). We should avoid the conclusion that these verses point to a repudiation of cultic worship and that they encourage a kind of spirituality wholly detached from sacrifices. Rather the point is that burnt offerings or other sacrifices which God will accept must express the sacrificial reality of the “crushed” heart of the worshiper. It is possible that one use of this psalm

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⁴⁹⁷ One of the several interpretations of “righteous sacrifices” is the following: “sacrifices that will be ‘rightfully due’ because they will be an appropriate response to what God will do” quoted in ME Tate, Psalms 51-100, WBC (electronic ed. Logos Library System; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 26; cf. BA Levine, In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 135–37.

⁴⁹⁸ There is also the possibility that the sin alluded in the Psalm falls into the category of “high-handed” sins that no sacrifice could atone for (Num 15:30). The cult made provision for “un-desired” or “unconscious” sins but for sins such as adultery or murder the punishment was to be “cut off” from the community. Certainly, David’s sin fell into this category and thus the rejection of sacrifices as a means to atone for the sinner was in place according to cultic stipulations. This interpretation, however, is not embraced by the majority of scholars.
was for recitation at the time of sacrificial offerings. The psalm expresses the real meaning of sacrifice: confession, forgiveness, ministry, total dependence on a merciful God, and a joyful new life that emerges from that process.  

3.3 The Book of Isaiah

The book of Isaiah commences with a shocking accusation against Israel. The nation is said to “have rebelled against [God],” to “not know” the Lord, to be a “sinning nation, guilt-laden people, evil generation, corrupt children” who have “forsaken the Lord” and “turned away from the Holy One of Israel.” As a culmination of the first accusation, Israel is even called Sodom and Gomorrah (1:9-10).

Oswalt explains that Isaiah rejects Israel, in part, because its people were being idolatrous (see as an example Isa 2:8). Isaiah 1:4 uses very similar language to that of Deuteronomy (Deut 28:20; 29:25, 26; 31:16), which condemns idolatry. The Israelites were trying to keep both a relationship with Yahweh, a God of grace who requires ethical surrender, and with other gods who knew nothing about grace but everything about contracts, i.e., sacrifices that manipulate them in order to satisfy the worshipper’s petitions, and that do not require a change of behaviour. While on the one hand the book of Isaiah is filled with mockery and exhortations against idolatry, on the other hand it contains passages in which the cult to Yahweh is criticised, in spite of following the stipulations – however external – of the Torah.

3.3.1 Isa 1:10-17—Vain Offerings. Perhaps the most famous anti-cultic passage, Isa 1:10-17, is one such criticism of the cult to Yahweh. In this passage, Yahweh’s weariness with offerings, feasts and prayers is blatantly obvious. The people are to stop their evil

499 Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 199.
ways and do good. They are to take care of the oppressed, the orphan and the widow.

Thus, the prophet distinguishes between two ways to approach or relate to God: through hypocritical cult or through obedience. The former is rejected and the latter is considered as appropriate. The passage ends with an exhortation to choose between these two ways:

10 Hear the word of the Lord, governors of Sodom; Give ear to the teaching of our God, people of Gomorrah.
11 “What is the abundance of your sacrifices [zebah] to me?” says the Lord; “I am glutted with burnt offerings [‘ôlâh] of rams and fat of fatlings; For the blood of bulls and lambs and goats I have no desire.
12 When you come to appear before me, who requested this from your hands—trampling my courts?
13 Do not bring vain offerings [minhâ] anymore. Incense [qêtôret]—it is an abomination to me.
New moons [hôdeš], Sabbaths [sabbât], calling of assemblies [miqrâ’]— I cannot bear iniquity and solemn assemblies [‘āsîrâ].
14 Your new moons [hôdeš] and appointed festivals [mo’ed], my very being hates. They have become a weight upon me;
I am weary of carrying them.
15 When you spread out your hands, I will turn my eyes from you. Even though you multiply your prayers,
I am not listening. It is blood that fills your hands.
16 Wash, to be clean! Take away the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Stop doing evil;
17 Learn to do good. Seek justice;
Straighten out the ruthless. Do justice for the orphan; Contend for the widow.”

In spite of Israel’s whole-hearted rebellion against Yahweh, verses 11, 13 and 14 show that they have not abandoned the cult to Yahweh in the least. They bring sacrifices [zebah], burnt offerings [‘ôlâh], offerings [minhâ], and incense [qêtôret]; they celebrate new moons [hôdeš] and sabbaths [sabbât]; they call for assemblies [miqrâ’], solemn assemblies [‘āsîrâ] and appointed festivals [mo’ed]. But all these rituals were an abomination to God (v. 13) and an unbearable burden (v. 14). In fact, Oswalt remarks that the repetition of cultic terms plays a role in this: “the reader (or listener) gets the
impression of an endless round of activities all repeated continuously to no effect. The weariness of God becomes palpable.”

3.3.1.1 Analysis of Cultic Terms. According to Jones, the rich cultic terminology found in this passage is meant to describe “the whole system as it was in force in the time of Isaiah.”

It is vital to investigate what each of these words tells us about what cult Isaiah is rejecting.

Even though the term zeḇaḥ “refuses to allow for a simple analysis,” in Isaiah 1:11 the term is best translated as “sacrifices,” which more precisely refers to all slain animal sacrifices (NIV; NASB; ESV; other translations choose “gifts, present” [NLT; YLT] or “sacrifices” [NRSV]), which is translated some 160 times in the OT.

The term ʾōlāh is translated as “burnt offering” in 287+ instances in the OT. The name is probably reflecting the manner in which the offering was presented: “going up” or “causing it to go up”, as the smoke of the fire would go up (ʾlh) as a pleasing aroma (Lev 1:9, 13, 17). It was viewed primarily as a personal offering on a person’s own initiative (Lev 1). Only men could bring the burnt offering, i.e., in representation of their families (Leviticus only talks about men; cf. Job 1:5). It was the most common of all sacrifices performed at least twice daily and more often on holy days and usually done in conjunction with other offerings, e.g., the guilt offering (Lev 5:7, 10, 17-18), the sin offering (Lev 5:7; 6:25; 9:2-3, 7; 12:6, 8), the votive or freewill offering (Lev 22:18), the sheaf offering (Lev 23:12), and the new grain offering (Lev 23:15-22, esp. v. 18).

500 Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah, 97.
reference to “rams,” “fat of fatlings,” “blood of bulls,” “lambs” and “goats” leaves no
doubt that the prophet refers to all burnt offerings.503

Averbeck explains the usages of the burnt offering: 1) “a means of calling on the
Lord to pay attention to the prayers of his worshippers (see, e.g., Num 23:3; 1 Sam 7:9-
10; Job 42:7-9; cf. Job 1:5); 2) an expression of “various sentiments and concerns in
worship (Lev 22:18-20; Num 15:3); 3) and, along with grain and drink offerings, “the
foundation of the daily, weekly, monthly and annual festival system (e.g., Exod 29:38-45;
Num 28:3-8, 10).”504

Among the many usages that minhâ is given in the OT (cultic and non-cultic),505
when it refers to a gift to God, it can mean, in its broadest sense, “offering” (1 Sam
26:19; 1 Chr 16:29; Ps 96:8, etc) or, in a more precise way, “incense offering” (Num
16:15), “meat or bread offering” (1 Sam 2:17; Judg 6:18) and “grain offering,” especially
in the book Leviticus and almost all priestly writings (e.g., Lev 2:1-16; 6:14-18; 7:9-10;
10:12-13).506 The grain offering did not make atonement for sin; however, the idea of
propitiation is implicit in it. With recognition of God’s provision as its raison d’être, the
grain offering was presented in the regular daily cult accompanying the burnt offering
and the drink offering both in the morning and in the evening (Num 28:3-8), including

504 Averbeck, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” 713.
505 The term, in secular contexts, means “gift” (LXX translates minhâ as δῶρον some 30 times)
which is usually given to an authority, particularly kings, denoting submission (1 Sam 10:27; 1 Kgs 4:21; 2
Leviticus [minhâ] is a technical term for cereal offerings…, but elsewhere its meaning is much broader. It
may refer to animal sacrifices as well as cereal offerings; for example, both Cain’s and Abel’s offerings are
called minhâ, though Abel’s consisted of animals and Cain’s of cereals. Other references to minhah in
nontechnical passages may well refer to animal sacrifices as well as cereal offerings (1 Sam 2:17, 29;
26:19)” in Wenham, Leviticus, 69.
506 Averbeck, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” 713.
the Sabbath day (Num 28:10), the first day of the month (Num 28:15) and annual festivals (Num 28:24; 29:6).

The term qētôret (incense) means that which “goes up in smoke” and was an offering included in sacrifices. It symbolized prayer and how sacrifices were “pleasant” to Yahweh.

They celebrated ḫōdeš (New Moon), which is a reduced form of rō’s ḫōdeš that was only legislated in Num 28:14 (cf. Ezek 46:6) and combined with burnt offerings. Here, it is placed as parallel to the Sabbath, as in many other passages (2 Kgs 4:23; 1 Chr 23:31; Neh 10:33; Isa 66:23; Ezek 46:1; Amos 8:5, etc), as one of Israel’s religious days. New Moons were among Israel’s most joyous feasts (Num10:10; 1 Sam 20:5, 18, 24; 2 Kgs 4:23; Ps 81:1-3). Of special interest is the reappearance of the New Moon festival in Isaiah 66:22-24 that says that the time will come when all humanity will bow down to Yahweh, from one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another implying acceptance of the ritual.

The term šabbāt refers to the weekly day of rest that was designed as a means of dedicating extra time to God and giving rest to the worker. Sabbath days included the Day of Atonement, the first day of Trumpets and the first and last days of Tabernacles (Lev 16:31; 23:24, 32, 39) among other dates.

The call for migrā’ (assemblies) is probably referring to any day set apart as holy for Yahweh (e.g., Sabbath), though it can also be alluding to the first or last days of a week’s period of feasting.\(^507\)

As previously mentioned, ‘ăşārā (solemn assemblies) may refer to “the final, or closing, day of an extended feast (Lev 23:36; Num 29:35; Deut 16:8) though elsewhere it may simply designate a religious assembly, whether approved by Yahweh or not (cf. 2 Kgs 10:20; Amos 5:21).”

The majority of English versions translate the term mo’ed as “appointed feasts/festivals” (NIV, NASB, NRSV, ESV, ASV). In cultic contexts, the word alludes to the days of the year that were set apart for festivals, and “it often refers to the time when a ḥag will be celebrated (e.g., Exod 13:10; 23:15) but it may be used to describe the feast itself (e.g., Sabbath or New Moon).”

I agree with Jones when he states that the passage means to describe the whole cultic system of Israel in the time of Isaiah. Nothing in this passage suggests that the performance of the cult, in its forms, was a result of pagan influence. If the Israelites were failing in the cult to Yahweh, it was not because of their performance. Jones also notes,

The sacrifices of which Isaiah speaks were the correct sacrifices according to custom and there is no reason to suspect that the performance of them in any way departed from the rules. The question is whether they are acceptable to God, whether therefore He is pleased to use them and so to maintain His people by His grace.

What Isaiah tells us about the Israel of his time is that she was being syncretistic, not within the Temple at Jerusalem, but in using two (or more) religions at the same time, i.e., worshipping several deities in different shrines.

Isaiah’s words against the cult are bitter and filled with sarcasm, as is characteristic of other anti-cultic passages. Words such as “I am glutted with burnt offerings…for the blood of bulls and lambs and goats I have no desire…who requested

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508 Ibid.
509 Ibid.
this from your hands—trampling my courts? Do not bring vain offerings anymore. Incense is an abomination to me…I cannot bear iniquity and solemn assemblies…my very being hates…They have become a weight upon me…I am weary of carrying them…When you spread out your hands, I will turn my eyes from you. Even though you multiply your prayers, I am not listening” are far from being a mere reprimand about religious performance—they shake the value and meaning of Israel’s whole cultic system making the reader (or listener) wonder whether the cult itself is inherently sinful and man-made.

Further, Isaiah seems to exchange the whole system for an ethical life which, quite plainly, the Israelites were far from owning. They are told to have to “stop doing evil,” “seek justice,” “straighten out the ruthless,” “do justice for the orphan” and “contend for the widow.”

Now, what could have triggered such a repulsion of the cult? Note the overemphasis on rituals with words such as “abundance”, “glutted”, “many animals”, “I am weary of carrying them”, “multiply your prayers”… and note also that the prophet values the sacrifices as “vain” (Isa 1:13). Isaiah opposes the sacrifices and every possible ritual not because they are inherently sinful or inappropriate but because they are vain and do not please Yahweh.

3.3.1.2 The Ethical Life vs. the Cultic life?: The ethical life of the Israelites was far from the covenantal ideal established between Yahweh and the nation. First of all, the cult was an expression of the inner life of the worshipper, i.e., an honouring, fearful relationship with Yahweh. Such a relationship was based on and sustained by God’s grace who had
mercifully chosen his people to be his. And second, contrary to pagan religions, the ritual was never meant to have magical properties in and of itself. They were never separated from the worshipper so, for someone to approach the altar, he had to be in good terms with the God he was trying to please, being submissive, repented, thankful and obedient to his Word, i.e., under covenant stipulations. Jeremiah captures this dichotomy when he says, “For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you that it may go well with you” (Jer 7:22). Without obedience, the system is useless.

Reflecting on this special relationship between the cultic and the ethical, N. W. Porteous’ comments show us how only within a covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel do the prophets’ criticisms make sense:

The ultimate basis of the ethical teaching of the prophets is, of course, to be found in God who has never left Himself without a witness in the hearts of men, but who could not adequately reveal His will until He had created a people within which a fellowship could be developed that was a conscious response to grace. Truth and justice are very old ideas, but they came to mean something new when they became incarnate in Israel’s history, a history which originated in the will of God and moved towards a culmination determined by the will of God. Not in Egypt or Babylon or Assyria, and not even in Greece, could the ethical teaching of the prophets have made its appearance because it is not just the communication of ideas but is the flowering of lives lived in conscious fellowship with God and within human fellowship which had been created by Him as a special medium of His revelation.\(^{511}\)

Isaiah does not, thus, replace sacrifices with morality. Rather, he contends that offerings from immoral and wicked people are detestable to Yahweh and “vain.” If this is true, then Isaiah is not arguing for the abolition of prayer (v. 15), which would be quite unlikely, but against prayers from un-repented murderers. Such prayers do not please

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Yahweh. Jones points out that what is at stake is what pleases and what does not please Yahweh,

[Israel’s] standing is therefore in the initial covenant election of God, “Sons I have made great and exalted”, 1.2 (cf. Ps. 50.5). The question they have to ask of their religion is whether it is pleasing to God. Isaiah says God does not delight in their self-justifying practices (cf. Hos. 8.13, Mic. 6.7, Jer 14.10, etc). Other prophets point to what is pleasing and acceptable (2 Sam 24.23, Isa 49.8, 61.2, 58.5, 60.7, 56.7). Acceptable sacrifices are “sacrifices of righteousness” (Ps. 51:19). The significant question is not whether they are valid or correctly performed. Their validity and performance may be impeccable but they may still find no favour with God.512

The Israelites were treating the cult very much like the pagans, assuming that the ritual itself would make the worshipper clean and requiring no repentance whatsoever and no change of behaviour. Their mistake was to ignore that, for God, the cult was a symbol of what came first inside the offerer: repentance and worship (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:23-53 where thousands of sacrifices are not condemned due to a correct attitude: repentance and worship). Sacrifices, festivals, New Moons, etc, were of no use Yahweh “if they were not accompanied by the kind of devotion that manifested itself in lives lived accordingly to his holiness?”513

3.3.2 Isa 43:22-25—Expected Offerings.514

22 “Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel.
You did not bring to me the sheep of your burnt offerings [ôlâh], and with your sacrifices [zebah] you did not glorify me.
I have not burdened you with grain offerings [minhâ] nor wearied you with demands for incense [lebonâh].
You have not bought sweet cane [ôb qâneh] for me with money, or drench me with the fat of your sacrifices [zebah] but you have burdened me with your sins, you wearied me with your offences.
25 "I, I am he who wipes away your transgressions for my own sake, and your sins I will no remember.

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513 Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah, 97.
514 Whether Second Isaiah is a different book (i.e., different author/s) or not, I treat both First Isaiah (1-39) and Second Isaiah (40-66) as a theologically unified whole. For a discussion on the authorship, composition and theology of the book(s) see Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah, 17-54; also RE Clements, “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah,” Int 36 (1982), 117-29.
This passage is found within a text that demonstrates that Yahweh is the only saviour and will be proven thus through Israel. Isa 43:22-25 reminds the people of Israel that they have nothing to boast about when considering their privileged position as Yahweh’s elected people; it is Yahweh alone who has forgiven their sins and invited them into a covenantal relationship. According to Westermann, Oswalt and others, the style of the text reflects “a dispute between God and his people in which God asserts that he never wanted sacrifices, per se, and that sacrifices as they were giving them did not constitute the obedience that he really wanted (vv. 22-24).” Verse 25 clarifies that if God forgave Israel’s transgressions it would not be because of their rituals, but because of his character full of grace.

The terms ‘ôlâh, zebâh and minhâ mean the same as in Isaiah 1. Both lebonâh (incense) and sweet cane qâneh (sweet cane) are part of the offering that produced a pleasant smell at the time of sacrifices.

Perhaps the most important point about this passage is Yahweh’s emphasis on the basis for the atonement and forgiveness of the Israelites’ sins. It is not sacrifice, nor rituals, but it is the character of God (“I, I am he who wipes away your transgressions” v. 25a). God himself is the basis for their forgiveness since he is a gracious God, ready to forgive and forget their sins (“your sins I will not remember” v. 25b).

Nothing is this passage points to a specific festivals of the year. Just like Isaiah 1, the intention of the prophet is to address a whole range of offering that belongs to the proper Israelite cult.

There is a significant difference with Isaiah 1. While Isaiah 1 shows no deficiency in the form and performance of the offerings (even an excess of religiosity!), Isaiah 43 shows the Israelite failure to bring the “sheep of your burnt offerings,” to buy “sweet cane” and to drench Yahweh “with the fat of [their] sacrifices.” Rather than wearying God with offerings, the people are accused of wearying God with their insurmountable quantity of sins. Note that Yahweh considers the fact that no offering was brought to him as negative. It was the least the people could do but instead they paid him with countless sins.

3.3.3 Isa 58:3-9—Rejection of Improper Fasting

3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'

"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.

4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?

Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to Yahweh?

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of Yahweh will be your rear guard.

9 Then you will call, and Yahweh will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

Fasting in ancient Israel included not eating, not drinking, “weeping (Judg 20:26; 2 Sam 1:12-21; Joel 2:12, 17; Neh 1:4; 2 Macc 13:12), mourning (2 Sam 1:12; Neh 1:4; Esth 9:31?; Ps 35:14; Zech 7:5), tearing one’s clothes (1 Kgs 21:27; Joel 2:23, 1 Macc 3:47), putting on sackcloth (1 Kgs 21:27; Neh 9:1; Pss 35:13; 69:11; Isa 58:5; Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:6; 1 Macc 3:47), sitting in ashes (Isa 58:5; Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:6), throwing dust/ashes on one’s head (Neh 9:1; 1 Macc 3:47), lying on the ground (2 Sam 12:16; 2 Macc 13:12), refraining from sexual intercourse (Joel 2:16; Dan 6:18(?)), and going about daily routine with a long face (1 Kgs 21:27; Ps 35:13-14; Isa 58:5). Those fasting would cry out to God to deliver them from some present or threatened disaster (Joel 2:17)."516 One last element that had to be part of biblical fasting, which is all too often ignored by interpreters of the cult, was that fasting was by necessity a sign of contrition of the heart and an attitude of submission and obedience to God.

In Isa 58 we are presented with hypocritical worshippers who, on the one hand, are fasting before Yahweh in order to please him but, on the other hand, exploit their workers (v.3); quarrel, strive and even strike one another (v. 4); support injustice and the oppression of the weak (v. 6, 9); deny food to the hungry (v. 7); provide no shelter for the poor wanderer (v. 7); are indifferent to the naked homeless (v. 7); even deny help to their family members (v. 7); and talk maliciously against one another (v. 9). Isaiah tells such people that no ritual, such as fasting, will please God unless they first change their life. In fact, only when they do away with all these sins will he listen to their cry (v. 9), i.e., their

fasting will be heard when they undo their immoralities. A very similar situation is recorded in Jer 14:11-12, “although they fast I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.”

Hoppe concluded that Isa 58:1-12 is another example of the prophets’ rejection of the cult as idolatry since the only thing Yahweh requires is justice. He says, God demands justice for the poor—not the practice of fasting or any other cultic activity. God does not call for a reform of one’s internal dispositions to accompany external practices such as fasting. The message of Isa 58:1-12 is clear: God demands justice. Fasting, like other cult-related practices, is usually criticized in prophetic traditions because the prophets saw the cult as domesticating Yahweh.

But his interpretation ignores that the OT makes explicit statements to reform not only one’s internal disposition toward God but also the external one. The passage at stake explicitly reaffirms correct fasting as a positive ritual in order to please God – for example, such as these statements in verse 5: “Is this the kind of fast I have chosen? and “is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes.” And in verse 9 the prophet reassures that, after restoring a correct fellowship with fellow man and with God, fasting will be accepted by God: “then you will call and Yahweh will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.”

3.3.4 Isa 66:3—Highhanded Disobedience Nullifies the Cult. Our last passage from the book of Isaiah echoes much of what has already been said by the prophet.

3 But whoever sacrifices a bull
is like one who kills a man,
and whoever offers a lamb,

See also the criticism of fasting in Joel 2:12-17. In Joel 2:13a we read the famous phrase “rend your heart and not your garments.” Rending the garment alludes to a practice included in fasting. This verse seems to reject fasting in pro of internal conversion. However, the previous verse (2:12) clarifies what Yahweh wants, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning.” In other words, fasting is also considered an expression of one’s return (or conversion) to God, but it is preceded by an internal expression.

The first verses, 1-2, allude to the encounter between Nathan and David in which Yahweh explains through the prophet that no house can contain his presence. In fact, the whole earth is his footstool. Verse 2 speaks of the man who Yahweh esteems, “he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at [God’s] word.” But what are we presented with in verse 3? People who “have chosen their own ways, and [whose] souls delight in their abominations.” As in previous passages, high-handed disobedience to Yahweh’s word, i.e., direct disobedience and rebellion against him, nullifies any attempt to please him through sacrifices, offerings, prayers, etc. Yahweh needs no sacrifice or ritual, but he chooses to be worshipped in that way by people who obey his word.

3.4 The Book of Jeremiah

There are at least two passages in Jeremiah that speak negatively about some aspect of the cult.

3.4.1 Jer 6:19-20—Rejection of Yahweh’s Law Nullifies the Cult.

19 Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.
20 What do I care about incense [lebonâh] from Sheba or sweet cane [tōb qâneh] from a distant land? Your burnt offerings [’ōlāh] are not acceptable; your sacrifices [zebah] do not please me.”
Incense from Sheba was the frankincense brought from South Arabia and East of Africa and was a main ingredient for the incense used in Israel’s cult. The long distance made it expensive just as the “sweet cane” that came primarily from India. The cost of these offerings was meaningless to Yahweh. The couplet “burnt offerings” and “sacrifice,” as in precious instances, is better understood as a way to comprehend the totality of sacrifices. The similarity with Isaiah is obvious. Jeremiah’s listeners have not listened (obeyed) to the words of Yahweh; they have explicitly rejected his law. The result is that no ritual of theirs is acceptable to Yahweh. Note the repetition of the possessive pronoun “your.” Yahweh is not rejecting any burnt offering or any sacrifice, but the ones from people who rebel against him.

3.4.2 Jer 7:21-23—No Sacrifices During the Wilderness? (I)

21 This is what Yahweh Almighty, the God of Israel, says:
Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!
22 For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them,
I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,
23 but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people.
Walk in all the ways I command you that it may go well with you.

The theory that the prophets did not recognise divine providence of the cult ignores Jer 7:21-23. Here, Jeremiah speaks of a God who gave specific commandments to Israel right after the exile in Egypt, “I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices.” While recognizing the divine providence of the cult, the prophet also clarifies that obedience is required. Without it, the sacrificial system was useless. In this case, as in most previous cases, that obedience is connected to walking rightfully (v. 23b). The following verses call the listeners “stiff-necked” and people who do “more evil than their forefathers” (v. 26).
3.5 The Book of Hosea

3.5.1 Introduction to the Book. The prophet Hosea has always been put beside the great social prophet Amos who advocated for the landless, the socially inferior and the poor. Hosea denunciates similar unethical behaviours as well as cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery (Hosea 4), etc, and puts the Israelites in the category of people with no mercy, who are unjust and, above all, who break the covenant with Yahweh. On top of not meeting any of the expected ethical standards of Yahweh’s law, the Israelites are rightly accused of idolatry and thus the famous analogy of the unfaithfulness of Hosea’s own wife comes alive as the nation is compared to an unfaithful wife whose children also become unfaithful to the father, as they engaged in Baal worship.

3.5.2 Hos 5:6-7—Yahweh Withdraws in the Face of Idolatry. Hosea speaks of the present punishment from Yahweh who has already withdrawn from the Temple as he finds no pleasure in it:

6 When they go with their flocks and herds
to seek Yahweh,
they will not find him;
he has withdrawn himself from them.
7 They have been unfaithful to Yahweh
for they have had alien children.

Now, the new moon will devour their tracks of land (Hos 5:6-7).

The entire people of Israel, Ephraim and Judah, are accused of covenantal unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The cult, which exists for the purpose of pleasing Yahweh, finds no reason for its existence for Yahweh has withdrawn and will not be found. The paired words “flocks and herds” alludes to the cult and represent both small (sheep and goat) and large (cows, oxen, bulls) cattle of sacrificial animals. The expression “the new
moon will devour their tracks of land” turns the cultic feast of the New Moon – a holy
day celebrated the first day of each month on which sacrifices take place (Num 28:11-15)
– into a curse rather than a blessing. Thomas McComiskey speaks of this passage as
denoting a “corrupted religious externalism, symbolized by the Festival of the New
Moon.” He further remarks that Israel’s “life as a nation was in their allegiance to their
covenants, but they had forsaken these instruments of divine grace for rites that were
devoid of life.” Hosea chooses to emphasise their festival of the New Moon perhaps
because it had become much more important than it was meant to be, but his referral to
all kinds of cattle must be interpreted in the wider sense, i.e., all kinds of animal offerings
(mostly burnt offerings).

3.5.3 Hos 6:6—Dialectic Negation. The most famous passage in the book of Hosea that
seems hostile toward the cult is found in Hos 6:6:

6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice [zebah],
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings [ʾōlāh].

This passage, far from being a punishment or a predicament for the future, seems
to be the most direct anti-cultic sentiment present in the book. The Hebrew allows for
translating “more than” instead of “rather than,” which would lessen the intensity against
sacrifices, but the latter translation is preferable. The negation that is used here in order to
emphasise the importance of mercy and the knowledge of God may be an example of
what has been coined as “dialectic negation,” which is also present in other prophetic
texts and is characteristic of either-or statements. Th. Booij explains that dialectic
negation includes “‘exaggeration’…in the negative member, which may often be

519 T McComiskey, “Hosea” in The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expositional Commentary
(ed. TE McComiskey; vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 79.
characterized as a statement of contradiction...[this] contrasting-by-way-of-negating is intended for emphasis.” In other words, negating something is only used as a means to emphasise the other side of the coin. It is an exaggeration that by no means rejects what is negated, but it highlights the importance of the opposite. Gen 45:8 is an example of this literary device. Joseph says to his brothers, “It was not you who sent me here [Egypt] but God.” Is Joseph saying that his brothers did not send him to Egypt? That would be nonsense. Joseph is emphasising the also true fact that God was involved in that event. A literal reading may seem to suggest an either-or interpretation of the facts, but that would betray the intention of the “dialectic negation,” which is to emphasise through exaggeration rather than to contradict. Other examples of the “dialectic negation” among anti-cultic statements are Ps 51:16-17 (“You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”), Ps 40:6 (“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but you have made me obedient”), Mic 6:6-8 (“Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?...what does Yahweh require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”). Hosea’s words are interpreted more correctly if we take into account the style he uses to emphasise his point.

But there is also the element of corrupted religion in the context of Hosea. We have every reason to believe that what the prophet is opposing is not the Levitical cult, but a syncretism proper of the eighth century ancient Israel. McComiskey states,

We need not think that the prophets viewed sacrifices as a hated Canaanite intrusion that had no role to play in Israel’s covenant obligations. In the eighth century sacrifice was a perverted

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521 I owe this point to Barré, “Fasting in Isaiah 58:1-12,” 96.
expression of religious externalism that masked the ethical response God wanted to receive from his people…[the prophets’s] use of the rhetorical question and indirect allusion seems more an appeal for the balancing of obedience with the ritual of sacrifice than outright condemnation of levitical sacrifices.\textsuperscript{522}

And again he notes,

The people knew the ways of the fertility cults; they consorted with harlots and observed rituals, but they did not know the ways of the God who wanted purity and brokenness of heart.\textsuperscript{523}

\textbf{3.5.4 Hos 8:13—Return to Egypt.}

13 They offer sacrifices [zābah] given to me and they eat the meat [bāšâr], but Yahweh is not pleased with them.

Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins:

They will return to Egypt.

Notably, in this passage Yahweh states that he is not pleased with worshippers who present sacrifices to him but are wicked and sinful. Though it is implicit that they do not please him, he does not reject the sacrifices, but he rejects the ones who sacrifice and threatens them with exile (“Egypt”). This is but another example that sacrifices were not magical in and of themselves but were an extension of the worshipper whose life had all to do with his religion. Porteous comments that “a religion which was non-ethical was worthless in the sight of God.”\textsuperscript{524} But perhaps what is most significant is the mentioning of Egypt, which is a reference to being oppressed as slaves under a pagan nation, namely, the second exile.

\textbf{3.5.5 Exile Envisioned in the Context of Anti-cultic Statements.} Yahweh makes use of his prophet Hosea to admonish Baal idolaters that the punishment is about to come, a time when no sacrifice will take place. Any statement about the cult, thus, must be

\textsuperscript{522} McComiskey, \textit{Hosea}, 92.

\textsuperscript{523} Ibid., 93.

interpreted in the light of a highly Baalized cult and the threat of exile. In fact, this is an element that is too often ignored by scholars. Prop hets like Jeremiah, Hosea and Amos passed on warnings that the day was coming when Israel would go into exile, to a foreign nation. They were aware of the consequences of an exile: no more land privileges, no more Israelite customs and, undoubtedly, no more Israelite religion, at least not the rituals within the Temple and local sanctuaries. Because the cult was about to disappear, the prophets of the eight and seventh century felt justified in speaking so hard against it. Take, for example, Jeremiah who warns his audience that Yahweh will cast them out of his sight into exile (Jer 7:15) before he speaks against the cult.

Similarly Hosea makes the point that Israel will go into exile where there will be no king and no sacrifice, just as the time in Egypt. After a long period, she will return just as she came to the Promised Land centuries ago (Hos 3:4-5; cf. 8:13-14a): “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim. Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king.” The sacrifices and offerings will be restored, but Yahweh’s main concern will always be “mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6). Until they remember their Maker (Hos 8:14a), their offerings are useless.

Also, Amos 5:27, where the prophet, after uttering harsh words against the religion of his hearers, concludes, “So I will cause you to go into exile beyond Damascus, says Jehovah, the God of Hosts is His name.” It is particularly important that two verses before he says, “Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O

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525 This point I owe to Jones, “Exposition of Isaiah,” 463-65.
house of Israel?” as a preparation for the time to come when the sacrificial system would stop.

One last significant passage is Ps 51:16-22. Here we read that God is not pleased in sacrifices and burnt offerings. However, after the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, i.e., after the return from exile, “there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar” (Ps 51:19). The implication is that the cult is not rejected per se, but a corrupted form which needed to be purged through the exile.

All these passages are delivered within the context of exile, when the time of sacrifices would stop, just as when the Israelites were in Egypt, the former exile. Though this does not change the fact that some prophets seem to condemn the cult, it helps us understand the fulminating character that these oracles convey. Had there been no exile, the tone of these condemnations against the corrupted cult might have felt different.

Hosea’s view on the punishment for Israel takes into account the sacrificial system in the future, “a whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame” (Hos 4:19) and “They will not pour out wine offerings to Yahweh, nor will their sacrifices please him. Such sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners; all who eat them will be unclean. This food will be for themselves; it will not come into the temple of Yahweh” (Hos 9:4). Such words show how useless sacrifice will be when the time comes for Israel to go into exile.

3.6 The Book of Amos

3.6.1 Introduction to the Book. Amos attacks the sins of the nations surrounding Israel and Judah but is strikingly harsher with the people of Yahweh. The sins of the Israelites
are far worse than Edom’s or Egypt’s for they have abandoned the God who loves them and is faithful to them. The prophet concentrates on two major sins: idolatry and social injustice. The predicament is punishment that has already taken place in the form of hunger, thirst, plagues, etc, but will ultimately lead to exile, though always leaving a thread of hope (Amos 9:11-12). Known as the “social prophet,” Amos’ words are harsh against the cult and very favourable toward an ethical social life.

3.6.2 Amos 4:4-5—Overemphasis on Cultic Activity Condemned.

4 “Go to Bethel and sin [pāša’]; go to Gilgal and sin yet more [pāša’].
   Bring your sacrifices [zebah] every morning,
   your tithes [maʿāsēr] every three days.
5 Burn leavened bread as a thank offering [tôdâh]
   and proclaim freewill offerings [nedāḇāh]—
   boast about them, you Israelites,
   for this is what you love to do,”
   declares the Sovereign LORD.

Bethel and Gilgal were meaningful places in the history of Israel but by the time of Amos they had become the hosts of idolatry. The first clauses categorise as sin what follows:sacrifices, tithes, thank offerings and freewill offerings. The list of many offerings and sacrifices describes the way in which the worshippers are magnifying their rebellion. With each offering they worsen the situation, for their religious zeal was great but built upon the wrong foundation. Note the emphasis on extraordinary cultic activity, which is what they are already doing (“what you love to do”): They bring individual sacrifices “every morning” when this was not required. They bring the tithe every three days when they were only obliged to do so every year (or every three years if this is the analogy that is alluded to). Not only do they burn unleavened bread, they also burn leavened bread,

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526 The Hebrew is more emphatic than the English. The terms pišʾū and harbu lipšōa’ are translated by Stuart as “Come to Bethel and rebel, to Gilgal and magnify rebellion.”
which goes against the cultic laws. They proclaim freewill offerings and boast about them when this type of offering is meant to be voluntary and free of coercion. Amos’ exhortation to bring all these offerings carries tones of exaggeration, irony and sarcasm. Just as Jeremiah uses sarcasm to condemn Israel’s ritual practices by encouraging them to continue with them (Jer 7:21: “Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!”), so Amos makes use of the same technique to criticise their excess in tithes and sacrifices.

Is Amos rejecting the cult or is he rejecting a corrupted form of it? The force with which Amos speaks against the sacrifices at Bethel and Gilgal is strong. Yet he is stressing the worshipper’s overemphasis on rituals. But what is at stake is not the criticism of the quantity of sacrifices, but the fact that no matter how many offerings are brought, none of them please Yahweh because they are not turning to him. In fact, Amos 5:5 encourages Israel to seek Yahweh instead of seeking whatever they seek at Bethel and Gilgal, implying that they are not truly seeking him, “Seek me that you may live! But do not seek at Bethel, and you shall not go to Gilgal.” As in previous passages, what is at stake here is a treatment of rituals as magic that requires no ethical response—a worship that is unattached to the worshipper’s life and which is not directed at Yahweh, but at themselves.

3.6.3 Amos 5:21-27—No sacrifices During the Wilderness?(II)

21 "I hate, I despise your religious feasts [hag];
I cannot stand your assemblies [‘āšārā].
22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings [ʼōlāh] and grain offerings [minḥâ],
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings [ṣelem],
I will have no regard for them.
23 Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!
25 "Did you bring me sacrifices [zebah] and offerings [minhā] forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?
26 You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god—which you made for yourselves.
27 Therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says Yahweh, Whose name is the God of hosts.

The hatred and rejection of the feast, and indeed of every ritual mentioned afterwards, must have staggered any hearer. Yahweh despises their “religious feasts” (most probably referring to the three major yearly feasts: the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of the weeks and the feast of booths)\(^{527}\) and their assemblies (the three major annual assemblies; Lev 23:26; Num 29:35; Deut 16:8).\(^{528}\) Yahweh will not accept their burnt offerings, their grain offering, their fellowship offerings, their songs of praise or any music performed in cultic contexts. In fact, he describes their music as noise (or “din”) that he cannot stand. Why would Yahweh criticise all these rituals? After all, he meticulously commanded Israel about each of them. We should note the emphasis on where the offerings come from: It is their offerings that are utterly hated. Sacrifices and rituals are never detached from the offerer, especially offerers who are under covenant relationship with the one they worship. Rituals, feasts, songs and all cultic activity had become ends in themselves. The offerers had rejected the heart of the law, which was love for one’s neighbor (Matt. 22:37). By observing religious rituals they were lulled into thinking that they were fulfilling the whole law and giving God his rightful due.\(^{529}\)

As long as Israel treated Yahweh as all neighbouring nations treated their gods and continued to simplify the covenant life and communion with him into rituals, there would be acceptance of their offerings.

\(^{528}\) Ibid.
\(^{529}\) Ibid.
What makes Amos one of the strongest anti-cultic prophets is his reasoning that, since there were no sacrifices during the Wilderness, Israel’s prime time in her relationship with Yahweh, the cult was never meant to be part of Israel’s religion. In fact, verse 25 is often understood as the most crucial text against the cult of ancient Israel; in Barton’s words, “they are prima facie evidence of prophetic opposition to the cult.”

It is true that Israel’s religion was updated and became more sophisticated with time, especially after the unification of the nation under David and the subsequent construction of the Temple at Jerusalem that fostered “a great increase and elaboration of the rites and ceremonies associated with the worship of Yahweh.” Josiah’s reform was particularly revolutionary and transforming not just for the cult in Jerusalem, but for every single sanctuary and, thus, we can claim quite safely that, when compared to the original status of the cult during the time of the Wilderness, it had important differences. That there was a Canaanite influence as well in Israel’s cult is so certain that it hardly needs to be demonstrated here (see Clements, Rowley, et al). We cannot know what type of cult existed back in the time between Egypt and Canaan but, as Clements states, “it is very improbable that [it was] wholly non-sacrificial” and the reason why Amos and other prophets spoke in this way was because, to some degree, “the cult which they found practiced in Israel did not represent the covenant tradition.” It “had become overloaded with rites and ceremonies, borrowed from the Canaanites, which had never been integrated into the older Mosaic tradition.” Therefore, we must conclude that Amos, and perhaps Jeremiah, were justified in their reasoning that such a cult did not find its

530 Barton, “The Prophets and the Cult,” 112.
531 Clements, Prophecy and Covenant, 92.
532 Ibid., 96.
533 Ibid., 96-97.
origin in the Wilderness, both because it did not represent the covenant-like cult and because it had become very influenced by pagan Canaanite religion. But we must also acknowledge the usage of dialectic negation that exaggerates what is negated in favour of emphasising what is affirmed.

In fact, there are other reasons why it is quite difficult that any prophet could reject the cult per se. Clements explains how intertwined the cult was with the worship life of Israel and any other ancient culture. To reject the cult would be as impossible as to reject the culture itself. Worship to Yahweh was expressed through the cult, and thus the prophets could have never opposed the existence of the cult in favour of a non-cultic religion; rather, they opposed the existing cult in favour of a covenantal Yahwism that expressed itself both in the rituals and the ethical life of the nation.

From the earliest period of which we have any clear picture of Israel’s religion, it is certain that that religion was cultic in its expression. There was no purely individualistic piety which divorced itself from the public ceremonies and festivals which governed the devotion of the people as a whole...the covenant festival was the centre of the entire people’s religious devotion.”

Not only was the cult the commonly known structure for worship in almost every culture but, at least for Israel, the Temple and all activities within it were the main schools of tradition and religion for the layman, for it was part of the priests’ responsibility to teach the people and instruct them in the ways of Yahweh. This was done both during rituals that were combined with songs and recitations and with formal teaching. Clements clarifies that the
cult had a teaching function which must not be neglected or relegated to a position of small importance. In a world where literacy was attained only by a few, and where the use of literature was restricted, the cult had the primary place as a means of religious instruction. The sacred shrine was the most powerful agency of continuity in religion, and the hereditary priesthood, which normally attended it, passed on from one generation to another the holy lore that had been entrusted to them...Cult was fundamental to all ancient religions, since it was through it that religion found its corporate expression, and a communication of religious ideas took place.\(^{535}\)

\(^{534}\) Ibid., 86-87.
\(^{535}\) Ibid., 87-88.
Porteous also helps us understand how important the role of the cult, in the hands of priests, was,

what the priest was seeking to do...was to dramatize the relationship between God and Israel that men might not readily forget the great saving events which made Israel a people and which established a new way of life as Israel’s own, a way of life which proceeded to incorporate itself in actual human lives. We must not allow the denunciations of Israel’s prophets...to blind us to the service which Israel’s cult must have rendered in maintaining through the centuries the faith and obedience of many a pious Israelite. The moral side of life requires the support of regular worship.\footnote{Porteous, \textit{Living the Mystery}, 75.}

Scholars who are prone to treat pre-exilic anti-cultic passages as a rejection of the cult must therefore be cautious to misread those prophets for the possibility that an absolute rather than a relative rejection of the cult is what we have at hand underestimates the role of sacrifices and rituals within ancient Israel’s culture.

\section*{3.7 The Book of Micah}

\subsection*{3.7.1 Introduction to the Book} The prophet Micah has often been called the “prophet of the poor” or of the middle-class, like Amos, because of his outspokenness for the oppressed and poor who are neglected by the unmerciful rich (Mic 2:1-5, 6-11; 3:1-3, 9-10). The prophecies were delivered at both Samaria and Jerusalem and showed that, just a generation after Amos and Hosea, the immorality of Samaria had also infested Jerusalem.

\subsection*{3.7.2 Mic 6:6-8—Nothing Can Buy Yahweh’s Forgiveness} In chapter 6, where the prophet introduces a message of doom (Mic 6:1-7:7), we find one of the most famous passages of Micah, which also contains words of anti-cultic character:
6 With what shall I come before Yahweh
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings [‘ōlāh],
with calves a year old?
7 Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn [bekôr] for my transgression [peša‘],
the fruit of my body for the sin [ḥaṭṭā‘t] of my soul?
8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does Yahweh require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Previously, in vv. 1-5, the prophet has laid an accusation against Yahweh’s people for not reciprocating Yahweh’s love. He summons the mountains as witnesses of how poorly Israel has treated Yahweh who cries “O my people, what have I done against you? And how have I overburdened you?” (v. 3). Following this, it appears that the king, the only one who can offer thousands of animals, acts as one who asks rhetorical questions in which the expected answer is “no.” The questioner is well aware of his sin before Yahweh and his need of atonement and thus asks whether sacrifices, even of his firstborn, would please Yahweh. The effect of the questions has a ramping effect. The sacrifices start with burnt offerings and are followed by more expensive and ostentatious offerings: one-year old calves, thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil to culminate with what was considered the most valuable, the firstborn son. The effect of this increase in offerings leaves the worshipper with no option for “paying” for his sin. No sacrifice will please Yahweh since what it is required is not economic or cultic sacrifices but true repentance that seeks to “walk humbly with your God” that results in a change of behaviour – namely, “to act justly and love mercy” (v. 8). To ratify the assertion that nothing can buy Yahweh’s forgiveness, Micah had previously reminded the people of Israel how Yahweh had redeemed them for free from the slavery of Egypt.
The way in which Micah represents the king’s understanding of the cult, which represents the nation’s understanding, shows that, as in the time of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Hosea, sacrifices were used as rituals that automatically (or magically) dealt with sin, worship and any relationship with Yahweh. Far from what was meant in the covenant, and in spite of Amos and Hosea’s efforts to warn the people against treating Yahweh like another Canaanite god, worship at the time of Micah was stripped of ethics and obedience and this, among other things, would lead Israel into exile.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

We have seen that idolatry was a crucial issue before the exile. The classical prophets condemned a cult to Yahweh that was only a portion of Israel’s cultic life. The sons of Jacob were indulging in other cults with all their corresponding pagan practices even as they worshipped Yahweh. Such syncretism was an abomination in itself that would lead the nation into exile.

Even in texts in which idolatry is not part of the scene, a strong pagan influence is evident in the way the Yahwistic cult is carried out. The Israelites used the cult as if it were “magical” in itself, creating a strong dichotomy between ethical and cultic life. Such a decision was a complete misunderstanding of the significance of the covenant with Yahweh and thus prompted the denunciation of the cult.

The reality of a near exile gave an element of finality to the cult, thus shaping the words of the prophets. It is because the prophets knew the nation, along with the cult, was destined to doom that they felt justified in speaking so harshly against the cult, which at the same time served to prepare the nation theologically for 70 years without the
sacrificial system. Had there been no exile, many anti-cultic statements might have been uttered differently, perhaps not as negatively.

Yahweh prefers obedience and, in case of disobedience, true repentance and an attitude of restoration rather than rituals, sacrifices or offerings. Because of this, most of the anti-cultic text studies above should be seen not as a repudiation of the cult but as a repudiation of an erroneous understanding of sacrifices and ultimately of the relationship with Yahweh. Yahweh wanted honesty and integrity in people’s worship, not automatic, unattached rituals devoid of any connection with the worshipper’s heart.
VI. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE OFFERING ASPECT OF THE CULT IN MALACHI

1. IS MALACHI'S EMPHASIS ON THE OFFERING ASPECT OF THE CULT UNIQUE OR DISTINCT IN ANY WAY?

As we have seen in the exegesis, thorough organisation was characteristic of the cult at the time of Malachi. Many aspects of the cultic life were maintained on a regular basis. This, however, does not differ very much from the cult at the time of Isaiah, when almost every aspect of the cult was maintained (Isa 1:10-17). Other pre-exilic passages give us a much less complex picture of the cultic life of the nation, seeming to imply that the cult was being somewhat abandoned. Thus there were times when the cult was kept rigorously, as in the time of Malachi, and other periods when some aspects were ignored (e.g., Isa 43:22-25). In this sense, Malachi is unique just as any other prophet who described the particular historic and religious situation of his day.

What, however, makes Malachi distinct from other prophetic writings that address the offering aspect of the cult? I find at least four distinctions to be considered:

1.1 The Cult in Light of the Exile. The fact that most, if not all, of the pre-exilic prophets envisioned a near exile gave them the liberty and justification to speak so negatively against offerings and the cult in general. On the one hand, the cult was about to disappear so these discourses served as a proclamation of judgment. But on the other hand, they went beyond proclamation to prepare the Israelites theologically to deal with 70 years without cult or rituals, and definitely not sacrifices or offerings.

This exilic element is missing completely in the time of Malachi, which makes any statement against the cult stronger since the prophet is not anticipating a catastrophe but
an explicit judgment on the cult. Such is the case of Malachi’s mention of the shutting of the Temple doors. The protest has nothing to do with other sins but only with their despising of the Temple and its owner.

1.2 The Cult in Light of Idolatry. Idolatry was a crucial issue before the exile. The classical prophets condemned a cult to Yahweh that was syncretistic. Israel was indulging in worshiping other gods, among which they included Yahweh. Such syncretism was an abomination in itself that would lead the nation into exile. Any protest against the cult, before the exile, had to take such syncretism into consideration, for it corrupted the cult to Yahweh.

Malachi knows nothing of such syncretism. The only pagan influence alluded to is weeping and groaning, but it was directed toward Yahweh alone, not other gods. Similarly, using offerings in a “magical” or “automatic” way was due to pagan influences (or a complete lack of teaching on cultic matters), but again, in the book of Malachi, it happens within Yahwism, not idolatry. Malachi’s criticism of how the cult was conducted was only based on covenantal (internal) principles.

1.3 The Cult in Light of Deceit. Another factor that makes Malachi unique or distinct is his strong condemnation of deceit or cheating in offerings. Worshippers were lying in regard to votive offerings and the tithe. Nowhere else in the OT do we find worshippers who cared about offering sacrifices to Yahweh, who did not worship other gods, and who simultaneously cheated. Without doubt, this speaks of the lack of respect for Yahweh in those days, even though there was a general awareness of the importance of obeying
cultic laws. The contrast with other prophets is important. In the past, the issue was that the people forgot Yahweh or simply added him to a list of other deities. In Malachi, Yahweh gets Yehud’s single attention, but only as a duty for which stipulations can be slightly ignored with no penalty.

1.4 The Cult in Light of Superficiality. Following from this, the passionless and heartless attitude of both the priest and the worshipper at the time of Malachi must be stressed. The people are fulfilling a duty, but they do not fully understand the role of offerings within Israel’s covenantal relationship to Yahweh. Sacrifices had become mere rituals devoid of depth or passion. In one sense, the people were obeying the letter of these cultic laws. But even though they were trying to obey the letter of the law, they were also failing in some important basic aspects such as maintaining standards of cleanliness or tithing the whole amount. It is one thing to obey the letter of the law but miss the spirit of the law, but it is even worse to fail to obey both the letter and the spirit of the law! There were other times in the history of Israel where the cult was treated superficially, but it never happened without some degree of syncretism. Malachi remains different because there was no idolatry involved.

Perhaps the most noteworthy characteristic of Malachi is that the prophet reaffirms the value of the cult by pointing explicitly to the right usage of it while, before the exile, the statements seem notably anti-cultic. Malachi shows where the cultic deficiencies are and how to fix them, whether by encouraging bringing qualified animals or including the whole tithe. This is perhaps Malachi’s most singular characteristic that appears nowhere else in the other prophets.
2. CAN MALACHI’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CULT BE RECONCILED WITH THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CULT IN THE WIDER BIBLICAL PROPHETIC TRADITION?

Part of this thesis has consisted of demonstrating that what seems to be a criticism of the cult before the exile is not a rejection of the cult per se, but of a corrupted form of it. The key to understanding this distinction lies in a correct interpretation of what role the cult played within the covenant with Yahweh. There was neither room for separating the ethical from the cultic nor room for using the cult as a means to achieve one’s own interests. Only if the worshipper’s heart and actions were in the right relationship with Yahweh did the cult have any use. Similarly, the despising attitude of Yehud toward offerings and Yahweh could not be disconnected from their rituals. Yahweh would never accept an offering that was given with a scornful attitude and much less if did not meet the minimum requirements. The key to reconciling both attitudes, then, lies in the role that the cult plays within a covenant with Yahweh.

Pre-exilic prophets criticised the Israelites for using the cult as if it were “magical” in itself, which created a strong dichotomy between the ethical and the cultic life. Such a dichotomy, based on a complete misunderstanding of the significance of the covenant with Yahweh, demanded any prophet’s denunciation.

We do see aspects of this dichotomy in the book of Malachi, but the prophet’s criticism does not contrast the cultic with the ethical. What Malachi criticises has nothing to do with a highly corrupted morality (at least not as much as the pre-exilic one). Malachi’s criticism is against the attitude of both worshipper and priest while performing the cult. Their heart was not in their ritual worship and this lowered the standard of cultic
performance. Offering lower quality animals, cheating in vows to Yahweh, and partial tithing were the outcome of their disrespect for Yahweh.

So, in answer to the question of whether we can reconcile Malachi’s pro-cultic emphasis with pre-exilic anti-cultic emphases, we must say “yes, we can.” Both of them are protests of their contemporary circumstances that differ strongly from one another. Just as in pre-exilic criticisms of the cult, Malachi attacks a wrong usage and understanding of the cult, not the cult per se.

3. **IN WHAT WAY IS MALACHI’S EMPHASIS ON THE OFFERING ASPECT OF THE CULT SIGNIFICANT WITHIN ISRAEL’S PROPHETIC HERITAGE?**

Without a pro-cultic emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult we are left with only one side of the coin. Pre-exilic anti-cultic statements are predominant in Israel’s prophetic heritage and thus have an enormous weight when considering the general attitude toward the cult. Malachi’s distinct attitude shows that the problem is not with the cult per se, but with keeping the covenant, i.e., a correct relationship with Yahweh, and, within that context, the cult can then obtain meaning and a correct usage.

Malachi’s pro-cultic emphasis balances the somewhat anti-cultic flavour found in pre-exilic prophecy which gives the impression that the cult per se was an invention of men that was never meant to be part of Israel’s religion. Malachi helps us see that there was nothing wrong with the cult unless it was not used correctly as part of the wider picture of Yahweh’s covenant with his people.
4. FINAL THOUGHTS

4.1 Aim of the Thesis

The aim of this thesis was, as posed at the beginning, to contribute to the study of the cult in Israel’s history by exploring the book of Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult. My intention was to examine the significance of Malachi’s focus on offerings by concentrating on whether Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult is unique or distinct in any way to Israel’s prophetic heritage. In order to do so, it was also necessary to compare Malachi with previous attitudes toward the cult, and find out whether Malachi’s particular focus can be reconciled with pre-exilic prophetic views on the cult that have been interpreted by many as contradictory.

I hope I have sufficiently fulfilled this aim in responding to the questions postulated in both the research question and most subsidiary exegetical questions. The book of Malachi is unique in that it presents a very positive attitude toward the offering aspect of the cult. At the same time, this positive emphasis can be reconciled with previous ones if we understand the role of the offerings within a covenant with Yahweh.

4.2 The Working Hypothesis in Retrospect

At the beginning of the thesis I suggested a working hypothesis that Malachi’s emphasis on the offering aspect of the cult is due to the prophet’s concern to return to Israel’s past traditions and reaffirm the importance of obeying the Law’s stipulations as established at Sinai. This is common to post-exilic writings and should be understood as a general characteristic of the times after the exile when it was important to rebuild the Israelite society in all its forms. Such an emphasis must have influenced Malachi’s
positive attitude toward the cult. It went beyond the scope of this project to explore other post-exilic writings so I have not provided any further details as to how such writings might have made Malachi’s treatment of the cult unique or distinct. My working hypothesis also suggested that pre-exilic attitudes toward the offerings were different because of the historical context previous to the exile and that the seemingly anti-cultic statements are not a rejection of the cult but a criticism of a corrupted form of the cult. I think I have been able to prove successfully this theory by comparing famous pre-exilic texts with Malachi. We can state with some degree of certainty that Malachi’s emphasis is unique but not disconnected to that of the previous prophets.

The working hypothesis has provided me with a correct direction, opening other avenues to explore in order to further understand those anti-cultic statements. Although I did not include it in my hypothesis, one of the main factors needed to understand both Malachi’s attitude toward the cult and the pre-exilic anti-cultic statements is the relationship of the cult within the covenant. While it is true that historical aspects played an important role in shaping the prophets’ words, the most important factor is that the cult to Yahweh was different to pagan cults because of its covenantal nature. For Yahweh, if an Israelite was not in a covenantal relationship with him, no ritual could atone or please him. The covenant with Yahweh required humility of heart, repentance of sin, integrity, morality, etc. Above all, it required honest obedience and a corresponding love to Yahweh. Without this, the cult was mere rituals devoid of any significance.

4.3 Further Research

This study has been limited in space. Initially it was my intention to compare the views of Malachi also with those of other post-exilic prophets who, in greater or lesser
degree, also deal with cultic matters or show a particular attitude toward the offering aspect of the cult. Joel, Haggai and Zechariah do deal with cultic matters that would be worth comparing with Malachi. My guess is that they offer a more positive attitude toward the cult than their predecessors, but not as positive as the one in Malachi. Perhaps it would also be enriching to compare the views in Malachi with those of the Chronicler.

Another interesting avenue of research that could be pursued from this thesis concerns the branch of the theology of work. The book of Malachi has caught my attention particularly because of its emphasis on the excellence that is required from the Israelites when presenting offerings. It was not enough to have a correct attitude and understanding of the cult; it was also of utmost importance to bring the best of the animals and primary resources to Yahweh. This shows that God is not satisfied with anything we can give, our leftovers or what does not require any sacrifice from our part. He delights and is pleased with gifts that are costly. This is very interesting when applied to every area of our life, if one’s understanding of work is to glorify God and, if one is a Christian, to glorify Christ.

More specifically, my interest would be within a Spanish Roman Catholic context, in which work is generally understood as a curse and not a God-given mission that glorifies him. Such a view underlies Spaniards’ approach to work as a mere duty. As such, with work having little value in itself, it is only a means to survive and thus it is very common to find attitudes of escapism and of covering the minimum requirements. The reason why Malachi would be a good platform for such a study is because of the similar approach to the cult: one of duty but devoid of passion or meaning. Such an attitude is criticised and contrasted with excellence in worship and actions full of
meaning within the relationship with God. Perhaps this would be my starting point for
future studies pertaining to today’s Spanish society.
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