

HAGGAI & MALACHI: ENGLISH BIBLE

by

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4801 Allen Road
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Summer Semester, 2009**

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Part I: Haggai

In our examination of Haggai, we will divide the material into two broad sections. The first section deals with the material that is introductory to Haggai. The second will focus on an exegetical analysis of the content of the book of Haggai.

I. Introduction

This introduction focuses on issues that are normally discussed under the subject of special introduction. These items will include a brief presentation concerning the title, authorship, date, literary composition, destination, historical background, occasion and purpose, canonicity, and text.

A. Title

MT: חַגַּי, *Haggai*, “festal”

LXX: Ἀγγαῖος, *Aggaios*, “Haggai”

V: *Aggeus*, “Aggeus”

B. Authorship

1. The Prophet and His Name

Little is known about this prophet. He referred to himself as “the prophet Haggai” (1:1; cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14, there is an allusion to him in Zech 8:9). The name Haggai (חַגַּי) is derived from the Hebrew noun *hag* (חַג) meaning “festival-gathering, feast, pilgrim-feast” (BDB, p. 290).

2. The Prophet in Tradition

Haggai’s name, which is linked, with Zechariah’s name is found in the apocryphal books of 1 Esdras (6:1; 7:3) and 2 Esdras (1:40). Ecclesiasticus 49:11 is a partial citation of Haggai 2:23.

Some psalms in various editions of the LXX contain Haggai and Zechariah’s name in their superscriptions. Adjusting these psalms to our English order, these psalms are 138, 146, 147, 147:12, and 148.

Jewish tradition has it that he was of priestly decent. He was supposedly buried near the tombs of priests and was honored as though he was a priest.

3. The Questioning of Haggai’s Authorship

After examining points of agreement between orthodox and unorthodox commentators on this issue, we will focus on two issues that critics use in questioning Haggai’s authorship.

a. Orthodox and unorthodox commentators agree on two basic points:

- 1) The series of four brief messages as represented in Haggai came from the prophet Haggai.
- 2) They also agree that the essence of Haggai’s four messages have been recorded in the book bearing his name.

This is the place where disagreement is reflected. A distinction is made between orally given prophecies and written prophecies. Furthermore, some scholars would distinguish between the actual prophecies and the editorial framework. This editorial framework includes the dated introductions (1:1; 2:1, 10, 20), the narrative section (1:12), and the shortened introductions (2:13, 14). The real issue focuses upon whether or not Haggai was responsible not only for the actual prophecies but also for the editorial frameworks (see Verhoef, p. 9).

- b. Does the character of the book demand a different author for the editorial framework?

Ackroyd has answered in the affirmative (see Ackroyd [1951], pp. 163–76; and [1952], pp. 1–13). Neil has summarized this position with this: “The form of the book would suggest that these oracles were collected by someone other than the prophet himself. Haggai is referred to throughout in the third person and is described impersonally as ‘the prophet.’ Moreover, the book serves as a record of the effect of the prophet’s words, as well as a collection of his utterances” (2:509). Keil follows this in his commentary on the Minor Prophets.

- c. However, does this third person style in the editorial framework demand this interpretation?

After having cited the generally accepted critical position, Neil goes on to point out that, it is possible that Haggai could have written in the third person as well. However, he appears to be acquiescing at this point. The observations that Neil has reflected are quite unconvincing. Because of the precise nature of the reporting in the Book of Haggai, Otto Eissfeldt, the classic liberal OT scholar, has not accepted this view. He has argued for the prophet Haggai having written the book in the third person “in order to enhance the impression of the complete objectivity of the report” (p. 428; however Eissfeldt has his own problems in this area, see below). Conservative scholars such as Archer (pp. 407–8), Young (pp. 267–69), and Freeman (pp. 326–32) have been quite adamant in defending Haggai’s authorship. In commenting on the use of the third person, Freeman has stated that “this contention is never decisive in itself, since use of the third person in Scripture is a common phenomenon; moreover, even the use of an amanuensis is not denial of complete originality (cf. Jeremiah and Baruch)” (p. 330).

4. The Prophet’s Age at the Time of Writing

There are two views about the time of Haggai’s writing.

- a. Haggai was a younger man at the time of writing.

Ancient Christian tradition maintained that he was of priestly descent. He was born in Babylon and returned with his parents to Jerusalem as a young child. This would explain why his name is not mentioned with those returnees in Ezra 2 (Verhoef, p. 7).

- b. Haggai was an older man at the time of writing.

Haggai 2:3 has been taken to indicate that Haggai had seen the glory of Solomon’s temple. Since the writing of this book was about 520 B.C. and the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C., this means that he had to be older than 66 years of age.

This is further supported by one phase of Jewish tradition that had him living the greater part of his life in Babylon (see Baldwin, p. 28).

C. Date

Baldwin has provided us with the following chart (p. 29):

Reference	Year of		Date of		Equivalent date, B.C.
	Darius	Month	new moon	Day	
1:1	second	sixth	29 Aug	1st	29 Aug 520
1:15	second	sixth	29 Aug	24th	21 Sept 520
2:1	second	seventh	27 Sept	21st	17 Oct 520
2:10, 20	second	ninth	25 Nov	24th	18 Dec 520

Given the precise dates in this work, we can see that Haggai delivered his messages preserved in this book in a span of fifteen weeks during the second year of the reign of Darius I (521–486 B.C.). Based upon an abundant amount of evidence from Assyria and Babylon, Thiele has correlated the dates founded in the Old Testament with the Julian and Gregorian calendar.

After 18 December 520 B.C., Haggai's last dated prophecy, there is no information available explaining what happened to Haggai. Once the building project was earnestly moving forward and having Zechariah as his successor, Haggai appears to fade from the scene (Baldwin, p. 29).

D. Literary Composition

We will examine four literary aspects related to this book's composition: unity/authenticity, literary features and forms, structure, and genre.

1. Unity/Authenticity

Until the late nineteenth century with W Böhme ("Zu Maleachi und Haggai," *ZAW* 7 (1887): 215–16), the unity of this book was never seriously questioned. Some critics have followed this; however, others such as Mitchell have maintained its basic unity, though he maintains that a friend or disciple preserved the words of Haggai (see pp. 30–31; for a brief discussion of the difference between the sermons and the editorial framework in the third person, see above and Verhoef, p. 14). Ackroyd (1951) has argued for a number of glosses; however, the main focal point of our text that has been challenged is 1:1–11 and 1:15a, 2:15–19.

a. 1:1–11

1) Because this unit appears to be "overloaded" (vv. 5–6 is parallel to vv. 7, 9–11), Eissfeldt has argued that it is derived from two separate units, vv. 1–6, 8 are taken from a memorial to Haggai and vv. 7, 9–11 are a collection of Haggai's sayings (p. 428).

2) There are two reasons why Eissfeldt's proposal is unacceptable.

- a) We should initially notice that there is nothing in the text that hints that there are two separate units. Though there is significant overlap between vv. 5–6 and vv. 7, 9–11, it is possible that our author meant to have vv. 5–7 as a unit and vv. 9–11 as a unit with the admonition found in v. 8, which provides the solution to Judah’s problem, being the focal point.
- b) There are also some significant additions in vv. 9–11, viz., God is clearly identified as the ultimate cause for Judah’s state of judgment and the structure is placed in a question and answer format which explicitly drives home the point of the people’s responsibility for this state of judgment (Whedbee, p. 189).

b. 1:15a, 2:15–19

- 1) Because the date, “in the second year of King Darius,” in 1:15b is best taken as going with chapter 2 and because two different themes are emphasized in the unit 2:10–19, there must be some dislocation of material in the text. The first paragraph in the unit 2:10–19 is vv. 10–14. It emphasizes that the people of Judah were unclean based upon the priestly torah. The second paragraph, 2:15–19, emphasizes Yahweh’s promise to bless his people from that time period and onward. Following Rothstein, Eissfeldt has defended that this promise of Yahweh’s blessing best fits following the people’s beginning to work. Therefore, we have a date when this blessing was pronounced, “on the twenty–fourth day of the sixth month” (1:15a) and this is immediately following by the blessing given in 2:15–19 (pp. 427–28).
- 2) This is an extremely tenuous position on two accounts.
 - a) What is significant is that 2:15a begins with *w^eattâ* (וְעַתָּה), “and now.” This is usually used to denote a new beginning point in a unit. It seems highly unlikely to have a date, 1:15a, followed by a conjunction signifying a new beginning point (Verhoef, p. 113).
 - b) There is no textual warrant for deleting *w^eattâ* from the text. The easiest way to see this is to see 2:10–14 as the first paragraph and 2:15–19 as a new paragraph but both are part of the same unit.

c. Conclusion

The best solution to this is to follow the traditional view and maintain that this work is a basic unity compiled by the prophet Haggai himself.

2. Literary Features and Forms

- a. Parallelism is found in 1:6, 8, 10–11; 2:4, 8.
- b. Chiasm is found in 1:4, 9, 10; 2:23.
- c. A Rhythmic style of dialogue is reflected by 1:4, 5, 9; 2:11–13.
- d. Paronomasia is used a number of times. For example, because God’s house was a ruin (*hārēb*, v. 9), God called for a drought (*hōreb*, v. 11) on the land of Israel.
- e. Rhetorical questions are used to emphasize key issues (see 1:4, 9; 2:3, 19).

f. Repetition is used effectively. An example of this is “Give careful thought” in 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18; “I am with you” (1:13; 2:4); and “I will shake the heavens and earth” (2:6, 21).

3. Structure

A date and the messenger formula are used to introduce each of the four messages. Bullock has laid out the following structural arrangement (p. 304):

Message 1	Date + messenger formula (1:1)
	Messenger formula + oracle (1:2–11)
	Narrative material (1:12)
	Messenger formula + oracle (1:13)
	Narrative material + date (1:14–15)
Message 2	Date + message formula (2:1)
	Oracle (2:2–9)
Message 3	Date + messenger formula (2:10)
	Messenger formula + oracle (2:11–19)
	First question to priests and answer (2:12)
	Second question to priests and answer (2:13)
	Oracle of application (2:14–19)
Message 4	Messenger formula + date (2:20)
	Oracle (2:21–23)

When these four messages are considered as a whole, a parallel arrangement should be noted. Messages I and III focus on agricultural failure. The first message explains that this is a result of Israel’s disobedience to God and the third sets forth that Israel’s work on the temple had reversed the results of the drought. In messages II and IV God was going to shake the heavens and the earth. This reflects the pattern of the book:

Message 1 (1:1–15)	Message 2 (2:1–9)
Message 3 (2:10–19)	Message 4 (2:20–23)

4. Genre

When I am discussing form, I am using the term to discuss the various types of literature used in a book; however, when I use the term genre, I am using it to describe the type of literature a book is as a whole.

Is the book written in poetry as is the case with many other prophetic works? Or is it in prose? The book is made up of four abbreviated messages that were written in the third person. Paul F. Bloomhardt ("The Poems of Haggai," *HUCA* 5 [1928]: 153–95) suggested that the actual words of Haggai reflected a poetic meter, but those sections written in a narrative style (1:1, 12, 14; 1:15 and 2:20; 2:1, 2, 10, 11) came from the hand of a subsequent redactor. This redactor attempted to restore the original poetic sections. Ackroyd, following Bloomhardt, called this poetic prose. It is unacceptable to look for a poetic original behind the prose. The best way to understand the parallelism that occurs in the Hebrew text was the style of writing as intended by Haggai. This could be called poetic prose (see Bullock, p. 303) or even rhythmic prose (Verhoef, p. 17).

In general, the narrative frames are prose and the brief sermons or oracles are the rhythmic prose. The narrative discourses joining Haggai's sermons contain a date and messenger formula (see above), as well as other pertinent editorial remarks. This also provides a distinctive chronological movement for the book, which sets this work apart from other short prophetic works such as Zephaniah, Nahum, Micah, and Amos. Haggai's four oracles are introduced by his editorial remarks in 1:1–3; 2:1–2, 10, and 20. Haggai has other editorial information in prosaic form in 1:12–15 apparently as a postscript to his first sermon demonstrating when the people actually began the work on the temple.

These chronological editorial remarks appear to demonstrate that Haggai wanted to show progression in his work. Also, a cause and effect relationship is reflected in the book as it unfolds in chapter 1 through the conclusion in chapter 2. In this regard, his work is more like a chronicle than a prophetic work such as Zephaniah, Nahum, Micah, and Amos. However, it does contain prophetic oracles. By combining an editorial framework reflecting chronological development with prophetic oracles, this short work is comparable to Jeremiah 26 and 36, the account of Jehoiakim's attempt to destroy the word of Yahweh, and Jeremiah 37–41, the account of the illegitimate departure of some Israelites to Egypt. N. Lohfink has compared these chapters in Jeremiah to 2 Kings 22–23 where the account of Josiah's covenant ratification is recorded. Petersen notes a number of similarities shared between these accounts such as relatively short prosaic narratives which focus on a key person or persons, the prose accounts denote a sequence of activities, dates are used to mark boundaries between units, the actual accounts are made up of several different scenes which vary in length, and the accounts appear to have an apologetic function (Petersen, *Haggai*, pp. 34–35).

The one basic distinction seems to be that in Haggai we are dealing with four prophetic oracles; however, this difference is minimal when we consider that the sermons are not purely poetic as what we have in other prophetic works such as Nahum, Zephaniah, Micah, and Amos. Haggai is written in what we could consider a rhythmic prose. Lohfink categorized the form of 2 Kings 22–23, Jeremiah 26 and 36, 37–41 as *historische Kurzgeschichte* or a short historical account. However, this seems to miss the apologetic thrust of each of these units. In 2 Kings the thrust is positive, while in

Jeremiah, each thrust is negative. In Haggai there appears to be, a positive apologetic thrust. Petersen classifies this as a “brief apologetic historical narrative.” We could classify the genre of Haggai as an apologetic historical account of prophetic sermons. As Petersen has said, “The book is, in sum, a short apologia, comprising Haggai’s words placed within a historical narrative. The book of Haggai is not a typical prophetic collection, but is rather an apologetic history that uses prophetic oracles as its essential source” (*Haggai*, p. 36).

E. Destination

1. First oracle

1:1–2—these verses are directly addressed to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest. Indirectly it was addressed to the people as a whole, see 1:12, 14.

2. Second oracle

2:2—it was addressed to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people.

3. Third oracle

2:11—it was addressed to the priests.

4. Fourth oracle

2:21—this was intended exclusively for Zerubbabel.

F. Historical Background

1. Judah taken into captivity

According to Jeremiah 25:11–12, the nation Judah had been sent into captivity for their disobedience. This began in 605 B.C. with the first Babylonian deportation and this was followed by the 597 and 586 B.C. deportations with the last one resulting in the city of Jerusalem and the temple being destroyed.

2. Babylon conquered by Cyrus

Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and subsequently issued a decree for the Jews to return to the land of Canaan and to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:2–4; 6:3–5). The return to the land was completed in 536 B.C. The Book of Ezra provides us with some information about the Jewish remnant and their return home.

a. Leaders: Zerubbabel, governor; Joshua, high priest

b. 42,360 people and 7,337 slaves returned.

c. They set up an altar to resume sacrifices. They also laid the foundation for the temple in 536 B.C. (Ezra 3:8–13).

3. Samaritan interference

Samaritan neighbors interfered and the rebuilding of the temple had to be discontinued for 16 years (see Ezra 4:5).

4. Changes in Persia

Between 536 and 520 B.C., the Persians experienced quite a few changes. Some of these changes include the following:

a. Cyrus died 529 B.C.

b. Cambyses, Cyrus's son, reigned between 530–522 B.C.

After one-year co regency, Cambyses reigned for seven years. In order to establish himself on the throne, he had his brother Smerdis (Bardiya), whom he considered as a rival to the throne, put to death. "His major accomplishment was his bringing Egypt under Persian control. The passage of his armies through the land of Israel may have worked a hardship on the native population. Demand for food, water, clothing, and shelter may have greatly diminished the meager resources of a people engaged on a building project well beyond their means" (Alden, p. 571).

While encamped near Mount Carmel when traveling home in 522 B.C., "Cambyses received news that one Gaumata had seized the Persian throne, masquerading as Smerdis, the brother whom Cambyses had secretly assassinated. Cambyses's sudden death at this point has given rise to numerous conflicting stories that he committed suicide, although this far from certain" (Wood, p. 332).

c. Darius Hystaspes reigned from 522–486 B.C.

An officer of Cambyses, Darius Hystaspes (also called Darius I or Darius the Great), who was the son of the satrap Hystaspes, took charge of the army and successfully returned to Persia to put down an insurrection and to take the throne for himself (ibid.).

This Darius appears in the Book of Haggai. Wood has presented a good summary of Darius.

"Darius went on to become one of Persia's most capable rulers. He demonstrated skill in reorganizing the empire. Cyrus had added conquered kingdoms without changing established boundaries; but Darius, having just suffered the effects of serious revolt, now changed boundaries by dividing all into newly designed satrapies. Judges with fixed circuits were appointed, and an intricate postal system for effective communication was established. Darius proved himself an able military leader by directing his armies to repeated successes. Basing his strategy on the false assumption that the divided Athenians would not offer significant resistance, Darius's commander suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Greeks in the famous battle of Marathon, 490 B.C. He planned revenge, but a revolt in Egypt demanded his attention for a time, and his own death came in 486 B.C. before he was able to retaliate" (pp. 332–333).

5. Various religions in Persian Empire

Darius I was concerned about the religions of his empire, which included the religion of the Jewish nation. Though the Samaritans had a role in having the work on the temple cease, the primary responsibility during this sixteen-year period fell on the Jews for their indifferent attitude to correcting this situation. Haggai attempts to arouse the Jews from their lethargy. Because of Haggai's successful ministry, the temple is rebuilt and

dedicated by 516 B.C. (see Ezra 6:15–18).

G. Occasion and Purpose

1. Occasion

Because of their problems with the Samaritans resulting in Cyrus's command for Israel to stop building the temple, the Jews had left the temple lie dormant for approximately 16 years. Apparently, other factors had prompted this extended delay such as apathy and indifference.

2. Purpose

Haggai wrote to encourage Israel, by giving a prophetic message about Yahweh's future program for the overthrowing of the nations and the glory of Israel with a special emphasis on the Temple and the honor of the Davidic dynasty, to forsake their indifference to the God of the covenant and to obey Yahweh that primarily included their rebuilding the Temple. The focal point of this statement of purpose for Haggai's contemporary audience included these two issues:

a. Rebuilding the temple

In the simplest of terms, Haggai's message was to rebuild the temple. To support this, he indicated to Israel that their recent crop failures was due to their neglect of rebuilding the temple.

b. Correcting Judah's spiritual priorities by obeying God.

Haggai lucidly demonstrates the consequences for disobedience to the God of the covenant (1:6, 11; 2:16–17) and the results of obedience (2:7–9, 19). When Israel demonstrated that God and His house were preeminent, instead of being cursed, God would bless them. Encouragement and strength were the results of loyalty to God as demonstrated by obedience to the Mosaic Covenant (2:4–5; for further development of this, see Lev 26 and Deut 28).

H. Canonicity

1. Haggai as part of the Twelve

Jesus ben Sira spoke of the twelve prophets in Ecclesiasticus 49:10–12 as a unit that was parallel with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. This apparently indicates that all twelve Minor Prophets were considered a unit and already written together on a scroll. This clearly indicates that the twelve Minor Prophets were already considered part of the canon. This indicates that the twelve Minor Prophets had been considered part of the canon before 190 B.C.

Josephus was also aware of this particular unit (*Against Apion*, 1.8.3).

Augustine called them the "Minor Prophets" ([*The City of God*, 18.25], see also *NIV Study Bible* [p. 1320]; Young [*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 250]; and Harrison [*Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 858]).

2. The order of the Twelve

From the Talmud it seems quite clear that chronological order played a part, in arranging the twelve Minor Prophets in their particular order. For example, it is stated in the Talmud “Hosea was the first, because it is written, the beginning of the word of the Lord of Hosea. Now, did he first speak with Hosea? Rabbi Johanan says that he was the first of the three prophets that prophesied at the period, namely, Hosea, Amos and Micah, and would not Hosea be placed at the head? [Answer]: His prophecies were placed by the side of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi; and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were the end of the prophets; it is reckoned with them. It should be written in part and [placed] at the head. Since it is short, it might have become lost” (*Baba Bathra*, 14b as cited by Young, *IOT*, p. 250). Though we are not sure why this particular arrangement was adopted, the Talmud does seem to suggest that we have three periods reflected in the Minor Prophets:

a. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah

These apparently correspond to those books written while the Assyrians were exerting great power over the ancient Near East.

b. Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

These books were apparently written in the declining years of Assyrian power when the Babylonians were beginning to exert their force over the ancient Near East.

c. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

These books were written in the postexilic era.

3. Time of Canonicity

When did the Haggai become associated with the other Minor Prophets?

It is clear that this could not be any later than 190 B.C. It is possible that the first nine Minor Prophets were collected and placed on a scroll during the exile (see LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, p. 19). Pierce has demonstrated that there are a number of thematic and literary connections between Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (pp. 277–89; 401–11). How are we to explain these similarities? First, one redactor edited all three and this redactor developed these similarities himself. This would be a possible explanation for a more liberal approach. For a little more acceptable approach for broad new evangelicals, one would have to say that this redactor was himself inspired and lead of God to do this. In this situation, a case might be made for Malachi doing this. I naturally tend a way from this because it allows more freedom for the redactor than what I feel is historically or theologically defensible. A second approach would be to maintain that there was common interaction between Haggai and Zechariah and one (probably Zechariah) was consciously emphasizing the same theological and literary issues as the other (Haggai). Malachi was consciously adding a portion of inspired writ to complete the prophetic work begun by his postexilic predecessors. Following this latter scenario, each book has been independently added to the canon shortly after it was written. Or possibly, they may have been added together. In this case, these may have been added to the collection shortly after the time of Malachi’s writing. Because of Jewish insistence on prophecy (apparently meaning the inspired writers of Scripture) ceasing with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, a historically and theologically safe induction is that these were added

quickly to the canon (see my OTI syllabus, pp. 100–101).

4. Final consideration

From the pragmatic side, the subject of questioning Haggai's canonicity has never been raised in Jewish history or Christian history. Haggai 2:23 is alluded to in Ecclesiasticus 49:11 and Haggai 2:6 is cited in Hebrews 12:26. These more or less put a stamp of approval upon the book (pp. 277–89; 401–11).

I. Text

Though the Septuagint has a couple of major additions at 2:9 and 2:14, it is in general agreement with the MT. This is true also for the Vulgate, Syriac Peshitta, and the Targums. The leather "Scroll of the Twelve" from Wadi Murabb'at exhibits remarkable agreement with the MT. This leather scroll which dates from the second century A.D. contains Haggai 1:12–2:10, 12–23. It has only two insignificant variations from the MT.

However, it should be noted that the problem with the leather scroll from Wadi Murabb'at is that it comes after the standardization of the *textus receptus*.

II. Exegetical Analysis

In analyzing the content of Haggai, the book can be broken down into four sections: message 1: rebuilding the temple (1:1–15), message 2: the promised glory for the new temple (2:1–9), message 3: blessings for a defiled people (2:10–19), message 4: Zerubbabel, the Lord’s signet ring (2:20–23).

A. Message 1: Rebuilding the Temple, 1:1–15

The objective of Haggai in this chapter was to challenge the leaders and the people of Israel about their indifference toward finishing the rebuilding of the Temple and to admonish them to complete this task. This chapter can be divided into three sections: the superscription, v. 1; the message disputing Judah’s indifference toward rebuilding Yahweh’s Temple, vv. 2–11; and Haggai’s editorial remarks regarding Judah’s positive response to his message, vv. 12–15.

1. Superscription, v. 1

a. The Date of the Message

“In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month”—the sixth month in Hebrew is the month Elul. This would correspond to August 29, 520 B.C. (see Alden, “Haggai,” p. 579).

b. The Authority of the Message

“The word of the LORD came”—The expression translated as “the word of the LORD” (*d^ebar-YHWH*, דְּבַר־יְהוָה) is used approximately 240 times in the OT. This expression is used almost exclusively to refer to Yahweh’s special revelation. When this expression is denoting divine revelation, it is usually connected to the divine name Yahweh, though there are times where *d^ebar-YHWH*, is followed by God, *Elohim* (for example, Judg 3:20; 1 Sam 9:27; 2 Sam 16:23; 1 Kgs 12:22; 1 Chr 17:3; 26:32; Isa 40:8; see Even-Shoshan, pp. 251–54). As such, it is an appropriate superscription to prophetic books such as Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, and Zephaniah (*TDOT*, s.v. “דְּבַר,” by W. H. Schmidt, 3:111).

The word of Yahweh is generally mediated through prophets (*TWOT*, s.v. “דְּבַר,” by Earl S. Kalland, 1:178–81). This is clearly the case in Haggai. It is stated in Haggai three times that “the word of the LORD came [*hāyâ*]” *through* the prophet (1:1, 3; 2:1) and twice that it “came [*hāyâ*]” *to* the prophet (2:10, 20).

In Haggai “the word of the LORD” (*d^ebar-YHWH*, דְּבַר־יְהוָה) is synonymous with “He [Yahweh] said” (*ʾāmar*, אָמַר, see 1:5, 7, 8; 2:6, 7, 9, 11), “declares the LORD [Almighty]” (*neʾ ūm*, see 1:9, 13; 2:4 [3 times], 9, 14, 17, 23 [3 times]), and “the voice of the LORD” (*qôl-YHWH*, קוֹל־יְהוָה, see 1:12). These various expressions reflect that the source of the prophet’s message was Yahweh and by using these various expressions, the prophet is authoritatively stating that he was accurately communicating it. As Verhoef has stated it, “In this way the formula of revelation obtained an objective and real character; the word did not originate in the mind of the prophet, but occurred, manifested itself, and thus was received and communicated by the prophet. The objective quality of this word was demonstrated by the fact that its

occurrence could be dated” (p. 45).

c. The Instrument Proclaiming the Message

“Through the prophet Haggai”—this literally could be translated “through the hand of the prophet Haggai.” It is readily apparent here that “hand” is not to be taken literally. In Hebrew this construction, *bēyad*, is a combination of the prefix preposition *bē* (“in,” “at,” “by,” “with”) and the noun *yād* (“hand”), and hence this combination literally means “by the hand of.” This type of construction is what we call a compound grammatical construction, which is used in an idiomatic sense. It is easily seen how this came to denote agency. For example, in Judges 6:36 Gideon is preparing to set out his fleece when he prays to God, “If you [God] will deliver Israel by me [i.e., *by my hand*],...” The point is that hand is a symbol of the person, it denotes personal agency. Basically, *bēyad*, is a prepositional phrase used idiomatically to denote the agent and may legitimately be translated “by” or “through.” Though its use in the Latter Prophets is rare (Hag 1:1, 3; 2:1; Mal 1:1), it is commonly used in the Torah and the Former Prophets to denote a prophet speaking as the representative of Yahweh (Exod 9:35; Josh 14:2; 20:2; 21:2, 8; for more examples, see BDB, p. 391). In light of Haggai’s theological emphasis apparently drawn from this earlier material, we should expect this to be used in a manner consistent with its earlier use.

d. The Recipients of the Message

“Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah”—Since Zerubbabel was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, he was the apparent heir to the Davidic throne (Jehoiachin is also referred to as Jeconiah, cf. 1 Chron 3:17–19 with Matt 1:12). The reference to Zerubbabel as the “son of Shealtiel” may be due to the practice of levirate marriage (Deut 22:5–10). Following this hypothesis, Pedaiah would have died. Subsequently, Shealtiel would have taken his brothers widow as his wife. The offspring of this union would have been Zerubbabel (Lindsey, pp. 1538–39).

“Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest”—the father of Joshua, Jehozadak, had been deported to Babylon while serving as high priest. This took place in 586 B.C. (1 Chron. 6:15) (Lindsey, p. 1539).

2. The Development of the Disputation Sermon Encouraging Judah to Rebuild Yahweh’s Temple, vv. 2–11

Haggai has developed his sermon around the form of a disputation speech, *Disputationswort*. This is a subcategory of the polemic genre. A polemic is an attack on or a refutation of the opinions of someone else. In this regard, a disputation speech is an attempt to convince another of the legitimacy of the other party’s position. Haggai as Yahweh’s representative is attempting to show Judah that their apathetic position concerning the rebuilding of Yahweh’s house is illegitimate and that the correct position is that of Yahweh’s, viz., to rebuild the Temple. A focal point in our discussion of this *Disputationswort* is the exhortation in v. 8. Though recognizing this verse as the parenthetic focal point, Verhoef appears to be inconsistent at this point in his structural analysis for he has argued that vv. 7, 9–11 are a literary unit forming an extended

parallel to vv. 5–6 (p. 21). While being in essential agreement with Verhoef, I would feel more consistent following Whedbee for he has maintained that vv. 5–7 form a segment of a larger literary unit made up of vv. 2–7 and vv. 9–11 are a separate one forming a parallel with vv. 5–7. The apex in Whedbee’s analysis is v. 8 (p. 180). Our outline for this section will follow his analysis.

a. The Explanation of the Problem: Judah’s Indifference toward Rebuilding the Temple, vv. 2–7

Haggai’s explanation of Judah’s problem can be broken down in a threefold manner. In v. 2 the prophet states the basis of the problem, viz., Judah’s indifferent attitude toward rebuilding the Temple. Yahweh attacks Judah’s position, which was an adherence to wrong priorities, vv. 3–4. In vv. 5–7 the nation is challenged to consider their present circumstances.

1) The Basis for the Problem, v. 2

a) Messenger formula

“This is what the LORD Almighty says”—The key issue focuses on whether *Yahweh Š^ebā’ôṭ*, יהוה צבאות, be rendered as “the LORD of Hosts” or “the LORD Almighty.” *Yahweh Š^ebā’ôṭ*, יהוה צבאות, is found approximately 300 times in the OT with 247 of these occurring in the prophetic books. It is found 14 times in Haggai, 53 times in Zechariah, and 24 times in Malachi. A general lexical sense of *Š^ebā’ôṭ*, יהוה צבאות, is “army.” The translation of *Yahweh Š^ebā’ôṭ* in the Vulgate as *Dominus exercituum* “Lord of armies” certainly reflects this understanding. It has generally been understood that this has reference to God being in control of an angelic army.

However, it is the contention of many that this is too specific an understanding of this term since it occurs in many contexts where there is no reference to a heavenly host. The first occurrence of this expression is found in 1 Samuel 1:3 where Elkanah goes to worship and sacrifice to *Yahweh Š^ebā’ôṭ*, יהוה צבאות. It is again used in Hannah’s prayer in 1:11 and is used in description of the ark in 4:4. From David’s time onward, there are some uses where it is connected with the city of Jerusalem (Ps 48:8). In Isaiah 45:12–13, the Creator is identified as *Yahweh Š^ebā’ôṭ*, יהוה צבאות. Because of these various uses, it is best to use *Š^ebā’ôṭ*, יהוה צבאות, in a manner that is broad enough to include its various uses.

Along this line of seeing a broader translation, it should be noted that the Septuagint translator of the Psalms and the translator of the Greek Qumran scroll of Zechariah translated *Yahweh Š^ebā’ôṭ* as κυριος των δυναμεων, “Lord of the powers of heaven”; the Septuagint translator of Haggai and Zechariah translated this with the more general rendering κυριος παντοκρατωρ, “Almighty Lord.” In light of this, a case can be made for rendering *Yahweh Š^ebā’ôṭ* as the translators of the NIV rendered it, “the LORD Almighty.” As such, rather than assuming a construct-genitive relationship between *Yahweh* and *Š^ebā’ôṭ*, יהוה צבאות (a construct-genitive relationship suggests a translation such as “LORD of hosts” or “Yahweh of hosts”), *Š^ebā’ôṭ*, יהוה צבאות, may be an appositive to

the leadword *Yahweh*, יהוה (an appositive relationship suggests a translation such as “LORD Almighty” or “Yahweh Almighty”). This appositional construction suggests the idea of “Yahweh who is Almighty.” Support for taking *Ṣēbā’ōt* as an appositive may be drawn from Psalm 80:5 (Eng. v. 4), *Yahweh ’Ēlōhîm Ṣēbā’ōt*, יהוה אלהים צבאות (‘‘Yahweh, God Almighty’’). What is clear in this passage is that *Yahweh* is the leadword and *’Ēlōhîm Ṣēbā’ōt*, ‘‘God Almighty,’’ is the appositive phrase, and this appositive phrase is made up of two nouns that are in apposition to each other: the leadword is *’Ēlōhîm* (‘‘God’’) and the appositive is *Ṣēbā’ōt* (‘‘Almighty’’). Because *’Ēlōhîm Ṣēbā’ōt* are clearly connected through an appositive relationship and not through a construct-genitive relationship, *’Ēlōhîm Ṣēbā’ōt* can only awkwardly be translated as ‘‘God of hosts’’ as NASB renders Psalm 80:5; it is more grammatically consistent to translate it as ‘‘God Almighty’’ (‘‘O LORD, God Almighty’’). What this all suggests for the use of *Yahweh Ṣēbā’ōt* in Haggai 1:2 is that *Yahweh* is the leadword, and *Ṣēbā’ōt* is its appositive, which suggests a concept such as ‘‘Yahweh who is God Almighty.’’ With this type of understanding, the ending on *Ṣēbā’ōt*, יהוה צבאות, would be understood as a plural of majesty.

What is the significance of *Yahweh Ṣēbā’ōt* in the context of Haggai? ‘‘The momentous significance of this title must be evaluated against the historical background. The emperor of Persia had at that time sovereign sway over his vast empire, including the minor province of Jerusalem-Judah. The emperor’s word was law, even to the Jewish community. Now, however, another word was conveyed to them, the word of the Lord Almighty, he being the highest and the most absolute Potentate in the whole universe, including the Persian empire!’’ (Verhoef, pp. 52–53).

b) The Statement of the Problem

‘‘These people’’—by referring to Judah in this manner as opposed to ‘‘my people,’’ this may reflect that Yahweh was displeased with His covenant nation.

‘‘The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built’’—Haggai states the basic problem. The Hebrew in this text is a little tedious; however, the prophet’s point is clear that the people had been claiming that it was not time to rebuild Yahweh’s house.

In light of the historical background for this, it would seem that Judah was going through some difficult times. Though Cyrus had initially ordered the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:2, 3; 4:4), he appears to have refrained from interfering when the various groups were able to terminate the project (Ezra 4:5). Judah like her other ancient Near Eastern neighbors viewed the building of temples as a responsibility of kings. Since Cyrus did not correct the situation with the Samaritans and others, Judah felt that it was not time to build the Temple. Also, the times were perilous (Zech 8:10). Furthermore, the nation appears to have been experiencing financial difficulties (Hag 1:10, 11). Though these items along with some other issues may have suggested that it was not time to rebuild the temple, God did not recognize their cogeny. These were

excuses that were inconsistent with their covenant obligations and because of this, the covenant curses had to be enacted (Verhoef, pp. 55–56).

2) The Attack on Judah's Position, vv. 3–4

a) The Introduction to the Attack, v. 3

Haggai again introduces his message with the messenger formula, “the word of the LORD came” (see above), followed by a statement that he was God's vehicle for proclaiming God's special revelation (see above).

Why was the messenger formula repeated? This was apparently for rhetorical effect to stress that Yahweh had a faithful messenger for His people. As Verhoef has noted with this summation: “The repetition of the messenger formula probably served a rhetorical purpose, to emphasize the fact that God did not leave himself without witness in the actual situation of his people, or else to prevent the people from regarding their own argument (v. 2) as the word of God (so Von Orelli). According to Baldwin the emphatic introduction of the messenger formula is understandable when we assume that the spokesmen of the people had been heckling the prophet” (Verhoef, p. 57).

b) The Content of Attack on Judah's Position, v. 4

“Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses”—in Hebrew grammar it is not common to have a personal pronoun referring to the same antecedent used three times. In this verse Haggai uses the second masculine plural personal pronoun three different times, “you,” “yourselves,” and “your.” This use reflects a strong emphasis on Judah's responsibility in not rebuilding the Temple for the God of the covenant.

“Paneled houses”—the Hebrew passive participle, *s'pûnîm* is used as an attributive adjective and is accordingly translated as “paneled” in the NIV. This verb is used less than ten times in the OT. It means to “cover,” “cover in,” “panel” (BDB, p. 706). The last translation reflects that this can be understood as paneling. The first rendering may also fit in with this nuance. The second rendering means “cover in” in the sense of being “roofed in.” Consequently, the issues involve either *decorating* (paneling) a house or *finishing* (putting a roof on) a house. Let us briefly examine these two options.

- i) It is used in this sense of paneling in Jeremiah 22:14 where the evil king of Judah, Jehoahaz, made a palace and paneled it with cedar. In 1 Kings 7:3, 7 Solomon decorated the walls of the House of the Forest of Lebanon (v. 3) and the Hall of Judgment (v. 7) with cedar “paneling.” Because of this, many versions such as NIV, NASB, and NKJV have translated this as “paneled.” This is the view of scholars such as Ackroyd, Petersen, and Ralph Smith. In support of this, it should be noted that this forms a strong contrast between “this house in ruins and your nicely finished houses” (Petersen, *Haggai*, p. 48). In addition, since the text indicates that the people were living in their houses, then this is best seen as some activity done after they were already living in the house, viz., paneling. If we

follow this interpretation, we would probably be best to confine this to the aristocrats of the land since vv. 5, 9–11 suggest that Judah was living in a state of adverse economic conditions.

- ii) This may also be taken in the sense of being “roofed.” This appears to be followed by the Septuagint, Aquilla, and the Vulgate. The KJV apparently follows this with the translation of it as “sealed.” The translation as “roofed” is also followed by the NEB and is supported by commentators such as Baldwin, Mitchell, and Thomas. Advocates of this point of view draw attention to the fact that there is nothing inherent in the verb that necessarily implies luxury. This view appears to do greater justice to the adverse economic situation that Judah was facing. In addition, this term is denoting being “roofed” in 1 Kings 6:9. This last verse provides a helpful qualification to this view for the author of Kings is describing the *completion* of the outer part of the Temple in vv. 2–14, and in vv. 15–35, he discusses the inner structure of the Temple. In v. 15 the paneling job done by Solomon is discussed. In reference to v. 9, it should be noted that Solomon’s labor force was completing the outer structure of the Temple by “roofing it with beams and cedar planks.” The point is that the beams and cedar planks were the *completion* of the outer structure. Consequently, the contrast in Haggai 1:4 “is between the unfinished and thus unusable House of Yahweh and the complete and functional homes of the Yehudites rather than between ornamental or elaborate homes of the people and a ruined temple” (Meyers, p. 25).

“While this house remains a ruin?”—this last clause in v. 4 is the antithesis of the preceding. Notice the contrast between “your houses” and “this house” as well as the concept of living in your finished houses versus a house in the state of ruin. The NIV has translated the Hebrew predicate adjective *ḥārēb* as “remains a ruin.” This adjective, often translated as “waste, desolate” (BDB, p. 351), is derived from a verb *hrb*, which semantically revolves around the nuance of dryness, “to be dry, dried up” (ibid.). Related to this is the verbal sense of being laid waste due to the lack of water, and from this develops the concept of being laid waste because of war. Francis Andersen has demonstrated that the use of *ḥārēb* in this context is similar to its use in Jeremiah 33:10, 12 where it is used to describe Jerusalem as an uninhabited place, and in Jeremiah 26:9 where the verbal form of this adjective is used to describe an uninhabited or unused temple (cited by Meyers, p. 24). Therefore, this term may be used to refer to something that is uninhabited or even a place that is not useable.

When we consider this data, we must also compare this with its historical setting as set forth in Ezra 3–4. Ezra 3:2–6 establishes that, when the Jewish people return from Babylon in 536 B.C., they set up an altar to offer up regular sacrifices and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. Ezra 3:7–15 demonstrates that the Jews began to rebuild the Temple by laying its foundation (note especially v. 11). Ezra 4:1–5 reflects that the Samaritans and Judah’s other neighbors were able to obtain legal counselors who were

able to effectively influence Cyrus to have this project suspended. Ezra 4:24 indicates that the temple, with only its foundation having been laid, remained in this state until the second year of Darius. When we evaluate this information, it is best to understand that the adjective cannot mean that the Temple with its surrounding court was in a complete state of ruin. Ezra demonstrates that the court had been at least partially reconstructed and the foundation for the Temple had been laid. Consequently, the Temple is only a ruin in the sense that it was unfinished and therefore could not be used effectively (see Meyers, p. 24).

Verse 2 appears to be a condensation of what is said in vv. 4–11; however, there appears to be a slightly different emphasis. Verse 2, in light of v. 1, was addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua and vv. 4–11 appear to be addressed to the people as well. Presumably, this indicates that Zerubbabel and Joshua were addressed in the privacy of their dwellings and the people were possibly addressed in the forecourt of the temple. This finds plausibility when it is considered that this was the first day of the month and time for a holy festival in Jerusalem (cf. Isa 1:14 and Hos 2:11). This reflects the structural unity shared between these sections.

3) The Exhortation to Reflect on Present Circumstances, vv. 5–7

a) General Exhortation to Contemplation with Messenger Formula, v. 5

“Now”—begins with *w’attâ* (וְעַתָּה), “and now.” This is usually used to denote a new beginning point in a specific unit (see above). As such, there is a connection with the preceding material, but it begins a new thought in a unit that is a consequence of the preceding. The prophet’s point is to show that there is a connection between an unfinished Temple and Judah’s adverse economic situation.

“Give careful thought to your ways”—this can be literally translated as, “Set your hearts upon your ways.” The command to “set your hearts” is found in this verse, 1:7, 2:15, and twice in 2:18. In Hebrew to set one’s heart on something meant to consider seriously (see 1 Sam 9:20; 21:13; 25:25; 2 Sam 13:13; 19:20; Isa 57:1; Jer 12:11). In Isaiah 40:21–24 to “set [one’s] heart” is parallel with other verbs denoting understanding, and knowing. In this passage, the point for Isaiah’s audience is to grasp “the real meaning of the historical and eschatological ‘events.’ The same applies to the expression ‘to set your hearts upon.’ The people must consider, must give careful thought to, their circumstances, and experiences, in order that they may deduce from them the correct conclusions. They must consider their situation and fate from the point of view of what God had wanted from and had intended for them” (Verhoef, p. 60).

b) Specific Object of Contemplation: Frustrating Social and Economic Conditions, v. 6

This verse contains five tightly bound clauses:

“You have planted much, but have harvested little.”

“You eat, but never have enough.”

“You drink, but never have your fill.”

“You put on clothes, but are not warm.”

“You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”

In Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, the curses for disobedience to the covenant are spelled out. In Deuteronomy 28:38–40 and Leviticus 26:20, disloyalty results in the land becoming unproductive. Eating, drinking, having sufficient clothing and wages can be seen as having a correlation with meager produce in an agrarian society.

This verse involves what Hillers (*Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, pp. 28–29) has labeled the “futility curses.” This formulation involves the description of an activity in one clause followed by the futility of that activity in the following clause. These curses are usually found or at least associated with covenant contexts. The book of Deuteronomy is in the form of a conditional covenant (suzerain-vassal treaty); it is the Mosaic Covenant as applied to the generation of Israelites who would occupy the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 28 provides examples of covenant blessing for loyalty to the Covenant and curses for disloyalty. The curses of Haggai 1:6 find their background in a text such as Deuteronomy 28:38–40. This provides a good illustration of an example of the “futility curses.” “You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off.”

The point in the context of Haggai is that Judah’s failure to rebuild the Temple reflects an attitude of indifference to the God of the Covenant. This is to say, Judah’s abrogation of the covenant had brought on the “futility curses” (Petersen, *Haggai*, p. 50).

c) Repetition of General Exhortation to Contemplation with Messenger Formula, v. 7

This verse is a reduplication of v. 5 with the exception that the initial *w^e ‘attâ* (וְעַתָּה), “and now,” is missing (see above). This forms an inclusion with v. 5 and stresses the specific object of contemplation in v. 6 as something that Yahweh sees as being significant. In light of their reflection on their experience with the futility curses, Haggai prepares his audience for the solution to their problem.

b. The Solution to the Problem: Judah’s Obligation to Rebuild the Temple, v. 8

The prophet initially gives a series of commands followed by the reason for the commands. Following our discussion of the structure of this section, v. 8 is the apex of Haggai’s sermon (see above). The problem of Judah’s indifference toward the rebuilding of the temple is explained in vv. 2–7. This is balanced off by vv. 9–11 where the problem is reiterated and expanded. The parenetic focal point of Haggai’s sermon is v. 8. It is not structurally related to the preceding or following verses. Standing independently, it receives the major thrust in this sermon. As such, vv. 2–7

and 9–11 comprise a form of envelope construction with v. 8 being the apex (see Whedbee, p. 189).

1) The Series of Commands for Rebuilding the Temple

There are three commands given in this verse. “*Go up* into the mountains and *bring down* timber and *build* the house.” The emphasis with this series of commands no doubt falls on the last command. What is interesting with the first two commands is that they pertain to timber with no other building material being alluded to. Why does Haggai’s commands pertain strictly to timber? Was not other building material used such as stones and metal? In addition, Ezra 3:7 indicates that the Jews had paid Phoenicians to bring cedar logs for the reconstruction of the Temple. How do these two passages harmonize? In response to these issues, there are four explanations of this passage that attempt to resolve some of these. From this, we will then draw a conclusion.

- a) The Jews initially built a wooden temple. Ehrlich has maintained this based on Josephus. This interpretation is somewhat forced since Josephus does not specifically say this. Josephus makes reference to money that was given to masons and carpenters; however, there is no reference or allusion to a wooden structure representing a finished temple (Verhoef, p. 65).
- b) The walls of Solomon’s Temple were left standing in the 586 B.C. destruction. This only required the wood to be replaced. Jerome had made an allusion to a Jewish tradition supporting this. This is unlikely, however, when we consider passages such as 2 Kings 25:8–17. In this context, the destruction of the temple is elaborated on and the context clearly affirms that flammable items were burned. The other building materials were apparently broken down and expensive items in the Temple itself were actually taken to Babylon. Psalm 74:7–8 summarizes the Temple’s destruction. In each case, the destruction was complete in the sense that it would require laying a new foundation and building a superstructure upon that foundation. Ezra 3:10–11 states that the foundation for the second Temple was laid by the people who returned from exile (see Verhoef, p. 65). Ezra 5–6 as well as Haggai elaborates on some of the details in building the superstructure.
- c) This specific command has a comprehensive intent. This is the view of Keil. He maintains that timber is one of the key items that needed to be acquired for building the Temple. However, it was not the only item that needed to be obtained for reconstructing the Temple. He points to Ezra 5:8 where it states that the house of Yahweh had been built with square stones and timber was placed in the walls (Keil, 2:180). Verhoef objects to this by pointing out that the command is too precise. In addition, when supporting his view, he points out what I feel is a more forceful argument, viz., that the solid material from Solomon’s Temple would have remained and therefore all that was needed was wood (p. 65).
- d) This verse strictly relates to acquiring the timber necessary for rebuilding the Temple (so Verhoef, pp. 65–66). With this view, we would have to recognize the possibility that some of the wood acquired from the Phoenicians (Ezra 3:7) had been stockpiled. Accordingly, the timber referred to in Haggai 1:8

simply supplemented the more durable wood obtained from the Phoenicians. In light of Ezra 3:7 and due to the nature of wood that was necessary for major supports in a large building, Carol and Eric Meyers have argued that the timber mentioned in Haggai 1:8 was simply used for building scaffolds and items of that nature that were necessary for this project (pp. 27–28).

- e) It would seem to me that the third and fourth views have much merit. Since the command does not go into all the details required in a building project such as this one, I would maintain that Haggai gave this specific command because timber was the major item that was needed. This probably included collecting more items, but the major one was timber, which was collected to supplement the wood that had been stockpiled earlier. This fresh supply of lumber was probably used in the actual building in areas that did not require sturdier wood. We would also have to allow for it being used for the construction of equipment.

2) The Rationale for Rebuilding the Temple

The ultimate reason for completing the reconstruction of the Temple was that God would be pleased and glorified.

c. The Reiteration and Expansion of the Problem: Yahweh's Enforcement of Covenant Curses for Judah's Disobedience, vv. 9–11

The parallel relationship between v. 9 and vv. 4, 6 reflects Haggai's theological emphases in this unit. An inverse relationship should be noted for v. 4 is parallel with v. 9b and v. 6 with v. 9a. The futility curse that was mentioned in v. 6 is again mentioned in v. 9a. However, v. 9a is more precise than v. 6 in that the prophet is directly citing Yahweh with the divine "I" as being responsible for the drought. In v. 9b Yahweh raises the question, "Why." He is posing a question concerning why Judah was going through this drought. With this answer, Yahweh again returns (v. 4) to his earlier motif of His "unfinished" (*ḥārēb*) house versus finished houses for the people of Judah (see above). The use of "therefore" at the head of vv. 10–11, continuing his answer from 9b, makes it extremely clear that the drought was of divine origination. The prophet uses paronomasia, a play on words with the use of *ḥārēb* in vv. 4, 9b and *ḥōreb*, "drought," in v. 11 (Whedbee, pp. 188–89).

1) A Reflection on Present Negative Circumstances, v. 9a

As noted earlier, the circumstances described here fulfill the covenant curses set forth in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. In v. 6 the prophet dealt with planting, eating, drinking, having sufficient clothing and wages where here he is more general dealing with looking for much and bringing home. These probably refer to the Judean farmers having expected a good harvest but instead had a poor harvest. The Judean farmers expected an abundance but instead "experienced insufficiency" (Verhoef, p. 71). Our writer is very clear about the cause, "I [Yahweh] blew on it." This is to say, Yahweh blew it away. He brought the drought with its poor results.

2) The Reason for the Present Negative Circumstances, vv. 9b–11

a) Question, v. 9b

Yahweh raises the question, “On account of what?” That is, “Why?” Why did Judah experience the futility curse?

b) Answer, vv. 9c–11

i) A Declaration of Judah’s Guilt, v. 9c

The covenant curses were enforced by Yahweh because the Yehudites were more committed to their houses rather than Yahweh’s house.

ii) A Declaration of Divine Judgment, vv. 10–11

The point of vv. 10–11 is that Judah’s economically distressing situation was a consequence of their disobedience. This situation is declared to be a result of divine judgment. It is explained from the negative side in v. 10 and the positive in v. 11.

a) The Negative Explanation, v. 10

“Therefore”—the Hebrew particle *‘al-kēn*, אֲלֵכֵן, introduces a fact that is an outgrowth of the preceding material (BDB, p. 487). The language of v. 9, like v. 4, brought Judah’s declaration of guilt to an end. “Therefore” introduces the conclusion to this unit of material contained in vv. 2–11.

“Because of you”—this is a translation of the Hebrew preposition, *‘al*, with the 2mp object suffix attached to it. Rather than taking this as “because of you” as NIV and NASB have done, the Vulgate, KJV, and NKJV have taken it as “above you” and Hitzig as “against you.” This Hebrew preposition has a variety of translation values. If we take *‘al* as “against you,” this points to the negative effects of the drought upon Judah (Meyers, p. 30). However, it usually has this meaning with a verb of motion and this is not the case in this verse. The translation “above you” is also certainly possible. Following this understanding, this means that the heavens above Judah have withheld their dew (Ralph Smith, *Malachi*, p. 151). Following the rendering of the NIV and NASB, the emphasis is on Judah’s behavior as the cause of divine judgment. This harmonizes quite well with the immediate context.

“The heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops”—“As long as the moisture came down, the crops came up; if the former failed, so did the latter. Through the long, dry summers of the Middle East, the only moisture apart from artificial irrigation was the dew. The moisture-laden air coming from the Mediterranean condenses through the cooler nights, and the thirsty plants absorb the dewdrops that have gathered on and around them. So while every summer is a limited drought, it is particularly severe if the weather is such that even the dew fails to meet the needs of the vegetable world” (Alden, p. 582).

b) The Positive Explanation, v. 11

Yahweh called for a drought. The word translated as “drought” is a play on words with the term translated as “ruin” in vv. 4, 9 (see above).

Yahweh’s drought affected “the fields and the mountains”; “the grain, the new wine, the oil”; “whatever the ground produces”; “men and cattle”; and “the labor of your hands” (for a reference list of covenant curses and blessings, see Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, pp. xxxii–xlii).

“The fields and the mountains”—the expression translated as “fields” is derived from the Hebrew word *'eres*, which is often translated as “earth” or “ground.” However, its context determines precisely how it is to be translated. It was used in v. 10 and was coupled with “heavens”; in this verse it is coupled with “the mountains.” “The semantics of this word are here defined by the situation and context. It concerns the experiences of the postexilic community in the minor province of Jerusalem-Judah. The extent of the *'eres*, therefore, is effectively confined to their territory. It could either refer to the territory as a whole, with the mountains as a part of it (NEB, JPSV), or to a separate portion of the land, that which is being cultivated, the fields (NIV), distinguishing it from the mountains. We prefer the second alternative. The distinction between the ‘fields’ and the ‘mountains’ is to emphasize two areas which were seriously affected by the drought: the cultivated area, . . . and the noncultivated area, the *mountains*, which usually get the most rain. In this way both the seriousness and the severity of the drought are stressed” (Verhoef, pp. 75–76).

“The grain, the new wine, the oil”—grain can also be understood as corn and may refer to bread. The new wine is the juice freshly squeezed from grapes. The oil is the juice from olives. This trilogy possibly refers to “food, wine, and oil.” These words are commonly used together in the OT (see Num 18:12; Deut 7:13; 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 28:51, etc., see Verhoef for more examples, p. 76).

“Whatever the ground produces”—this summarizes the produce that was affected by the drought.

“Men and cattle”—the drought would affect both man and beast alike.

“The labor of your hands”—literally this reads “on all the toil of hands.” The most strenuous labor for the Yehudite farmers would be affected by the drought.

3. The Positive Response to the Disputation Sermon Encouraging Judah to Rebuild Yahweh’s Temple, 1:12–15

As noted earlier, I have understood this as Haggai’s editorial remarks demonstrating how the people of Judah responded positively to his message.

a. The People's Positive Reaction, v. 12

The people of Judah's positive response are noted in a twofold way in this verse.

1) Their Obedience

It is noted here that Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people obeyed Yahweh.

"Zerubbabel . . . obeyed"—The verb translated as "obeyed" is a combination of the verb *šāmaʿ* (to hear or listen) plus *b^eqôl*, the prefix preposition *b^e* ("in," "with," etc.) attached to *qôl* ("voice"). The sense of this is to give heed/pay serious attention to what one says; this indicates an element of submission on the recipient's part and as such, this is an idiom meaning to obey. As was noted on pp. 25–26, Yahweh's voice is tantamount to His commands. The point is the people obeyed God.

"The voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai because the LORD their God had sent him"—Since Yahweh had sent Haggai, there is no discrepancy between Haggai's word and God's word. God's word is Haggai's word and Haggai's word is God's word.

"Whole remnant of the people"—the term translated as "remnant" comes from the Hebrew term *š'êrîṭ*, which can be translated as "rest," "residue," "remainder," or "remnant"; it can be used of "survivors" (BDB, p. 984). It is derived from a verb that means to be "left over" or "remain." In prophetic literature, it has a precise use as a reference to "those who have survived the catastrophe caused by God's judgment. The term does not, of itself, describe either those who returned from exile or those who remained in the land, but all who survived to be the true Israel, the people of God in the restricted area of Jerusalem and Judah. . . . We may assume that the covenantal aspect of the 'remnant' theme, which was characteristic of the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos, is also implied in Haggai's prophecy. In this connection the listening of the people acquires a deeper [?] meaning: those who obeyed the word of the Lord were the 'remnant' as the representatives of God's own people, the people of the covenant" (Verhoef, p. 81).

2) Their Fear

The Hebrew term translated as "feared" may denote reverential fear or the emotional aspect. At times, it can even reflect the resultant idea of worship (see *TWOT*, 1:399). In this context, it must denote the terror that was the result of Yahweh's covenantal judgment on Judah. This led to their obedience. "To obey the word of the Lord is to acknowledge one's own sinfulness and condemnation. Leaders and people alike became aware of the fact that the drought was due to God's judgment, because they sinfully withheld the honor that was due to him. Such a sense of guilt can easily manifest itself in a feeling of dread and anguish, because of God's continuous wrath and judgments" (Verhoef, p. 83).

b. The Content of God's Word, v. 13

"Haggai, the messenger of the LORD gave this message of the LORD to the people"—

this verse is introduced with the messenger formula, which Haggai uses to introduce his messages. This points to the authority of the messenger when he gives Yahweh's word (for a discussion of this, see above).

“I am with you”—The use of the divine I with the Hebrew prepositions *'et* or *'im*, both may be translated as “with,” is used 30 times in the OT (see *TDOT*, 1:450–51). It is also used in 2:4. This is a promise of Yahweh's presence with its associated power to enable Judah to reconstruct the Temple during this difficult time.

c. Narrative material and date, vv. 14–15

- 1) “So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel...,” v. 15—this no doubt stresses the results of Yahweh's presence with His people. The verb translated as “stirred up” is the Hebrew verb *'ûr* which basically means to “rouse oneself, awake.” Here it is used in the hiphil stem and has the idea to “rouse” or “stir up” for a certain activity (BDB, p. 735). A closely related text with this same verb used in the hiphil stem (its subject is Yahweh as here and its object is the same term used in this verse which is translated as “spirit”) is 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 where Yahweh aroused the spirit of Cyrus to decree the rebuilding of the Temple. The Hebrew term translated as “spirit” is *rûah* which may denote “mental activities” (Ezek 11:5; 20:32), “attitude” or “disposition of mind” (Num 14:24). As in Isaiah 26:9 (“in the morning my spirit longs for you”), *rûah* is referring to “immaterial consciousness of man” (see *TWOT*, 2:836).
- 2) “On the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month,” v. 15a—this is the 24th day of Elul; September 21, 520 B.C. When we compare this with the first verse, there has been a delay of 23 days.
- 3) “In the second year of King Darius,” v. 15b—the issue here relates to which unit of material is v. 15b most directly related. Does it have a direct connection with 1:15a, or with 2:1, or with 2:15–19? There are four possible ways that this has been explained:
 - a) Eissfeldt has supported transposing 2:15–19 so that it immediately follows 1:15a. According to Eissfeldt, 1:15b was intended to introduce chapter two (pp. 427–28; so also Mason [p. 414], David Smith [p. 391], and Thomas [p. 1043]). Based upon a judicious use of textual criticism, Eissfeldt's view has no textual support; and, therefore, must be viewed as unacceptable.
 - b) Verse 15a and 15b have been treated as a unit and viewed as an introduction to chapter 2. The key versions in which this is treated as such are the Septuagint and the Vulgate. However, if we take v. 15 as a heading to chapter two, the content of v. 15a (“on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month”) is in conflict with 2:1 (“in the seventh [month], on the twenty-first day of the month”).
 - c) Many modern commentators have taken v. 15b as the beginning of Haggai 2, while 15a is associated with Haggai 1 (so Petersen, p. 63; Ralph Smith, *Malachi*, p. 156). This is based on the general format for sequential arrangement of year-month-day when these three items are given. According to Verhoef, this is used twenty times in the OT (p. 93). We see this sequence in Haggai 1:1

(ibid., p. 46). Though this is a possible understanding and poses no significant textual problems, we should perhaps note that this eliminates the apparent *inclusio* construction that ties 1:1 with 1:15.

- d) It is possible that v. 15b does double duty. It serves as a conclusion to the preceding and as introduction, being used as an ellipsis, to the following material (so Meyers, pp. 36–37). If we follow this view, 1:15 is an *inclusio* with 1:1. Since the second year of Darius is mentioned in 1:15b, there is no need to mention it again. Thus, it is doing double duty. There is also a similar case in 2:18 and 2:20 where we have an abbreviated format for the full date since that had been mentioned in 2:10 (Meyers, pp. 4–5).

B. Message 2: The Promised Glory for the New Temple, 2:1–9

Seven weeks have transpired since Haggai's first message was delivered and four weeks since the people actually began building the superstructure of the temple. It would be four years before they would finish the temple. No doubt, the initial enthusiasm has worn off and the people of Judah had become discouraged. There were possibly two other reasons for being discouraged. First, the work of preparing the site took more time than was anticipated. "Much time was consumed in clearing the site of rubble, re-dressing stone that was fit for use, organizing teams of workmen for their particular tasks. Such preparations on a sixty-year-old ruin, without any mechanical aids, would tax the endurance of even the most enthusiastic worker" (Verhoef, p. 92). Second, work would have also been hindered due to the many feast days in the seventh month as well as the Sabbaths. As Verhoef has noted, "progress would have been delayed during the seventh month by the major festivals on which no work would be allowed. In addition, to Sabbath rest days, the first day of the month was the Feast of Trumpets, and the tenth the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:3–32). Then on the fifteenth day, the Feast of Tabernacles began (Lev. 23:33–36, 39–43; Deut. 16:13–15), which lasted for seven days. It would be understandable if the enthusiasm was frustrated by a lack of progress due to the compulsory holidays" (ibid.). The point of Haggai's second oracle was to encourage the people to persevere in this project.

1. Unfavorable Comparisons with the Solomonic Temple, vv. 1–3

a. Date and the Messenger Formula, v. 1

"On the twenty-first day of the seventh month"—This is the month Tishri and would correspond to October 17, 520 B.C.

"The word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai"—as observed earlier, "The word of the LORD" is a formula denoting Yahweh's special revelation, which was given to His prophet (see above).

b. The Command to Address the Problem, v. 2

There are three addressees here as we had in 1:12, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people.

c. The Questions Reflecting the Problem, v. 3

Haggai raises three questions reflecting that the returned community of Israelites had become discouraged. Notice how each question lays a foundation for the next

question and in the final question, Haggai's point is made explicit.

1) The First Question, v. 3a

“Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory?”—This question reflects that there were some among the returnees who had been alive when Solomon's temple was still in existence in 587 B.C. Though the Solomonic temple had diminished in some of its splendor since Solomon's day (e.g., treasures were removed from the temple a number of times, 1 Kgs 14:25–26; 2 Kgs 12:17–18; 16:17–18; 18:13–16 [Hezekiah had silver and the gold from the doors of the temple removed]; 24:12–13 [this last reference was in 597 B.C.]), the temple itself had been an imposing structure with a complex of other buildings. Elderly people [those who were approximately 60–70 years of age (586–520 = 66 years old if born when the temple was destroyed)] who had seen the temple were possibly making comparisons with the earlier aspect of the temple. This becomes clear as the questions continue.

Notice how the Solomonic temple is referred to as “this house in its former glory.” The point is that the temple they were reconstructing was viewed from God's perspective as the same temple. Notice further support is drawn from the second question by the use of the personal pronoun *it* (*'ōtô*) and the temporal adverb *now* (*'attâ*). The antecedent of *it* is “this house” in the first question. Notice that “now” brings the temple up to the time period of 520 B.C. Though we make a distinction between Solomon's temple and Zerubbabel's temple, in this context they are regarded as one. It is probably more theologically precise to see one temple with two or more aspects.

2) The Second Question, v. 3b

“How does it look to you now?”—Haggai is saying compare the former glory of the temple with its present glory or lack of glory.

3) The Third Question, v. 3c

“Does it not seem to you like nothing?”—This literally could be translated, “Is the likeness of it not as nothing in your eyes?” The reading of the KJV is very rough “*Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?*” In Hebrew the use of the interrogative particle with the negative indicates a positive response, “Yes, this is nothing!” Undoubtedly, the disappointment was a result of this temple lacking suitable building material and it lacked sacred objects such as the ark of the covenant. Why should an inferior temple be built?

The questions in this verse reflect a problem that revolves around unfair comparisons. These elderly people no doubt had a negative influence on getting the job done.

2. Yahweh's Encouragement to Overcome the Unfavorable Comparisons with the Solomonic Temple, vv. 4–9

Haggai encourages the people to overcome their unfavorable comparison in vv. 4–9. He does this by giving Judah an exhortation in vv. 4–5 and a promise in vv. 6–9.

a. Yahweh's Exhortation to Be Strong, vv. 4–5

1) The Three Commands to Encourage the Completion of the Temple, vv. 4–5

a) “Be strong,” v. 4

This command is a translation of the Hebrew verb *ḥāzaq* meaning “be or grow firm, strong, strengthen.” Here it is probably a command to be “courageous” or “confident” (BDB, p. 304). The idea of this Hebrew term is to have that kind of mental framework which enables one to pursue something with diligence. In this context this is a strong desire that is a prerequisite for rebuilding the temple. This same imperative is repeated three times in this verse. In each case, it is addressed to a different individual or group. It is initially directed to Zerubbabel, then to Joshua, and finally to all the people of the land. This refers to the postexilic community as it does in Zechariah 7:5 and is synonymous with “all the remnant of the people” in Haggai 1:12, 14; 2:2.

b) “Work,” v. 4

Judah was to be strong in order to accomplish this task.

c) “Do not fear,” v. 5

David had given Solomon a similar set of commands with the same reasoning as we have in these two verses in 1 Chronicles 28:20 (“David also said to Solomon his son, ‘Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished’”).

2) The Reason for Completing the Reconstruction of the Temple, vv. 4e–5

Between the command to work and the prohibition to not fear, Yahweh gives his theological motivation for accomplishing this task.

a) “‘For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty,” v. 4e

Yahweh, the Almighty One, the King who was more exalted and powerful than the Persian King Darius, reaffirms His presence in v. 4 (see above).

b) “This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt,” v. 5a

This part of v. 5 has two problems. We will briefly look at these.

i) The first problem is a grammatical problem. A literal translation would be helpful to reflect this problem, “[DDO]the word which I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt.” This verse apparently begins with the sign of the definite direct object which I have labeled in a superscript as “DDO” followed by the direct object, “[DDO]the word.” The grammatical problem is that this accusative is not governed by a verb. There are three solutions to this problem.

α) Some have understood that this is an elliptical construction with a verb such as remembering having been omitted. In this case, the verse would

read, “Remember the word.” A problem for this understanding is that we nothing in the context approximating “remember.”

β) Since the sign of the definite direct object is identical with the preposition *’et*, “with,” in certain situations, another possible explanation is to take this as the preposition, *’et*, rather than as the sign of the definite direct object. This solution would understand this verse something like this, “**In connection with** the word which I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, my Spirit remains among you.”

γ) A third solution is to see this object marker as not only marking accusatives but also more generally as a marker used for emphasis. This would be similar to the use of *αυτος*, “self” in Greek (see Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 177–78). This is often explained as emphasizing the nominative case in Haggai 2:5, “the-word-which-I-have-cut-with-you, and my Spirit remains with you. Thus we have a compound subject, “the-word-which-I-have-cut-with-you” and “my Spirit,” with the participle “remains” (Verhoef, p. 100; see also Mitchell, pp. 64–65). It would seem to me that no matter how we are to explain the grammatical problem in v. 5a (the second or third views are preferable), there is a close connection between v. 4e and v. 5, with v. 5a being an elaboration on v. 4e, and the essence of v. 4e is then restated in v. 5b.

ii) The second problem is a semantic one. The verb translated as “covenanted” is the verb *kārat* which literally means to “cut” and often has as its object *b^erît*, “covenant.” When the verb *kārat* is followed by its object *b^erît*, this verbal phrase may be literally translated as to “cut a covenant,” or more idiomatically rendered as “make a covenant.” The use of *kārat* in this specific verse in Haggai appears to be an elliptical construction where the basic verbal is used with a discourse sense of “make a covenant” (so also other contexts such as 1 Sam 11:2; 20:16; 22:8; Isa 57:8, see CDH, 4:464; and TDOT, s.v. “כָּרַת,” by G. Hasel, 7:349). The NIV has obviously also recognized this semantic use of *kārat* with its translation of this verse. Verhoef is essentially in agreement with this (p. 101).

c) “And my Spirit remains among you,” v. 5b

This is basically a repetition of v. 4b except instead of Yahweh’s presence abiding with His covenant people, we have God’s Spirit abiding with them.

b. Yahweh’s Promise Concerning the Future of the Temple, vv. 6–9

“These verses announce what the Lord intends doing on behalf of the rebuilding of the temple: he will harness his sovereign sway over nature and nations in order to provide the wealth that would be necessary to fill this house with glory. In what the Lord is about to accomplish, leaders and people will observe the reason (*kî*) for God’s assurance and encouragement that he will be with them, and that they, therefore, need not be afraid (vv. 4, 5). The considerations of their lack of wealth and material are irrelevant. The Lord is their King and Shepherd, they shall want nothing in the service

of the Lord. He is the Lord Almighty, and this is what he says” (Verhoef, p. 101). I will divide this section in three ways: The Content of the Promise in vv. 6–7, The Reason for the Promise in v. 8, and The Results from the Promise in v. 9.

1) The Content of the Promise, vv. 6–7

Yahweh promises in these verses that he would exercise his sovereign control over nations and nature for the purposes of glorifying his temple. His control is reflected by the fact that he would shake the universe in a little while and the nations, have the desired things brought to the temple, and have the temple filled with glory.

a) Yahweh’s Shaking of the Universe, v. 6

“In a little while, I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land”—Two facts should be notice about this verse. First, “once more” implies that this is an event that has already occurred at least once. In Exodus 19:16 God shook Mount Sinai. In Judges 5:4, the earth shook. This is a description of Yahweh’s leading Israel in the form of the cloud. This no doubt refers to the supernatural intervention of God at places such as the Red Sea. The point is God will supernaturally again shake the heavens and the earth (see also other contexts such as Isa 2:12–21; 13:13; Ezek 38:20; Amos 8:8; and Hag 2:21–22).

Second, “in a little while” (*m^eat*) refers to the certainty of the event. This temporal adverb may refer to something that will occur shortly or even to something that could occur in the millennium (e.g., Isa 29:17 refers to the millennium as vv 18–21 demand). In temporal contexts where Yahweh is clearly doing something, Yahweh’s action is certain to happen.

b) Yahweh’s Shaking of the Nations, v. 7

The shaking of the universe is no doubt primarily done in order to affect the nations in such a way that they contribute to reconstructing the temple. This shaking of the universe and nations may refer to the Day of the LORD. Though the exact expression Day of the LORD is not used in this passage, there is an interesting correlation between this verse and the preceding one and Zechariah 14, which is dealing the Day of the LORD. In Zechariah 14 Yahweh intervenes in history by causing cataclysmic disturbances in the cosmos as well as being involved among the nations, the Battle of Armageddon (Joel 3, Matt 24, Rev 19). There is possible similarity with this passage in Haggai for God is doing activities as in Zechariah 14. In addition, Zechariah 14:14 discusses the wealth of the nations being collected for the temple. Furthermore, Hebrews 12:26 quotes Haggai 2:6 and then adds “that the kingdom of God, which ‘cannot be shaken’ (Heb. 12:28), will survive all divine judgments” (Lindsey, p. 1542). Therefore, this is best taken as future time from the time of the vantage point of Haggai as well as writer of Hebrews and therefore is best seen as eschatological, possibly the Battle of Armageddon.

c) Yahweh’s Causing the Desired Things to Be Brought to the Temple, v. 7a

The most difficult problem in this section is found in v. 7a. The issue focuses on the identification of the “desired of all nations.” The primary issue is to whom or to what does this refer. There are two basic interpretations of this, individually of the Messiah or collectively of possessions.

i) Individually

The advocates of the individual interpretation maintain that Christ is the “desired of all nations.” This interpretation is reflected by the rendering of the KJV, “the desire of all nations shall come.” This translation allows for “desire” to be taken as a reference to the Messiah. It should be observed that the Hebrew noun translated as “desire,” *hemdat*, is used to refer to individuals in 1 Samuel 9:20 and Daniel 9:23. This messianic interpretation began with ancient rabbis and was continued in Christian tradition through Jerome and Luther. The term “glory” in the latter part of this verse has been used to support this interpretation since it is used to refer to the glory of God and is used in messianic passages such as Isaiah 40:5 and 60:1.

Those who interpret this individually of the Messiah have generally seen this fulfilled in Christ’s first advent (Calvin [4:360–61], Pusey [2:310], and Feinberg [p. 244]). Because the New Testament clearly portrays Christ as being scorned by the nations rather than desired, Alden has correctly noted a problem with the individual interpretation. “Were the Gentile nations desiring the Messiah? Certainly, the Gentiles who receive Christ as Savior view him as desirable. Can that, however, be said of them before their salvation?” (p. 586). Consequently, the first advent fulfillment has been rejected by a few with a proposal that this would be fulfilled at Christ’s second advent (Gaebelein, p. 228).

Whether this is seen as being fulfilled in Christ’s first or second advent, there are two problems with the individual interpretation. First, a problem with this view is the grammatical disparity between the singular subject and plural verb. The term translated as “desired” (*hemdat*,) is the singular subject of the plural verb “will come” (*bā’û*). In the final analysis irrespective of how “desired” (*hemdat*) is to be explained, one is still left with a plural verb and this presents a problem for the messianic interpretation. Second, another difficulty arises from the content of v. 8 which focuses on the desirable material wealth.

ii) Collectively

Because of the preceding problems, many interpreters have explained “desired” (*hemdat*) as a plural idea. This could be translated “The desired things of all nations will come.” The translators of NASB correctly rendered *hemdat* as “wealth” (“they will come with the **wealth** of all nations”). Unfortunately, the translators of the NIV translated *hemdat* in an ambiguous manner, “the desired of all nations will come.” The ambiguity revolves around whether “desired” denotes “the desired one” or “the desired objects.”

Since the term “desired” is singular, some have felt compelled to emend the vowel pointing of the feminine singular noun *hemdat* to *ḥ^amudōt*, a plural form, in order to have agreement between subject and verb. However, this is unnecessary since *hemdat* can just as easily be taken collectively. This is a common device in Hebrew known as metonymy, where there is an association between the desire and the object desired. This term is used as a metonym for articles of value in Ezra 6:8 (Darius’s contribution to the temple). The most solid support for this interpretation is the following verse, “‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty.” As such, this verse is understood as a reference to those possessions such as silver and gold that is clearly indicated that the Gentiles will bring on behalf of this temple (see Isa 60:5–9 and Zech 14:14).

As with the individual interpretation, the differences primarily revolve around the fulfillment of this verse as well as with some of the various implications associated with what is desired. There are four different fulfillments associated with this interpretation. First, this has been understood as being fulfilled in the Persian period. Liberal scholars generally advocate this. The objects brought to the temple are the temple vessels that the returned exiles brought back from Babylon. This material was added by a redactor in the time of Ezra and is a call for the inclusion of Gentiles into temple worship (Petersen [*Haggai*, p. 68] and Stuhlmüller [*Rebuilding*, p. 30]). Second, some have seen this fulfilled during Christ’s first advent. The desired wealth is symbolic of the work of Christ that results in men being drawn to His spiritual temple (Hailey, pp. 310–11; see also Siebeneck, p. 315). Third, others have viewed this as being fulfilled in reference to the eschatological temple (Kessler, pp. 159–66; even some who would reject any literal eschatological fulfillment, take this view, see Ackroyd [“Haggai,” p. 644] and Meyers [p. 53]). Fourth, others have seen this as being fulfilled during both Christ’s first and second advent (Alden [“Haggai,” p. 586] and Wolf [“The Desire of All Nations,” p. 101]).

Because this appears to be an eschatological context, I would contend that the eschatological fulfillment is to be preferred. Three items support this understanding. First, the Hebrew verb translated twice as “shake” in vv. 6–7 denotes an eschatological shaking. When this verb, *rā‘aš*, has either an impersonal subject or object, it is used in a hyperbolic manner to stress the “infinite strength and awesomeness of the one who performs the shaking” (Kessler, p. 161). When it is used with either a personal subject or object, it is used metaphorically denoting a fearful trembling demonstrating the “abject impotence of the one who trembles” (ibid.). Kessler has noted the significance of this in our immediate context. “Thus when Haggai speaks of Yahweh’s shaking of the heavens and earth his primary reference is to the convulsion and dissolution of the elements of nature before One of infinitely superior might. When the nations of the earth are described as shaking, it is their subjective response of terror and submission that is in view” (ibid., p. 162).

Second, the syntactical arrangement of 2:6–7 also suggests an eschatological setting. In v. 6 the verb *shake* is a participle denoting a future action, which in the mind of the prophet is imminent, the *futurum instans*. When this type of participle is followed by the perfective aspect as we have with the verb in v. 7, it shows the logical or temporal consequence of the participial action. What this means is that the celestial and terrestrial catastrophe described in v. 6 are foundational for the Gentiles fearful response as demonstrated by bringing their desired objects in v. 7 (ibid., p. 163).

Third, Kessler further notes that two themes developed by Haggai are part of what he calls Jerusalem Zion theology. These motifs are “(1) a battle cycle wherein the nations launched a unified campaign against Zion, which culminated in the coming of Yahweh with earthquake and darkness, a great battle and the final preservation of Zion; and (2) a second cycle involving the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion in worship” (ibid., pp. 163–64). Kessler shows how these same motifs are developed in Ezekiel 38–39, Joel 2:10, 3:16, and Zechariah 14. From this, Kessler concludes, “Haggai 2 stands in general continuity with broader patterns in Zion—Jerusalem theology: the assault of the nations (2:22), the intervention of Yahweh and its attendant shaking (2:6, 21), the resultant terror and self-destruction by the armies of the nations (2:7, 22), and the submission of the remnants of the nations to Yahweh and their worship at Jerusalem (Hag. 2:8–9; cf Zech. 14:16–19 among many examples of this motif)” (ibid., p. 165).

One final item should be noted at this point, how do we explain the comparison made in v. 9 between Zerubbabel’s temple being greater than the Solomonic temple. In v. 7 and v. 9 the temple is referred to as “this house.” If we compare this with v. 3, we should note that both Solomon’s temple and Zerubbabel’s temple are referred to as “this house,” both temples are unified. This is to say, the Israelite thought of one temple with two different aspects. Because two aspects of the temple are summarized with “this house,” in v. 3, it is certainly possible to have “this house” in vv. 7, 9 including a future eschatological temple. I would understand that the context would be a strong support for seeing this future/eschatological aspect of the temple also included in our context.

The contextual data would suggest that the first view of an immediate fulfillment ignores the eschatological nature of this context. In addition, most interpreters do not understand Zerubbabel’s temple as being greater than the Solomonic temple as v. 9 appears to demand. In addition, there is nothing in the context that would suggest any reason for understanding the fulfillment of this passage during Christ’s first advent. This would exclude the second and fourth views concerning the fulfillment of this passage. When all the data is considered, it appears that the eschatological understanding of this is the best (for a good discussion of this, see Todd’s thesis).

d) Yahweh's Having the Temple Filled with Glory, v. 7b

This part of the verse could also refer to the material splendor of the future aspect of the temple. However, it should be observed that the only other references to "glory" filling the temple is in connection with the Shekinah glory of Yahweh's presence (1 Kgs 8:10–11). Since the Shekinah glory had been lost and Ezekiel correlates the return of the Shekinah glory with the eschatological temple (see Ezek 40:34–35; 43:1–12), this is best interpreted as finding its fulfillment in the millennial kingdom.

2) The Reason for the Promise, v. 8

The reason why God will provide the wealth of all nations to adorn the temple is that it all belongs to Him.

3) The Results from the Promise, v. 9

There are two results from the restoration of the temple.

a) The temple will have greater glory in the future than what Solomon's temple had.

b) God would bring peace to this place. The Hebrew term translated as "peace," *šālôm*, no doubt refers to the peace that will be experienced in the millennial kingdom because this is the temple that will be blessed by the presence of the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:16; Zech 9:9–10).

C. Message 3: Blessings for a Defiled People, 2:10–19

The date for this section is December 18, 520 B.C. (v. 10). The work on the temple had begun three months earlier. Yahweh again speaks to Haggai who is now supposed to question the priests about ritual purity and impurity (vv. 11–13). These questions are then related to Judah's uncleanness in reference to spiritual defilement because of their lack of loyalty to the God of the covenant (v. 14). Haggai then extends his application of this to how Yahweh was going to bless Judah from this time and forward (vv. 15–19).

1. Date and the Messenger Formula, v. 10

"On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius"—this is the month Chislev and would correspond to the December 18, 520 B.C.

"The word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai"—as noted above this is the messenger formula indicating that Haggai was delivering Yahweh's special revelation (see above).

2. The Oracle Dealing with Past Defilement and Anticipated Blessing, vv. 11–19

a. Judah's Past Defilement, vv. 11–14

1) Judah's Past Defilement as Reflected by the Requests to the Priests about Ritual Purity and Impurity, vv. 11–13

After introducing this unit, Haggai poses two questions; one is found in v. 12 and the second in v. 13.

a) Messenger formula, v. 11

This same formula has been used earlier in the books in 1:2, 5, 7; 2:6.

b) First question to priest and answer, v. 12

Verse 11 introduces Haggai's hypothetical question posed to the priests. Haggai poses his first question to the priests in v. 12. It is related to sacred meat that was carried in the fold of a garment. The sacred meat made that garment holy. Could that garment then transmit that holiness to another object? The answer to this question is found in Leviticus 6:27 that states that the meat from the sin offering transmitted its holiness to an item with which it came in contact. Haggai's question however, deals with whether this holiness could be twice transmitted. Did that consecrated meat sanctify the garment? The answer is yes. However, is it possible for that garment to subsequently make other foods ritually pure? The answer to that is no as the priests clearly communicated. This was the response that Haggai expected.

c) Second question to priests and answer, v. 13

“The opposite question is the substance of v. 13. The question here is not, is holiness infectious. But, is defilement infectious? Leviticus 22:4–6 supplies the background: ‘If he touches something defiled by a corpse, . . . the one who touches any such thing will be unclean till evening.’ Numbers 19:11–16 is an expanded version of the same basic tenet; viz., uncleanness is contagious” (Alden, p. 588). So, the priests' affirmative answer to this question is exactly the response that Haggai wanted.

2) Judah's Past Defilement as Reflected by the Application from Ritual Impurity, v. 14

The point of the questions was to cause the priests to understand that these truths about cleanness and uncleanness also applied to the nation. Since they were a defiled nation, everything that they touched was defiled. The point was that the only correction to this defiled state was for them to obey Yahweh by rebuilding the temple.

b. Judah's Anticipated Blessing, vv. 15–19

This is the most difficult section in the book as far as exegetical difficulties are concerned (see Clark's discussion of these). The manner in which I am taking this stanza is that v. 15a and vv. 18–19 form an *inclusio* structure.

1) The Exhortation to Contemplate the Present and Future in light of Yahweh's Past Enforcement of the Covenant, v. 15

“Now give careful thought to this from this day on”—the issues with this part of v. 15 concern the content of what the people of Judah were to think and the time when they were to think (see Clark [pp. 432–33] and Verhoef [pp. 121–24]). Does the command mean to think only about the future as it relate to God's covenant provisions from the time of this command into the future? If this is so, then vv.

15b–17 are completely irrelevant, strictly parenthetical, to Haggai’s thought. This understanding is too disruptive to Haggai’s thought.

Or, does the command mean that from the time of Haggai’s command and “onward” reflect on how God’s enforced the covenant curses for failing to take God’s program of worship as preeminent? Because of the use of “onward” (*mo’lâ*) in v. 15a coupled with the conjunction, “before” (*mîttêrem*), that begins the next clause in v. 15b (“before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’s temple”), it is apparent that Haggai informs the remnant that they must consider the “recent past.” Along this line, the *NET Bible* has translated v. 15 like this: “Now therefore reflect carefully on the recent past, before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’s temple.” Thus the temporal setting of the command is a present-future sense. In line with this understanding, the content of their reflection has two parts. The backdrop is found in vv. 15b–17, 19a. This is composed of Judah’s disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant and its consequential judgment. This was intended to be a comparison with the focal point of the content in v. 19b, viz., that Yahweh will bless them for obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. In this context, their loyalty to Yahweh was to be demonstrated by rebuilding the temple with the consequences of experiencing God’s covenant blessings.

2) The Exhortation to Learn from the Past, vv. 16–17

“The people are reminded of what they have experienced in the past because of their uncleanness. The connection with the preceding sentence is evident: because of their impurity they must consider their past experiences as a token of God’s displeasure with them” (Verhoef, p. 24). This is the same theological idea as was demonstrated in 1:6 (see pp. 43–44).

3) The Exhortation to Contemplate the Present and Future Blessings from Yahweh, vv. 18–19

The main point of this literary unit is that from this day when this exhortation was given God would bless the nation Israel, as they were loyal to Him.

“From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month,” v. 18—this is the same day as was given in 2:10, December 18, 520 B.C. “From this day on,” is the same expression as we saw in 2:15.

“Give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid,” v. 18—“Give careful thought” is literally “set your heart.” This is a way of emphasizing a seriousness of thought. A tension in our understanding of this verse revolves around when the temple’s foundation was laid. Is Haggai referring to a newly laid foundation? Or is he referring to a restoration of a building project that had already been started? Or is there another solution. There are four options that have been proposed.

- a) Some have taken this to mean that the temple’s foundation was laid on December 18, 520 B.C. (Driver, *The Minor Prophets*, pp. 147–48, 167–68). The problem with this understanding is that the foundation for the temple had been laid in 536 B.C. as Ezra 3:8–13 indicates. In addition, Haggai 1:14–15 reflect

that work had started three months earlier.

- b) A second solution is to understand that the verb denoting a foundation being laid has a broader nuance that includes the idea of a rededication ritual. Wiseman has suggested that this “may well relate to the ritual act to mark a new start (as Ezr. 3:10).... More than one foundational ritual was commonly employed for temples. It is likely that the first marked the subterranean foundation-laying and the second the first building at ground level as in ancient Mesopotamian practice” (p. 784).
- c) Advocates of the third alternative note that the Hebrew verb *ysd* (translated in NIV as “the foundation . . . was laid”) is not a technical term for setting stones in place for the foundation. This verb generally means to “establish, found” (BDB, p. 413). Baldwin suggests that the term includes the sense of restoring (pp. 52–53). A key passage supporting this position is 2 Chronicles 24:27 where Joash restores (*ysd*) the house of God. This view may also be combined with the second view as the Meyers do (p. 64).
- d) The fourth view is advocated by Wolf (*Haggai and Malachi*, pp. 49–50). The reference to the temple’s foundation having been laid is part of a parenthesis that extends from v. 18b through v. 19a. Haggai’s primary command to seriously consider is given in v. 18a. This is followed by a parenthesis with a secondary command to consider Judah’s past history since the foundation of the temple had been laid 16 years earlier, vv. 18b–19a. The object of what Judah was to consider in v. 18a is stated in v. 19b. This contains a promise of Yahweh’s resultant blessing for obedience (Chisholm, *Interpreting*, p. 226).
- e) This is a difficult problem and I do not think that any of the views are free from problems, as Clark has noted (p. 436). The third and fourth views seem to have the fewest problems.

D. Message 4: Zerubbabel, the Lord’s Signet Ring, 2:20–23

1. Messenger formula and date, v. 20

When compared with 2:10, this second oracle came on the same day as that oracle, December 18, 520 B.C. Some scholars have had a problem with Haggai receiving two different oracles from Yahweh on the same day so they alter either the third or fourth oracle (Peterson, p. 97). However, since this was a special day for the history of the second temple as vv. 18–19 may reflect, this would be an appropriate day for receiving revelation from Yahweh. In addition, both oracles are significant in that one relates to the religious future of the nation and the final one relates to political mechanism of the theocracy, the future of the Davidic dynasty.

2. The Oracle, vv. 21–23

This oracle is an eschatological oracle of salvation given specifically to Zerubbabel, but it also gives hope for the nation that Yahweh has not set aside His promises to David. Jehoiachin may have been unfaithful but Yahweh is always faithful to His word.

a. Yahweh’s Shaking of Heaven and Earth, vv. 21–22

In this message, Yahweh gives Zerubbabel three promises.

1) Yahweh will shake the heavens and the earth, v. 21b

The Hebrew in the last clause is the same as 2:6b with the exception that “the sea and the dry land” has been omitted. The verb *rāʿaš* is a participle and is pointing to a vivid portrayal of the future. As noted earlier, it is used with an impersonal object and is consequently being used in a hyperbolic manner stressing Yahweh’s infinite power (Kessler, p. 161). This is the future Day of Yahweh (see above).

2) Yahweh will overturn royal thrones, v. 22a

God is going to overturn the Gentile kingdoms. The verb translated as “overturn” is used for Yahweh’s intervention in the affairs of men such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:21–22). This verb is used in the perfective aspect and with its syntactical construction following the participle “shake” in the preceding clause it reflects that this is an outgrowth of Yahweh’s shaking the heavens and the earth. As in 2:6–7 the context is eschatological.

What significance would this have had for Zerubbabel as well as his contemporaries? The Meyers have addressed this with this: “The future context, however, does not in any way diminish the import for the prophet’s own day of this final oracle, which anticipates the end of any foreign domination, no matter how benign or minimal, over Yehud. God assuredly and in due course will reestablish his world sovereignty by dramatic means” (pp. 66–67).

3) Yahweh will shatter the power of foreign kingdoms, v. 22b

In light of the remainder of this verse, Yahweh specifies those instruments of war associated with strength. Through the use of metonymy, instruments such as chariots with their drivers and horses with riders may function as representative of any item of military strength.

The language of this verse and the following “is reminiscent of the destruction of Gentile world powers represented in the great image in Daniel 2. There the worldwide messianic kingdom will replace the Gentile kingdoms (Dan 2:34–35, 44–45)” (Lindsey, p. 1544).

b. The Lord’s Choosing Zerubbabel as His Signet Ring, v. 23

1) “On that day”

To what time period does “on that day” refer? It is often used in eschatological contexts (Jer 25:33, Hos 2:18, Amos 9:11, Zech 13:2, and 14:4ff). Since “that” is a demonstrative adjective, we must always look at the context to determine its antecedent. In Haggai 2:23, the antecedent time period is found in v. 22. It is during the time that Yahweh overthrows the nations to set up His kingdom that we should expect to see this prophecy recorded here happen.

2) “I will take you”

The semantic range of the verb “take” is quite broad. It may include the idea of selecting (BDB, pp. 542–43) as the last line of this verse clearly reflects through its

use of the normal term for this, *bhr*, to “choose.” This last verb is used for David’s election as king in Psalm 78:70.

3) “My servant”

“Servant” is not used of many people in the OT as personal servants of Yahweh. It shows a special relationship between Yahweh and His servant. David was called Yahweh’s servant in 2 Samuel 7:8 and Psalm 78:70. Verhoef has stated, “The figure of ‘servant’ presupposes the idea of the favourite confidant of the king, one who remains in the vicinity of the king, who knows the mind and wishes of the king, and who executes the confidential assignments of his master. Without mentioning David or the Davidic dynasty, the idea is evidently implied” (p. 146).

4) “My signet ring”

“Signet ring” is a figure that focuses on the Davidic dynasty. The figure of “a signet ring” was powerfully used to begin the pericope in Jeremiah 22:24–30. In the context, Yahweh describes His rejection of Jehoiachin and his descendants from sitting on the throne by setting forth that He would remove him as His signet from His right hand. Thompson has well described the significance of the signet ring. “The *signet ring* was used to impress the owner’s signature into a document. Earthenware jars used to collect grain and oil for taxation purposes carried the royal stamp with two-winged symbol, the word *lmlk*, ‘belonging to the king,’ and the name of the town where the collection was made. The kings of Judah were regarded as Yahweh’s official representatives who employed his signet ring. The signet ring was valuable and precious to its owner. . . . But Coniah would be rejected as Yahweh’s signet ring and would no longer operate as Yahweh’s anointed king in Judah” (*Jeremiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], p. 483). How far reaching is this rejection of Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah and Coniah)? This question is answered in v. 30. The text indicates that none of his descendants would ever again rule as king in Judah.

If this is the case, does this mean that God has nullified the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7? If God has nullified the Davidic Covenant, then why is the Davidic Covenant generally considered to be unconditional (that is, its fulfillment rests solely on God and not anyone in the Davidic line)? It seems to me that we are correct in maintaining that the Davidic Covenant is unconditional. This is supported by the fact that Yahweh told David in 2 Samuel 7:14–15 if his son who was to become king would sin Yahweh would punish him, but he would not set aside His covenant. In v. 16 God announces that this covenant will endure forever. What are the promises of this covenant? David is promised a great name in v. 9; rest in the land in v. 11; a kingdom in vv. 12, 16; and an enduring dynasty in vv. 13, 16. Consequently, we must affirm that it is impossible for Yahweh to nullify the Davidic Covenant with His rejection of Jehoiachin and his descendants. God will fulfill His promises to David—the Davidic dynasty is permanent. The dynastic line, however, will not be through Jeconiah.

When we compare this with the two prominent genealogies in the New Testament, this understanding is corroborated. In Matthew 1 Joseph’s family line is traced

through Jehoiachin back to Solomon and to David. This established the legal rights of Jesus to be king. This meets the demands of the Davidic Covenant. However, it is important to note that Joseph was not his biological father. Thus, Jesus' kingship is not in violation of the curse on Jehoiachin. The other genealogy is in Luke 3. It apparently traces Jesus' family line back through Mary to Nathan and to David (for general information on the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, see Stein, *Luke*, pp. 140–41; for a helpful discussion, see Gundry and Thomas, pp. 313–19). Since Mary was Jesus' biological mother, it was necessary for him not to be a descendant of Jehoiachin.

How does this data apply to Zerubbabel who is a descendant of Jehoiachin according to the genealogy in Matthew 1? It should be noted that Zerubbabel is never called king. In v. 22 he is referred to as the governor. Yahweh's selecting him as His signet ring suggests that there is a special relationship between the real King, Yahweh, and His vassal, Zerubbabel. But what is the significance of this relationship? Some scholars have suggested that this has reversed the curse on Jehoiachin (so Alden ["Haggai," p. 591], Baldwin [p. 54], Chisholm [*Interpreting*, p. 227], etc.). In response to this, we must ask whether God will negate something that He appears to have permanently cursed. In addition, as we have briefly examined the New Testament data, it would certainly seem consistent to maintain that the curse on Jehoiachin had not been reversed.

Another has suggested that the significance is for Zerubbabel's rebuilding the temple (Dumbrell, "Kingship," p. 39). The use of the imagery of the signet ring seems to strongly point to something more than simply taking the lead in rebuilding the temple. It seems to suggest one who is in some kind of authoritative position.

I feel that it is better to understand that this was a reconfirmation that the Davidic Covenant had not been set aside. This was crucial for restored Jewish community. As a signet, Zerubbabel had authority to affect the political and religious affairs of Judah. Though not a king, Zerubbabel as governor had a strong influence on the Jewish political scene. As the leader in restoring the temple, he also had a strong influence on the religious scene. Yet, in keeping with the eschatological nature of our context, Zerubbabel had a significant juncture in the history of the Jewish state as it looked forward to the time when the real King-Priest will rule.

PART II: MALACHI

In our examination of Malachi, the material will be divided into two broad sections, as was the case in Haggai: an introduction to Malachi and an exegetical analysis of this book.

I. Introduction

This introduction focuses on issues that are normally discussed under the subject of special introduction. These items will include a brief presentation concerning the title, authorship, date, literary composition, destination, historical background, occasion and purpose, canonicity, and text.

A. Title

MT: מְלַאכִּי, *Malachi*, “my messenger”

LXX: Μαλαχίας, *Malachias*, “Malachi”

V: *Malachi*, “Malachi”

B. Authorship

The issues related to this book’s title and authorship are related since the title of the book is apparently derived from the author’s name. A key problem in Malachi relates to the name Malachi. Is this a personal name or is it a title? The arguments in favor of each alternative will briefly be examined.

1. Arguments for Taking Malachi as a Title

There are six arguments in favor of this.

- a. The name Malachi does not occur anywhere else in the OT. In addition, his father’s name was not given. To this it should also be added that Malachi’s name is not mentioned in Ezra or Nehemiah. In contrast, Haggai and Zechariah’s names are mentioned.

PROBLEM: This same criticism could also be applied to Habakkuk since his name is never found outside of his book in the OT neither is his father’s name mentioned. Obadiah’s father’s name is not mentioned either.

- b. The name Malachi literally means “my messenger.” Many OT scholars feel that this is an inappropriate name for a child.

PROBLEM: We must recognize that this may apparently be somewhat awkward, but I wonder how far we can push this. It may be as some have argued that this is an abbreviated form of *mal’ākîyâ*, “messenger of Yah[weh].” Freeman (p. 351) has pointed out some examples of this in the OT, Abi is derived from Abijah (2 Kgs 18:2; 2 Chronicles 29:1) and Phalti from Phaltiel (1 Sam 25:44; 2 Sam 3:15).

- c. This was the view of a number of the church fathers and apparently the view of the translator(s) of the Targum of Jonathan.

PROBLEM: History is mixed on the subject as is evident under the discussion favoring Malachi as a personal name.

- d. Because of the similarity in titles in Zechariah 9:1, 12:1, and Malachi 1:1 and because

Zechariah 9:1, 12:1 were written anonymously, this points to Malachi 1:1 also being derived from an anonymous secondary source (for more information, see Freeman, p. 350; and Verhoef, p. 154).

PROBLEM: This is based upon a hypothesis that Zechariah was not author of Zechariah 9:1, 12:1. The division of Zechariah into a proto, deutero, and trito-Zechariah is based upon the subjective whims of higher criticism. Stuart has stated the issue like this: “The assertion that any of the prophetic books contain secondary appendages is unprovable. Such supposedly nongenuine parts of books are typically identified by the appearance of contrasting theological outlooks—a sufficiently subjective enterprise that it is debatable in every case. Since many competent scholars defend the unity and integrity of Zechariah and maintain that Zechariah 9–14 is not a secondary addition to Zechariah 1–8 (e.g., Baldwin, *Malachi*, pp. 211–15; see also Verhoef, *Malachi*, pp. 9–16), the argument that Malachi is a tertiary addition to Zechariah 9–14 is much less tenable” (pp. 1246–47).

- e. Supposedly, the title Malachi was mistakenly derived from Malachi 3:1. Support for this is found in the Septuagint and the Targum of Jonathan. The Septuagint and the Targum translated *mal'ākî* as a title rather than as a personal name. The Septuagint has rendered this as “by the hand of his angel [messenger]” and the Targum as “by the hand of my messenger, whose name is called Ezra the Scribe.”

PROBLEM: If this was derived from 3:1 by a redactor, the redactor was a very poor editor for grammatically “*my messenger*” does not make sense in the heading of 1:1 since God should be referred as in the third person, “his messenger.”

- f. Building upon the assumption that Malachi was originally anonymous like Zechariah 9:1 and 12:1, “by the hand of Malachi” was added in Malachi 1:1 in order to distinguish between it and the two anonymous prophecies in Zechariah and to obtain, consequently, the desired number of minor prophets, viz., twelve.

PROBLEM: If we logically pushed this argument, then we should end up with 14 Minor Prophets instead of 12.

2. Arguments for Taking Malachi as a Personal Name

Assuming the validity of the problems mentioned in connection with the arguments for this being a title, there are four arguments that favor this being a personal name.

- a. If Malachi is a title, then this is the only book in the Minor Prophets that begins with a title and not the personal name of the prophet.
- b. When *b'yaḏ*, “through the hand of,” is used to indicate the human instrument of God’s revelation, it is followed by a personal name.
- c. The historical understanding of this as a reference to a personal name is found in Theodotion, Symmachus, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Vulgate.
- d. 2 Esdras (second century A.D.) lists the last three Minor Prophets as *Aggaeus*, *Secharias*, and *Malachias*. In reference to Malachi, an additional remark was added, “who is also called the angel [messenger] of the Lord” (Verhoef, p. 156).

C. Date

Because the Jews were under the leadership of a governor (1:8) and the temple in Jerusalem had been completed and was being used for religious purposes (1:6–10), most would agree that this book was written after 516 B.C. Since the internal evidence in the book suggests that temple worship had deteriorated drastically (1:6–14; 2:1–9; 3:6–12), a considerable period of time must have transpired since the days when Haggai and Zechariah had delivered their oracles with the people's repentant response. The disagreement among scholars pertains to whether Malachi should be dated before, during, or after Ezra and Nehemiah. A further problem affects one's view of the dating. Some modern critical scholars have preferred to view Nehemiah as having preceded Ezra. Since there is no solid evidence for this, the traditional dates will be followed here. Ezra arrived in Palestine in 458 B.C. with a small group of exiles. Nehemiah followed him in 445 B.C. Both worked together for a period of time. Nehemiah stayed in Palestine for a period of twelve years and returned to Susa in 433 B.C. After an unknown period of time, he returned to Jerusalem for his second visit. Each of these views about the dating of Malachi will be briefly summarized.

1. Before Ezra-Nehemiah, one or two decades before 458 B.C.

The following arguments support this view.

- a. Malachi does not reflect any knowledge of either the person or work of Ezra or Nehemiah. For example, when Malachi discusses the issues of mixed marriages (Mal 2:10–12), he completely ignores Ezra and Nehemiah's legislation on this subject (Ezra 10:3; Neh 13:23–27). In Nehemiah 13:10–13 Nehemiah had made provisions to take care of the temple staff through compulsory giving. Malachi does not refer to this in 3:6–12 (for conservatives favoring this view, see the preference expressed by Baldwin [p. 213] and Bullock [pp. 338–39]).

PROBLEM: The use of Nehemiah 13:23–27 is somewhat irrelevant since it would fit a date around 433 B.C. The use of Ezra 10:3 is based on the assumption that Ezra procured permanent results. In fact, the opposite situation is probably the case since Nehemiah found it necessary to rebuke the Israelites for their mixed marriages (Neh 10:28–32); and, on his return trip, he was forced to introduce legislation against these (Neh 13:23–29). In addition, this argument is based on silence. Why do Ezra and Nehemiah not reflect any knowledge of Malachi?

- b. Critical scholars have noted that Malachi does not reflect knowledge of the Priestly Code and since this did not receive its final redaction until 444 B.C., Malachi had to be written before then.

PROBLEM: If one does not accept the tenets of the Documentary Hypothesis, this has no validity.

2. Contemporary with Ezra and Nehemiah, ca. 450 B.C.

Those who hold this view date Malachi during the early phase of Ezra's work but before Nehemiah's first trip to Jerusalem. Because of the similar conditions shared between the book of Malachi and Nehemiah 13:10–29 and because of the absence of any mention of Nehemiah's reforming work in Israel, Malachi must have been written just prior to his becoming governor (for a proponent of this view, see Harrison, p. 961).

PROBLEM: The lack of information about Nehemiah is an *argumentum e silentio*. The same argument could be applied to Isaiah who does not mention Hezekiah's reforms and to Jeremiah's apparent neglect of referring to Josiah's reforms. This same argument from silence could be applied in just the opposite way. If Malachi preceded Ezra, why did he not refer to Malachi? This is an irrelevant argument in either direction at this point.

3. Between Nehemiah's two trips to Palestine, shortly after 433 B.C.
 - a. Before Nehemiah arrived on his first trip to assume the governorship of Judah, temple worship was maintained by the Persian government (Ezra 6:6–12; 7:12–26). Malachi's exhortation for Israel to bring their tithes and offerings to the temple (Mal 3:6–12) has a greater significance if it is understood in light of the covenant renewal that took place in Nehemiah's days. It was during these days that the Israelites accepted their responsibilities of maintaining the temple personnel and worship (Neh 10).
 - b. Malachi 1:8 could not be referring to the days when Nehemiah was governor since he had relinquished his rights to remuneration (Neh 5:1–18). This would indicate a time after his governorship (assuming the validity of the arguments against the time prior to Ezra's time), apparently after he returned to Susa.
 - c. Prior to Nehemiah's second trip to Jerusalem, the priests, and Levites appeared to have maintained a positive attitude toward the temple and its worship (Ezra 3:8–13; 6:16; Neh 3:1, 17; 8:7–9, 12, 14–19; 9:4–15, 38; 10:28–29; 12:30). During his trip to Jerusalem, Nehemiah accused them of defiling the priesthood (Neh 13:29).
 - d. There are a number of similarities between the charges made by Malachi and Nehemiah.
 - 1) The issue of mixed marriages, cf. Malachi 2:10–12 with Nehemiah 13:25–27;
 - 2) Concern with Israel's failure to maintain the temple personnel, cf. Malachi 3:6–12 with Nehemiah 13:10–14, 31;
 - 3) Negligence of the priestly duties was briefly indicated in Nehemiah 13:9, 30, but clearly elaborated upon in Malachi 1:6–2:9.

D. Literary Composition

1. Unity/Authenticity

Most scholars agree that Malachi reflects a basic unity. The unique characteristics of the various dialogues reflect that this is the work of a single mind. The book of Malachi reflects the same historical background, uniformity in language, and a typical dialogue style that occurs at the beginning of each major section.

The authenticity of 2:11–12 and 4:4–6 (Heb 3:22–24) has been the sections of Malachi that have been most often questioned.

a. 2:11–12

This passage is dealing with the subject of mixed marriages, i.e., an Israelite married to a foreigner. As a few critics maintain, the subject of mixed marriages in 2:11–12

does not fit the immediate context dealing with divorce in 2:14–16 (see note by critical scholar John Smith who disagrees with this critical understanding, *Malachi*, p. 4). However, Malachi 2:11–12 is not in a context that exclusively deals with divorce in 2:14–16, but is a part of a broader context that begins in 2:10, which focuses on the general subject of covenant infractions in the area of marriage.

b. 4:4–6

This is the passage where there has been the widest unanimity among critics that it had to come from the hand of a later interpolator. The use of Moses and Elijah is somewhat abrupt since they have not been previously mentioned. “However, the ideas of the Law and the eschatological prophet who will prepare the way for the terrible Day of the Lord are certainly not alien to the book. Malachi was concerned about the stipulations of the Law, both cultic and moral, and predicted the coming of the eschatological prophet” (Bullock, pp. 337–38).

c. 1:1, 11–14; 2:2, 7; 3:1b.

These seven verses are also occasionally questioned (see Verhoef, pp. 163–64).

2. Literary Features and Form

Contrary to most prophets whose works are characterized by literary forms such as prophetic oracles against foreign nations and gods, Malachi consistently uses a catechetical style, a question-answer format that is confrontationally addressed to the nation. This question-answer format is consistently cast throughout the book with this confrontational tone that is found in an identifiable tripartite arrangement (assertion-objection-response). Egon Pfeffier has called this form a *Disputationsworte* or “speeches of disputation” (“Die Disputationsworte im Buche Malaechi,” pp. 546–48). Many commentators have followed this rubric, such as Baldwin (p. 300), Glazier-McDonald (p. 19), Hill (*Malachi*, pp. 34–37), Ralph Smith (*Malachi*, p. 300), Stuart (pp. 1248–51), Verhoef (p. 171), and Wendland (p. 112). The prophet’s “message is particularly striking because of its rationalized, didactic cast” (Glazier-McDonald, p. 19). A key in understanding his confrontational style is his use of rhetorical questions followed by Malachi’s answer to the rhetorical questions. Seven times, he places these questions in the mouths of his objectors (1:2, 6, 7; 2:17; 3:7, 8, 13) and several times, he asks his audience rhetorical questions (for example, 1:6, 8, 9; 2:10, 15; 3:2). These help to illustrate the disputative nature of his work. While the disputation speech is the major literary feature/form in Malachi, there are many other features, such as alliteration in 2:10, 11, 12, 14, chiasm in 1:2, 3:11, hyperbole in 3:19, and irony in 1:9 (for more examples, see Hill, *Malachi*, pp. 38–41).

3. Genre

Because of the nature of Malachi’s disputation literary style, most categorize this as some form of disputation; for example, Stuart labels this as a “rhetorical disputation” (p. 1248). This disputative style is found in other places such as Micah 2:6–11, Jeremiah 2:23–25, 29–32; 29:24–32; and Haggai 1:2–11. However, Malachi’s use is on a much more extended level. As we evaluate this in light of the book of Malachi being called an oracle, *maśśā*, in 1:1, I prefer to label the genre of Malachi as a prophetic disputation (so Deutsch, p. 68). Stuart’s labeling this as a “rhetorical disputation” (rhetorical

describes Malachi's question and answer format) is essentially the same as my identification of this as a "prophetic disputation," since he also describes Malachi as "six prophetic disputation speeches" (Stuart, "Malachi," pp. 1247–48). In reality, the distinction between a rhetorical disputation and a prophetic disputation is a difference without a distinction.

4. Structure

Through using a triadic disputational form in the six pericopes of Malachi, the overall structure of the book can be seen. For purposes of simplicity, we should note that Malachi's disputational format involves a basic question-and-answer format (Alden, 7:704). However, we can more precisely say that each pericope has three basic elements: assertion-objection-response format, though different labels have been used to represent each of these three parts. For example, Verhoef lists the parts of this triad as God's statement-People's Response-God's motivation (p. 171), Chisholm as assertion-people's question-response (*Interpreting*, p. 279), Hill declaration-refutation-rebuttal (*Malachi*, p. 145), and Wendland assertion-objection-response (p. 112). While recognizing this same triad, Stuart expands the third part into two: response becomes response and implication (p. 1248). Stuart's expansion is helpful in delineating what God's actual response is to the stated concern and what are implications from God's response. Nevertheless, Stuart's implication is more simply left as a response that allows for implications. At the end of the day, while various descriptive titles are used for each of the three parts of this triad, the various commentators reflect that Malachi's disputative triad is a clear rhetorical feature of his work. Recognition of this triad is also helpful in defining what the actual parameters are for each pericope in Malachi. With each pericope, Malachi generally makes a theologically acceptable statement. This is then followed by a projection of a question from the people. Malachi finally presents Yahweh's response to the people's objection along with its implications (see Wendland [p. 112] who refers to this as a linear arrangement). This style is reflected in six pericopes: 1:2–5, 1:6–2:9; 2:10–16; 2:17–3:5; 3:6–12; 3:13–4:3:

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Assertion</i>	<i>Objection(s)</i>	<i>Response</i>
1. 1:2–5	1:2a	1:2b	1:2c–5
2. 1:6–2:9	1:6a, 7a	1:6b, 7b	1:7c–2:9
3. 2:10–16	2:10–13	2:14a	2:14b–16
4. 2:17–3:5	2:17a	2:17b	2:17c–3:5
5. 3:6–12	3:6–7b, 8a	3:7c, 8b	3:8c–12
6. 3:13–4:3	3:13a	3:13b	3:14–4:3

E. Historical Background

1. Babylon

The Babylonians were responsible for three major deportations of Jews in 605, 597, and 586 B.C. The last deportation also included the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (see above). The Babylonian empire began to decline with Nebuchadnezzar's death (ruled from 605–562 B.C.) in 562, the Neo-Babylonia Empire declined quickly. His sons Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk) ruled from 562 to 560. He was the king who released Jehoiachin from house arrest while living in Babylon in 561 B.C. (Jer 52:31). Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 B.C. At the time of the fall, Babylon was under the rule of Belshazzar (553–539). Belshazzar had been made coregent with his father Nabonidus (556–539) in 556 B.C.

2. Persia

There were three major returns from Babylon during the Persian period. The first was lead by Zerubbabel in 538 B.C., the second by Ezra in 458 B.C., and the third by Nehemiah in 444 B.C. After the first return, the temple was rebuilt (see Ezra 1–6, Hag, and Zech). After the second return, the people needed to return to their covenant responsibilities (Ezra 7–10). After the third return, the Israelites rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (for more information reflecting the contact between Persia and Judah in this postexilic period, see the following chart [the chart has been taken from *Bible Knowledge Commentary: OT*, p. 654]).

Chronology of the Postexilic Period

Persian Kings	Dates of Their Reigns	Biblical Events	Scripture References	Dates
Cyrus	559-30 B.C.	Decree of Cyrus for the return	Ezra 1:1-4	538 B.C.
		First Return of 49,897 exiles under Zerubbabel (to build the Temple)	Ezra 2	538
		The altar and temple foundation built	Ezra 3:1-4:5	536
Cambyses Smerdis Darius I, Hystaspes	530-22 522 521-486	Haggai prophesied	Book of Haggai	520
		Zechariah prophesied	Book of Zechariah	520-18
		The temple completed	Ezra 5-6	515
		Accusation against Judah	Ezra 4:6	486
Xerxes (Ahasureus)	485-65	Esther becomes queen	Esther 2:17	479
		Artaxerxes stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem	Ezra 4:7-23	c. 464-58
Artaxerxes I (Artashasta)	464-24	Second return of 4,000-5,000 exiles, under Ezra (to beautify the temple and reform the people)	Ezra 7-10	458
		Third return of exiles, under Nehemiah (to build the walls of Jerusalem)	Book of Nehemiah	444
		Nehemiah's second return	Nehemiah 13:6	c. 430
		Malachi prophesied	Book of Malachi	450-30 (?)

F. Occasion and Purpose

1. Occasion

Israel had become apathetic toward the temple ritual and the Mosaic Law. In short, they had become indifferent to the Mosaic Covenant (see above).

2. Purpose

The major thrust of Malachi's work was to apply the Mosaic Covenant to this postexilic community of Israelites who had lost sight of their distinctiveness as God's chosen nation. Consequently, Malachi was often negative because he reminded Israel of the consequences of disobedience. However, this must be tempered against his first pericope in 1:2–5 where he reminds Israel of their privileged position. His purpose was to call Judah back to a renewed allegiance to the God of the covenant. According to Blaising, the theme of Malachi is "covenant blessings require covenant faithfulness" ("Malachi, p. 1574).

G. Canonicity

Historically there have not been any questions about Malachi's canonicity. It is found in all authoritative listings and mentioned in the New Testament in Matthew 11:10; 17:12; Mark 1:2; 9:11, 12; Luke 1:17; and Romans 9:13.

A fragment containing Malachi 1:13–14 has been found at Qumran.

H. Text

The MT has some difficulties, especially in 2:10–16, and this suggests that the MT's quality is not as good as most of the Minor Prophets (Stuart, "Malachi," p. 1255). However, the MT, along with consultation from other manuscripts and versions, is serviceable and adequate for establishing the Vorlage of Malachi (see the discussion of the textual material for Malachi by Hill, *Malachi*, pp. 3–12).

II. Exegetical Analysis

Putting aside the superscription in 1:1 and the concluding summary and exhortation in 4:4–6, Malachi is made up of six forms we have called disputations. The first disputation is Yahweh’s electing covenant love for Israel as demonstrated by His rejection of Esau (1:2–5), the second is the priests denounced for polluting the table of Yahweh and corrupting the covenant of Levi (1:6–2:9), the third is Judah’s unfaithfulness through violation of Yahweh’s expectations in marriage (2:10–16), the fourth is Yahweh’s coming to judge the wicked and to purify His people (2:17–3:5), the fifth is Yahweh’s desire to bless His unfaithful people (3:6–12), and the sixth Yahweh’s affirmation of justice by contrasting the fate of the righteous and the wicked (3:13–4:3).

A. Superscription, 1:1

1. “Oracle”

The Hebrew word from which “oracle” is translated, *maśśā’*, is used 28 times in the OT (2 Kgs 9:25; 2 Chr 24:27 Prov 30:1; 31:1; Isa 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6; Jer 23:33, 34, 36, 38 (3 times); Lam 2:14; Ezek 12:10; Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1; and Mal 1:1). Early interpreters were divided concerning how this term should be rendered. It has been understood as either a “burden” (so KJV and NKJV) or an “oracle” (so NASB and NIV). The Targum of Jonathan, Aquilla, and the Syriac version have supported the former rendering and the Septuagint has supported the latter rendering. We will briefly look at the more cogent arguments supporting each of these.

a. “Burden”

When *maśśā’* is rendered as “burden,” it is usually correlated with the Hebrew verb *nāśā’*, which means to “lift, bear, carry” and as such, it is a burden, a message that is difficult to carry. There are a number of arguments that support this (see “**נָשָׂא**” *TWOT*, 2:602 by Walter C. Kaiser; in his brief discussion, Kaiser relies on Hengstenberg’s discussion of Zechariah 9:1 in the unabridged edition of *Christology of the Old Testament*; for more up-to-date support of this idea, see P. A. H. de Boer, *An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Term Maśśā’* [Leiden: Brill, 1948]).

- 1) The focal point in every context where this is used is judgment. This term exclusively denotes a burden, a message that is hard to carry because it is consumed with judgment.
- 2) The noun *maśśā’* has no other cognate nouns that are used in the sense of “oracle” or “utterance.” Connected with this it is often pointed out that verbal root associated with *maśśā’*, *nāśā’*, is never used in the sense of speaking (so Keil, 2:8).

b. “Oracle”

When *maśśā’* is translated as “oracle,” it is usually correlated with the Hebrew verb *nāśā’*, used in the sense of lifting up such as a voice (*qôl*) or an oracle (*māšāl*). As such, *maśśā’* has the idea of an utterance, a prophetic pronouncement or an oracle. This is meaning assigned to it by BDB (p. 672), KB (p. 570), and CHAL (p. 217; for further support, see Kenneth Barker, “Zechariah,” in vol. 7 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 657; and Cathcart’s work).

- 1) Though the majority of the contexts where this term is used reflect judgment, there are a few notable exceptions such as 2 Chronicles 24:27 and Zechariah 9:1 and 12:1. With these last two references, a number of scholars have noted that these contexts include judgment. This point must be conceded; however, the point of the overall context is a future hope of Israel; this is to say, the contexts are a mixture: salvation and judgment oracles. (9:1–11:17 focuses on the advent and rejection of Israel’s Messiah and 12:1–13:9 focuses on His advent and reception (see Barker, “Zechariah,” p. 657). Therefore, my point is that since this term does not exclusively denote judgment, why not translate it on a more general level?
- 2) It should also be conceded that *masśā’* has no other cognate nouns that are used in the sense of “oracle” or “utterance.” However, not all the cognates mean “burden”; for example, 1. *nāsī’* (I) meaning “one lifted up, i.e., a chief prince” (BDB, p. 672); 2. *nāsī’* (II), “rising mist, vapour” (ibid.); 3. *masśā’ā*, “the uplifted (cloud)” (ibid., p. 673); 4. *śē’ēt*, “exaltation, dignity,” “swelling,” “uprising” (ibid.). There are two cognates that are used many times as a burden: 1. *masśā’* (a homonym of our word under discussion), meaning “load, burden, lifting, bearing, tribute,” however, it is not always negative at times it has a positive use such as an “uplifting” (ibid., p. 672); and 2. *mas’ēt*, “uprising” or “burden, portion” (ibid., p. 673). We should also consider its verbal use. The verb *nāsā’* not only means to carry, but it also means to “lift up.” For example, one may lift up his voice as in Judges 9:7 and Isaiah 52:8. Quite significant is its use in Numbers 23:7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23 where Balaam lifts up (*nāsā’*) an oracle, *māsāl*. Therefore, a *masśā’* may refer to lifting up one’s voice, i.e., to utter an oracle (Barker, “Zechariah,” in vol. 7 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 657).

c. Conclusion

I think at this point it is better to understand this term in the sense that the standard Hebrew lexicons take it. As such, I would understand *masśā’* to have a general meaning, a prophetic oracle. This prophetic oracle often involves judgment but not always. In our context in Malachi, the judgment idea is clearly involved in this prophetic oracle. Because of its close connection with “the word of Yahweh” in this context, I would prefer to translate *masśā’* as “oracle.”

2. “The word of the LORD”

As was noted earlier (see above), “the word of the LORD” is almost exclusively used to denote Yahweh’s special revelation. In this context it is possibly in an appositional position with “oracle.”

3. “To Israel”

In this book Israel is used (1:1, 5; 2:11, 16; 4:1) interchangeably with Judah (2:11; 3:4), descendants of Jacob (3:6), and Jacob (2:12). This is apparently a broad designation used to denote the whole remnant of Israel (see above; Hag 1:12). In the historical setting of Malachi, it is the restored Israelite nation, the representatives of God’s covenant people

(Verhoef, pp. 190–91).

4. “Through Malachi”

The preposition “through” is a translation of the Hebrew *b’yad*, “through the hand of” (see above); and reflects personal agency. It indicates that Malachi is speaking as Yahweh’s representative.

B. First Disputation: Yahweh’s Covenant Love for Israel As Demonstrated by His Rejection of Esau, 1:2–5

The thrust of this first section is to show that Yahweh’s rejection of Esau was a demonstration of His covenant love for Israel. With Malachi’s first disputation, He makes an assertion about His covenant love for Israel (v. 2a), this is followed by Israel’s question or objection to Yahweh’s assertion (v. 2b), and then Yahweh responds to correct Israel’s objection (vv. 2c–5). In keeping with our earlier discussion of Malachi’s Structure, we can breakdown vv. 2–5 like this:

Assertion, 1:2a	“...says Yahweh Almighty”
Objection, 1:2b	“But you ask, ...”
Response, 1:2c–5	Yahweh’s response

1. Yahweh’s Assertion about His Love for Israel, v. 2a

“‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD”—this is rendered in English as a perfect tense, showing that Yahweh’s love started in antiquity for Israel and has continued until the present. The verb love with God as its subject is used “32 times in the OT. The objects of his love are righteous deeds (Ps. 11:7; 33:5; 37:28; etc.), those who pursue righteousness (Prov. 15:9), and are in themselves righteous (Ps. 146:8). The Lord loves those he disciplines (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6), and the alien (Deut. 10:18). Abraham is called ‘the loved one,’ the friend of God (Isa 48:14). He loves Mount Zion (Ps. 78:68; 87:2) and his ‘sanctuary,’ here presumably Israel (Mal. 2:11). In most passages his love is directed toward Israel (Deut. 7:6–8; 7:13; 23:5; Ps. 47:5 [Eng. 4]; Isa. 43:4; Jer. 31:3; Hos. 11:1; 14:5; Mal. 1:2; 2:11) and their predecessors, the patriarchs (Deut. 4:37; 10:15)” (Verhoef, p. 196).

God’s love for his chosen nation is unconditional and sovereign. Its classic expression is found in Deuteronomy 7:6–8. “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefather that he brought out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” This passage is quite clear that God’s love was an act of His sovereign will and it was not because Israel met any conditions; it was just the opposite, it was unconditional, electing love. This love was initiated with Abraham and continued through the patriarchs (Isa 41:8; Deut 4:37). As Deuteronomy 7:8 indicates this love was also revealed with His miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Jeremiah 31:3 calls it an “everlasting love” (see Verhoef, pp. 196–97).

2. Israel's Objection to Yahweh's Assertion about His Love for Israel, v. 2b

“But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’”—The question posed by Israel should not be taken as a literal quotation; rather, Malachi verbalizes the people's position. When the prophet cites the people as saying “how have you loved us,” the emphasis is not on the fact of God's love but the specifics of God's love (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1282). What are the immediate proofs of God's love? This question as summarized by Malachi for his disputational purposes reflects the attitude of Judah, an unbelieving type of attitude. It reflects that they doubted Yahweh's covenant faithfulness. Approximately a hundred years has passed since the exile and they were still living as a nation in a rather insignificant state. Neither God's theocratic king nor kingdom had arrived. In its place, Judah was living under Persian ruler. In sinful unbelief, the Yehudites questioned Yahweh's covenant love.

3. Yahweh's Correction of Israel's Misunderstanding His Love for Them, vv. 2c–5

a. Yahweh's Explanation of His Assertion about His Love for Israel, vv. 2c–3

Two facts demonstrate Yahweh's love for Israel

1) The Expression of Yahweh's Love in His Choosing of Jacob, v. 2c

“Was not Esau Jacob's brother?”—the manner in which this question is expressed implies an answer of yes, “Yes, Esau was Jacob's brother.” How does this answer the preceding question, “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’” God is saying that the key to understanding His love for Jacob is demonstrated by the brotherhood of Jacob and Esau. The historical background for this is Genesis 25:21–34. Isaac and Rebekah had been married and she was unable to conceive. So, Isaac prays for God to reverse her inability to conceive. In response to Isaac's prayer, God removes his wife's barrenness by enabling her to conceive. During her pregnancy, she has tremendous difficulties because she was carrying twins. Because of the difficulties, Rebekah inquires of the LORD for assistance. Yahweh responds in v. 23 with this: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.” Jacob and Esau were twins with Esau being minutes older. As such, Esau was the firstborn and entitled to the inheritance rights of his family. Yet, God passed over the eldest and set His love on Jacob. The blessings should have gone to Esau but it went to the lesser of the two. This is why the next clause says, “Yet I have loved Jacob.”

“Yet I have loved Jacob”—the waw-consecutive functions in a logical manner in this context showing a contrast, and is appropriately translated as “Yet.” We should further note that the verbal, a preterite, denotes a perfect aspect, “I have loved,” a past action with continuing results. It is a love that started in the past and was still being manifested in Malachi's day. Against the background of Genesis 25:23 and Deuteronomy 7:6–8, we must understand that God's love was freely, in sovereign grace, and unconditionally bestowed upon Jacob. From these passages, we will briefly consider four aspects of God's love.

a) God's love involved a choosing of Jacob over Esau. In Genesis 25:23 Jacob was chosen over Esau. In Romans 1–8, Paul has been dealing with the subject of

justification by grace. Through God's justifying grace Jew and Gentile are made equals in the body of Christ. When one has been made a beneficiary of God's justifying grace, nothing can remove him from that position (8:31–39). If salvation by grace is as certain as God portrays it, what happened to His elect nation? In Romans 9–11, Paul answers this objection by showing how soteriology is essentially theocentric. In 9:6, Paul authoritatively asserts that Israel's hardening is not a result of a failure of God's word. This is true as Paul further affirms, "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." This is to say, that not everyone in the elect nation is individually elect. There is a difference between unbelieving Jews and Jews who are believing Christians. The programmatic statement of Paul in v. 6 is further developed in vv. 7–9 by marshaling biblical evidence to show that not all of Abraham's descendants are children of promise. He continues his thought further by showing that God's electing purposes discriminated between Jacob and Esau in vv. 10–13.

¹⁰Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹²not by works but him who calls—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' ¹³Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

To prove his point in vv. 10–13 Paul has merged Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2–3. Based on God's electing purposes, Paul is teaching that God's salvation is an absolute certainty. God's electing purposes are certainly affirmed by Jacob and Esau.

- b) God's love for Jacob was unconditional. We should have also notice in Genesis 25:23 Jacob was chosen before he had done anything good or bad. As such, his election was not according to meeting any requirements. This is why Paul maintains in Romans 9:12 God's election was "not by works but him who calls."
- c) God's love for Jacob was also a choice reflecting God's sovereignty. There was nothing in Jacob that caused God to choose him. In fact, God could have passed over him just as he did with his brother Esau. Nothing in Jacob or anyone else coerced or coaxed God into choosing Jacob. Paul says in Romans 9:11–12 that Jacob's election was not based upon anything meritorious in him. Rather, Jacob was the object of God's love to demonstrate that God's purposes in election are inviolable.
- d) God's love for Jacob finally reflects God's freedom. Our pluralistic society defines freedom as the ability to choose in a manner that has not been previously influenced by us or anyone else. We want to operate from a position of neutrality and with no biases. If this is the definition that we accept for freedom, we have a tremendous problem for God cannot lie. If God cannot lie, He cannot be influenced or inclined to lie. If God is not potentially able to lie or sin, then He is not free. This is an abominable understanding of freedom. A more biblical understanding of freedom is that freedom is our ability to choose according to our strongest inclination. At the point of decision, we make choices

based upon the strongest inclination of our heart. Man lies and sins because it is consistent with his nature, his depravity, and moral corruption. God does not lie and sin because His nature is perfect and holy. As such, God's freedom means that God's will is not bound by anything outside Himself. Therefore, God is unable to lie or sin. God is exclusively limited by His nature and will. "God's decisions and actions are not determined by consideration of any factors outside himself. They are simply a matter of his own free choice" (Erickson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:278). Since God set His love on Jacob before he had done anything good or bad, God was not influenced by anything in Jacob. God's freedom was the overflow of God's infinite mercy.

2) The Expression of Yahweh's Love in His Rejection of Esau, v. 3

"But Esau I have hated"—when hate is used of God, it does not denote the same emotional nuance that it does for man. Nevertheless, it does show rejection or condemnation. Some such as Walter Kaiser have attempted to soften the significance of this contrast between Yahweh's loving and hating. This is done by arguing that "hate" means "loved less" (*Malachi*, p. 29). This is supported by some passages where hate is probably used in the sense of loving less, e.g., Genesis 29:31 where Leah is hated but in v. 30 it is stated that Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. The context of Genesis 29 signifies that hate has the nuance of loving less. However, there are a number of passages against this interpretation. If we properly understand the background to this passage Genesis 25:23–24 and Deuteronomy 7:6–8, it seems to me that it is impossible to understand God's "love" and "hate" in a comparative sense. God unconditionally chose Jacob and therefore rejected Esau. In the context of Malachi, it included the destinies of their descendants. That is the point of the remainder of v. 3, "and I [Yahweh] turned his [Esau's] mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." Thus, God's hatred included not only Esau but also his future descendants. To say anything less than God's hatred included Esau and his family is to undermine the text. In addition, Malachi accurately represents the assessment of people surrounding Edom as recognizing Yahweh's hatred of Edom. These people descriptively label Edom as "The Wicked Land" and "The People that Yahweh Cursed Forever" (see Stuart's translation on p. 1286). While it is certainly true that someone who is hated is definitely loved less than one who is not hated, the intent of Malachi's language is too emphatic to say this means anything other than God "hated" Edom. Whatever hermeneutical grid one uses, the text of Malachi unambiguously communicates that Edom is "hated" by God, they are a condemned people. Theologically, we would say they are under a sentence of divine judgment that can only be offset by God's sovereign electing love satisfies the demands of a holy God's wrath against them.

Looking past the Edomites in Malachi's time, history tells us that the downfall of Edom began in the 6th century B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Moab and Ammon. Nomadic tribes began to infiltrate Edom after this. The Nabateans who began to force the Edomites out of their land in the fifth century B.C. followed this. This may be what Malachi 1:3b is referring to. In any event, what is clear in vv. 2c–3 is that Yahweh's electing love was manifested toward Israel in terms of His

covenant love. God's hatred of Esau indicates that the Edomites did not experience the blessings of God's covenant love; they experienced the antithesis of divine blessing.

Does Malachi 1:2–3 have any bearing on Jacob and Esau's eternal destinies? It appears to me that Malachi is not explicitly teaching anything about either Jacob's or Esau's eternal destinies. The same is also true in Genesis 25. The point in each passage appears to be concerning each individual and the future of each one's posterity. However, as we have previously seen in the context of Romans 9:10–13, Paul is dealing with the eternal destinies of the individual Jacob and the individual Esau. Though Genesis 25 and Malachi 1 relate to each son and his future descendants, we can say that the foundation for Paul's teaching is found by implication in these two passages when interpreted in light of God's overall progressive revelation (note especially Jesus' strong statements on this subject in John 6). Paul is explaining a principle that ties these concepts together. Piper has summarized well how Paul is using these Old Testament passages in Romans 9.

“Paul's main goal in Rom 9:6b–13 was *not* to prove that God freely elected the *nation* of Israel, but rather his goal was to establish a *principle* by which he could explain how individual Israelites were accursed and yet the word of God had not fallen. What Rom 9:6b proves is that in Paul's mind the election of Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau established an *ongoing principle* whereby God elects beneficiaries of his blessing not only in the establishment of the nation Israel by Jacob and his sons, but also within that very nation so that ‘all those from Israel, these are *not* Israel.’ Since the unconditional election of Israelites from within (physical) Israel to be (true, spiritual) Israel cannot be construed as an election to ‘theocratic privileges’ (for all physical Israel has those), and since the immediately preceding distinction made between some Israelites and others (Rom 9:3–5) was that some are accursed and cut off from Christ, therefore we must conclude that Paul views ‘the purpose of God according to election’ (9:11c) as a purpose to be free from human influence not only in the determination of historical roles but also in the determination of who within Israel are saved and who are not” (Piper, *The Justification of God*, p. 48).

b. Yahweh's Expansion of His Explanation, vv. 4–5

“But this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD,’” v. 4—in expanding on his explanation, Yahweh points out that though Edom may have had plans to rebuild after having begun to face destruction, however, Yahweh would make sure that whatever they attempted to rebuild He would tear down. This prophecy is clearly fulfilled with the subsequent history of Edom. Filling in the void left by the Babylonians, Arabic nomadic tribes infiltrated Edom. An Arabian tribe known as the Nabateans began driving the Edomites out of their land in the fifth century and continued this until it was completed in 312 B.C. (see *ISBE*, rev. ed., s.v. “Edom,” by B. MacDonald, 2:18–21). Thus, Yahweh did not complete his destruction until this latter time.

Let us consider four observations about God's hatred for Esau.

- 1) God's hatred of Esau in Malachi 1:3 means that God worked in such a way that his family's property became a wasteland.
- 2) In v. 4a God's hatred of Esau means that He would continue to oppose them as the Edomites resisted His judgment.
- 3) In v. 4b God's hatred of Esau also means God's judgment would run such a course that his descendants and their property would be called "the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD." Esau begat children in His likeness and they deservedly become known as "the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD."
- 4) In v. 4c God's hatred of Esau means that he and his posterity are under God's wrath, they are under a state of condemnation. They are hated by God and as such are "a people always under the wrath of the LORD." As we compare Edom's condemnation under the wrath of God with Genesis 25:23 and Romans 9:10–13, we should soberly observe that God chose to bless Jacob and to reject Esau. Before their birth, both Jacob and Esau were already in Adam. As such, they were both in a state of condemnation. God's condemnation of Esau was a divine choice to leave Esau in his sin and to let him obtain what he deserved. God did not have to exert any divine energy to make Esau wicked for Esau was already that way in Adam. The result of God withholding His electing love from Esau was that he ran his course of wickedness and got what he deserved. All God did was to leave Esau as well as his descendants on his own. Esau and his posterity were under God's wrath.

"You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel,' v. 5—Israel should see how Yahweh deals with Edom in His awesome and terrifying wrath and appreciate His love for them and they should say "Great is the LORD!"

C. Second Disputation: The Priests Denounced for Polluting the Table of Yahweh and Corrupting the Covenant of Levi, 1:6–2:9

The thrust of this section is a rebuke of the priests for showing disrespect to God in their priestly obligations and a challenge to show genuine covenant loyalty to their God by following their covenant obligations. In essence, this polemical indictment reflects God's holy and prescribed demands for worship under the Mosaic Covenant. God had demanded from the Levites worship as He prescribed it in the Torah, yet they miserably failed in their covenant obligations.

This is a difficult section to outline (see Wendland, pp. 112, 116–17; Stuart, "Malachi," p. 1294; Verhoef, pp. 172–74). For purposes of simplification, we will essentially follow the arrangement of Chisholm (*Interpreting*, p. 281), with some modifications from Wendland (p. 112). In v. 6a Yahweh makes an assertion. This is followed by the people's objection in v. 6b. The assertion of v. 6a is specified in 7a and this is followed by a specified objection in v. 7b. Yahweh then makes a prolonged response in 1:7c through 2:9. In 1:7c–14 Yahweh explains his assertion and from this provides a warning in 2:1–9. This arrangement is like this:

Assertion, 1:6a, 7a “...says Yahweh Almighty”

Objection, 1:6b, 7b “But you ask,...”

Response, 1:7c–2:9 Part 1—1:7c–14

Part 2—2:1–9

We will divide this unit up in a threefold manner: introduction, 1:6a–7b, the first part of the response in 1:7c–14, and the second part of the response in 2:1–9.

1. Introduction, 1:6a–7b

There are four divisions in vv. 6a–7b: Yahweh’s assertion about the priests’ polluting His table (v. 6a), the priests’ objection to Yahweh’s assertion about the priests’ polluting His table (v. 6b), a specification of Yahweh’s assertion about the priests’ polluting His table (v. 7a), and a specification of the priests’ objection to Yahweh’s assertion about the priests’ polluting His table (v. 7b). As we have seen in vv. 2–5, this introductory unit includes the assertion and objection segment of our linear pattern. This breaks down into a format of A–B–A¹–B¹ (cf. Wendland, p. 116).

A	B
Yahweh’s Assertion, v. 6a	Priests’ Objections, v. 6b
A ¹	B ¹
Yahweh’s Assertion, v. 7a	Priests’ Objections, v. 7b

a. Yahweh’s Assertion about the Priests’ Polluting His Table, 1:6a

This second disputation begins with Yahweh making a universally accepted assertion about proper social relations in Israelite society. It was culturally normative for a son to honor his father and for a servant to honor his master.

“‘If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the LORD Almighty”—For Israel this should have been an indisputable fact. “The father-son relationship between God and Israel was stated at the beginning of the Exodus deliverance, when Moses proclaimed the word of the Lord to Pharaoh: ‘Israel is my firstborn son.... Let my son go’ (Exod. 4:22, 23; cf. Hos. 11:1). Afterward this relationship was mentioned explicitly (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; Mal. 2:10; Ps. 89:27 [?]) or by way of comparing it with the human relationship between father and son (Deut. 1:31; 8:5; Ps. 103:13). L. M. Muntingh rightly observed that the father-son relationship between God and Israel must be considered a covenant relationship” (Verhoef, p. 212).

“It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name”—Yahweh specifically indicted the priests. The verb “show contempt” is a participial form and may denote a continuous despising of Yahweh.

b. The Priests’ Objection to Yahweh’s Assertion about the Priests’ Polluting His Table, 1:6b

“But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’”—in explaining the response of the priests to this assertion, Malachi places the priests in a role of claiming to be ignorant of Yahweh’s assertion.

- c. A Specification of Yahweh's Assertion about the Priests' Polluting His Table, 1:7a
 "You have placed defiled food on my altar"—When Yahweh referred to "defiled food" on His altar, the priests should have felt some remorse for having allowed this to be practiced. The term translated as defiled has the idea of that which is ceremonially unclean (*TWOT*, s.v. "טָמֵא," by R. L. Harris, 1:145). The term thus denotes something that does not meet the cultic requirements set forth in the Law. Moses had given clear instructions about what was considered as being defective in Leviticus 22:17–30. In v. 2 and v. 32 they were warned that such sacrifices profaned God's name. In this context, Moses indicated that a defiled animal was one that was blind, diseased, or maimed. It was these types of defective animals that the priests tolerated being sacrificed to Yahweh during Malachi's day.
- d. A Specification of the Priests' Objection to Yahweh's Assertion about the Priests' Polluting His Table, 1:7b
 "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?'"—Apparently the priests are so callused to their sinful actions that they are unable to see Yahweh's point.

2. First Part of the Response: Yahweh's Response to the Priests' Polluting His Table, 1:7c–14

The first part of the response includes the assertion and objection segment of our linear pattern. This breaks down into a format of A–B–C–A¹–B¹.

A Yahweh's response to the priests for offering defective sacrifices, vv. 7c–8b

B Yahweh's evaluation of the priests' defective sacrifice, vv. 8c–10

C Yahweh's pleasure with pure offerings, v. 11

A¹Yahweh's response to the priests for offering defective sacrifices, vv. 12–13a

B¹Yahweh's further evaluation of the priests' defective sacrifice, vv. 13b–14

a. Yahweh's Pointed Accusation against the Priests for Offering Defective Sacrifices, vv. 7c–8b

This continues the accusation of Yahweh made in vv. 6a, 7a. Now Yahweh moves to His precise indictment, viz., the priests, in effect, call Yahweh's table contemptible (7c) by their actions (8). The altar is called Yahweh's table only in this context (v. 7 and v. 12). Here Malachi draws our attention to what he means by "defiled food," viz., animals that were "blind," "crippled," and "diseased." If the priests whom Malachi was addressing were committed to following the Mosaic requirements of Leviticus 22:17–30, they would not have been offering this type of animal.

b. Yahweh's Evaluation of the Priests Defective Sacrifices, vv. 8c–10

To show His displeasure, Yahweh compares Himself to Judah's governor in vv. 8c–9 and then confirms His displeasure in v. 10.

1) Yahweh's Displeasure Likened to a Governor, vv. 8c–9

With tremendous sarcasm, Malachi exhorted the priests, "Try offering them to your governor!" Their Persian governor would not have accepted this type of

animal. Malachi uses an a fortiori argument. If the first argument is valid, it is deduced that the second argument is even stronger. If this type of sacrifice was clearly unacceptable to their Persian governor, it is even more certain that Yahweh Almighty would not accept it. If Yahweh would not accept their sacrifices, neither would he accept those who let this type of offense continue.

2) The Confirmation of Yahweh's Displeasure, v. 10

To reinforce his thought, Malachi strongly states, "Oh, that one would shut the temple doors." Since God would not accept their worship, all the fires presented on the altar for burnt offerings were useless. God would not accept anything that they would offer to Him.

c. Yahweh's Pleasure with Pure Offerings, v. 11

This verse is the antithesis of what was stated in vv. 8–10. In these verses Malachi described impure offerings and those, which did not please Yahweh; however, in v. 11 he describes pure offerings and those that honor Yahweh's name. To begin our discussion, we will contrast Verhoef's translation with that of the NIV. Verhoef has translated it like this: "Verily, from the rising to the setting of the sun my name *is* great among the nations, in every place incense *is* offered to my name, a pure offering, for my name *is* great among the nations says the Lord Almighty" (so also RSV, NRSV, and NLT). However, the NIV has translated it in this fashion: "My name *will be* great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings *will be* brought to my name, because my name *will be* great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty." The differences between the two translations relate to the tense of the verbs. Is Malachi describing offerings that were being made around the world in his day or in the eschatological age? It is sometimes stated in support of the former understanding that the Hebrew is more accurately translated with the present tense (Isbell, p. 42). Though this may be translated in the present tense, a past tense or a future tense could also translate it. In Hebrew this is a verbless clause and its translation value is dependent upon its context. In this context, it is possible to translate it as a present tense as some have done; however, it can also be translated as a future tense just as well as is reflected in the translations of the NIV, NASB, ESV, *NET Bible*, KJV, and NKJV.

Those translations that render this in the present tense understand the pure offerings here as a reference to worship among pagan nations, Jews of the dispersion, or proselytes (see Verhoef, pp. 227–28). It seems to me that the worship of pagans is clearly contradicted by Scripture. God has always been exclusive about man's approach to Him. All religions do not lead to God. We should notice in v. 11 that these pure offerings are given in Yahweh's name, that is, they are consistent with His demands and character. In addition, the dispersion and proselytes views do not seem to accurately explain the universal language here as well as the lack of evidence from this time period to support either view (Chisholm, *Interpreting*, p. 282).

If we notice the text, Malachi appears to be emphasizing that Yahweh's name will be honored among the nations. Also, he stresses that from all over the globe ("from the rising of the sun to its setting" and "from every place") sacrifices will be brought to

Yahweh (Baldwin, p. 230). This language is used in other contexts to describe the universal worship that will characterize the future messianic kingdom. Furthermore, the “incense” and “pure offerings” that are to be brought are consistent with the offerings that other Old Testament prophets have described as characterizing the kingdom (see Isa 2:2–4; 19:19–21; 24:14–16; 42:6; 45:22–24; 66:19–21; Mic 4:1–3; Zeph 3:8–9; Zech 8:20–23; 14:16). This data points to a future time when universally pure offerings will be brought to Yahweh (Chisholm, *Interpreting*, p. 282). In conclusion, Malachi appears to be contrasting the impure offerings of Malachi’s day with the pure offerings that will characterize the messianic era (though Verhoef agrees with this, he attempts to harmonize this with a concept that was present during Malachi’s day; I find this to be problematic).

d. The Restatement of Yahweh’s Pointed Accusation against the Priests for Offering Defective Sacrifices, vv. 12–13a

Turning aside from the eschatological pure offerings and incense (v. 11) that will be offered in the future kingdom, Malachi now returns to the profane state of the priesthood. He levels the same type of charge against the priests as he had done in v. 6 (“It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name”) by declaring that they “profane” Yahweh’s name. In vv. 7–8 Malachi summarizes the types of descriptions they had used about the offerings. This undoubtedly points to what they were really like in their attitudes.

e. Yahweh’s Further Evaluation of the Priests Defective Sacrifices, vv. 13b–14

When these types of offerings were brought, should Yahweh accept them? This is the thrust of the question that Malachi poses. This is essentially a restatement of vv. 8c–10. The implied answer to the question that ends v. 13 is that Yahweh would not accept this type of sacrifice.

In v. 13, Yahweh accuses the priests of presenting offerings to him made up of three categories of defective animals: “injured,” “crippled,” and “diseased animals” (so NIV). These three types of defective animals correspond to the same categories of animals mentioned in v. 8. However, if we compare the types of animals mentioned in v. 13, according to the NIV, with the NASB and NKJV, we have reason for pause, since, instead of the NIV’s “injured,” NASB has “taken by robbery” and NKJV has “the stolen.” As we can see, NASB and NKJV are in essential agreement. The Hebrew term from which “injured” and “stolen” are translated is the word *gāzûl*. These translations reflect the two different nuances associated with this lexeme. Stuart’s observations about this term and its immediate understanding in v. 13 are helpful: “Some translations read ‘stolen’ or ‘taken by violence’ since גזל [gzl] can mean not only ‘ripped’ but ‘ripped off’ in roughly the same idiomatic sense that English slang ‘ripped off’ means ‘stolen.’ Since verse 13 so closely parallels verse 8, however, which exclusively describes faulty sacrifices in terms of the imperfections of the animals themselves rather than how they were obtained (how could a priest recognize a stolen animal?), it is most likely that גזל [gāzûl] refers to some kind of defect here as well, and ‘injured’ is the preferred translation” (p. 1308).

In v. 14 a curse is pronounced on the cheat. Malachi describes a situation where a man gives an offering as the payment of a vow. When a person took this type of vow, he was not required to do so. However, once he took the vow the Mosaic legislation required him to fulfill it (Deut 23:21–23). Moses had also given precise legislation to the priests concerning the types of sacrifices they were to accept (Lev. 22:17–25). When one had vowed to give an acceptable sacrifice and then substituted in its place an unacceptable sacrifice, this was clearly sin. If no one would do this to an earthly king or governor, then how could they ever think of cheating their “great King” whose “name is to be feared among the nations”? Consequently, Malachi ends this subsection by stressing God’s absolute right as King.

3. Second Part of the Response: Yahweh’s Response Warning the Priest’s about Corrupting the Covenant of Levi, 2:1–9

The following chiasm is adapted from Wendland (p. 116).

A The Priests’ Perversion Resulting in a Covenant Curse, vv. 1–4a

B The Covenant with the Priests, vv. 4b–7

A¹ The Priests’ Perversion Resulting in a Concluding Covenant Curse, vv. 8–9

a. The Priests’ Perversion Resulting in a Covenant Curse, vv. 1–4a

In examining God’s judgment on the priests for disobedience, we will initially examine the admonition to the priests to listen in v. 1 and followed by the consequences for failure to follow Yahweh’s commands in vv. 2–3.

1) The Conditions for the Curse on the Priests, vv. 1–2a

The conjunction that begins v. 1, *w^e’attâ*, “and now,” is used to introduce the main injunction against the accused priests (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1310). “Admonition,” *miswâ*, is always used in the Pentateuch to refer to a commandment given by Yahweh. As in the Pentateuch, this “admonition” to the priests has covenant overtones. This word “was surely chosen for its covenant overtones and for its relation to daily priestly practice” (ibid. p. 1311). While using repetition in v. 2a, Malachi indicts the priests for not wholeheartedly giving honor to Yahweh, “to honor my name.”

2) The Consequences for Failure to Follow Yahweh’s Commands, vv. 2b–4a

“I will send a curse upon you,” v. 2b—if the priests did not honor Yahweh by following His commands, He would impose the Mosaic curses on them (for a presentation of both the positive and negative sanctions found in the Mosaic Covenant, see Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, pp. xxxi–xlii; and “Malachi,” pp. 1258–62). The term translated as *curse* no doubt relates to the judgments of God. The curses spelled out in the Mosaic Covenant affected every area of life for the Israelite.

“I will curse your blessings,” v. 2b—God’s curse is focused on the priests’ “blessings.” “A curse,” according to Stuart, “is a pronouncement of divine punishment. All prophetic curses are based on the curses announced in the Mosaic Covenant” (“Malachi,” p. 1311). Thus, Yahweh pronounced a judgment on the priests’ blessings. The blessings have been interpreted in three different ways.

- a) First, the priests had a basic function of pronouncing a blessing on Israel in Yahweh's name. This is a basic function of the priesthood, as Numbers 6:22–27 states

²²The LORD said to Moses, ²³“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:’ ²⁴‘The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.’ ²⁷So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

With this understanding, God's curse involves making the priests' pronouncements of blessings ineffective, though it allows other material blessings to be effected by God's curse. Stuart calls this a curse of “rejection/destruction of the cult.” This is found especially in Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 4, 28–32 (“Malachi,” p. 1311).

- b) Second, “blessings” may also refer to the material benefits that the people of Israel were to give the priests (so Dentan).
- c) Third, the word “blessings” is a broad term, and, as such, is a comprehensive expression referring to any way the priests were enriched as an aspect promised in the covenant with Levi. With this understanding, God cursed their position in approaching God and their function in performing their regular duties (so Verhoef, pp. 239–40).
- d) According to Verhoef, a majority of commentators hold to the first view (p. 239), and I find it to be the most palatable. This view would see that God's curse focuses primarily on the futility curse, while it would also include a rejection and demise of Israel's basic worship. With the futility curse, one's activities result in frustration with the activity and its results, rather than the anticipated benefits from those activities (see above). Stuart provides a beneficial explanation of this view.

“How would ‘curse your blessing’ be a futility pronouncement on the priests? Precisely because blessing was their business... In the most general sense, people went to priests for blessing. The priests served as the intermediaries between the people and God (Exod. 28–29; cf. 1 Sam. 2:28) and in that sense were authorized to pronounce his blessing on the people. Blessing is the result of proper worship. And, specifically, the priests were pronouncers of blessing statements, declarations of benefit and well being. It was their job, on request, to say blessings for the people who came to them. The Aaronic blessing was probably the high point, and probably also the conclusion, of a worshiper's experience at the temple. Were it to fail, to be withheld, or to be reversed in effectiveness so that it functioned like a curse (i.e., so that people went home after a blessing only to experience disasters of various sorts), this priestly key role would be rendered futile. A futility curse, like the reversal of blessing, is, of course, well within God's power. Indeed, the opposite—the divine turning of a curse into a blessing—is also demonstrated elsewhere in the Old Testament (the main example being Balaam's curses; compare Deut. 23:6 [23:5]; Neh. 13:2). God is the

controller of blessing and curse. The priests' blessing pronouncements were only their verbal acquiescence to the will of God. If they disobeyed his will, he would not honor their blessing pronouncements. This is the point of Number 6:27, which says "They will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless you"—presumably including both people and priests" (Stuart, "Malachi," pp. 1311–12).

"Descendants," v. 3—this term is also often translated as "seed." With this more general translation, it allows this to refer to the crops raised by the priests. Another interpretation is based on a revocalization of the Hebrew term *zera'*, to read as *z'rôa'*, "arm." As such, Yahweh is threatening to curse the arm of the priest that is held up when the priest pronounces the blessing. Thus, he would not be able to do his job. The final interpretation is that of "descendants." The problem with the first interpretation is that the Hebrew term *zera'*, is never used in the sense of crops. The second interpretation is a conjecture and has no manuscript support. The third, and least problematic, interpretation is consistent with the general nature of this term.

"I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices," v. 3—the term rendered as 'offal' is normally used to refer to the entrails of the sacrificed animal. In Leviticus, it was stressed that the sacrificed animal's entrails had to be carried to a designated place outside of the camp and destroyed (Lev 4:11–12; 8:17; 16:27). For disobedience, these priests will have the entrails of the animal smeared on their faces. "Not only was such an action intended to be humiliating, but it would also disqualify the priests involved from serving in the temple because of their uncleanness" (Isbell, p. 45).

"And you will be carried off with it," v. 3—the translation of NASB is similar, "you will be taken away with it." The Hebrew text literally reads: "one will take/carry you to it." The verbal construction with the direct object, "one will carry you," is an impersonal construction that reflects a Hebrew idiom. When translated into English, the direct object, "you," is transformed into the subject and the impersonal verb, "one will carry," is made a passive verb, "will be carried." Consequently, an acceptable translation would be, "you will be carried [taken]." There is also a prepositional phrase in this part of v. 3, which we could literally render "to it." The translation in NASB and NIV are in essential agreement. However, both versions translate the prepositional phrase *'elâw* as "with it," but it could more consistently be translated as "to it." Therefore, I would prefer to translate this clause as "you will be carried to it." The antecedent of "it" in v. 3 appears to be the "offal" from their ritual feasts. This clause reflects a covenant curse found in Leviticus 26:19; Deuteronomy 28:20, 25, 37, 43–44, 68. This curse focuses on dishonor and degradation (see Stuart who lists this as curse 16, which is a part of Stuart's catalog of 27 curses, "Malachi," pp. 1259–60). As such, this means that the priests will be taken to the same place where the dung is taken. This covenant curse "represents a continuation of the dishonor/degradation curse (type 16) since it suggests that God will not allow the priests to become ritually clean again, but will forcibly put them outside the camp/temple in the unclean area where the dung is

dumped. ‘I’ll confine you to the dump’ would be a periphrastic way of indicating the intended meaning. In verse 9, the statement ‘I make you despised and humiliated before all the nations,’ clearly the language of dishonor and degradation, confirms in its overall summation of the passage’s curses what the end of verse 3 suggests in more narrow focus” (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1314).

“So you will know that I have sent you this admonition [*miswâ*],” v. 4a—this forms an inclusio structure with v. 1, as the use of *miswâ*, “admonition,” in both verses seemingly reflects.

b. The Covenant with the Priests, vv. 4b–7

In the last half of v. 4, Yahweh states his motivation for his assertion in vv. 1–4a: “so that my covenant with Levi may continue.” Levi was the priestly prototype and Yahweh established a covenant with him. While asserting his desire to continue the covenant with Levi, vv. 5–7 reflect the terms and obligations associated with the covenant of Levi. This admonition was given in order to challenge the Levites to repent and to persevere with the same type of character as Levi.

1) The Covenant with Levi, vv. 4b

The most significant problem in v. 4 relates to identifying the origination of the covenant with Levi. Because there is no specific text that explicitly details a “covenant with Levi,” scholars are divided about its provenance (Stuart, “Malachi,” pp. 1317–18). Five interpretations should be noted.

- a) Initially, because of the verbal parallels with Numbers 25:11–13, some have taken this Mosaic passage as a possible reference to the covenant made with the Levites (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1317). However, Numbers 25:11–13 is specifically dealing with Phinehas and it is in the form of a promissory covenant and not a suzerain-vassal type treaty as Malachi 2:5 demands (the benefits are “life and peace” and the requirements for receiving the benefits are reverential fear of and obedience to Yahweh—we call this perseverance of the saints that can only begin with the regeneration). However, my rejection of this view is not without some hesitation, for Stuart has noted seven conceptual and verbal correspondences between Numbers 25:11–13 and Malachi 1:6–2:9 (“Malachi,” p. 1316).
- b) Another common suggestion is that this is found in the blessings of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:8–11 (Dumbrell, “Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms,” p. 46; Hill, *Malachi*, p. 206; Ralph Smith, *Malachi*, p. 317; Tate, p. 400). While Stuart has noted 12 verbal correspondences between this passage and Malachi 1:6–2:9, he takes Deuteronomy 33:8–11 as less determinative to the context of Malachi 1:6–2:9 (“Malachi,” p. 1316). A reason for downplaying the significance of Deuteronomy 33:8–11 on Malachi 1:6–2:9 is that it is a pronouncement of blessing on Levi and does not reflect a bi-lateral covenant.
- c) A third option suggested by Kaiser is that the covenant with salt in Numbers 18:19 is the background text for the covenant with Levi (*Malachi*, pp. 63–64). Because Numbers 18:19 is limited in scope, it has less connection with Malachi 2:1–9, as Chisholm notes (*Interpreting*, p. 283).

- d) Though rarely used, another text that may have some connection with Malachi 2:1–9 is Exodus 32:26–29. This passage reflects some of the same concepts that are involved in Malachi, such as reverence, teaching, and holy living (see Baldwin, *Malachi*, p. 234). Against this interpretation, the priests used the sword for judgment in Exodus 32:26–29; however, in Malachi 2:6–7 the priests use exhortation to turn many from wickedness (Chisholm, *Handbook*, p. 479).
- e) The final view is that the actual covenant with Levi is best correlated with Numbers 3, and some of the covenant's details are reflected in a few Pentateuch passages.

On the one hand, Nehemiah 13:29 (“the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites”) and Jeremiah 33:21 (“my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me”) explicitly teach that Yahweh had made a formal covenant with Levi. Numbers 3:12 specifically indicates that Yahweh set apart the Levites for his special purposes: “I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine” (see also vv. 41–43). Consequently, though the covenant with Levi is not explicitly referenced, this text provides the actual occasion when Yahweh established this covenant.

On the other hand, the various motifs of Malachi 1:6–2:9 indicate that the elements of this covenant with Levi are distributed through various sections of the Pentateuch. Besides the four Pentateuch passages presented above, Numbers 6:23–27, as previously mentioned in connection with Yahweh's curse on the priests' blessings in Malachi 2:2–3, also provides an informing motif for Malachi's covenant with Levi: “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:’ ²⁴‘The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.’ ²⁷So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” While a number of Mosaic texts provide informing motifs for Malachi's summary of the covenant with Levi (for correspondence in vocabulary used with some of these texts, see Stuart, “Malachi,” pp. 1315–16), none of them provide the specificity that Malachi 1:6–2:9 demand.

Therefore, Malachi 2:4–5 indicate that Yahweh made an actual bi-lateral covenant with Levi, which is preferably placed in Numbers 3 (so Chisholm, *Handbook*, p. 479), and the various motifs of Malachi 1:6–2:9 indicate that the elements of this covenant are a subsection of the Mosaic Covenant, which are dispersed in various sections of the Pentateuch.

2) The Terms of the Covenant with Levi, v. 5

If we look at the two sides of this bilateral agreement, we initially should note in Malachi 2:5 that God as the Suzerain promised the Levites “life” and “peace.” The word “life” means more than physical life. In Numbers 25:13 “life” refers to a perpetual priesthood and this is apparently the way the term is used in Malachi 2:5. The word “peace,” *šālôm*, refers to the protection and care that God would provide

for the Levites. As Stuart says, “The priesthood was established and protected, provided with perpetual sustenance via the tithes of all the people, given special cities within the various tribal territories and guaranteed a portion of every sacrifice save for the whole burnt offerings of which no human ate. This is what ‘peace’ means in the present context (“Malachi,” p. 1317).

The obligations of the Levites, the vassals, are indicated by the words “fear” and “terror.” Both terms “signify much more than the emotion of being frightened. They are ways of indicating the serious responsibility of the priests to supervise worship, enforce various provisions of the covenant, and keep the nation holy, that is ‘make atonement for the Israelites’ (Num 25:13). To ‘fear’ God is to worship and obey him, to make him primary over other interests so that he is honored above all. Among its most minimal implications was certainly the responsibility of the priests to be utterly careful about how they handled the sacrificial system” (Stuart, “Malachi,” pp. 1317–18).

3) The Obligations from the Covenant with Levi, vv. 6–7

In contrast to the corruption in the priesthood of Malachi’s day, Levi instructed Israel in true righteousness and turned many from sin. Verses 6–7 reflect three obligations from the covenant with Levi and a reason for faithfulness to this covenant.

- a) A true priest was required to faithfully teach the Law, v. 6a, 7a: “True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips....⁷For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction.” While priests are generally associated with those who offered sacrifices, there are a number of passages that emphasize that the priests were expected to teach the Law. In Leviticus 10:11, the sons of Aaron were to “teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses.” According to Deuteronomy 33:10, the Levites were to teach all of Yahweh’s Law to Israel. In Deuteronomy 31:9–13 they were to read the Law to Israel. In the days of Jehoshaphat, he set up priests to teach the Law, as 2 Chronicles 17:9 indicates: “They [the priests] taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the LORD; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people.” In the post-exilic era, Ezra, the priest, took up the task of teaching the Law: “For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezra 7:10).
- b) A true priest’s character should reflect covenant loyalty, v. 6b: “He walked with me in peace and uprightness.” Walking is an Old Testament idiom that often refers to a person’s character; and in this verse, it suggests that the priest was to have a life characterized by a relationship with God. The words “peace” (*šālôm*, also used in v. 5) and “uprightness” are used together in Psalm 37:37 in reference to a genuine believer who was characterized by covenant loyalty and had God’s protection on him.
- c) A true priest was expected to preserve holiness in Israel, v. 6c: he “turned many from sin.” The priest were supposed to instruct Israel in what was ritually and morally holy (Lev 6:2, 7, 9, 14; 10:10–11). An example of how priests would make judgments on ritual holiness is found in Haggai 2:11–13 (Stuart,

“Malachi,” p. 1316).

d) The reason for the Levites obeying the obligations of the covenant is that they are Yahweh’s messengers, v. 7d: “because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty.” “Messenger,” *mal’ak*, is a word often used in connection with the angel, *mal’ak*, of Yahweh. In this context, it clearly refers to the Levitical priests. *Mal’ak* is also used for a priest in Ecclesiastes 5:5 (Hebrew, v. 6). The Levites were considered Yahweh’s *mal’ak* because God set them apart for this priestly role in the covenant with Levi, as Malachi 2:4–5 reflect.

c. Yahweh’s Concluding Judgment for Disloyalty to the Covenant of Levi, vv. 8–9

The priests of Malachi’s period were quite a contrast with the prototype of Levi, as demonstrated in vv. 4–7. The priests of Malachi’s day had broken this covenant with Levi by giving Israel erroneous doctrine about sacrifices as the first chapter would indicate and about marriage as the following material (vv. 10–16) will reflect. The consequence of this in v. 9 is that Yahweh had caused them to be “despised and humiliated” before the nation. The word translated as “despised” was also used in 1:6–7 and translated as “contempt.” In that context, the term indicated the priests’ contempt for Yahweh. Therefore, the people of Israel would treat the priests with contempt (Chisholm, *Interpreting*, pp. 283–84). This judgment indicated in v. 9 is the covenant curse of dishonor and degradation. This is Yahweh’s judgment on those who had broken his covenant with Levi.

D. Third Disputation: Judah’s Unfaithfulness through Violation of Yahweh’s Expectations in Marriage, 2:10–16

In the preceding disputation, 1:6–2:9, Malachi focused on the priests; however, in 2:10–16, he returns to focusing on the Yehudites, as he did in 1:2–5. In this passage, Yahweh announces that He does not accept Judah’s worship because they had violated their marital covenant obligations. Marrying foreign women and divorcing their Jewish wives demonstrated the breach of their covenant obligations.

At this point in Malachi, we can see how Malachi organized part of his book around “the catchword principle.” By using “catchwords,” the writers of Scripture linked together small and large units in convenient and memorable manner. A motif or key words appearing in both units of material provide the basis for this linkage. In relating this to Malachi, Malachi uses this principle throughout his book, though this does not deny that in Malachi there is interplay with rhetorical devices, such as chiasmic arrangements. More specifically, Malachi uses “catchwords,” shared vocabulary and thematic elements, to provide linkage between the second and third disputation. The following chart from Stuart (“Malachi,” p. 1327) highlights the connection between the disputations.

Catchword	2nd Disputation	3rd Disputation
father	1:6	2:10
altar	1:7, 10	2:13
favor, accept	1:8, 10, 13	2:13
covenant	2:4, 5, 8	2:10, 14

offspring	2:3	2:15
guard, preserve	2:7	2:15, 16

In keeping with the triadic disputation throughout Malachi, 2:10–16 can be visualized in this manner:

Assertion, 2:10–13	Malachi’s extended assertion
Objection, 2:14a	“You ask,…”
Response, 2:14b–16	Yahweh’s response

Based upon an adaptation from Hugenberger (*Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 99–100), we can more precisely divide our text in the following schematic arrangement:

- A First accusation about Israel’s unfaithfulness, v. 10
- B Specification of the accusation about intermarriage, v. 11
- C Curse on intermarriage, v. 12
- C¹ Curse on disingenuous sorrow, v. 13
- B¹ Specification of an accusation about aversion divorce, v. 14
- A¹ Second accusation about marital unfaithfulness, vv. 15–16a
- A² Summary challenge, v. 16b

Based upon the chiastic arrangement of this pericope, we can organize these seven subunits in a threefold pattern. A, B and C relate to this subject: Yahweh charges Judah with violating His covenant by marrying idolatrous wives, vv. 10–12. A second unit of material is comprised of A¹, B¹ and C¹; and it emphasize this: Yahweh charges Judah with violating His covenant by practicing aversion divorce, vv. 13–16a. The change in focus from vv. 10–12 is textually reflected in v. 13a, “Another thing you do” (or “second thing you do”). Since the first unit of vv. 10–12 is brought to a conclusion with a curse and the next verse, v. 13, is also a curse, this suggests that vv. 10–16 are arranged chiastically. A², v. 16b, makes up a third unit that provides a summary challenge for vv. 10–16a. After developing the argument of this passage, we will draw some conclusions about marriage and divorce.

1. Yahweh charges Judah with violating His covenant by marrying idolaters, vv. 10–12.

Malachi sets forth the general accusation about Judah violating the Mosaic covenant. Specificity is added to this accusation in v. 11 where Yahweh accuses Judah of marrying idolatrous wives. The culmination of this subunit is v. 12 where Malachi pronounces an imprecation on those Yehudites who marry idolaters.

 - a. An accusation about Judah’s covenant violations by marrying idolatrous wives, v. 10.

In v. 10 the prophet sets forth the premise of his argument through three rhetorical questions. The point of these questions is Yahweh’s charge that Israel had broken faith in the covenant community.

 - 1) First question

“Have we not all one Father?” The primary interpretative issue with this question pertains to the identity of the “Father.” Is it Adam, Abraham, Jacob, or God? No matter which way we interpret this, however, most recognize that the context is

clearly stressing the unity of the Jewish nation. Baldwin argues for either Abraham or Jacob (p. 237). Abraham is referred to as Israel's father in Isaiah 51:2. Jacob and Abraham together might be inferred together considering the remainder of this verse in Malachi. This can be supported by the fact that the plural form "fathers" is also used (in addition, see the use of Jacob in 1:2, 2:12, 3:6; from this it would be understandable to conceive of Jacob as their father). However, the parallelism in this verse and the contrast with the daughters of a foreign god suggest that we are referring to Yahweh (for other OT references in this light, see Exod 4:22, 23; Deut 32:6, 18; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 2:27; 3:4, 19; 31:9).

Though "father" does not have an inherent reference to God as the "Father" of the covenant, this seems to be the thrust of this verse as is indicated by the final rhetorical question in this verse. As such, this has no bearing on the subject of God as the universal Father. We can see this type of covenant relationship in Exodus 4:22–23 where Yahweh refers to Israel as "my firstborn son" and "Let my son go." God's role as Father presents Him as the redeemer of Israel (Merrill, p. 414).

2) Second question

"Did not one God create us? Like the preceding rhetorical question, the answer to this is "yes, one God did create us." This is not a reference to God originally creating Adam and Eve but a reference to God creating a covenant nation. Because of the last question, this must be the emphasis of the passage. In Isaiah 64:8 both concepts of God as Father and Creator are stressed, "Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." In Jeremiah 31:9, a clear covenant context, Yahweh says, "I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son." Like Malachi, God's role as redeemer and creator are both presented in Isaiah and Jeremiah.

3) Third question

"Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" Having responded affirmatively to the first two questions, Malachi is now able to make his point with this final question. The point of the question is that many Israelites were violating their covenant obligations with their covenant relatives. This context strongly suggests that a necessary part of a covenant relationship is solidarity within the covenant nation. This is seen from two sides. First, in the first two questions the unity of Israel's initiator was stressed. He was "one Father" and "one God created us." If there is solidarity in their Father and Creator, this suggests that His nation is to replicate their initiator. Second, the question specifically mentions that Israel was profaning the "covenant," *b'rit*. In this context, "God's covenant can be called 'the covenant of our fathers' not because they made it but because God made it with them, our common ancestors, and because we are all equally their descendants, we are all equally bound by the covenant" (Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage*, p. 159).

Therefore, the sin for which Israel is being accused is in the realm of the covenant nation. The actual sin is breaking faith with one's covenant relative. This is stressed with the phrase "breaking faith with one another." "Breaking faith" is a translation of *bāgad*. This term means to "deal treacherously with" or "depart

treacherously” (*HALOT*, 1:108); often this is used about a prior commitment or covenant agreement. In this context, the point is acting unfaithfully toward someone in a covenant relationship. This term is used in reference to one breaking faith with a wife (Exod 21:8) or a husband (Jer 3:20) (*ibid.*). This term is a key word in our immediate context as is illustrated by the fact that it is cited five times, vv. 10, 11, 14, 15, 16 (see Isbell, p. 50). In 2:10 Malachi accuses Israel of breaking faith within the covenant community. Malachi’s use in 2:10 of *bāgaḏ* with this sense of violating covenant obligations provides the basis for his charge in vv. 11–13 of violating the covenant by marrying idolaters and by practicing aversion divorce in vv. 14–16. With Israel “breaking faith” in respect to their covenant obligations in marriage, they were undermining their obligations to the covenant community. Accordingly, the breaking faith is a serious and widespread breach of the Mosaic Covenant.

- b. A specification about Judah’s covenant violations by marrying idolatrous wives, v. 11.

Based upon the accusation of Israel’s violation of covenant solidarity in v. 10, Malachi provides the first of two examples that document Israel’s covenant infractions in the realm of marriage. The point of this verse is that the Yehudites committed a widespread violation of the covenant by their intermarriage with pagan woman. Malachi saying that it was committed “in Israel, and in Jerusalem” shows the widespread nature of this problem. It is also clear from the text that religious intermarriage was a violation of the covenant, for it is described as “breaking faith,” an “abomination,” and as that which “desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves.”

This religious intermarriage was an infraction that not only affected one’s immediate family, but the whole covenant community. It violated covenant solidarity. The Mosaic Covenant clearly prohibited marriage to people who served other gods. Using the Canaanites as representative of other idolatrous nations, many contexts prohibit marriage to Canaanites (Exod 34:16; Lev 21:14; Num 36:6; Deut 7:3; 13:6–9). So serious was this problem, Ezra commanded those within such religious intermarriages to divorce their pagan wives (Ezra 9–10). However, between Ezra’s first return, 458 B.C. and Nehemiah’s second return, 433 B.C., religious intermarriage had again become a national problem as Nehemiah 13 indicates.

Since the Torah so clearly prohibits religious intermarriage, why did the people of the covenant nation act in such a blatantly recalcitrant fashion? People have not changed much in these areas over the years. Religious intermarriage occurs for two major reasons: physical desires and money. Though physical lust is probably not the primary reason for religious intermarriage, it did play a role in Malachi’s day, as 2:14–16 reflects and as Stuart indicates with this (“Malachi,” p. 1333):

“Sex was probably less often the dominant motive than money, but must also have played a role, especially in those cases where a man had become tired of his first wife (vv. 14–16). Pagan practices allowed for women to be treated as sex objects in contrast to what biblical law enjoined (Num. 25; Hos. 4:6–14; Amos 2:7–8; etc.), and many Israelite men must have found it easier to marry outside their people and faith, into pagan families who would not insist on monitoring

their daughter's welfare in the home of her husband as Israelite families would. Pagan families would also tolerate marriage after divorce—marriages based on physical attraction rather than on arrangement while one was still in childhood—more easily than their Israelite counterparts.”

Probably desires for greater financial security was a greater controlling factor for religious intermarriage than physical desires. Stuart again reflects good insight into the significance of money and the fifth century B.C. Jewish mindset (“Malachi,” pp. 1332–33).

“Money was probably the main motive. It came from the establishment of marriage ties with landed non-Israelites, who would favor their in-laws in business dealings in general and the granting of jobs in particular. During the last two-thirds of the sixth century B.C., Judah had suffered far more than her neighbors at the hands of the Babylonians, because Judah had led regional opposition to Babylonian imperialism and because Jerusalem had held out so long against the Babylonian siege of 588–586 B.C. Not only did Judah suffer the ravages of conquest and exile, but the Jews who returned from exile beginning in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1–3) returned to an impoverished land, a thoroughly destroyed capital (Lam. 1–5), hostility from neighbor states (Ezra 4–5; Neh. 4, 6), exploitation by unscrupulous Judeans who had not been taken into exile (Neh. 5), and an economy that was considerably under the control of foreigners (Neh. 13:6–22). Who had the wealth? Who would it be prudent to ally oneself with via marriage if one wanted to get ahead? To the west were the Philistines, and to the east were the Ammonites and Moabites (Neh. 13:23). Other nationalities were surely involved, these were the prominent ones.”

Not only did “breaking faith” with one’s covenant relative result in a widespread and serious desecration of the covenant with Israel’s ancestors, but it is further described in this verse in two ways.

1) Violating the covenant is a detestable thing

“Breaking faith” is described as a detestable thing, *tô’ēbâ*. This is a particularly strong term and it demonstrates something that is particularly heinous in God’s sight. This term is used 117 times in the Old Testament. It describes sins such as homosexuality along with similar perversions (Lev 18:22–30; 20:13), idolatry (Deut 7:25), human sacrifice (Deut 12:31), occult practices (Deut 18:9–14), involvement in ritual prostitution (1 Kgs 14:23), and other abominable practices (see *TWOT*, s.v. “תֹּעֲבָה,” by Ronald F. Youngblood, 2:976–77). As such, *tô’ēbâ* “is used in the Old Testament to indicate something that God will not under any conditions tolerate, an ‘automatic’ covenant violation that earns its practitioners serious guilt” (Stuart, “Malachi,” pp. 1331–32).

2) Violating the covenant profanes the sanctuary

“Breaking faith” is further described as profaning the *qōdeš*, “sanctuary.” Whatever the “sanctuary” is, it was a defilement involving marriage to foreign wives who worshipped pagan deities. The “sanctuary” may be interpreted in one of three ways: the “holiness” of Yahweh (so Merrill, p. 417), the temple (so Ralph Smith, *Malachi*, p. 319), or the nation Israel (so Verhoef, p. 268; and Stuart,

“Malachi,” p. 1332). It is easy to see how a case can be made for any of these understandings in this book. Though a case can be made for all three interpretations of *qōdeš*, the “holiness” of Yahweh is the least likely in the immediate context. The latter two understandings appear to have more contextual merit and require further attention.

a) The temple interpretation

Two reasons may be drawn to support this interpretation of *qōdeš*, “sanctuary.” First, the Hebrew expression *qōdeš Yahweh* (“sanctuary of Yahweh”), is generally used in reference to the tabernacle or temple (see BDB, pp. 871–72). Second, the overall context of Malachi supports this interpretation. Malachi emphasizes perversion of Temple worship, its functions, sacrifices, and servants.

b) The covenant nation interpretation

A stronger contextual case can be made for taking *qōdeš*, “sanctuary,” as a reference to God’s holy nation and this for two reasons. First, though *qōdeš* is used more often in the Old Testament as a reference to the temple, *qōdeš* is used in reference to Israel and the Promised Land (see Exod 15:17 and Isa 63:18). The nation Israel had been set apart as God’s “holy seed” in Isaiah 6:13 and Ezra 9:2. In Exodus 19:5–6 God had chosen Israel as His “treasured possession” (Verhoef, p. 268). Another example of this type of use is found in Leviticus 19:8, the only other place the clause *hillēl qōdeš YHWH* (“he [Judah] has profaned Yahweh’s sanctuary”) is used in the OT. This passage reflects on the ruining of God’s covenant people (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1332). Second, the strongest support for this interpretation is the immediate context as v. 10 clearly indicates (for further support, see Verhoef, p. 268; and Stuart “Micah,” p. 1332).

How did Israel desecrate the sanctuary? Yahweh more precisely says, “by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.” In this context “Malachi shows the religious implication of a matter that might have been dismissed as being of no great consequence: marriage with non-Jewish women” (Deutsch, p. 94). When Malachi refers to these women as “the daughter of a foreign god,” this is equivalent to the expression “son of.” When an Israelite heard someone say that someone was a “son of the prophets,” he recognized that the individual being described had “the characteristics of a prophet,” that is, he was a prophet. To say in our context that a woman was “the daughter of a foreign god,” this meant she was one who bore the characteristics of that god; that is she was a worshiper of a foreign god. The reference in this verse makes it abundantly clear that we are dealing with marrying women who served other gods.

The problem with intermarriage is what it resulted in, viz., going after other gods. “It had been proved in Israel’s experience that in practice the less demanding standards prevailed (I Ki. 11:1–8; 16:31; Ne. 13:23–27), and apostasy quickly became the fashion. Since apostasy had been responsible for the exile it was unthinkable that the whole community should be put at risk again” (Baldwin, p. 238).

c. Curse on Judah's covenant violations by marrying idolatrous wives, v. 12.

In this verse Malachi essentially pronounces a judgment by invoking an imprecation on any Israelite who would marry a woman who served a pagan god. When Malachi invokes that Yahweh "cut him off from the tents of Jacob," he may mean that he should die, that his family line should cease (Blaising, p. 1580), or be excommunicated (Alden, p. 717). From Malachi's perspective this kind of man should be cut off irrespective of whether he gave sacrifices to Yahweh.

2. Yahweh charges Judah with violating His covenant by practicing aversion divorce, vv. 13–16a.

Malachi reverses, in vv. 13–16a, the order of parts from the manner he had set forth in vv. 10–12. In this section, Malachi begins with an imprecation on disingenuous sorrow of those who have violated their marriage covenant, v. 13. This is followed by a specification about Yahweh's role as the enforcer of the marriage covenant, v. 14, and an accusation about Judah's covenant violations by practicing aversion divorce, vv. 15–16a.

a. Curse on the disingenuous sorrow of those who violate their marriage covenant, v. 13

The two imprecations in vv. 12–13 are arranged chiastically and reflect that both verses are transitional. Verse 12 completes the subunit of vv. 10–11 and v. 13 begins the subunit of vv. 13–16a. "Another thing you do," v. 13, reflects the transitional nature of v. 13. This begins a new subunit that adds a new twist to Malachi's basic charge begun in v. 10 about Judah's violating their covenant obligations. In this verse Yahweh makes the general assertion, "You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands." This verse depicts a pious display of excessively fervent religious devotion. It is possible that this excessive pious fervency may have been brought into Israelite religious practice through other ancient Near Eastern pagan religious ritual. Stuart suggests that, since Malachi uses two different words in the verse for crying and one for groaning, the use of manipulative misery and mourning had been carried over into Israel's worship from her pagan neighbors. Extremes in manipulative practices are reflected in ancient Near Eastern religious systems, especially as seen by the use of self-inflicted mutilation of one's body (so 1 Kgs 18:26–30, see also Ezek 8:15; Isa 15:2–3). While contrition over sin may appropriately be reflected when one repents, extreme displays may reflect that the worshipper thinks he can manipulate God, or the gods in ancient Near Eastern cults (Stuart, "Malachi," pp. 1334–35).

However, Stuart's interpretation of manipulative worship places too much emphasis on the nature of *wailing* (*'anāqā*) as a term denoting emotion associated with pagan worship. The word *'anāqā* is only used four times in the Old Testament; and, in three of the uses (Pss 12:5 [Heb v. 6], 79:11, 102:20 [Heb v 21]), no pagan syncretistic religious connotations are found (Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, pp. 250–51). In fact, the very reason why these Israelites were crying with emotional excess is that God had rejected their offering (Chisholm, *Interpreting*, 285; Verhoef, p. 273; John Smith, p. 59; Ralph Smith, *Malachi*, p. 320). Furthermore, if Yahweh is rejecting their offering because of religious syncretism, this adds another covenant violation

for which Yahweh condemns Israel. As Clendenen has stated the case: “The claim that Judah was ‘practicing pagan-style worship’ at the lord’s altar would mean that the problem of divorce introduced in v. 14 was yet a *third* activity the prophet was condemning” (*Malachi*, pp. 343–44).

If one does not genuinely repent and forsake his disobedience to the covenant, God will reject his offering, with the rejection being observable through Yahweh’s inflicting them with covenant curses, though he cries with great crocodile tears (see Verhoef, p. 273). Yahweh is not pleased with tears of sorrow because one experiences the consequences of sin. There are different types of sorrow in Scripture. There is a heaven-and-hell distinction between the repentant sorrow associated with Peter’s denial of Christ and the hardening sorrow associated with Judas’ selling Jesus out for silver. The one is a genuine sorrow of one who has been regenerated—a Spirit-produced sorrow over sin that leads to genuine repentance; and the other is a disingenuous sorrow of one who is reprobate—a selfish sorrow associated with the consequences of sin that leads to self-pity and, in Judas’ case, to suicide.

Therefore, because of the listed covenant infractions among the Yehudites, they were experiencing the covenant curses; and these curses were tangible proof that Yahweh had rejected their offerings. Over this situation, the covenant violators had sorrow. However, this “was not the sorrow of repentant sinners confessing their sins. Rather it was the petulant outbursts of unmanageable children who demand the Father’s blessings without giving him the obedience and love they owe Him” (MacLeod, “The Problem of Divorce (Part 2),” p. 39).

- b. A specification about Yahweh’s role as the enforcer of the marriage covenant, v. 14
After the imprecation of v. 13, Malachi begins his polemic against “aversion” divorce, i.e., an unjustified divorce (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 67). The people initially raise a question about the reason for God’s curse, v. 14a. This is followed by God’s response in v. 14b.

1) The people’s question, v. 14a

Since God has not explicitly given the reason for His rejection of their offering, the people ask the question, *‘al-mâ*, “for what reason,” i.e., “why.” Why does God reject their emotionally oriented worship? However, this question is not coming from minds of inquiry, but those that are obstinately opposed to God’s covenant curse.

2) Yahweh rejects Israel’s unrepentant sorrow because He is the enforcer of the covenant, v. 14b.

Verse 14b presents a reason why God rejects disingenuous sorrow. Because some of the members of the covenant community had violated their vow to uphold the terms of the divinely given marriage covenant, Yahweh would not accept pious worship. Three aspects of this portion of v. 14 and a survey of the significance of the marriage covenant will explicate details of why Yahweh rejects the worship of those who violate his covenant. Based upon this verse, we will finally make two observations.

- a) This verse is set in a covenantal context. First, the context of Malachi 2 is set in v. 10 where the word *b^erît*, “covenant,” was initially used. *B^erît* is also used at the end of v. 14, “the wife of your marriage covenant.” Second, the violation in this context is breaking faith, “you have broken faith,” *bāgād*. As noted in v. 10, *bāgād* is used in reference to a prior covenant agreement (*HALOT*, 1:108). Third, *hē’îd*, “acting as the witness” is consistently used as covenant term in the Old Testament (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1337). While the precise idiom *hē’îd* [“acts as a witness”] + *bēn* [“between” A] + *bēn* [“between” B] [“acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth”] is only used here, a close parallel is found in Genesis 31:50: “God is witness between you and me.” In the context of Genesis 31, v. 50 is a clear attestation to a witness to the covenant between Jacob and Laban, as v. 44 indicates: “let us make a covenant [*b^erît*], you and I” (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 28). In the Old Testament era, covenants had witnesses. Ancient Near Eastern covenant called upon gods and goddesses to serve as witnesses. In the Old Testament, God either explicitly or implicitly acted as a witness. However, a covenant in the Old Testament is not like a witness in today’s court, someone giving testimony in a legal trial. The obligation of the covenant witness was to serve as “an enforcer or guarantor.... A covenant witness was the third party who could and did make sure that the direct parties to the covenant keeps its terms” (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1337). Therefore, because the context of Malachi 2:14 focuses on God acting as the enforcer between two covenant partners, its juxtaposition with v. 13 reflects that God rejects the disingenuous sorrow of those who violate their marriage covenant.
- b) The one being divorced is the wife from an Israelite man’s youth, “the wife of your youth.” The wife of one’s youth refers to the marriages in OT times that were arranged by one’s parents before a youth was full-grown. “Sometimes before children were born, almost always before they reached puberty, very rarely when they were grown (Judg. 14:1–10), their parents would make a contract with the parents of an appropriate mate in anticipation of the time that the two would be married. Prior to the marriage they were betrothed, a legal status. Upon marriage, contracted probably in writing, solemnized by vows, witnessed by ceremony and celebration, and enforced as a covenant by God himself, they certainly were legally obligated to one another. Since nearly all marriages were arranged during the childhood of both parties, the term ‘wife of your childhood’...made sense. Men could marry other wives later, but these could never be called ‘your childhood wife.’ They could be called *pîlegeš* (concubine, non-inheriting wife) as in Judges 19:1, or ‘other wife’ as in Genesis 4:19; Deuteronomy 21:15; 1 Samuel 1:2. Marrying a second or subsequent wife (polygamy was never outlawed in Scripture) was never an excuse for divorcing a first one” (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1338).
- c) “The wife of your youth” is further described as “your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.” Verse 14 indicates that marriage is a covenant relationship. The covenant relationship described in this verse is different from the covenant of Levi in 2:4–5, though both have a connection with the Mosaic Covenant.

Furthermore, the immediate context of 2:14 suggests that the marriage covenant is related to the Mosaic Covenant mentioned in 2:10. In 2:14, the covenant is clearly related to marriage, as “the wife of your covenant” certainly indicates. Hugenberger defines covenant, *b^erît*, as “an elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation established under divine sanction” (*Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 215; in essential agreement with this understanding is Meredith G. Kline, *by Oath Consigned*, p. 16). In the Old Testament marriage is explicitly referred to as a *b^erît* on two occasions, our immediate context and Proverbs 2:17 (for a much more detailed treatment of the OT material on subject, see Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 27–45, 280–338). According to this understanding, there are 4 essential ingredients to an OT *b^erît*: “1) a relationship 2) with a non-relative 3) which involves obligation and 4) is established through an oath” (ibid., p. 215). It is best to understand that the marriage covenant, as used in Israel, is a sub-covenant to the Mosaic Covenant, as “the covenant of our father” in 2:10 may suggest. As such, a marriage covenant between two people of the opposite sex living under the Mosaic Covenant is a mutually binding agreement with Yahweh, the Lord of the covenant, who serves as the enforcer of the marriage covenant. In this verse, breaking faith with your partner refers to being unfaithful to one’s marriage covenant.

- d) While Malachi’s marriage covenant is a sub-covenant of the Mosaic Covenant, it is grounded in the creation ordinance of marriage. To have a more complete picture of what is involved with the marriage covenant, we will look at it as a creation ordinance and how it is carried over into the Mosaic Covenant.

Marriage involves a covenant relationship that is divinely sanctioned. From a biblical perspective, marriage was established in the Garden of Eden, as Genesis 2 teaches. As such, it is a creation ordinance (see Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, pp. 27–30; 45–81). In 2:18, God stated that it was not good for Adam to be alone. God then brought the animals before Adam, vv. 19–20, so that Adam could exercise his headship over them by assigning names. By bringing the animals to Adam, God did not bring the animals before Adam so that God could discover what man would name the animals, but rather to show Adam his need for a helper, v. 20: “But for Adam no suitable helper was found.” Verse 20 is stated the way it is for man’s benefit and not God’s. In vv. 21–22, Scripture records the first example of anesthesia and surgery when God put Adam to sleep and formed the woman from his rib. Adam responds to God’s feminine creation in v. 23: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” Variations of “bone of my bone” is used elsewhere in Scripture (Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2–3; 2 Sam 5:2 [note parallel in 1 Chron 11:1], 2 Sam 19:13–14 [Heb vv. 12–13] to show the serious nature of the marital commitment one makes, *verba solemnia*—a covenant ratifying oath that declares one’s commitment to a relationship and an appeal for reciprocal loyalty (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 230–31; see also John Feinberg, *Ethics*, pp. 301–3). With this first marriage, the four elements of covenant are present. There was a relationship with a non-relative,

which involves mutual obligation, and it was established with an oath, a *verba solemnia*.

As a creation ordinance, this also suggests that marriage is trans-dispensational. What this implies for the book of Malachi is that we should not be surprised to find elements of the marriage ordinance reflected in parts of the Mosaic Covenant. Marriage is presented as a uniquely chosen, divinely sanctioned relation of obligation, between two non-related people of the opposite sex. In the Old Testament, parents generally arranged marriages. With marriages under the law, families negotiated such arrangements. Drawing from the Old Testament and other ancient Near Eastern documents, part of the negotiations involved the payment of a *bride price* to the woman's father (see Exod 22:16–17) and the woman's father giving her a *dowry*. The purpose of these payments was to establish security for the married couple. In reference to the bride, the dowry gave her some security. "The dowry continued to belong to the bride, so if her husband died or divorced her, she had money to live on. She might also get a portion of the estate in addition to her dowry. The only exception to this was when the wife caused the divorce. In some arrangements the wife would get only half of the dowry in this case, though usually she lost all rights to the dowry" (Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage*, pp. 5–6). Another significance of these payments was to insure that marriage was not taken lightly (ibid., p. 6). A few examples of the arrangement of marriages as well as financial obligations are Genesis 24, 29, Ruth 3–4. All of this suggests that this was a formal agreement between families.

In addition, the Mosaic Covenant had stipulations tied to marriage. For example, it was unlawful to marry a blood relative, Leviticus 18:9. The covenant also established that marriage was between two people of the opposite sex; and it required marital faithfulness, Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy 5:18 (see Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, pp. 804–5). Homosexuality and bestiality were prohibited in Leviticus 18:22–23. A reason for this is that neither relationship can reproduce and fulfill the divine mandate of filling the earth. As such, the law describes these types of relationships as abominations before God. The extensive laws in Leviticus 18 about extensive interpersonal relations and moral standards reflecting Yahweh's holiness indicate that marriage was between two non-relatives of the opposite sex. Furthermore, each partner involved in a marital covenant had other obligations to fulfill. This included sexual faithfulness for both parties. The husband had certain obligations to satisfy the basic needs of his wife. For example, Exodus 21:10–11 establishes that a husband was obligated to provide for a slave-wife certain basics of life: food, clothing and marital rights. If these were denied, the slave-wife was free to leave, "without any payment of money." If a slave-wife had this type of freedom for divorce (see Sprinkle, "Divorce and Remarriage, p. 534), it is safe to assume that a free woman would also have these rights (Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage*, p. 26).

The marriage covenant was not complete until an "oath-sign," *verba solemnia*, was invoked. This may have involved a verbal oath ("bone of my bones and

flesh of my flesh,” Gen 2:23) as well as the sexual union (implied in Gen 2:24–25). This oath-sign must not be confused with the *bride price* that was a seal of the betrothal (see Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 246–47); this oath sign completes the marital contract. Sexual union between a man and a woman in the context of a mutual agreement for a permanent relationship between two families “was understood as a marriage-constituting act and, correspondingly, was considered a requisite for covenant-ratifying (and renewing) oath-sign for marriage” (ibid., p. 248). Though prior to the Mosaic Covenant, a clear example of this is Genesis 29. Jacob had met the contractual obligations to obtain Rachel as his wife. In order to complete this marriage covenant, Jacob said to Laban in v. 21, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her.” Verses 23–28 show the legal substance of this union in completing the marriage covenant. When Jacob finds out the morning after the physical consummation of this contract that Laban had deceived him by replacing Rachel with the elder daughter, Leah, he bitterly protests to Laban. However, what is clear in this context is that no objections were raised about the legally binding nature of the marriage. The legally binding nature of the sexual union in completing a marriage covenant is also implied in other passages such as Exodus 22:16–17 and Deuteronomy 22:28–29.

- e) Two observations can be made from Malachi 2:14 about the seriousness of the covenant relationship between a husband and wife.

First, breaking the covenant relationship is a challenge to God’s authority. Since God stands as a witness to and enforcer of this covenant relationship, it is not a mere human contract, but one that includes a heavenly dimension. God confirms and acknowledges the wedding. It has heavenly confirmation by the eternal, self-existent, sovereign God! To break faith with one’s partner is to defy the Almighty.

Second, the marriage partner is described in two ways in this text. She is “the wife of your youth” (a contracted marriage while one was under the authority of their parents) and “the wife of your marriage covenant.” Both these expressions point to the intimate relationship of the marriage covenant. To break this bond is to deny the most intimate of all earthly relationships. To be unfaithful by breaking the marital covenant is to be unfaithful to God. This provides another example of how Israel had shown disloyalty to the God of the covenant.

- c. An accusation about Judah’s covenant violations by practicing aversion divorce, vv. 15–16a.

In v. 15a, Yahweh provides a reason for his accusation. In the last part of this verse, v. 15b, Yahweh challenges the Judean husbands to be faithful and this is followed by an explanation of his challenge in v. 16a.

- 1) A reason for Yahweh's accusation about Judah's covenant violations through aversion divorce, v. 15a

When examining the first part of v. 15, we must keep in mind that it is perhaps the most difficult verse in the Old Testament to interpret. This is due to the textual and grammatical difficulties (Verhoef, p. 275). In fact, Stuart goes so far as to say: "I would advise the reader that since nobody really understand what point verse 15a is making, the worst thing that could be done would be to assume that it *can* be understood" ("Malachi," p. 1340). Though this verse has a number of textual difficulties (see Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 123–27) and we must proceed with caution, we must not become so skeptical that we lose sight that v. 15a provides some reason for God's prohibition in v. 15b against being unfaithful to one's marital partner (Stuart, "Malachi," p. 1341). Two propositions are a part of this accusation.

- a) Covenant marriage as a one-flesh relationship

A literal translation of v. 15a would be: "And not one [he] made; and a remnant of spirit belonging to him/it." There are three problems with the first part of v. 15. First, should this part of the verse be taken as an interrogative? Second, should "one," *'ehād*, be the subject of the sentence or the object? Third, what does "remnant of spirit" mean? And, why do some versions translate a Hebrew word as "remnant," while others give a translation of "flesh"? We will briefly address each of these problems.

First, "and not [*w^elo*'] one [he] made [3ms qal perfect]" has been taken either as a negative statement ("not one has," NASB; "no one who has," *NET Bible*) or a question ("Did he not," ESV, NKJV; "Has not *the Lord*," NIV, TNIV; "Did not one God," NRSV; HCSB; "Didn't the LORD," NLT). Since the interrogative particle is not used with this sentence, a case can be made that this is a negative statement (so Verhoef, p. 276), as apparently taken by NASB and *NET Bible*. However, most translations have taken this clause as an unmarked interrogative sentence. The truth of the matter is that an interrogative particle is not needed to create a question. Chisholm has stated, "Not all questions will be indicated by this particle [ו]. Sometimes a question is introduced with an interrogative pronoun or adverb; at other times questions were apparently expressed simply by intonation. In this case the interpreter must rely solely on context" (Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition*, p. 75). A few items suggest that the interrogative interpretation of this part of v. 15 is preferable. GKC (sec 150a) notes many cases where the conjunction *w^e* introduces a question; and, since this clause introduced by *w^e* is coordinated with the following interrogative clause (*mā*), the interrogative understanding is more likely. Additionally, the inverted word order of this clause ("and not one [he] made," as opposed to "and [he] made not one") also suggests an interrogative question (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 146). Finally, most ancient versions, such as the Aramaic Targums, Latin Vulgate, and Syriac Peshitta, translated this clause as an interrogative question, as do most modern versions (*ibid.*, pp. 146–47). Therefore, it is better to follow the interrogative understanding of this clause.

Second, the use of *'ehād*, “one,” is also debated. The issues relate to determining the antecedent of *'ehād* and its syntactical function. In noting the complexities with *'ehād*, “one,” Clendenen observes: “As it stands the syntactical and exegetical problems are legion. Is ‘one’ (*'ehād*) in the first clause the subject or object (or predicate adjective) of ‘did/made’ (*'āsā*)? Does it refer back to *'ehād* in v. 10? If it is the subject, what is the understood object (perhaps ‘it,’ ‘her,’ or ‘them’)? Does ‘one’ refer to God (or to Adam or Abraham, especially if ‘one father’ in v. 10 refers to one of these) or to the marital relationship of v. 14 (perhaps alluding to Gen 2:24) or to the one guilty of unfaithfulness (noting similarities to the curse in v. 12, especially ‘to the man who does it’) or is it pronominal with *lo'*, ‘not,’ with the sense of ‘no one’ (cf. Job 14:4)? If ‘one’ is the object, who is the understood subject of the verb?” (*Malachi*, p. 350).

The NASB, NRSV, HCSB and *NET Bible* take “no one,” *lo' 'ehād*, as the pronominal subject of this clause (for support of this rendering, see Verhoef, p. 277 and Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, pp. 82, 106–8). Against these four translations, it is likely that if a pronominal subject had been intended, Malachi would have used either *'ēn 'iš* or *'ēn* (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 129–30). Another issue that works against the translation of the NASB, NRSV, HCSB and *NET Bible* are the sixteen uses of the collocation of *lo'* and *'ehād* in the OT. Hugenberger has demonstrated that there are no clear references where *lo'* used with *'ehād* clearly function as a pronominal subject (ibid., p. 130). Therefore, *'ehād* should be seen as either an object, or predicate adjective, in this clause, rather than its subject. Since *'ehād* is something of an object in this clause, what is the antecedent of the subject, “he” (*'āsā*, “he made,” 3ms qal perfect)? The most obvious antecedent would be “the LORD,” *Yahweh*, in v. 14.

At this point, we could translate this clause of v. 15 like this: “Has He [Yahweh] not made one?” A translation along this line is found in ESV, NIV, TNIV, NLT and NKJV. To what then does “one,” *'ehād*, refer? Is there a connection between the first use of “one,” *'ehād*, in this verse and the two uses of *'ehād*, in v. 10: “Have we not all one [*'ehād*] Father? Did not one [*'ehād*] God create us?” The point of 2:10 was to stress to the covenant community that, because Yahweh is “one,” they should be “one” (Ralph Smith, *Malachi*, p. 321). “By analogy with 2:10,” as Hugenberger observes, “Malachi may imply in 2:15 that the One God who made Adam and Eve likewise made them to be ‘one’ and hence, on penalty of their lives (2:15ba, cf. Gen. 2:23), requires that they should act as ‘one’ (cf. Gen. 1:27 and 2:24)” (*Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 148). This is to say the use of “one,” *'ehād*, points back to the “one flesh” relationship described in Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh [*bāsār 'ehād*].”

Additionally, this reference to Genesis 2 is further supported by the fact that the book of Malachi as a whole is filled with references and allusions to the Pentateuch. To this we should also note that Malachi’s use of the verb *'āsā*

(to “do, make,” “create”) is one of the verbs used in Genesis 1–2 to describe God’s creative activity. For example, Genesis 1:26 uses this verb to describe man being created in God’s image: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man [‘āśā] in our image.’” When God concludes his creative work on day 6, Genesis 1:31 says “God saw all that he had made [‘āśā].” Just prior to God’s creation of Eve, he says, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make [‘āśā] a helper suitable for him.” In the context of aversion divorce, the early chapters of Genesis lay the foundation for marital unity, as opposed to marital disunity. “Since the subject under discussion is divorce, what would appear more typical of this Hebrew prophet than to return to the originating passage where the marriage ties had been set forth with the same degree of solemnity as argued here? It would be as conclusive an argument as our Lord will later make in a similar situation where divorce is also the subject” (Kaiser, *Malachi*, p. 71). Thus, Malachi’s use of “one” in 2:15 is a reference to the “one flesh” relationship that God established in the Garden of Eden. Verse 15a should be taken as question: “Has not Yahweh made husband and wife one flesh?”

Third, two issues related to “remnant of spirit” need to be addressed. Initially, why do some versions have “flesh” as opposed to “remnant/portion”? In addition, assuming the accuracy of “remnant” rather than “flesh,” what does “remnant of spirit” mean?

To begin with, while “he had a remnant of spirit,” which is in basic agreement with NASB and NKJV, has similarities with “a small portion of the Spirit” (*NET Bible*) “with a portion of the Spirit in their union” (ESV), and “with a remnant of His life-breath” (HCSB), there is a greater difference with the NIV’s “in flesh and spirit they are his,” or similar translations in TNIV, NLT, NRSV. The difference between the two sets of translations relates to a vowel point associated with the Hebrew word, *ûšē ‘ār* (רֶשֶׁת), “and/even/with a remnant/portion/small portion.” If one vowel point is changed from *ā* to *ē* (*ûšē ‘ār* [רֶשֶׁת]), “remnant,” to *ûšē ‘ēr* [רֶשֶׁת], “flesh”), the Hebrew word would be translated as “flesh” or “body.” This vowel change would result in a translation like the NIV’s “In flesh and spirit they are his.” This is to say, husband and wife are united to the Lord as a complete unit of “flesh/body and spirit.” While this interpretation clearly makes a connection with Genesis 2, a major problem against it is that, though the ancient versions disagree with the MT in several points in Malachi 2:10–16, this is the one place where they agree (Clendenen, *Malachi*, pp. 354–55; for a discussion of the differences between the Hebrew text in Malachi 2 and the Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, and Latin Vulgate, see Day, “The Witness of the Ancient Versions in the Book of Malachi,” pp. 32–48). Though the vowel points were not part of the inspired autographa of Malachi, the ancient versions support the reading found in the MT. In the final analysis, I take the *wāw* conjunction that begins this clause as an exegetical use of *wāw*, *ûšē ‘ār*, “even a remnant”; and I understood that the antecedent of “him/it,” *lō*, to be the one-

flesh relationship alluded to in the first clause of v. 15. This clause could be translated as “even a remnant of spirit belonging to it.”

Furthermore, to what does “spirit” (“remnant of spirit”) refer? The translations found in the NASB, ESV, NKJV, and *NET Bible* suggest that the use of *rûah* is in reference to the Holy Spirit (“the Spirit”). However, it is difficult to conceive how the Jews in Malachi’s day could conceive of a personal manifestation of the Spirit, while simultaneously limiting the Spirit. John Smith has stated: “If the Spirit of Yahweh be thought of as a personal manifestation, as this translation seems to suggest, how can it at the same time be presented in an abstract quality or be spoken of quantitatively? Could the Hebrews think of the Spirit as limited in amount” (*Malachi*, p. 54). While Hugenberger makes an allowance for *rûah* referring to the Holy Spirit, he also suggests that *rûah* could relate to the breath of life in mankind (*Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 136–37). Clendenen appears to combine the Holy Spirit and what he preserves in the marriage union (*Malachi*, p. 355). The final and preferable view is that of Hill. His view is that *rûah* “refers to the ‘life force’ or ‘life principle’ animating all living things” (*Malachi*, p. 245). Because the semantic range of *rûah* includes “life principle,” this is an allowable interpretation (*HALOT*, 2:1199). A possible parallel for this understanding of *rûah* may be drawn from Genesis 6:3 where God states that his life-giving principle (“spirit,” *rûah*) would only remain with the antediluvian civilization for 120 years until the universal flood in Noah’s day (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 137). Furthermore, this use of *rûah* is consistent with its additional use in the last part of Malachi 2:15: “so guard yourselves in your spirit [*rûah*]” (see Davis, “Malachi 2:10–16,” pp. 78–79).

In concluding this discussion of Malachi 2:15a, Malachi provides a reason for his prohibition against aversion divorce. In spite of the textual and syntactical difficulties associated with Malachi’s reason for his prohibition, we believe this text can still be worked with. While it is necessary to proceed with caution, I could translate v. 15a this way: “Has not Yahweh made the two into one, with a remnant of spirit belonging to it?” Perhaps, it might be helpful to paraphrase Malachi’s rhetorical question in this part of v. 15 with two summary questions. Has not Yahweh, the one and only God who created Israel’s covenant unity, arranged the created order, beginning with the first husband and wife, so that the two, husband and wife, have a one-flesh relationship? In addition, is not the preservation of Israel’s marriage covenant consistent with that original one-flesh relationship? These questions give a foundation for the next question in Malachi 2:15 that focuses on a divine intention with a covenant marriage.

b) Divine intention for covenant marriage as a one-flesh relationship

This part of v. 15 can be translated: “And, what was the one [*hā’ehād*] seeking? Godly offspring.” Our translation of this question should be contrasted with the NIV’s: “And why one?” The type of translation represented by the NIV assumes that both uses of *’ehād* in v. 15 have the same referent. One problem for this interpretation is that the interrogative pronoun *mā* (“what”) is used 554 times in

the OT and, according to Hugenberger, only about 17 uses of *mā* are used as “why”; and none of the uses *mā* as “why” are found in verbless clauses as is the case in Malachi 2:15 (*Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 138–39). Therefore, the NIV’s translation inadequately captures the sense of this clause. Another problem is the use of the article with “one” (*hā’ehād*), “the one,” which seems to distinguish it from the first use of *’ehād* in v. 15 (“one [flesh]”) (ibid., p. 139). The use of the article allows for each use of *’ehād* to have different referents.

What then is the referent to “the one”? Merrill has identified the referent as Abraham (*Malachi*, p. 421). This is also the interpretation of the *NET Bible* as its translation and footnotes suggest. The problem for this interpretation is that this antecedent is not found in the immediate context. Verhoef takes *hā’ehād* as “that one.” He maintains, “that one” refers to “the person who seeks a godly offspring” and reflects “spiritual insight and does not violate the marriage as a divine institution” (p. 277). Unfortunately, it is unlikely that Verhoef’s interpretation of *hā’ehād*, “that one,” can be equated with “not one” in the first clause of v. 15 (see Davis, “Malachi 2:10–16,” p. 81). A contextually reasonable interpretation is to take the antecedent of “the one” to be the “one Father” and “one God” in v. 10 (Hill, *Malachi*, p. 246). Between the “one-flesh relationship” of the first clause and use of “the One” in the immediate clause, v. 15 looks back to Genesis 1–2 where God created the one-flesh relationship of the marriage covenant. This backdrop in Genesis 1–2 provides a basis for Malachi’s charge for faithfulness to the marriage covenant (Davis, “Malachi 2:10–16,” pp. 82–83).

In agreement with this interpretation of Malachi 2:15 is the translation of the ESV: “And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring.” “Godly offspring” (*zera’ ’ēlōhîm*, זֵרַע אֱלֹהִים) could be literally translated as “the seed of God.” In this particular collocation, *zera’* (“seed”) is metaphorically used to refer to “offspring” and *’ēlōhîm* (“God”) functions as an abstract noun, “godly.” This is an attributive genitive. With attributive genitives, the genitive is rendered as an adjective that qualifies the construct noun, “godly offspring” (see my “Syntax Notes for Hebrew Syntax and Reading,” [Fall 2005], p. 31). This is the only place in the Old Testament where this specific construct-genitive is used (Baker, *Malachi*, p. 257). When Malachi answers his question with “seed of God,” I understand that this is not a reference simply to the remnant of the covenant having children in general, but rather reflects the hope of every household of faith that they would hopefully raise a God-fearing progeny. This is to say, covenant marriages should follow the one flesh relationship of Adam and Eve, with the desire of raising up “seed” of the woman rather than “seed” of Satan. This expectation of raising God-fearing children started in the time of Adam and Eve and lived on in Malachi’s day, as he looked forward to a future when Elijah would return and “turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers” (Mal 4:6, Heb 3:24) (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 140–41). The point is that God often uses permanent, godly marriage as a means of producing a godly offspring.

2) First divine challenge for faithfulness in covenant marriage, v. 15b

An outgrowth of his reason for accusing Judah of covenant infractions in their marriages, Yahweh gives his first challenge about faithfulness in marriage: “So guard yourself in your spirit [*rûah*], and do not break faith [*bāgad*] with the wife of your youth.” Whatever else may be said about the difficulties associated with v. 15, this part of the verse is clear. Yahweh challenged the husbands of the covenant community to internally guard themselves and not violate their obligations to the marriages arranged by their family.

3) A reason for the divine challenge for faithfulness in covenant marriage, v. 16a

Since Malachi has issued a prohibition against a Jewish husband breaking faith with his covenant partner, his intention in v. 16a is to support his command. The Hebrew text of v. 16a has some textual and interpretative difficulties, and some of these may be reflected by a number of questions. How does the first clause relate to the next (“and/then he covers his garments with violence”)? This is to say, are the clauses coordinated or subordinated? Why do some versions have the personal pronoun “I,” representing God, rather than “he,” which represents either God or the man filing for a divorce? Is the verb *hates* a finite verb or an infinitive? How does the verb *hates* relate to *divorces*? Before we survey some of the interpretations of v. 16a, a discussion of the text is apropos.

a) Textual discussion

Various English versions represent three types of translation, as the following reflect.

NIV: “‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty” (this is similar to the translations found in NASB, RSV, NRSV, NLT, and *NET Bible*).

NKJV: “‘For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,’ says the LORD of hosts” (similar to KJV).

ESV: “For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts” (similar to HCSB).

In this brief comparison of the three types of translations, we should notice that the subject of the verb “hate” is the LORD in both NIV and NKJV, with the former representing God in the first person and the latter in the third person. However, in the ESV the subject is the man who initiates divorce with his covenant partner. These three translations reflect some of the interpretative options. In order to frame our discussion, we will use my following literal translation as the basis for our discussion:

“‘For/if he hates, divorces,’ say Yahweh the God of Israel, ‘and/then he covers his garment with violence,’ says Yahweh Almighty.”

First, the conjunction *kī* can be translated as “for” or “if.” This conjunction is translated as “for” in KJV, NKJV, NRSV, ESV and NLT. However, it is translated as “if,” in HCSB, Stuart’s translation (“Malachi,” p. 1339), and in most ancient versions, such as most manuscripts of the Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, and Aramaic Targums (ibid., pp. 1341–42). Since this *kī* clause is followed by *w^e* + perfect verb (“he covers”), this supports taking *kī* as a conditional particle “if.” In this case, *kī* introduces the protasis and *w^e* + perfect the apodosis (see support by Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 67–71; so also Stuart, “Malachi,” pp. 1341–42).

Second, “he hates” is vocalized as a third person, masculine, singular, Qal, perfect verb. The verbal root *śn*’, “to hate,” is an antonym with *’hb*, “to love.” The semantics of *śn*’, can range from having “evil hatred,” to “complete hatred,” and even to having an aversion for someone (*TLOT*, s.v. “שׂנא,” by E. Jenni, 3:1278). In the immediate context of Malachi 2:16, the issue relates to the antecedent of “he” in “he hates.” The preceding context in v. 15 may suggest that the antecedent is Yahweh. However, it is awkward to have Yahweh in direct speech to refer to himself in an impersonal manner: “‘he [Yahweh] hates,’ says Yahweh the God of Israel...” (Clendenen, *Malachi*, pp. 361–62). Apparently to avoid the awkward nature of this construction, the KJV and NKJV change the style to reported speech, rather than direct speech style used in the Hebrew text: “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce” (NKJV).

Rather than taking the antecedent of “he” as Yahweh, the verb *śānē*’ (“he hates”) has been either emended to *śānē’ī*, “I hate” (1cs, qal, perfect), or a personal pronoun is added to the text, *’ānī* (“I”), along with allowing either one of the vowel points of the verb *śānē*’ to be changed to make it a masculine singular participle, *śōnē*’ (“hating,” resulting in “I hate”) or suggesting that the form preserved in the MT is a rare participle (which only exists in Mal 2:16a, yet the actual participle *śōnē*’ occurs about eight times in the OT; see Clendenen, *Malachi*, p. 361, n. 171). This latter option is Verhoef’s approach, with the exception that, rather than supporting an addition of *’ānī* (“I”), he maintains that this personal pronoun has been suppressed and should be supplied from the context, though he allows for a change of one vowel point with *śānē*’ so that it reads *śōnē*’ (*Malachi*, p. 278). Verhoef’s suggestion that there is an implied subject, *’ānī* (“I”), is unlikely in a clause where a participle is used as the predicate. In these types of Hebrew verbless clauses, a specific pronoun, either the independent personal pronoun or a pronoun attached to one of three particles (*yēš*, *’ēn*, or *hinnēh*), is employed (Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 623–24, sec. 37.6.a). This may be how many English versions treat the Hebrew text. The versions following this emendation, or even assuming a suppressed subject, are the NIV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NLT, and *NET Bible*. This emendation has neither

support from any Hebrew manuscripts (Sprinkle, “Divorce and Remarriage,” p. 539) nor any of the ancient versions (Baker, *Malachi*, p. 258). Based upon this tenuous textual foundation, the most comprehensive condemnation of divorce has often been strongly asserted!

However, I am convinced that the Hebrew text can be taken at face value, just as Hugenberger has argued (*Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 70). Thus, *šānē* (“he hates”) is a 3ms, qal perfect verb, just as represented in the MT. This verb form may be translated as “he hates” or “one hates” (ibid.). Baker has stated the case like this: “An option preferred here is that the subject is not Yahweh but is impersonal, ‘one,’ who in this case is the husband in the marriage under discussion” (*Malachi*, p. 258). This antecedent of “one” or “he” is indicated in v. 15: “let none break faith [אִל־יִבְגְּדוּ] with the wife of your youth.” The husbands in v. 15 are those who hate, who have an aversion for their spouse.

Third, “divorces” is a translation of *šallah*, either a Piel infinitive construct or a Piel infinitive absolute. The semantics of the Qal stem for the root *šlh* is to “stretch out, send, dispatch,” and of the Piel to “let go free, dismiss, expel” (*HALOT*, 2:1511–16). The Piel may be used as a legal term to reflect the dismissal of a woman from the state of marriage (ibid., 2:1514–15). A Piel form of *šallah* is used for “divorce” in Deuteronomy 22:19, 29, 24:1, 3, 4, Isaiah 50:1. This establishes that one of the nuances for *šlh* is “divorce.” When *šallah* is correlated with *šānē*, this indicates that the issue is not simply “divorce,” but a certain type of divorce, one that is based on the husband’s aversion. Along with another word for divorce (*k^erîṭut*), the two verbs used in the first clause of Malachi 2:16 (*šānē* and *šallah*) are also used in Deuteronomy 24:3: “and her second husband hates [*š^enē’āh*] her and writes her a certificate of divorce [*k^erîṭut*], gives it to her and sends [*šillah*] her from his house.”

While there is great unanimity about the semantics of *šallah*, the differences relate to identifying its grammatical form. As *šallah* is vocalized, it may be identified as a Piel infinitive construct (“to divorce”). The infinitive construct can be taken as a result clause: “He hates so as to divorce” (Sprinkle, “Marriage and Divorce,” p. 539). While this is a possible interpretation, *šallah* could also be taken as a Piel infinitive absolute. The advantage of this understanding is that infinitive absolutes are often substitutes for finite verbal forms. In this case, this infinitive absolute would substitute for a Piel perfect and *šallah* would reflect an asyndetic construction (no conjunction, yet treated as if it had a conjunction): “One hates and divorces” (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 72–73). While this form could also be taken either as a Piel imperative, which would give a command to divorce, or as Piel perfect, with slight adjustment to one of *šallah*’s vowel points (*šillah*), resulting in the same translation as with the infinitive absolute, these are more problematic than taking *šallah* as either a Piel infinitive construct or absolute (see ibid.). While the grammatical identification of *šallah* has no

consensus, the semantic nuance of *šallah* as “divorce” is recognized in every translation.

In the discussion of Malachi 2:14, we summarized the marriage covenant under the Mosaic Covenant. Building from a foundation about what constitutes a marriage regulated by the Mosaic Covenant, it is helpful to consider some of issues along with the pertinent texts that imply and regulate divorce.

Initially, in some Old Testament texts the right to a divorce is assumed. According to Deuteronomy 24:1–4, if a man found “something indecent” about his wife, he could issue her a “certificate of divorce.” If this woman remarries and loses her second husband through death or divorce, she was prohibited from going back to her first husband. While historically this passage has received much attention, Sprinkle has noted four facts about this passage that cannot be glossed over. (1) Under some circumstances, God allowed divorce. (2) While “something indecent” has been the subject of much discussion, this establishes that a man was required to have some valid reason for divorce. (3) Divorce required legal documentation, a “certificate of divorce.” (4) Divorce with acceptable grounds allowed for remarriage (“Divorce and Remarriage,” pp. 531–32). Another passage that assumes divorce is Deuteronomy 22:13–19. If a man falsely accuses his wife of not having been a virgin at marriage, he forfeits his right to divorce her. In vv. 28–29, the right to a divorce is again forfeited in a situation where a man has raped an unengaged Israelite woman and then marries her (ibid., pp. 532–33).

In addition, there are Old Testament texts where grounds for a divorce are provided. In Deuteronomy 22:13–19, the very fact that a man falsely accused his wife of not being a virgin “suggests that groundless divorce was either not permitted or resulted in severe financial penalty” (Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage*, p. 23). As just mentioned in Deuteronomy 24:1–4, a ground for divorce was “something indecent.” Exodus 21:10–11 teaches that if a husband, after taking another wife, reduces his slave-wife’s basic provisions of food, clothing and marital rights, she was released from the marriage: “she is to go free, without any payment of money” (v. 11). “The point being made,” according to Sprinkle, “is that if this woman, sold as a slave-wife, is no longer to be a wife she cannot be kept as a slave on the pretext that she is the man’s wife. Instead she is to be given her freedom. The purpose of this law, then, was humanitarian: to assure that a woman sold for the purpose of marriage would not be taken advantage of by being reduced instead to ordinary slavery. Thus under these conditions, and for the sake of the woman involved, God commanded the Israelite unwilling to give

the woman full wifely privileges to divorce her without return of the original bride price” (“Divorce and Remarriage,” p. 534). Thus, failure to meet the basic requirements of marriage provided grounds for divorce.

In Deuteronomy 21:10–14, an Israelite soldier is given the right to marry a woman taken in battle, once she has met certain requirements. If after he marries her, she is not pleasing in his eyes, she is given her freedom, which implies divorce, but she cannot be sold as a slave. This “text does not condone the man’s choice of no longer accepting this woman as his wife. His reasons may well be morally unjustified. But if for whatever reason he rejects her as wife, the text prescribes divorce and release as preferable to her continued subjugation” (ibid., p. 535). Ezra 9–10 is another passage that provides a ground for divorce and remarriage. In Ezra 9:2 a number of Israelite men had married pagan women. After their confession of this to Ezra, he seeks Yahweh in prayer in the remainder of this chapter. In 10:1–2a the people of Israel mourn over their sin and tell Ezra that they will follow his instruction. In vv. 2b–4 Shecaniah tells Ezra that they will divorce their wives according to the Torah. In v. 5 Ezra places the Israelites under an oath to do what Shecaniah had said. In vv. 7–17, we see how they took care of this matter of divorce. It is clear Ezra mandated this type of divorce. In this case, the grounds for divorce was that the wife was an idolater. And, by doing what Ezra commanded, Israel would keep apostasy out of their land. In some sense, we would have to say that divorce in Ezra 9–10 was an act of obedience to God.

Furthermore, some Old Testament texts prohibit divorce. As previously noted, Deuteronomy 22:11–19 and 28–29 rule out an Israelite’s right for a divorce. Because of the special calling of the Levites, they were not permitted, according to Leviticus 21:7, 14, 22:13, to marry prostitutes, divorced woman, or widows. Malachi 2:16 condemns divorce based upon aversion.

Finally, when Israel seriously violated the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh chose the metaphor of divorce to show the seriousness of Israel’s covenant violations. In three passages, God uses the language of divorce to describe Israel’s violations of their covenant relationship with Yahweh, Isaiah 50:1, Hosea 2:2, and Jeremiah 3:1–8. If divorce is inherently evil, it is difficult to conceive of God using such a metaphor. God never portray himself as doing evil (Sprinkle, “Divorce and Remarriage,” pp. 541–43).

Our survey of passages pertaining to marriage and divorce reflects that under certain circumstances, divorce was allowable and gave one the

freedom to remarry, and under other circumstances, divorce was not allowed.

Fourth, the relationship between the first clause and second clauses in v. 16 could be one of coordination or subordination. As some translations reflect, it is possible that the relationship between the two clauses is one of coordination: “‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and the one who is guilty of violence’” (*NET Bible*). The conjunction *kî* that stands at the head of v. 16 may indicate that there is a conditional relationship between the first and second clause: “‘If he hates and divorces [his wife],’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘then he covers his garment with injustice’” (HCSB). While there is merit in seeing some type of coordination, or even causation, I am persuaded that it is preferable to see a conditional relationship between the two clause, as supported by Hugenberger (*Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 69–70), Sprinkle (“Divorce and Remarriage,” pp. 538–40), Baker (*Malachi*, pp. 257–58), Clendenen (*Malachi*, pp. 362–64), and Stuart (“Malachi,” pp. 1341–42).

Fifth, the apodosis in Malachi 2:16a, “covers his garment with violence,” has been interpreted in different ways. *Garment* has been taken literally to refer to the worship attire in an idolatrous cultic function (Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 74). It has also been equated with someone’s wife (*ibid.*, pp. 74–75). The most convincing view is that *his garment* is “another instance of the pervasive biblical image of clothes as the outward expression of the inner state of a man” (*ibid.*, p. 75). The combination of *his garment* and *violence* implies that divorce based upon aversion is an illicit act. This type of divorce is unethical and reflects an example of infidelity, covenant breaking. It is subject to divine judgment (*ibid.*, p. 76).

b) Critique of four interpretations

Having discussed the textual issues associated with Malachi 2:16a, we will survey some interpretations of it. Hugenberger has noted nine major interpretations of Malachi 2:16a and divided these into four groups: interpretations of Malachi 2:16a rejecting any mention of divorce, understandings necessitating or allowing for divorce, approaches affirming an absolute prohibition of divorce, and explanations limiting the kind of divorce banned (*Marriage As a Covenant*, p. 51).

First, some understandings reject any mention of divorce in Malachi 2:16a. This type of approach either figuratively interprets this text as referring to an idolatrous ritual or that it treats marriage-related problems but not divorce. Those who interpret this text in this fashion either feel that the text is hopelessly corrupt or it is necessary to emend this text at key junctures (see *ibid.*, pp. 51–58). With views of the text like these, interpreters turn to a figurative interpretation of this text (for support, see Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, pp. 113–20). However, if Malachi 2:16a, as well as the entire pericope of 2:10–16, is to be taken literally, not much significance can be attributed to these views.

Second, some interpretations of Malachi 2:16a require or permit divorce. A few interpretative options fit into this category. For example, some who see this text as requiring divorce take *šallah* as an imperative. V. 16a reads like this: “if he hates, send her away.” This is supported by a number of ancient versions, Latin Vulgate, Aramaic Targums, and some Septuagint manuscripts (see Hugenberger, *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 58–59). Variations of this view maintain that this command is to divorce heathen wives or that divorce is better than polygyny (see *ibid.*, pp. 59–62). While it is possible to take *šallah* as an imperative, this verbal identification undermines Malachi’s argument in this section (Baldwin, *Malachi*, p. 241).

Third, some approaches use Malachi 2:16a as a comprehensive condemnation of divorce. At least on the surface, most English translations support this understanding (NIV, TNIV, NASB, KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV and *NET Bible*). Verhoef takes this text as an absolute prohibition against all divorce. While conceding that divorces had not been prohibited prior to the postexilic period, he insists that Malachi sets a stricter standard. “In the postexilic period stricter demands were made on the marriage bond, apparently in connection with the prohibition of marriages with Canaanites and heathen people in general (Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:4). The prophecy of Malachi endorses these stricter stipulations, and provides in this respect the ultimate in the OT revelation” (*Malachi*, p. 280). Verhoef represents the view of many commentaries, such as Baldwin (*Malachi*, p. 241) and Blaising (“Malachi,” p. 1582; for a list of a number of other commentators who take this view, see Davis, “Malachi 2:10–16,” p. 86, n. 336). A major problem with viewing this as an absolute prohibition is that it glosses over the exegetical details that Hugenberger and others have produced. From my perspective, a more significant problem is the failure of this view to take into account the totality of Scripture’s teaching on the subject of marriage and divorce. This is to say, the analogy of Scripture has been downplayed and in some cases ignored (see Hugenberger’s response to this approach in *Marriage As a Covenant*, pp. 62–66).

Fourth, other interpretations of Malachi 2:16a limit the kind of divorce. This category can be divided into two subcategories. The first subcategory teaches that God hates a specific type of divorce, but he does not hate all divorce. Jay Adams represents this subcategory. “It is altogether true,” states Adams, “that God hates divorce. But He neither hates all divorces in the same way nor hates every aspect of divorce. He hates what occasions *every* divorce—even the one that *He* gave to sinful Israel. He hates the results that often flow to children and to injured parties of a divorce (yet even that did not stop Him from willing divorce in Ezra 10:44, 11). And he hates divorces wrongly obtained on grounds that He has not sanctioned” (*Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, p. 23). Thus, even if one does not agree that Malachi 2:16 is not prohibiting aversion divorce, it would appear that *analogia Scriptura* would teach that God hated certain types of divorce. In light of the many other passages on divorce and remarriage, the *analogia Scriptura* demands that God cannot hate all divorce.

The second subcategory teaches that the “hates” of Malachi 2:16a is a reference to a husband’s attitude of aversion against the wife whom he initiates a divorce. In my not so humble opinion, the aversion divorce view more consistently explains the actual Hebrew text and the exegetical details associated with it. Furthermore, it does not gloss over passages that assume divorce is allowable. In addition, it is in harmony with the whole counsel of God. As commentaries by Clendenen, Baker, and Stuart, as well as Instone-Brewer’s *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, reflect, they have been written in the post-Hugenberger era. Whether or not scholars agree with Hugenberger, they are forced to interact with his argument. Hugenberger’s influence is seen in the translation of Malachi 2:16 by the ESV and HCSB as each clearly reflects that it is not God’s hatred of divorce being described but the husband’s aversion for his wife that results in divorce (see the confession of Heth, “Jesus on Divorce: How My Mind Has Changed,” p. 7). In short, to divorce a godly woman because of aversion was a heinous violation of the Mosaic Covenant and, ultimately, against the LORD of the Covenant. With the evidence we have presented, the HCSB’s translation is most consistent with what we have presented: “‘If he hates and divorces [his wife],’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘he covers his garment with injustice,’ says the LORD of Hosts.”

3. Yahweh concludes with a summary challenge, v. 16b.

Because divorce between two supposedly believing partners is so serious, Malachi again gives Israel another admonition and a prohibition. This verses looks back to 2:15 where three of the same words were used: *guard yourself, in your spirit, and do not break faith*. The only difference between these three words is that *let none break faith* (so Hebrew text) in v. 15 was a third person masculine singular and in v. 16 it is changed to a second person masculine plural, *do not break faith*. So, v. 16b and v. 15b form an enveloped with this final portions of 2:10–16.

a. The admonition

“So guard yourselves in your spirit.” Malachi is advocating that his audience must be cautious. A member of the covenant community was to keep his mind so tenaciously set on being faithful in his marital contract with his spouse by covenant arrangement that they must never let the contrary thought cross his mind.

b. The prohibition

“Do not break faith.” The prohibition is stated in a very strong manner. We could translate it: “Thou shall not break faith through aversion divorce.” With somewhat of an application twist for marriages among believers in all ages, we could say: “Because God is opposed to ‘no-fault divorce,’ believers must not break faith in their marital agreement.” Collins summarizes this unit: “He who is wise will watch for the first stirrings of resentment, which might turn into dislike, and repent of it immediately, lest he deal treacherously with her whom the Lord has given to be a blessing” (“Malachi 2:16,” p. 40).

4. Conclusions about Marriage and Divorce for OT Members of the Covenant Community

Based upon Malachi 2:10–16, we will draw four conclusions about marriage and divorce.

- a. An OT believer’s marriage to one outside the covenant community was an “abomination” or “detestable thing,” *tô‘ēbâ*, in the sight of the Lord, v. 11. Though the church is not Israel, we can draw a principle from this passage that marriage in whatever dispensation is a covenant arrangement between God and two believers of the opposite sex. It is abominable for a believer to marry an unbeliever in violation of this pattern.
- b. An aversion divorce between two people in the covenant community breaks one’s covenant obligation with his spouse. When a godly man and woman marry, they form a triangular relationship, God, husband, and wife. To violate the terms of this covenant arrangement through aversion divorce is to break faith with God and other believers, v. 14b.
- c. Divorcing a godly spouse to go after an unbeliever hinders the development of godly offspring, v. 15a.
- d. God’s condemnation of aversion divorce between two believers is strongly stated as covering one’s garment with violence, v. 16a.

E. Fourth Disputation: Yahweh’s Coming to Judge the Wicked and to Purify His People, 2:17–3:5

It might seem strange to have a new unit of material begin with the final verse of a chapter. Since the time of Ibn Ezra, 2:17 has been taken as the beginning of a new division in Malachi. 2:17 has no connection with the preceding unit and is an integral part of 3:1–5. We should again note, through the use of catchwords, how closely this is tied to the preceding disputation. Stuart has noted the following connections shared between the third and fourth disputation (“Malachi,” p. 1347).

Catchword	3rd Disputation	4th Disputation
divorce, sending (<i>šlh</i>)	2:16	3:1
seeking (<i>bqš</i>)	2:15	3:1
covenant	2:10, 14	3:1
offering (<i>minhâ</i>)	2: 12–13	3:3–4
Israel, Jerusalem, Judah	2:11	3:4
Yahweh a witness (<i>‘ēd</i>)	2:14	3:5

As we have seen with some of the preceding disputations, this has the same triad: an assertion followed by an objection and concluded with Yahweh’s response. Wendland has essentially laid out the linear arrangement of this unit in this fashion (p. 113):

Assertion,	2:17a	
Objection,	2:17b	“You ask”
Response,	2:17c–3:5	Yahweh’s response

The people had asserted two complaints in 2:17 God is pleased with evil and God is unconcerned about injustice. Yahweh responds to this twofold reproach in 3:1–5.

In this pericope, Yahweh is addressing the covenant community as a whole. We can see this in 3:3–4 where He addresses the people of “Judah and Jerusalem” which according to this verse also includes “the Levites” as is also true in light of the preceding material in this book. To assist us in our understanding of this passage, we need to consider the theological and historical setting of this passage. Verhoef has succinctly summarized this. “The historical and theological background of the people’s reproach is to be found in their experiences. They had returned from exile quite a while ago. In the beginning the external circumstances seemed to justify their messianic expectations: the return was regarded as a miracle from God (Ps. 127:3); Zerubbabel was chosen to be God’s signet ring (Hag. 2:23); the erection of the second temple and the renewal of the sacrifices caused the people to rejoice (Ezra 3:10–13; Hag. 2:9; Zech. 2:10); the people had reconfirmed the covenant with their God (Neh. 8–10). The later course of events had been disappointing, however. The messianic age had not yet arrived. The people were still subject to Persian rule (1:8). The Promised Land did not become a paradise, but instead crops failed due to locusts and drought (3:11). Religious activities were becoming burdensome (1:13) and without spiritual effect (2:13). Priests and people alike were violating the covenants of the fathers (2:8, 10)” (p. 284).

This undoubtedly promoted the question of whether or not it was legitimate to “adhere to the promise of the coming of the Messiah. At any rate, the expectation appears to have had no concrete meaning. The evildoers apparently had their way, without fear of punishment. It made no difference whether a person did good or evil, because the rule of retribution, which would be especially applicable on the Day of the Lord, seemed to be ineffective (cf. Job 9:24; Zeph. 1:12). And so biting irony and reckless exaggeration marked the words of these speakers. The fact that evildoers in general were not immediately punished is interpreted to mean that the Lord endorsed evil and was pleased with the evildoers. With audacity, they proposed an alternative conclusion: Or, if this is not the case, where is the God of judgment? Why does he not reveal himself as judge to punish all the evil that is done?” (ibid., pp. 284–85).

Based upon Wendland’s linear arrangement, we will divide this unit in this threefold manner: Yahweh’s assertion, 2:17a, the people’s objection, 2:17b, and Yahweh’s response, 2:17c–3:5.

1. Yahweh’s Assertion, 2:17a

Yahweh asserts that Israel had wearied Him with their words. These words focus on Israel’s complaints about how God was not satisfying their expectations.

2. The People’s Objection, 2:17b

Once again, Malachi reflects that the people were completely oblivious to this charge. This is reflected by their question, “How have we wearied him?”

3. Yahweh’s Response, 2:17c–3:5

Yahweh responds by initially explaining the question raised in 2:17b. This explanation is found in the remainder of v. 17. He then expands on this response in the 3:1–5.

a. Yahweh's Response Summarized, 2:17c

How had some of these Israelites wearied Yahweh? Israel's basic complaint is summarized in a twofold manner.

- 1) "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them." Things had degenerated so much in Israelite society, many Judeans apparently thought that God did not really care. "Since evil prevailed so greatly in the nation, God couldn't be very bothered by it, could he? In fact, he must love it, or else he'd do something about it! The level of sin, crime, and corruption was such that it was *as if* God were encouraging it" (Stuart, "Malachi, p. 1348).
- 2) "Where is the God of justice?" This question reflects Israel's complacent attitude. God is negligent about enforcing justice. Therefore, why should his people be concerned about how they lived. Yahweh's negligence in immediately administering justice provides an excuse for Israel to live in whatever way they wanted.

b. Yahweh's Response Explained with a Prophecy, 3:1-5

Yahweh now responds to the twofold explanation of 2:17c. Yahweh initially responds on a general level in vv. 1-2b. In vv. 2c-4 He then responds to the first reproach and in v. 5 he responds to the second reproach (Verhoef, p. 283).

1) Yahweh will come in judgment, vv. 1-2b.

A problem is posed in v. 1 with identifying "my messenger," "the Lord," and "the messenger of the covenant." Most commentators see "my messenger" as being distinct from "the Lord" in v. 1a. "The Lord" is further correlated with "the messenger of the covenant." Yahweh's messenger ("my messenger") is clearly distinguished in this verse from Yahweh, "See, I [Yahweh] will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me [Yahweh]." This part of the verse precisely states that Yahweh's messenger will prepare the way before Him. Though Yahweh's messenger has been identified as John the Baptist, he is preferably identified with Elijah because of the parallel nature of this verse with 4:5-6.

The remainder of v. 1 is made up of two lines that have a number of items that semantically overlap. For purposes of clarification, we could literally translate it in this way:

"Then-suddenly **he-will-come** to-his-temple, *the Lord* whom-you are-seeking
And-the-messenger-of-the-covenant in-whom you delight, see **he-comes**,⁷ says
Yahweh Almighty."

The expressions that are hyphenated are either a translation of a single term or are inseparably bound in the Hebrew text. To highlight the areas that overlap I have highlighted them in various ways. The verbs in bold print are the same in Hebrew. The underlined verbal forms are parallel in thought. Seeking the Lord semantically includes desiring the same object. If these expressions are genuinely parallel, then it also follows that the Lord and the-messenger-of-the-covenant are also identical.

The term translated as “messenger” is the same term as what we had in the first line of v. 1 that we took as a reference to Elijah. We might then conclude that the Lord and the messenger of the covenant is Elijah. The problem with this is that the Lord goes to “his temple.” Since the temple is never regarded as Elijah’s and since it is regarded as the Lord’s temple, the best understanding is to understand this as a reference to God.

How then can the Lord be referred to as the messenger of the covenant? “The phrase probably refers to His role as enforcer of the covenant, whereby He has the authority to reward or judge His people on the basis of their loyalty (or lack thereof) to his demands” (Chisholm, p. 287). Since the term translated as “messenger” is specifically used in connection with the “messenger/angel of Yahweh” (see Gen 16:7–14; Exod 3:1–6; Zech 3:1–7), this is certainly like other places in the Old Testament where he “is both identified with and distinguished from God” (Verhoef, p. 289). This is a manifestation of the second member of the Trinity.

Not only is Yahweh’s coming unexpected, but in v. 2 it is also a time of severe judgment. The structure of the first two lines of v. 2 make it clear that no one can stand before the Lord when He comes and be able to endure during this time.

- 2) Yahweh’s disapproval of evil will be demonstrated when He purifies His people, vv. 2c–4.

Yahweh responds to the question pertaining to Him favoring evil. The issue from a theological perspective is not if Yahweh judges sin but when He chooses to judge sin. In these verses He shows His disapproval of evil through using His judgment to purify His people. Yahweh’s judgment in v. 2 is like a refiner’s fire and a launders’ soap, it removes that which is unclean. This coming judgment will purify His people. In v. 3 Yahweh is compared to the refiner and purifier. Here Yahweh will purify the descendants of Levi so that they will be able to bring righteous sacrifices. In v. 4 this purifying also includes the people who will be able to worship Yahweh in an acceptable manner.

- 3) Yahweh will demonstrate His justice when He comes in judgment, v. 5.

Malachi now directs his attention to answering the charges that Yahweh’s methods of operation approve of injustice. In v. 5 Yahweh acts in justice by taking “decisive action against all covenant breakers, whose faithless and oppressive deeds demonstrated their lack of respect for the Lord of the covenant” (Chisholm, p. 286).

F. Fifth Disputation: Yahweh’s Desire to Bless His Unfaithful People, 3:6-12

Because Israel has constantly turned away from Yahweh, they deserved to be destroyed. However, because of Yahweh’s immutable character, Israel has not been eliminated as a nation. In Deuteronomy 30:1–10 Yahweh had announced that when Israel had been exiled and subsequently returned with a resultant response of submission to Him, He would reverse the covenant curses and bestow on the nation the covenant blessings (see also Deut 28:1–14). To receive these blessings, Israel was expected to fully obey Yahweh (Deut

28:1). This included the issue of bringing their tithes and offerings to the central sanctuary. Israel had miserably failed in this regard.

Because of some general thematic parallels, 3:6–12 most clearly mirrors Malachi’s second disputation in 1:6–2:9. Some of these parallels with the appropriate verses are as follows (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1362):

1:6–2:9	3:6–12
Inadequate offerings	Inadequate offerings
Temple (1:10)	My house (3:10)
The nations (1:11, 14)	The nations (3:12)
Cheat (1:14)	Rob (3:8, 9)
Curse (1:14; 2:1–2)	Curse (3:9)
Blessing (2:2)	Blessing (3:10, 12)
Decimation (threatened, 2:3)	Decimation (forestalled, 3:6)
Appeal to patriarchal age (2:4–6)	Appeal to patriarchal age (3:6–7)
Covenant, law (2:4–6, 9)	My decrees (3:7)

With some modifications from Chisholm, our analysis follows Wendland’s pattern (p. 113). Yahweh announces that if Israel repents of this He would bless them. This pericope contains an assertion by Yahweh in vv. 6–7a. The first objection by the Israelites is stated in v. 7b. Yahweh expands his assertion in v. 8a and this is followed by an expansion of Israel’s objection in v. 8b. Yahweh finally gives a full response in vv. 8c–12. This arrangement would like this:

Assertion, 3:6–7a, 8a	“...says the LORD Almighty”
Objection, 3:7b, 8b	“But you ask, ...”
Response, 3:8c–12	Yahweh’s response

We will divide this unit up in a twofold manner: introduction in vv. 6–8b and Yahweh’s response in vv. 8c–12.

1. Introduction to Israel’s Disobedience in Giving, vv. 6–8b

a. Yahweh’s Assertion about His Faithfulness to Disobedient Israel, vv. 6–7a

Yahweh states that He is immutable (v. 6a). To say that God is immutable is to say that He is unchangeable. Grudem has defined God’s unchangeability, or immutability, like this: “God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations” (p. 163). When Malachi is referring to God’s immutability, he is referring to God’s not changing what He has promised. This guarantees that He will perform His covenant promises. In fact, this is the very reason Israel was still in existence (v. 6b). If God were changeable, He would certainly have been justified in destroying Israel since His covenant nation has continually disobeyed their covenant God (v. 7a). Israel had demonstrated in Malachi’s day about a thousand years of rebellion against his commandments. However, because Yahweh has not turned away from his promises, He calls Israel to repent. The verb translated

- as “return,” *šûb*, has a nuance of repenting in this context (Clendenen, *Malachi*, pp. 412–13). If Israel repents, God promises to renew his presence and favor (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1363).
- b. Israel’s Objection to Yahweh’s Assertion about their Disobedience, v. 7b
 “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’”—as before Malachi appropriately uses the questions raised by the people to develop his message. The point of Israel’s question is this: How can we return when we never turned away in the first place? However, God is prepared to give Israel the specifics of what area they need to return with the assertion He makes in v. 8a.
- c. Yahweh’s Expansion of His Assertion about Israel’s Disobedience in Giving, v. 8a
 “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.” In essence, Yahweh is bluntly accusing Israel of being a thief. They were stealing what rightly belonged to God. Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel was not regarded as the owner of the land that God had given them, but rather as stewards of the land for their Covenant Lord. This stewardship is indicated in Leviticus 25:23: “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.” As such, whatever the land produced or provided for belonged to their Lord, and Israel was required to give back to their Covenant Lord whatever he required. Failure to comply with God’s expectations reflected that Israel was not recognizing his lordship over them (Clendenen, *Malachi*, pp. 414–15).
- d. Israel’s Expansion of their Objection to Yahweh’s Assertion about their Disobedience in Giving, v. 8b
 “But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’” This question raised by Israel, like the previous questions, demonstrates their spiritual callousness.
2. Yahweh’s Response to Israel’s Disobedience in Giving, vv. 8c–12
 Yahweh’s response has two aspects: His affirmation in vv. 8c–9 and His exhortation with a promise in vv. 10–12
- a. Yahweh’s Affirmation, vv. 8c–9
 The specific evidence that is used against Israel is that they had failed to bring their tithes and offerings. Israel not paying their tithes and offering was regarded as robbing God and it was for this that the whole nation was experiencing God’s curse (v. 9). This is normally the text that many use to place the New Testament believer under a legal obligation to pay tithes to their churches or other Christian ministries. To understand what Malachi means and how it consequently applies to us, we will look at the terms “tithes” and “offerings” in v. 8c.
- 1) “Tithes” is a translation of the term *ma‘aser* which refers to the “tenth part.” The giving of a tenth part of one’s substance to sustain a government or religious system is well attested to in the ancient Near East. For example, the Phoenicians, Canaanites, Arabs, etc practiced it. The first occurrence of this in the Bible is found in Genesis 14:20 where Abraham gave a tithe of the spoils from battle to Melchizedek. Jacob also gave a tithe in Genesis 28:22. This apparently fit in with

the common cultural habits of the day (see Snoeberger, “The Pre-Mosaic Tithe,” pp. 71–95). In Leviticus 27:30, Mosaic Law mandated a compulsory tithe. Israel was to tithe on crops, trees (v. 30), herds and flocks (v. 32). Once Israel settled in the Promised Land, they were to annually bring a tithe to the central sanctuary and partake of a portion of this and, then give the remaining part to Levites, who would subsequently give a tithe to the priests, Deuteronomy 12, 14. Every third year (Deuteronomy 14:28–29, 26:12), this tithe “was to be dispensed in the person’s hometown to be consumed by the local landless inhabitants—Levites, foreign residents, the fatherless, and widows” (Clendenen, *Malachi*, p. 416). Numbers 18:21–32 suggests that the tithe was intended “to support the sanctuary and its personnel, the priests and the Levites” (*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “מַעֲשֵׂר,” by Richard E. Averbeck, 2:1041). Does this suggest there were different tithes that amount to 20 to 30 percent? Or does the collective noun “tithes” simply refer to 10% of crops and animals as a whole (something of a flat tax)?

How this data is interpreted has been the subject of debate. First, we can take this to mean that each Israelite gave each year a tenth for the Levites and another tenth for the sacred meal held annually in Jerusalem. In addition to this every third year an additional tithe was taken for the needy and Levites. Thus, every year the Israelite was supposed to give twenty percent and every third year they gave thirty percent. This translates into an average of approximately 22 to 23 percent given per year as a compulsory contribution (Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, p. 86). Second, an old Jewish view is that there were two required tithes per year. One was for the Levites and the other for the sacred meal. Every third year the latter tithe was used for the needy and the additional needs of the Levites (Verhoef, p. 304). Third, this could mean that the ten percent given by the Israelites were divided in three different ways: a portion for the Levites, another portion for the sacred meal, and every third year another portion is used for the needy and Levites (see Isbell, p. 67; for a helpful presentation on tithes, see *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “מַעֲשֵׂר,” 2:1035–55). I do not see that the Old Testament demands either 20 percent or 23 percent per year. If ten percent was required on everything—crops and animals—as well as other sacrifices and voluntarily vowed offering, it seems like this would be more than enough to maintain the Israelite economy. Since the tithe is so comprehensive, it would seem that Malachi’s use of the collective noun “tithes,” *ma’ăser*, מַעֲשֵׂר, has reference to the tithes that were brought to the central sanctuary, as Malachi 3:10 indicates: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.”

- 2) “Offerings” is a translation of *terûmâ*, which refers to a portion set aside from a larger portion for God and his work. At times this term may be used to make a distinction between other types of contributions (Deut 12:6, 17; Ezra 8:25). It may be used more generally in reference to all the contributions required to maintain the sanctuary such as holy offerings and firstlings (Lev 22:2, 3, 12, 15). It was derived from any type of substance. It was used in the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 25:1–7) and temple (Ezra 8:25) as well as for their maintenance. Its primary purpose was to provide for the priests (Exod 29:27–28; Num 18:8, 11, 19). With a more general reference, “tithes” would refer to ten percent and offerings would refer to any other gifts (see 2 Chr 31:12 with its three categories of

offerings: “contributions” (*têrûmâ*), “tithes” (*ma’ăser*), and “dedicated gifts.” As such, “tithes and offering” refers to “offerings in general” (Stuart, “Malachi,” p. 1367). However, Numbers 18:24 has *têrûmâ* qualifying *ma’ăser*: “I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes [*ma’ăser*] that the Israelites present as an offering [*têrûmâ*] to the LORD.” In this case, it looks like *ma’ăser* is a subcategory that fits into a larger category of *têrûmâ*, which would seem to be something of a technical term. With this understanding “tithes and offerings” may refer to “everything that the Levites are supposed to get” (ibid.) or it may refer to nothing more than the ten percent contribution expected in the Old Testament era (*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “מַעֲשֵׂר,” 2:1045).

- 3) Does this passage apply to the New Testament believer? Some would say that it does apply (so Davis, pp. 85–97). In demonstrating that this is an invalid principle for the NT believer, let me highlight four factors that demonstrate this conclusion.
 - a) The covenant judgment for not giving tithes and offerings applied to those whose lives were supervised by that covenant. According to the introductory verse of this pericope in Malachi, this text is addressed to the “descendants of Jacob” (v. 6). We should notice in v. 9 that the whole nation is under Yahweh’s curse. The point is that the system of tithes and offering was something prescribed in the Mosaic Covenant. We have noticed earlier that when Israel was unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh would send upon them covenant curses (see Lev 26 and Deut 28). Does this still apply to us? What then does the New Testament believer follow as a supervision of his life? Do we follow the Old Covenant? Or do we follow the New Testament? Whatever we follow, we must obey it and if it commands us to have this same type of compulsory giving then we must follow it.
 - b) The New Testament believer is not under the Mosaic Covenant. In the New Testament Paul goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the New Testament believer is not under the Mosaic legal system. He does this in Romans 6:14–15, Galatians 3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18; and 1 Corinthians 9:20. Paul makes it abundantly clear that he was not bound to the Mosaic system as a code of rules for conduct.
 - c) The New Testament believer is under the law of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 9:21 Paul sets forth that his obligation was to follow the law of Christ. With this passage as our backdrop as well as those used in Romans and Galatians, we must recognize that we submit our lives to what Christ teaches and his apostles. We must consider whether or not compulsory giving is to be presented in the New Testament as a binding obligation upon the Christian (especially helpful on the subject of the believer’s relationship to the law, see Moo’s two articles on this subject. “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” pp. 73–100; and “The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988]).
 - d) The New Testament epistles never command the believer to tithe. Though most recognize this principle, they seek to dodge it by pointing out that tithing antedates the Mosaic legal system (Gen 14:20 and 28:22). Because of this, it

transcends the dispensations. This is a valid point; however, if I follow Abraham's example, I should only give once during my earthly sphere of existence. In determining what from the Old Testament directly applies to me and what only applies indirectly is by considering whether or not it is a moral issue. An easy rule of thumb that I use is this: if a command or pattern is carried over from the Old to the New Testament and it is not negated in the New Testament, then I feel we have a moral constraint to follow it. If I understand New Testament giving correctly, it appears as if the New Testament negates this. My reason for saying this is found in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Paul's point negates the Mosaic compulsory giving norm. It is beyond the scope of our class to go into the principles of New Testament giving but the context of 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 and 2 Corinthians 8–9 specifically deal with the subject. The norm that Paul establishes is sacrificial giving which should move us beyond the ten percent rule.

b. Yahweh's Exhortation and Promise, vv. 10–12

Yahweh encourages Israel to test the accuracy of His promise. If they gave the required tithes and offerings, Yahweh would bless them with so much agricultural fecundity that they would not be able to handle it (v. 10). He would do this by removing the covenant curses (see also Deut 28:15–19). This would result in even the surrounding nations recognizing Israel's special relationship to Yahweh.

G. Sixth Disputation: Yahweh's Affirmation of Justice by Contrasting the Fate of the Righteous and the Wicked, 3:13–4:3

In this final disputation oracle, Yahweh corrects Israel's false accusations about His administration of justice. Yahweh had accurate and complete knowledge concerning everyone's commitment to the God of the covenant. Yahweh announced that in the future He would judge the wicked and reward the righteous.

We should also notice how this pericope shares a number of vocabulary connections with the preceding oracle. Stuart has noted the following (p. 1374):

5th Disputation	6th Disputation
<i>šmr</i> (keep, obey), 3:7	<i>šmr</i> (keep, obey), 3:14
<i>šr</i> (call blessed), 3:12	<i>šr</i> (call blessed), 3:15
<i>bhn</i> (test), 3:10	<i>bhn</i> (test), 3:15
<i>swb</i> (return), 3:7, 3 times	<i>swb</i> (return, do again), 3:18, 4:6 (Heb. 3:24)
<i>'ereš ḥēpeš</i> (delightful land), 3:12	<i>'ereš...ḥērem</i> (land...destruction), 4:6 (Heb. 3:24)

This disputation can be broken down in this fashion: Yahweh's assertion (3:13a), the people's objection (3:13b), and Yahweh's response (3:14–4:3).

1. Yahweh's Assertion, 3:13a

As in 2:17, Yahweh is once again dealing with Israel's wrong perception of justice. In contrast to Yahweh's reminder of covenant blessings for those living in faithful obedience to Him, He charges Israel with speaking harshly against Him. These words contradict the promised blessings in vv. 10–12.

2. The People's Objection, 3:13b

In keeping with Malachi's rhetorical style, he once again portrays Israel as being ignorant of sin. The spiritual insensitivity of Israel is reflected by the question that he has placed on their lips, "What have we said against You?"

3. Yahweh's Response, 3:14–4:3

a. Yahweh's Explanation of His Assertion, 3:14–15

This sixth disputation is much like the fourth in 2:17–3:6 where God's administration of justice was questioned. Questions such as why the righteous suffers and the wicked prosper. These people in a climactic way are addressed in this pericope. The people of Israel complained that loyalty to Yahweh's covenant did not have any positive results (v. 14). In contrast, the proud and the wicked were prospering. The tension for Israel was magnified in that even those who arrogantly challenged Yahweh were not punished (v. 15).

b. Yahweh's Promise to the Righteous with a Prophecy, 3:16–4:3

Though from Israel's perspective it looked as if Yahweh was not executing justice, Yahweh demonstrates that their accusation was unfounded. Yahweh precisely knew those who were genuine believers. "The prophet pictured a scroll in God's presence, upon which were recorded the names of His loyal servants (3:16). The Lord called this group His 'treasured possession,' to whom He would extend His fatherly compassion (3:17). The word translated 'treasured possession' is the same one used of the nation Israel in Exodus 19:5, where the Lord promised, 'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (cf. also Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4). Throughout its history, the nation never lived up to this high calling. However, the Lord promised the righteous remnant of Malachi's day that the ideal would be realized. Rather than overlooking them (cf. 3:14), God intended to establish them as His true covenant people" (Chisholm, p. 289).

When Yahweh does intervene in the future to administer justice, Yahweh's people will recognize His justice when He makes a distinction between the righteous and the wicked (3:18). As fire consumes stubble, so Yahweh will destroy the wicked in His day of judgment (4:1). By removing their agony and giving them joy, Yahweh will recompense those who fearfully follow Him (4:2). In 4:3, this is illustrated by portraying the righteous as trampling on the wicked as if they were ashes underneath their feet (Chisholm, p. 289).

H. Concluding Summary and Exhortation, 4:4–6

Malachi concludes his work in these final three verses. He provides a fourfold summation of the preceding part of his work: remembering the Law (v. 4), preparing for the day of Yahweh (v. 5), repentance (v. 6a), and judgment (v. 6b) (Wendland, p. 114):

1. Remembering the Law, v. 4

In summation of the preceding sections of his book (see 1:7–14; 2:10–11; 3:8–9), Malachi challenges the postexilic community of Israelites to obey the Law of Moses.

2. Preparing for the Day of Yahweh, v. 5

Malachi has previously taught that there was a time of judgment coming (3:2–5; 4:1–3) in which the nation would be purified of the chaff. Malachi observes that Elijah would come before the day of Yahweh. God will use his ministry to deliver His people from the curses for covenant disloyalty.

Who is this Elijah? In Luke 1:17 it is stated of John the Baptist that “he will go before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:17 clearly has as its background Malachi 4:5–6. In addition, we have previously suggested that “my messenger” in 3:1 is to be correlated with this Elijah. If we accept this identification, we then must also see if 3:1 is cited in any other place in the Bible. It just so happens that 3:1 is cited in Matthew 11:9–14. In this context, Jesus is asking the crowd what they went out to see when they saw John the Baptist. Jesus then says,

“⁹Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written:

‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

¹¹I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. ¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.”

It appears that Jesus is recognizing the possibility that John the Baptist is Elijah. In Matthew 17:10–13, Jesus appears to identify John the Baptist as fulfilling Elijah’s ministry.

“¹⁰The disciples asked him, ‘Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?’ ¹¹Jesus replied, ‘To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹²But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ ¹³Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.”

Is Jesus affirming in this passage that John the Baptist fulfilled the ministry of Elijah? In determining the answer to this question, we will briefly survey the various interpretations dealing with John the Baptist's apparent fulfillment of Malachi 4:5. From the NT text and our immediate context, some inductions will be made and then a conclusion will be drawn.

a. Various Interpretations

- 1) John the Baptist completely fulfilled Malachi's prophecy.
- 2) John the Baptist could have fulfilled this prophecy, but he did not because both he and Jesus Christ were rejected. Therefore, there will be a future fulfillment by another person who comes in the "spirit and power of Elijah."
- 3) John the Baptist could have fulfilled this prophecy, but he did not because both he and Jesus Christ were rejected. Therefore, there will be a future return of literal Elijah in fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy.
- 4) John the Baptist could not have fulfilled this prophecy since he only came in the "spirit and power of Elijah" and was not the literal, returned Elijah. Therefore, literal Elijah must return in the future to fulfill this prophecy.

b. Some Inductions about the Biblical Texts and Interpretations

- 1) Luke 1:17 indicates that John the Baptist was not Elijah returned from heaven since he came in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (see also John 1:18–21).
- 2) John could have fulfilled the requirement of Malachi's prophecy (Matt 11:14) but did not because he and Christ were rejected.
- 3) Matthew 11:14 and 17:11–13 seem to establish that Elijah did not need to personally return to fulfill Malachi's prophecy. At the minimum, these passages establish that the personal return of Elijah is not required to fulfill Malachi 4:5.
- 4) Consequently, view 4 is tenuous because it demands a literal return of Elijah. These NT passages mitigate that conclusion. This would seem also to apply to view 3. View 1 is incorrect because it does not meet the requirement of Malachi 4:5–6. John the Baptist did not come before the great and dreadful day of Yahweh. View 2 seems to be the most likely.

c. Conclusion

I would understand that Revelation 11:1–13 is the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5. One of the two witnesses will possibly be one who is in the "spirit and power of Elijah." As such, this Elijah-like individual is the precursor to the day of Yahweh (see Mayhue, "The Day of the Lord," pp. 111–18).

3. Repentance, v. 6a

Elijah will be used to bring about repentance in the nation. The translation of this in the NIV refers to reconciling conflicts within families. However, this verse could also be translated: "He will turn the hearts of the fathers together with (those of) the children, and the hearts of the children together with (those of) the fathers (to me)" (Chisholm, p. 290). This would mean that Elijah would restore the sinful society including father and

children to a right covenant relationship with Yahweh. As Verhoef has represented this view: “When Elijah comes he will restore the covenant relationship. We agree with Josef Scharbert that the solidarity between fathers and children must be reconciled with the previous state of things when God has entered into a covenant relationship with the ‘fathers.’ We have an interesting parallel in Isa. 63:16 The ‘Israel’ in the time of the prophet laments because their actual communication with Abraham and Jacob seems to have been broken: ‘Abraham does not know us and Israel [i.e., Jacob] does not acknowledge us.’ The fathers are of no significance any more when the ‘children’ become apostate. The relationship can only be restored by way of the renewal of the covenant. This point of view is in accordance with Malachi’s idiom. He compares the priesthood of his day with that of the classical times (2:1–9), and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem in his time with that ‘in days gone by, (and) in former years’ (3:4). The present generation has through mixed marriages profaned the covenant entered into with their fathers (2:10), with the verdict that they will be cut off ‘from the tents of Jacob’ (2:12)” (Verhoef, pp. 342–43). This is not to say that the fathers have not broken the covenant relationship since it is stated in 3:7 that they had. In this passage, Malachi is expecting Yahweh to bring about this type of conversion for Israel. “The point of reference, the scope of the encounter, in this process of turning to one another is the covenant relationship, which transcends the many periods of apostasy, and which forms the real basis for the restored communion with God, their Father and Creator (1:6; 2:10), and with one another, stretching across the centuries of their history (1:2, 5; 2:4–7, 10; 3:3–4, 7, 10–12)” (ibid., p. 343).

4. Judgment, v. 6b

If anyone should reject Elijah’s ministry, then Yahweh’s coming will have a serious effect on the Israelites in the land at that time. Malachi has mentioned Yahweh’s curses in three earlier passages (1:14; 2:2; and 3:9). Here he uses a stronger term, *hērem*. This term denotes being devoted to Yahweh for his exclusive purposes. It is a strong term and was often used in reference to Israel exterminating the Canaanite population when they entered the land of Canaan (Deut 20:17–18). It is also used for any Israelite city that became apostate (Deut 13:16–17). This is that day of Yahweh when He pours out His wrath on Israel as never before in the last half of the great tribulation.

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