

UNDERSTANDING THE ESCHATOLOGY OF MALACHI 4:1-6 ELISHA KWABENA MARFO¹

ABSTRACT

While several theological interpretations in Mal 4:1-6 have engaged the attention of scholars over the years concerning the meaning of the passage, the polarization of views seems to result from the divergence of scholarly opinions regarding the nature of Malachi eschatology, particularly that of the closing chapter of the book. This study therefore argues that contextual understanding of Malachi's the day of the Lord leads to a better understanding about the eschatology of Mal 4:1-6. However, the unfolding events and characters of the passage play an integral role within the pericope it is embedded, and correct understanding of the text is crucial to valid exegesis of the eschatological context. The nature of eschatology should influence our understanding of the prophecy of Malachi. Thus, exegetically the pericope (Mal 4:1-6) should be considered eschatological in orientation.

INTRODUCTION

In Malachi 4:1-6, the prophet mentions God's message concerning the coming of the "day of the Lord" and gives some details of the things that will occur in the coming day. One of the things that God will do is that He is "going to send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome Day of the Lord comes" (v. 5). Malachi reiterated that Elijah will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and likewise the hearts of children to their fathers (v. 6a). Malachi's prophecy in 4:1-6 has received a considerable amount of debate among scholars. Scholarship is divided on the interpretation of the "day of the Lord"² and the eschatological nature of the prophecy as a whole. The phrase is not the only one which is found in the Old Testament (OT). There are several use of the phrase in the OT. In the New Testament the phrase "the day of the Lord" appears four times (i.e., Acts 2:20; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; and 2 Peter 3:10). W. J. Beecher, in his article on the day of the Lord, observes that all doctrines in regard to the millennium, the second coming of Christ, and the final judgment depend greatly on the passages in the New Testament that use the formulas, "the day of the Lord," "the day of our Lord," "that day," and the like; such passages, for example, as 2 Pet. iii: 10, 1 Thess. v:2, 1 Cor. i:8, v:5, 2 Cor. i:14, 2 Thess. i:10, 2 Tim. i:12, Matt. xxv:13, etc. The meaning of these passages is, in turn, greatly dependent on the relations that exist, both in ideas and in phraseology, between them and the texts in the Old Testament that speak of "the day of the Lord," that is,

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²Gerhard von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4 (1959): 97-108; L. Cerny, *The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems* (Prague: Nakladem Filosofické Fakulty University Karlovy, 1948); F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation, with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 24A (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1989), 441-442; Meir Weiss, "The Origin of the 'Day of the Lord'—Reconsidered," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966): 29-60; Dana M. Pike, "The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord': The Anatomy of an Expression," *BYU Studies* 41, no. 2 (2002): 149-60; L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 100; R. Dennis Cole, "The Day of the Lord Is Coming: Mal 2:17-3:5, 4:1-6," *The Theological Educator* 36 (1987): 126-137; Richard L. Mayhue, "The Bible's Watchword: Day of the Lord," *MSJ* 22, no. 1 (2011): 65-88; Richard L. Mayhue, "The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord," *Grace Theological Journal* 6, no. 2 (1985): 231-146.

“the day of Jehovah.” Necessarily, the study of these places in the Old Testament will be profitable, both in itself and for the light it throws on New Testament eschatology.³

The day of the Lord in Malachi can be seen to be either in congruence or contrary to its usage in the Hebrew Bible especially among the prophetic books. For example, Walter C. Kaiser points out that Malachi’s “final time would be climactic and the sum of all the rest. Though the events of their own times fitted the pattern of God’s future judgment, that final day was nevertheless immeasurably larger and more permanent in its salvific and judgmental effects.”⁴ Similarly, Carlyn A. Reeder contends that the passage in Malachi 4:1-6 speaks to the realization and understanding that a day is coming where “the restoration of God’s people to each other and to God averts divine wrath from this ‘family’ on the day of judgment.”⁵ W. J. Beecher comments that “the prophets thought of the day of Yahweh as generic, not occasions which would occur once for all, but one which might be repeated as circumstances called for it.”⁶ Among several other issues, the understanding of the Malachi text has largely centered on the eschatological nature of the prophecy of Mal 4:1-6.

The polarization of views on Mal 4:1-6 seems to result from the divergence of scholarly opinions regarding the nature of Malachi eschatology, particularly that of the closing chapter of the book. Accordingly, any meaningful study of these verses must take the eschatology of the book into consideration. Therefore, another look at this issue pervading the book of Malachi is justified. Several questions of relevancy in this direction include the following: How should the day of the Lord be understood within the context of Malachi’s eschatology for a better appreciation of the text? Is Malachi’s eschatology to be understood in an apocalyptic sense or in a contextual (near historical) sense? These questions basically provide the contour of the discussion that follows in search of satisfactory answer to this problem.

With the purpose to determine the understanding of the eschatology of Malachi 4:1-6 in the context of the Book of Malachi and the OT, and to consider the context of Malachi’s prophecy to the people of Judah, the study contribute to studies in Malachi by focusing on the eschatology of the book and thus seeks to fill the gap in research in the book of Malachi. This is done through an exegetical study on the eschatology of Malachi 4:1-6 which falls within the parameters of OT historical-grammatical exegesis and biblical theology. Specifically, this paper will utilize and undertake literary, contextual analyses, the interest lying in the historical or contextual meaning of the texts in question.

Views on Eschatology in Malachi

Eschatology of Malachi has been understood in two special ways. While some of the scholars, such as Beecher, Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, argue for immediate future,⁷ others, such as Pamela J. Scalise, also hold ultimate eschatology.⁸ The immediate future proponents hold that the future promises of the book of Malachi, particularly those found in chap. 4:1-6, were meant to find fulfillment after the ministry of the prophet.⁹ There are several implications to this position. Some proponents are of

³W. J. Beecher, “The Day of Jehovah in Joel,” *The Homiletic Review* 18 (1889): 355. See also Mayhue, “The Bible’s Watchword: Day of the Lord,” 65-88.

⁴Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 191.

⁵Carlyn A. Reeder, “Malachi 3:24 and the Eschatological Restoration of the ‘Family,’” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 709.

⁶W. J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1905), 311.

⁷Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*, 130; Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 501.

⁸Pamela J. Scalise, “Malachi 3:13-4:3 - A Book of Remembrance for God-fearers,” *Review and Expositor*, 95 (1998): 571-581. See also Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 194; David L. Peterson, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi* (Louisville: Westminster, 1995), 22.

⁹F. B. Huey Jr. “An Exposition of Malachi,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 38 (1987): 20.

the view that Malachi was written during, and reflects, the postexilic period.¹⁰ Therefore, Mal 4:1-6 can be seen as describing the current situation to occur after the returned exiles. Here, the eschatology of Mal 4:1-6 and the postexilic expectation or condition of Judah is emphasized. Ralph L. Smith asserts that Mal 4:1-6 is “the covenantal history to the present and future obedience of Israel.”¹¹ Thus, the fulfillment of the prophecy in Mal 4:1-6 is to occur within history but not at the last age. To Longman and Dillard, “the eschatological hopes of the book of Malachi find their fulfillment in the pages of the Gospels.”¹²

Scholars who uphold the ultimate eschatology view of eschatology of Malachi assert that the promises of Mal 4:1-6 point to before or prior to the end of the world.¹³ While some proponents of this view posit that some of the promises given were for the fulfillment during the end time, they believe that their true fulfillment will take place just before or at the return of Jesus Christ. Pamela J. Scalise argues that though Malachi refers to apocalyptic eschatological.¹⁴ Thus the prophet uses ordinary OT terms to describe the symbolic future. Elizabeth Achtemeier also holds that Mal 4:1-6 addresses the eschatological community, yet some promises or features in this section are apocalyptic in the main.¹⁵ In view of these positions there is the need to analyze the passage in its context.

Defining Eschatology

The OT consist of several promises about a better future, they speak of the circumstances that scarcely could be expected to arrive as the “result of normal, or even extraordinary, human progress, and so [readers] agree in distinguishing them from ordinary hopes for a better future by calling them eschatology.”¹⁶ Although there is no definite description of what *eschatology* is, etymologically it is clear that the term is derived from the Greek ἔσχατος (*eschatos* translated *last*). There have been several attempt to define the concept in various ways. The term eschatology is seen as modern by some scholars.¹⁷ Bill T. Arnold states that “the term eschatology represents that branch of theology devoted to last or final things, such as death and judgment, heaven and hell, and the end of the world.”¹⁸ Nathaniel Schmidt observes that eschatology is “the doctrine concerning the last things. It deals with man’s condition after death, the destiny of nations, and the end of the world.”¹⁹ The term is a comprehensive one and refers to “teaching about events expected

¹⁰Elias Carlos Mora, class notes for OTST 667 Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophets, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, September 11, 2015; Longman II and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 498; Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 14.

¹¹Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32. (Waco: Word, 1984), 342.

¹²Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 502.

¹³Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 148; David L. Petersen, “Eschatology (OT),” *ABD* 2:575–579; Bob Wielenga, “Eschatology in Malachi: The emergence of a doctrine,” *In die Skriflig* 50, no.1 (2016): a2091; G. Goswell, “The eschatology of Malachi after Zechariah 14,” *Journal for Biblical Literature* 132, no. 3 (2013): 625–638.

¹⁴Pamela J. Scalise, “Malachi 3:13-4:3 - A Book of Remembrance for God-fearers,” *Review and Expositor*, 95 (1998): 572.

¹⁵Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi*, 184. See also Blessing Onoriode Boloje and Alphonso Groenewald, “Malachi’s Eschatological Day of Yahweh: Its Dual Roles of Cultic Restoration and Enactment of Social Justice (Mal 3:1-5; 3:16-4:6),” *Old Testament Essays* 27, no.1 (2014): 53-81.

¹⁶Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 1-2.

¹⁷Arland J. Hultgren, “Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 68. He argues that the term was “coin in the seventeenth century, when the Lutheran dogmatician Abraham Calovius (1612-86) of Wittenberg used the term “Eschatologia Sacra” as a general heading at the end of his twelve-volume dogmatics published in 1677.”

¹⁸Bill T. Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24. [23-39]

¹⁹Nathaniel Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 41, nos. 1.2 (1922): 102. See also Jurgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), x-xi. Compare the definitions offered by J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress,

to take place within a new era of history that will dawn, such as the return of exiles to their homeland.”²⁰ Other facet includes anticipated things in the age to come that are mostly revealed to prophets.²¹ In the field of Biblical studies eschatology indicates “the basket of ideas in both OT and NT and the inter-testamental literature about the end period of history or existence - ‘end’ meaning both a terminal point and also the events by which everything else is assessed.”²² Schmidt asserts that eschatology stems from and “develops with the growth of man’s intellectual and moral perceptions, his larger social experience, and his expanding knowledge of nature. While there is a general similarity, the outward forms vary with the character of the environment and the peculiar genius of each people.”²³ In what follows the Babylonian view of eschatology will be considered to help toward understanding eschatology in the book of Malachi.

ANCIENT NEAR EAST UNDERSTANDING OF ESCHATOLOGY

Babylonians Understanding of Eschatology

The history of Judah cannot be separated from the influence other nations had on their understanding, livelihood, and culture. Most of their understandings of issues can be said to have stemmed from some of these concepts and influences exerted on them in their exilic periods as well as from the surrounding nations to them. Jimmy J. Roberts maintains that “the time has come when no scholar can attempt a serious treatment of Israelite history without first acquiring an intimate acquaintance with the contemporary Babylonian and Assyrian records.”²⁴ Thus in order to understand the concept of eschatology in Malachi, understanding its background from the Babylonians is prudent and apt. The Babylonian Chronicles, a cuneiform texts, characterize one of the mainly “objective and reliable sources for the history of Babylonia and the surrounding areas that have been preserved from the ancient Near East.”²⁵ This chronicle testifies and shed significant amount of light on the Israelite history, of the Babylonian capture of and dominance over Judah.

The concept of eschatology can be seen as a view or practice that the Babylonian had as part of their beliefs. In the article *An Eschatological Drama: Bavli Avodah Zarah 2a-3b*, Jeffrey L. Rubenstein argues that eschatological vision and prophesy dominated the Babylonian kingdom.²⁶ He further points out that the Babylonian Talmud is occupied with many events depicting “the world to come” and “static descriptions of the glorious miracles that await the righteous in the next world.”²⁷ A look at the Jewish eschatology reveals, according to Schmidt, that the extant literature reveals a marked difference between earlier and later ideas in respect of man’s condition after death, Israel’s destiny, and the future of the world. The great prophets of the Assyrian and Chaldaean periods stand forth in striking contrast with their predecessors and their successors in the Persian and the Graeco-Roman periods. Their tremendous emphasis upon the ethical demands of Yahwe and their

1962), 360; G vod Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 118; S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 153-154; J. M van der Ploeg, “Eschatology in the Old Testament,” *OTS* 17 (1972): 93.

²⁰Hultgren, “Eschatology in the New Testament,” 68. See also Nancy Lapp, “Eschatology,” *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1996), 302.

²¹Hultgren, “Eschatology in the New Testament,” 68.

²²*Oxford Dictionary of the Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. W. R. F. Browning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s. v. “eschatology,” accessed from <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t94/e623>.

²³Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” 103.

²⁴Jimmy J. Roberts, “The Babylonian Chronicles,” *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1966): 280.

²⁵Roberts, “The Babylonian Chronicles,” 275. See also W. F. Albright, “The Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar Chronicles,” *BASOR* 143 (1956), p. 28.

²⁶Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “An Eschatological Drama: Bavli Avodah Zarah 2a-3b,” *AJS Review* 21/1 (1996): 1-37.

²⁷Rubenstein, “An Eschatological Drama,” 1.

opposition to chauvinism and entangling foreign alliances have set them apart and given them an epoch-making significance.²⁸

Persians Understanding of Eschatology

The Persian were people that had many myths and these were incorporated in the belief systems including cultural understanding, worship among others. Their understanding of eschatology was no exception. Schmidt asserts that several Persian myths and believes had found their way into the understanding and thoughts of Israel’s view of God and His dealings with nations and the world as a whole.²⁹ Among these, the idea that probably originated in Persia and spread around the Ancient Near Eastern region was “the conception of a coming destruction of the world by fire, preceded by an accumulation of plagues, and followed by a renewal of the world and the return of the terrestrial paradise, with its innocence and blessedness, ruled over by a semi-divine being, the first man.”³⁰ The prophets then applied this myth locally to the cosmic catastrophe and made concessions to the popular eschatology. This ancient mythical material was utilized by the apocalyptic seers, and fresh accessions from abroad made it possible for them to rear a more elaborate structure.³¹

To conclude on this section, though several things had influence on the Jewish understanding and concept of eschatology, “there is no room for doubt that myths of Sumerian, Akkadian, Arrapa- chitian, Amoritish, Aramaean, Canaanitish, Hittite, Egyptian, Cretan, and Assyrian origin found their way into Palestine and may have become known in Israel and Judah.”³² Thus “the rich development of eschatology in the Hasmonaean and Roman periods was influenced by Persian and Greek speculation” cannot be questioned.³³ From the understanding of the Ancient Near East, the day of the Lord “was a technical term popularly understood to mean both the end of the world through fire and its restoration, bringing in the golden age, but that the people generally expected to escape from the conflagration and share in the good time to come, while the prophets were unwilling to hold out any such hope.”³⁴

LITERARY AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Historical Context of Malachi

It is imperative for any study of any book of the OT like the book of Malachi that the writer should clarify the view regarding some of the book’s introductory issues. The authorship of Malachi for the Book of Malachi is assumed.³⁵ Who were the messages addressed to? From Malachi 1:1 it can be inferred that the people of Israel who had returned from the Babylonian captivity are the original recipients of the message of Malachi. Also a closer look at the message seems to indicate that some of the messages of the prophets were intended for the priest who were ministering to the people then (cf., 1:6; 2:1). However,

²⁸Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” 103-104.

²⁹Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” 105.

³⁰Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” 105.

³¹Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” 105.

³²Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” 107.

³³Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” 107. For further discussion on the Greek and Persian influence on eschatology in the Ancient Near East, see Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Biblical Seminar 85; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, “Fighting the Powers of Chaos and Hell: Towards the Biblical Portrait of God,” *Studia Theologica* 39, no. 1 (1985): 21-38; Douglas K. Stuart, “Sovereign’s Day of Conquest,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 221 (1976): 159-164; Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism,” 23-39.

³⁴Schmidt, “The Origin of Jewish Eschatology,” 106.

³⁵According to the superscription (1:1), the author of the book is Malachi. The name means “my messenger” (מַלְאָכִי). There is some debate whether “Malachi” should be understood as a proper name or as a title. The fact that Malachi as a name does not appear elsewhere in the Old Testament and that 3:1 uses “my messenger” as a title is used by some as proof that Malachi is not a proper name. If this conclusion is correct, then the book is anonymous.

majority of the message are directed to the masses or the people in general including the present generation. Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen point out that the prophet's message chides God's people for their spiritual apathy and their skepticism and cynicism concerning God's plan for their future. It also calls the people to correct their wrong attitudes of worship by trusting God with genuine faith as living Lord. Furthermore, it warns the people of their immoral behavior toward one another and calls for their repentance lest they be terrorized at the coming of the Lord.³⁶

The evidence in the book supports the view that the book of Malachi was written after the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and after the return from the captivity. Judah was ruled by governor "pehah", a term denoting a ruler or a governor of a probably small province during the Persian period.³⁷ The reference to the existence of ritual sacrifices and offering in the Temple in Mal 1:7-10 indicate that the Temple has been rebuilt. Malachi, the prophet, was probably the contemporary of Nehemiah, the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes (cf., Neh 1:11). Thus, it is probable that Malachi addresses are similar to the denunciation of Nehemiah upon his return to Jerusalem for the second term of his governorship in Judea (Mal 2:11–15; cf. Neh 13:23–27; Mal 3:8–10; cf. Neh 13:10–14; Mal 2:8–9; 4:4; cf. Neh 13:15–22; Mal 1:6–2:9; cf. Neh 13:7–9; Mal 3:5; cf. Neh 5:1–13). The book of Malachi thus, can be placed in the Persian period. Most scholars conclude that the book was written between 475 and 450 BC. This is due to the fact that the "disillusionment about the temple has already set in, it is probable that a few decades have passed since its completion. Furthermore, since Ezra and Nehemiah are not mentioned in the book, it is usually assumed that Malachi preceded them."³⁸

Although YHWH had promised His blessings for the Jews at the early stage of their return to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (Zech 2:7-12; 8:20-22), the situation turned out to be contrary (Neh 2:3, 13; 5:1-9; Mal 1:9-10, 12-13; 2:9; 3:8-9). The people of Israel became weary of the worship of YHWH. The priests and the religious leaders despised the name of YHWH of hosts. They became negligent of YHWH's statutes (Mal 1:7-8; 2:8-9; 3:8-9) and arrogant in their transgressions (Mal 3:13-14).

Malachi confronted all manner of spiritual degeneration, discontent and abuses in his time by inclusive moral force holding out the challenges of a glorious hope for the future.³⁹ This called for the prophet's message for the return of the Jews to God and to repent in order to enjoy the covenant blessings of YHWH (Mal 3:6-12). Eugene Merrill has observed that Malachi, "As the last of Israel's kerygmatic heralds, Malachi reached back to the beginning of her covenant election and forward to the promise of covenant fulfillment, bridging the two with his urgent insistence that the theocratic people be worthy of their calling, for the King of all the earth was at hand."⁴⁰ Malachi, the prophet, was God's messenger to the faithful minority in Israel who feared the Lord (3:16). Kelly posits,

The one source of hope for the nation in such tragic times was a faithful nucleus of God-fearing persons who regarded the situation with growing alarm. They came together regularly to speak of the Lord's goodness and to lend each other mutual support (3:16). They were the Israel within Israel through whom the great purposes of God would someday be realized.⁴¹

Malachi was of the view that "Israel could not fulfill its destiny unless the people found a sense of destiny and purpose"⁴² in God by repenting from their evil ways.

³⁶Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 231.

³⁷Geo Widengren, "The Persian Period," in *Israelite and Judean History*, ed. J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 510.

³⁸Mora, class notes.

³⁹Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 23.

⁴⁰Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 385.

⁴¹Page H. Kelly, *Malachi: Rekindling the Fires of Faith* (Nashville, TN: Convention, 1986), 5. Kelly states, "The prophet came on the scene to remind [the people] of their duty. His task was to rekindle fires of faith that almost had gone out."

⁴²Claude F. Mariottini, "Malachi: Prophet for His Time," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 26.3 (1998):149-158.

In view of this and the bigger picture, the audience and purpose of writing can be seen to have a greater bearing on the import of the eschatology of Mal 4:1-6. With this in view, the literary context of the book of Malachi is considered.

Literary Structure of Malachi

A brief outline of Malachi may be helpful here before establishing the literary context. The outline can be proposed as follows:

The Lord’s love for Israel (1:1-5)

Polluted offering and the priest (1:6-2:9)

Unfaithfulness in marriage (2:10-16)

Future cleansing and judgment (2:17-3:5)

Unfaithfulness in tithes and offerings (3:6-12)

Reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked (3:13-4:3)

Future promise (4:4-6)⁴³

However, there is agreement among scholars of the disputational structural series of the book. But the specific structure of the book is in doubt. It is generally acknowledged that Malachi consists of a superscription (1:1); six disputations between YHWH and the people (1:2–4:3); and two appendices (4:4; 4:5–6).

Six Disputations	Two Appendices
1. A dispute about God’s love (1:2–5)	
2. A dispute about God’s honor (1:6–2:9)	Admonition to remember the law of Moses (4:4)
3. A dispute about faithlessness (2:10–16)	
4. A dispute about God’s justice (2:17–3:6) ⁴⁴	
5. A dispute about repentance (3:7–12)	
6. A dispute about speaking against God (3:13–4:3)	Announcement regarding Elijah (4:5–6)

The recognition of these disputations and appendices is generally accepted, as pointed out earlier, but how this material is structured is of much debate.⁴⁵ However, a careful analysis of the book of Malachi presents seven (7) disputation speeches.⁴⁶ The structure is presented in the table below.

	GOD’S STATEMENT	PEOPLE’S QUESTION	GOD’S ANSWER
1	“I have loved you” 1:2	In what way have You loved us? 1:2	1:2-5
2	Where <i>is</i> My honor? You despise, 1:6	In what way have we despised Your name? 1:6	1.6
3	“You offer defiled food on	“In what way have we	1:8-2:16

⁴³For other outlines on Malachi, see *Andrews Study Bible* (Berrien Spring: Andrews University Press, 2010), 1231.

⁴⁴Many end this section with v. 5 but see Clendenen, *Malachi*, 227, 399-401.

⁴⁵For full discussion for the structure of Malachi see Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, New American Commentary, vol. 21a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 227-231.

⁴⁶This structure is proposed by Elias Carlos Mora. See Mora, class notes.

	My altar” 1:7	defiled You?” 1:7	
4	“You have wearied the LORD with your words” 2:17	“In what way have we wearied <i>Him</i> ?” 2:17	3:1-6
5	“Return to Me, and I will return to you” 3:7	“In what way shall we return?” 3:7	3.7
6	“Yet you have robbed Me!” 3:8	“In what way have we robbed You?” 3:8	3:8-12
7	“Your words have been harsh against Me” 3:13	“What have we spoken against You?” 3:13	3:14-4:6

This structure fits well to the book of Malachi due to the fact that all the questions raised by the people and God’s statements together with His responses are captured in this structure.

Literary Style and Genre of Malachi 4:1-6

While C. C. Torrey argues for “degeneracy of Hebrew literary style in Malachi,”⁴⁷ Longman and Dillard point out that the writings of Malachi is “creative in its form, clear in its message, and compelling in its argumentation.”⁴⁸ J. M. P. Smith posits that “if Malachi is to be regarded as poetical, either in form or content, distinctions between poetry and prose must be abandoned.”⁴⁹ Some scholars further argue that certain verse shows the feature of like rhythm and parallelism which defines them as poetry.⁵⁰ To G. L. Robinson, only Mal 1:11; 3:1, 6, 10; 4:1 has poetic qualities.⁵¹ Glazier-McDonald however clearly points out that the descriptive literary analysis reveals strong imprint of the prophecy’s form on the poetry style that include parallelism, repetition of grammatical elements, assonance, and poetic devices.⁵²

Malachi consistently uses a question-answer format which is in a form of confrontations directed to the people of Israel together with their priests. This question-answer format is repeatedly spread all through the book with this confrontational tone that is found in the response of YHWH. The message of Malachi is “striking because of its rationalized, didactic cast”⁵³ in the book. An important emphasis to understanding the confrontational style is the use of rhetorical questions followed by the answer of Malachi to the rhetorical questions. Seven times, Malachi places these questions in the mouths of the people (vv. 1:2, 6, 7; 2:17; 3:7, 8, 13) and several times, the prophet asks the audience rhetorical questions (cf., vv. 1:6, 8, 9; 2:10, 15; 3:2). These help to illustrate the disputative nature of the book. While the disputation speech is the major literary feature/form in Malachi, there are many other features, such as alliteration in Mal 2:10, 11, 12, 14, chiasm in Mal 1:2, 3:11, hyperbole in Mal 3:19, and irony in Mal 1:9.⁵⁴

Much debate has also centered on whether or not Malachi was written in poetry or prose. J. M. P. Smith, who proposes prose, asserted that, In distinction from most of the prophetic books, Malachi must be classified as prose. Neither in spirit, thought, nor form, has it the characteristics of poetry. Certainly, there is an occasional flash of poetic insight and imagination, or a few lines which move to a poetic rhythm. But

⁴⁷C. C. Torrey, “The Prophecy of Malachi,” *JBL* 17 (1898): 1–17.

⁴⁸Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 500.

⁴⁹J. M. P. Smith, *Malachi*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 5.

⁵⁰Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 3.

⁵¹G. L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (New York: George H. Doran, 1962), 160.

⁵²Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 4.

⁵³Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 19.

⁵⁴For more examples on the literary features see Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1998), 38–41.

only by the loosest use of terms could we call the prophecy as a whole poetry . . . If Malachi is to be regarded as poetical, either in form or content, distinctions between poetry and prose must be abandoned.⁵⁵

However, Bruce Theodore Dahlberg cites Robert Lowth, who had offered the following judgment relating to the Book of Malachi and its possible claims to a poetic style:

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are the only remaining prophets. The first of these is altogether prosaic, as well as the greater part of the second. . . The last of the prophetic books, that of Malachi, is written in a kind of middle style, which seems to indicate that the Hebrew poetry, from the time of the Babylonish captivity, was in a declining state, and, being past its prime and vigour, was then fast verging towards the debility of age.⁵⁶

The presentation of the Malachi text in the Hebrew Bible (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*⁵⁷) shows a poetic format. It indicates that to the Hebrew mind the book of Malachi is in poetry. The evidences of poetic literary features in the book also cement the fact that the book is poetic.

Translation of Malachi 4:1-6

Hebrew Text	Working Translation
<p>1 כִּי־הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם בֹּאֵ בַעַר כַּמִּנְעוֹר וְהָיָה כְּלִי־עֹשֶׂה רֹשָׁעַי לֶחֶם וְלֵהֵט אֹתָם הַיּוֹם הַבֹּא אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִעֲזֹב לָהֶם שָׁרֵשׁ וְעֵנָף:</p>	<p>1. But behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says YHWH of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.</p>
<p>וְנִרְחַה לְכֶם יְרֵאֵי שְׁמִי שֶׁמֶשׁ צִדְקָה וּמִרְפָּא בְּכַנְפֶיהָ וַיֵּצֵאתֶם וַיִּפְשַׁתֶּם כַּעֲגָלֵי מִרְבֵּק:</p>	<p>2. But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.</p>
<p>וְעִסוּתֶם רְשָׁעִים כִּי־יִהְיוּ אֶפְרַח תַּחַת כַּפּוֹת רַגְלֵיכֶם בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי עוֹשֶׂה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת: פ</p>	<p>3. And you will trample down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the Lord of hosts.</p>
<p>זְכֹרֵי תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אוֹתוֹ בְּחֶרֶב עַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים:</p>	<p>4. Remember the law of Moses My servant, <i>even</i> the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.</p>
<p>הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ לְכֶם אֶת אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא לִפְנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא:</p>	<p>5. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.</p>
<p>וְהָשִׁיב לִב־אֲבוֹת עַל־בְּנֵיהֶם וְלֵב בְּנֵיהֶם עַל־אֲבוֹתֵם כִּי־אָבֹא וְהִכִּיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ חָרָם:</p>	<p>6. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to <i>their</i> children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse</p>

Exegesis of Malachi 4:1-6

⁵⁵J. M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Malachi* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 4-5.

⁵⁶Bruce T. Dahlberg, "Studies in the Book of Malachi" (PhD diss. Columbia University, 1963), 76, accessed from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

⁵⁷Karl Elliger and Willhelm Rudolph, "Maleachi," *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)*, (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997), 1081-1086.

The passage begins with a particle כִּי and is translated as *because* or *for*⁵⁸ due to that fact that it is subordinate to 3:18. כִּי shows a contrast of the consequences of the righteous and the ungodly in Mal 3:18.⁵⁹ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה “the day is coming” is complimented by the בָּעֵר כְּתַנּוּר “burning like a furnace.” The LXX renders הַיּוֹם “the day” as ἡμέρα κυρίου “the day of the Lord.”⁶⁰ Thus, הַיּוֹם is synonymous to יוֹם יְהוָה. The participle בא “coming” is translated as the indicative present ἔρχεται.⁶¹ As an indicative, ἔρχεται “adds the connotations of immediacy and certainty.”⁶² Therefore, the LXX conveys the idea that ἡμέρα κυρίου “the day of the Lord” is certain. At the coming of the day of YHWH, the fulfillment of the promise of YHWH for the righteous (3:17) and the execution of justice for the righteous and complaining unrighteous are materialized.⁶³ The reference to “YHWH’s day”⁶⁴ is made contextually with הַיּוֹם “the day” or a period associated with that appointed time. According to the OT, the expression יְהוָה יִהְיֶה, indicates the intervention of God in the affairs of mankind in due time. “In the setting of prophetic message, either the execution of judgment upon the wicked and evildoers, or deliverance and reward for God’s faithful people, are rendered during that period.”⁶⁵ Commenting on יְהוָה יִהְיֶה, Von Rad posits that, “Thus by the Day of Yahweh the prophecy understands the day of battle and of the complete victory of Yahweh. This day is characterized by terrifying events in the sky and on earth, by darkening and earthquakes. . . . the occasion of the ancient wars of Yahweh such changes in Nature have been reported.”⁶⁶ “It will be a day to fear for all who set themselves against Yahweh, but for those who fear him, it will be a day of remembrance. That day will bring with it healing and a newness of life described in terms of playful young animals (4:2).”⁶⁷ Thus יְהוָה יִהְיֶה הַיּוֹם, could be expressed as an impending decisive intervention of God in the prophetic anticipation of the future.⁶⁸

⁵⁸Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naude and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic 1999), 302.

⁵⁹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing Biblical Aramaic*, Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius, (*BDB*) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), s.v. “כִּי” after a negative, כִּי becomes “but.” E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed. trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1983), 117h, cf. 157b.

⁶⁰Alfred Ralphs and Robert Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta: Editio Altera*, (Stuttgart, Germany: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 2006), 2:565.

⁶¹Ralphs and Hanhart, *Septuaginta: Editio Altera*, 2:565.

⁶²Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 229.

⁶³Connally Hla, “The Interpretation of ‘Sun of Righteousness’ with Wings in Malachi 4:2” (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, May 2006), 128.

⁶⁴Cf., Mal 3:1-2, 17; 4:5; Isa 2:2, 12; 34:8; Joel 2:1,2; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obad 15, 17; Zech 14:1; Ezek 7:19.

⁶⁵Hla, “Sun of Righteousness,” 128. See also Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1979), s.v. “Day of the Lord.”

⁶⁶Gerhard von Rad. “The *Origin* of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh,” *JSS* 4 (1959): 99-100. David Emory Lanier posits that “the expression as found in the Old Testament is prophetic (regardless of Its preprophetic nature, origin, and eschatological content) and refers not so much to a period of time as to a decisive event in history which is impending, large in scope and consequence, and which involves the active intervention of God, a theophany. Because of the nature of God, holy and just, this appearing takes the form of a judgment in which wrongs are corrected and a restoration in some fashion takes place.” David Emory Lanier, “The Day of the Lord in the New Testament: A Historical and Exegetical Analysis of Its Background and Usage,” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, n.d.) 55, accessed from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

H. Wheeler Robinson argues that “the Day of Lord” suggests “the twofold character of the history, as faith interprets it. On the one hand, it is implied that much of the history has been alien or contradictory to the purposes of the God of Israel. On the other, all this history is declared to be but the prelude to the triumphant vindication of God.” See H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 137.

⁶⁷Brian Froese, “Approaching A Theology Of The Book of Malachi,” *Direction* 25.1 (1996): 14-22.

⁶⁸Ernst Jenni, “Day of the Lord,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:784.

However, from the context of the book of Malachi, before הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, is the time when YHWH or the messenger of the covenant comes to His temple (Mal 3:1). Also, it appears as the time appointed for YHWH when He comes and chooses to manifest His will and Himself (Mal 3:2; cf., Ps 93:5; 96:13; 98:2, 9; 99:7).⁶⁹

A *qal* active participle of בוא “to come,”⁷⁰ בא “coming” is used to indicate a present as well as a close future event. It may be translated as “comes.” The participle connotes the definite idea of the coming of הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. Because the pericope about the coming day of YHWH is introduced with הִנֵּה “behold,” the corresponding particle syntactically conveys the notion that the message is an imminent event or something going to happen for sure in the future.⁷¹ This coming day is not taken literally. The manner here of the punishment is depicted by the participle בַּעֲרֵם. All the כָּל־וְאֵלֵים וְכָל־עֹשֵׂהֵם “and all the arrogant and all evildoers” will be victims, as stubbles, when YHWH distinguishes them from the righteous. Hla points out that in the book of Malachi, the consuming of the wicked are in the setting of “God’s additional revelation for the post-exilic Israelites in connection with the promised messiah (cf. Mal 4:2).”⁷² Thus, the punishment is for those who will reject the call to return to YHWH after the coming of His messenger (Mal 1:6, 14; 2:10, 13, 17; 3:13-14; 3:7; cf. 4:1, 3). Also a metaphorical expression is used in אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִצְנַב לָהֶם עֵרֶשׂ וְעֵנָף “that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” to convey the idea that a divine judgment and a thorough punishment await for the covenant breakers of Judea.

In the v. 2, through a metaphorical way the coming of YHWH is conveyed by the use of שֶׁמֶשׁ צְדִיקָה “sun of righteousness.”⁷³ His coming is pictured as “the rising sun,” that brings life and healing for “the long-suffering righteous.”⁷⁴ The promised divine appearance of the “Sun of Righteousness”⁷⁵ will bring separation between the wicked and the righteous, and will reward them accordingly. The וְרָחַץ “rise, come forth, appear”⁷⁶ and “shine forth”⁷⁷ of the “Sun of righteousness” conveys “the theological undertones of messianic prediction apart from its literal meaning or usage.”⁷⁸ The effect of the coming of the “Sun of righteousness” is that the righteous “will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall.”⁷⁹ And the verb used here וַיִּשְׂתַּחֲוּ shows how YHWH worshippers are distinguished from the wicked at the appearance of the “Sun of righteousness.” The metaphor כְּעֵגְלֵי מִרְבֵּק “like calves from the stall” is used to describe the joy and happiness the people who fear the name of YHWH will have at the coming of the Sun of righteousness. This rejoicing of the righteous is contrasted with the punishment which will be meted out to the wicked.

Verse 3 begins with a *waw*-consecutive וַעֲטוּתְהֶם “and you will trample/tread down” indicating the continuation of the experience of those who fear YHWH. The object of the verb in וַעֲטוּתְהֶם is רְשָׁעִים “the wicked.” The nature is so great כִּי־יִהְיוּ אֶפְרָר “for that they will be ashes.” The word אֶפְרָר means “ash, dust”⁸⁰ which is made by burning (cf., Jer 28:18). It represents “loathsome” or “what is without value” (Isa 44:20; Job 30:19).⁸¹ This expression can be seen as the antecedent of the burning of the wicked people on the day

⁶⁹Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 131-132.

⁷⁰Brown, *BDB*, s.v. “בוא.”

⁷¹Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* 359-360.

⁷²Hla, “Sun of Righteousness,” 130.

⁷³Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 233.

⁷⁴Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 234.

⁷⁵For full discussion on the identity and function of the “Sun of Righteousness” see Hla, “Sun of Righteousness,” 1-204.

⁷⁶David J. A. Clines, ed., “וְרָחַץ,” *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (DCH)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 3:138.

⁷⁷Helmer Ringgren, “וְרָחַץ,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 3:141.

⁷⁸Hla, “Sun of Righteousness,” 135.

⁷⁹Hla, “Sun of Righteousness,” 135.

⁸⁰Clines, “אֶפְרָר,” *DCH*, 1:360.

⁸¹Charles L. Feinberg, “אֶפְרָר,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:63-66.

of YHWH in Mal 4:1. This occurs at the judgment of YHWH after the rising of the Sun of righteousness (Mal 4:1-3). The condition of the wicked is again elaborated after the divine punishment in contrast to the righteous as תחת כפות רגליכם “under the soles of your feet.” The time for YHWH’s execution of the punishment towards the wicked is referred עֲשֶׂה בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה “in the day which I am preparing.” The reference to the day in Mal 4:1 indicates YHWH’s will to “implement and accomplish His judgment upon the ungodly.”⁸² Also the pronoun “I” used shows or emphasizes that YHWH Himself is going to carry out this event with the participle עֹשֶׂה “am preparing/doing” reoccurring to stress the point that the punishment or judgment YHWH will do will be in the future.⁸³

Malachi 4:4-6 is specially positioned in the Hebrew Bible as it does not only close the book of Malachi, but also the entirety of the Prophets (Major and Minor Prophets) and the OT.⁸⁴ Thus, these verses have been understood as a well-considered and systematized conclusion for the book Malachi and the Prophets, moving beyond Joshua to Malachi.⁸⁵ Some scholars however, consider this concluding section of the book as the ending to a prophetic collection consisting of the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi,⁸⁶ the conclusion of the Book of the Twelve,⁸⁷ or simply a conclusion to the Law and the Prophets.⁸⁸

Verses 4 begin with זָכְרוּ in the Qal masculine plural imperative of זָכַר “to remember, call to mind, recall.”⁸⁹ Johannes Pedersen points out that when a person “remembers something, it does not mean that it has an objective memory image of some thing or event, but that this image is called forth in the soul and assists in determining the direction, its action. When man remembers God, he lets his being and his action be determined by him.”⁹⁰ The use of זָכְרוּ is both recalling to the Law and living in obedience to it as well.⁹¹ Thus the people are to remember the תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה “law of Moses.” The Law of Moses can be seen as “the reference is to the Torah as a whole” in “its final form and authority.”⁹² The prophet stressed the need on the necessity of keeping the Law of Moses, thus the Torah. In Malachi the Law of Moses “functions as the unchanging authority for the whole community. Obedience to it issues in blessing; disobedience calls forth a curse.”⁹³ The phrase תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי “the law of Moses My servant” is used by the prophet to show the service Moses rendered to God which was pleasing to Him. Moses served as a mediator of God to the people of Israel. This also calls for the renewal of the kind of service Moses rendered in the time they upheld God’s law and served him wholeheartedly.

תְּהִלִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים “statutes and ordinances” constitute the Law of God (cf., Deut 4:8, 44-45). Glazier-McDonald posits that the מִשְׁפָּטִים are “legal decision; their goal is the preservation of God’s order”

⁸²Hla, “Sun of Righteousness,” 151.

⁸³Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 627-628.

⁸⁴Stephanus D. Snyman, “Malachi 4:4-6 (Heb 3:22-24) as a point of Convergence in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of the Intra and Intertextual Relationships,” *HTS* 68/1 (2012): 1-6 (1).

⁸⁵See Barry A. Jones, “The Book of the Twelve as a Witness to Ancient Biblical Interpretation,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 69; Snyman, “Malachi 4:4-6,” 1-6; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1972), 251; Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 568-69.

⁸⁶Mark J. Boda, “Messengers of Hope in Haggai-Malachi,” *JSOT* 2/1 (2007): 113-131; Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, BLS 27 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 96-97.

⁸⁷Hill, *Malachi*, 364; David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 233.

⁸⁸Redditt, *Haggai*, 185.

⁸⁹Clines, “זָכַר,” *DCH*, 3:111.

⁹⁰Johannes Pedersen, *Israel Its life and Culture*, 4 vols. (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1:106.

⁹¹Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 245.

⁹²Rex Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 159.

⁹³Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 248.

with the theme of the necessity of keeping the law.⁹⁴ This verse is important due to its reminder of the people that the nation of Israel continues to dwell under the Law of Moses which functions as the unchanging authority for the people.

Verse 5 starts with the participle הִנֵּה “behold” as can be seen in Mal 4:1. The tone of imminence is reiterated for emphasis in the participle recurring. To express the nearness and certainty of the forth-coming day of YHWH, the prophet uses the phrase הִנֵּה אֶנְכִּי שֶׁלֵּחַ “Behold I am sending.” אֵלֶיךָ הַנְּבִיאַא, “Elijah the prophet,” will be sent to the people. It can be deduced that this is not the historical Elijah who had ascended to heaven.

YHWH assured the people of sending His messenger to prepare the before the righteous to the day of His coming. The identity of Elijah the prophet can be parallel to the Messenger of YHWH in Mal 3:1-3. This will happen לְפָנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא, “before the coming of the great and fearful day of YHWH.” The prepositional phrase shows the time in which Elijah the prophet should come before the judgment day of YHWH upon the unrighteous.

אֵלֶיךָ “Elijah.” From the context, much detail is not given about his identity. However, 1 Kgs 17:1-21:29 gives an account of him. He is from Tishbe in Gilead. His ministry spans around the reign of King Ahab of the Northern Kingdom (ca 875-850 BC). He was a faithful prophet and even at a time that Jezebel, Ahab’s wife against him. Jezebel instigated hatred against him for preaching against idolatry. In the midst of all these the prophet stood for God. Elijah’s ministry was characterized by important events including his prophetic pronouncement of drought in Israel (1 Kgs 17:1-7); his miracle that supplied abundant food to the widow and her family during a period of severe famine (vv. 8-16). He later in Zarephath cause the dead son of the widow to resurrect (vv. 17-24); and at the period Baal worship was taking over the worship of Israel, God used him to triumph over the diviners of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:17-40). Thus, in the midst of religious apostasy, he called the people of Israel to repentance and became an advocate for reformation in Israel. Malachi’s prophetic reference about Elijah was for the coming of an eschatological Elijah whose mandate would be to reform and call the people to repentance. He was expected to help mend broken family relationship. Thus, Malachi’s Elijah would proclaim a message of similitude to that of the prophet Elijah. Elie Assis remarks that

The description of the coming of Elijah in 3,23-24 fits in well with the rest of Malachi’s oracles. The description of Elijah’s heralding the coming of the Day of the Lord parallels the description in 3,1 of the Lord sending his messenger before him. Elijah’s mission to “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children” (3,24) is reminiscent of the call by the prophet in 3,7: “Return unto Me, and I will return unto you.” The reference to the fathers and their children in the last verse of the book recalls 1,6. The threatening description of the Lord’s coming in 3,24 also takes (בישור), “us back to 3,1. The function of the prophet” and he shall turn parallels the function of the priest in 2,6. These affinities strongly suggest that these verses were written from the outset as the closing to the Book of Malachi, though admittedly they would also serve as a fitting closing to the Pentateuch and Prophets.⁹⁵

Mason posits that אֵלֶיךָ was a key OT major prophet and may “may symbolize the promise of a renewal of prophecy to prepare the people for the last time at a period when the living voice of prophecy had faded.”⁹⁶

Verse 6 depicts the activity of אֵלֶיךָ. וְהִשְׁיִיב לִב־אָבוֹת עַל־בְּנֵיהֶם וְלִב־בְּנֵיהֶם עַל־אָבוֹתָם. “and he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their father.” Glazier-McDonald argues that this phrase originated with Malachi due to the cause of the discord among parents and children must be rooted in the conditions of the prophet’s time.⁹⁷ This might have stemmed from “the precariousness of the economic situation in Judah during the Persian period induced young men to ally themselves with rich, influential families through intermarriage.”⁹⁸ Malachi spoke against this act and called the people’s

⁹⁴Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 251.

⁹⁵Elie Assis, “Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope A New Reading of Malachi 3,22-24,” *ZAW* 123. (2011): 209.

⁹⁶Mason, *The book of Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi*, 160.

⁹⁷Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 254.

⁹⁸Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 254-255.

attention to be with their youthful wives (Mal 2:10-16). Thus the need to turn hearts (לָב). This also reechoes the message of the prophet to return to YHWH wholeheartedly. To Glazier-McDonald, the turning to YHWH is a theme which is “at the heart of Malachi’s prophecy.”⁹⁹ The people are to return to YHWH and He will turn to them (Mal 3:7). Thus turning to YHWH is submitting to His will by observing the Law of Moses and the statutes and ordinances written therein. If this is not done then אֶת־הָאָרֶץ תִּקְרָא “I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

הָאָרֶץ, “land or earth or world.” As “land” the word may refer to the Promised Land where the people are currently living. The people lost the land due to disobedience and its subsequent exile. It is now regain back. The immediate target of Malachi in this message is to relate to the people that if they fail to honour the land and the donor then it would be permanently denied them. Malachi issues two options before them: (1) to respond to God who loves them or (2) suffer the terrible consequences (4:1, 6). If הָאָרֶץ is taken as “earth” or “world,” then it would have a universal connotation. It will be in line in seeing the prophecy as an eschatological notation in which the whole world was being warned to heed the injunction of the Law of Moses during the last days when the message will be preached in the spirit of Elijah.

The events and figures shown by Malachi are “eschatological, in the sense that there is the expectation of a future in which God will be revealed to the world and the faithful of God’s people will be vindicated.”¹⁰⁰ The exegesis shows that the envisioned day of YHWH by Malachi is an eschatological day of restoration and judgment. The vision of Malachi can be seen for the purpose of restoration. The restoration includes the sun of righteousness, eschatological Elijah, and a community of reverence to the Law of Moses who will enjoy righteousness and healing. YHWH is to come out of the blue, and his day is to bring judgment upon the wicked and ungodly, but for those who fear God, “the sun of righteousness” will trample the wicked. The vision of Malachi can also be seen as an eschatological vision with the idea of bringing judgment for God’s people, both the righteous as well as the wicked. Malachi called the people to repentance and failure to repent would demand judgment.

CONCLUSION

The eschatology of Malachi is consistent with Israel’s experience. In Joel 3:1-5, the prophecy is linked to the day of YHWH. Malachi and Joel describe the coming of YHWH using the same phrase: “the great and terrible day of YHWH” (Joel 3:4; Mal 4:2). They all point to what will precede the coming of YHWH. The import of the eschatology of Mal 4:1-6 is the turning of the spiritual eyes of the people to God.

Through Malachi, the right interpretation of Scripture will be enacted through the exegetical correspondence between biblical text and eschatological community.¹⁰¹ The events and figures raised by the Malachi lead to understanding about the eschatology of Mal 4:1-6. However, each event and figure by itself plays an integral role in the passage in which it is embedded, and correct understanding of the text is crucial to valid exegesis of the eschatological context. The eschatology should influence our understanding of the prophecy of Malachi, which immediately follows the OT. The exegesis of the passage considered together with the event and figures have shown to be eschatological in orientation. As OT prophecy generally, present eschatology are measured against an ideal immediate and a glorious future. Hopefully this brief look at the perplexing passage from Malachi 4:1-6 may contribute constructively to the ongoing study of this relationship.

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⁹⁹Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 256.

¹⁰⁰Katrina Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah: A Study of the Formation of a Mantological Wisdom Anthology* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1994), 10-11.

¹⁰¹R.B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 173.

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