

PUTTING THE ESCHATOLOGICAL VISIONS OF ZECHARIAH
IN THEIR PLACE: MALACHI AS A HERMENEUTICAL GUIDE
FOR THE LAST SECTION OF THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE

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In the last decades of the twentieth century it has become increasingly clear, and may now be considered as a basis for studies in the new millennium, that the so-called Minor Prophets must be perceived as parts of the Book of the Twelve Prophets. As James Nogalski has proposed, one should therefore no longer speak of Amos, Hosea, Malachi and the other prophetic collections as *books* but rather designate them as *writings*, which were meant to form a book only in combination. Within the collection of the Twelve, the writings were combined in such a way that the meaning of the whole overruled the meaning that a certain text had in its original place. The theological position that was held by the last redactors was inferred into every part of the collection. As a result, it is imperative that commentators of single writings take into account the place and function this writing has within the book as a whole (Petersen 1995; Sweeney 2000; Weyde 2000).

If the Book of the Twelve is purposefully arranged, one should expect to find a coherent global structure that directs the reading process (Collins 1993: 65; House 1990: 67-71). Most important in this respect are the beginnings of the twelve writings, nine of which contain superscriptions.¹ Since the dated beginnings follow in a historical sequence, the reader gets the impression that the whole collection intends to unfold a certain part of the history of prophecy. The deepest break is located between Zephaniah and Haggai. At this point the Babylonian exile is obviously presupposed,

1. I only want to speak of a superscription if 'die Informationen, die sie enthält, auf einer Metaebene zum restlichen Textkorpus liegen und sie weder grammatisch noch semantisch eine lineare Anknüpfung an den folgenden Text aufweist' (Schart 1998: 32). This is true only for Hos. 1.1; Joel 1.1; Amos 1.1; Obad. 1a; Mic. 1.1; Nah. 1.1; Hab. 1.1; Zeph. 1.1 and Mal. 1.1.

but the redactors do not even mention it. It seems to me that the redactor deliberately highlighted and justified this silence, in so far as Hab. 2.20; Zeph. 1.7 and Zech. 2.17 stress in very similar phrases the fact that silence is the appropriate human reaction when faced with the awe-inspiring and formidable reality of the LORD. To use the words of Zech. 2.17: ‘Be silent, all people, before the LORD!’

Within the last section of the Twelve, including Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, it is unambiguous that Haggai and Zechariah form a single unit.² It is much more difficult to establish, however, why and how Malachi follows Zechariah. There are reasons to argue that Malachi is not the proper name for a prophet, but rather a title (‘my messenger’). If this were true, it would be even more obvious that Malachi is not just another part of the chain of prophets, but serves a different purpose.

1. *How Many Layers in Malachi?*

Evaluating the source-criticism of Malachi, it is safe to say that over the last decades there has emerged a strong consensus that Mal. 3.22-24 was added to form a conclusion not only for the Book of the Twelve, but also for the second part of the Hebrew Canon, *Nebiim* (Rudolph 1976: 291; Nogalski 1993b: 185; Steck 1991: 134-36; Schart 1998: 302-303; Weyde 2000: 388-93).³ The rest of Malachi is more difficult to analyze. Among others, Bosshard and Kratz (1990), as well as Steck (1991), have proposed that one has to differentiate between two layers. Bosshard and Kratz start with the observation that Mal. 1.6-2.9 and 3.6-12 belong together because they use similar concepts. Likewise Mal. 2.17-3.5 and 3.13-21 belong together. Only the last two units mention a coming *Läuterungsgericht* (‘purifying punishment’). This thematic difference is enough evidence for Bosshard and Kratz to postulate two layers in Malachi. Their oldest layer (*Grundschrift*) is comprised of Mal. 1.2-5; 1.6-2.9 (without 1.14a) and 3.6-12.⁴ Since it is very common in prophetic writings to find oracles that

2. Neither Haggai nor Zechariah begins with a superscription; instead, they utilize a narrative framework, which consistently uses the same dating formula—‘In the second year of King Darius’ (e.g. Hag. 1.1; Zech. 1.1)—and seamlessly combines the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah.

3. According to Steck, Mal. 1.1 also belongs to this addition. However the arguments are weak. They only gain weight when one presupposes the thesis that Malachi once followed seamlessly after Zechariah—a thesis I will consider and dismiss below.

4. Bosshard-Nepustil (1997) repeats his earlier hypothesis (Bosshard and Kratz 1990) without mentioning any new arguments.

address present issues placed alongside those that deal with the judgment of God in the future, I see this argument of Bosshard and Kratz as very weak. Different oracles addressing different topics do not necessarily produce a source-critically relevant tension.

There are, however, some insertions. Relevant for this study is the case of Mal. 1.11-14. Elliger (1956: 198) considers the whole passage as secondary. However, I think that if one isolates Mal 1.11aßb and 1.14b as secondary elements, the rest of the passage fits into its context and should belong to the oldest layer. There are some other insertions, but they are not relevant for this investigation.⁵

2. To What Layer of Zechariah

Was the Basic Layer of Malachi Attached?

a. *Was the Malachi Grundschrift Attached to Zechariah 8?*

Steck (1991), Bosshard and Kratz (1990), and Nogalski (1993b) have proposed that their Malachi *Grundschrift* (not mine!) once followed Zech. 8. They compile a lengthy list of citations, allusions and thematic connections between the text passages in question. This list is at first glance quite impressive, and one has to admit that they note a lot of *Bezüge*, as they call them, which nobody has noted before. However, overwhelmed by the sheer mass of so far undiscovered *Bezüge*, they tend to overstate their case. First, it would be helpful if they would evaluate the significance of their observations. At least some of the *Bezüge* may not have been noted before simply because they are coincidental and meaningless. Second, one gets the feeling that these scholars no longer assume an oral history of the prophetic texts. Although it is true that many of the late prophetic writings belong to the literary type of *Schriftprophetie*, one should not deny up front that the writings grew out of a process of 'preaching the tradition', as Rex Mason has reconstructed it. Especially in the case of Malachi, one has the distinct impression that the written text goes back to discussions in which the prophet was involved. Shared vocabulary between different prophetic texts would be a natural consequence, if their authors took part

5. The one I consider most obvious is Mal. 3.1b-4, where a phrase from Joel is picked up and applied to the messenger of the covenant. This is one of the instances where it is very obvious that the redactors of the Malachi *Grundschrift* deliberately cite Joel, whereas the *Grundschrift* itself does not. The redactor wants to identify the messenger of the *Grundschrift* with the day of the LORD from Joel.

in the same debate within the community of faith.⁶ In this article I do not want to evaluate all of their *Bezüge*, but only those that I think are most interesting.⁷

(1) *First Argument: Mal. 3.6-7//Zech. 8.14//Zech. 1.2-3.* These three passages share a particular concept: in the current time the LORD proclaims that the punishment of the sins of the fathers has come to an end. The LORD is prepared to start anew if this generation repents and returns to Yahweh. All three passages share the sentences: 'Return to me...and I will return to you...' It can well be argued that these striking verbal agreements stem from the oral stage. The redactional framework of the visions in Zech. 1 and 8 may stem from the same community in which the discussion presupposed by Mal. 3.6-12 was rooted.

(2) *Second Argument: Mal. 1.9, 13b//Zech. 8.9, 13.* The phrase 'your hand' (singular) in Mal. 1.9, 13b alludes to the phrase 'your hands' (plural) in Zech 8.9, 13. This allusion is not very significant. One can ask why it is not mentioned that Zech. 14.13 has the singular 'hand' three times. In Zech. 8.9, 13 we have an exhortation: 'Let your hands be strong!' The addressed audience is Israel as a whole. In Malachi it is the priesthood. The fact is stressed, that the priests are responsible for the quality of the gifts offered to Yahweh. The chance that this allusion was intentionally created is very small.

(3) *Third Argument: Mal. 1.2-3//Zech. 8.17, 19.* More significantly, in both chapters Yahweh himself states 'I hate' (*qatal* first person) something. In

6. 'In the second place, the suggestion that such material is the result not only of a purely literary activity but springs from and reflects the living process of "preaching the tradition" surely does bring it to life and show something of its importance in the life and faith of a living community. It is all too easy for academic biblical scholars, using the techniques of literary criticism, to present the development of the biblical material in purely literary terms. It is almost as though we discern our counterparts sitting at some oil-lit desk in an ancient prototype of the Bodleian Library engaged in a purely intellectual exercise of up-dating the text, ironing out its difficulties or re-interpreting it so as to uphold its truth when its predictions have not been seen to materialise. But preachers are engaged on a more immediate and urgent task. They are concerned from a sense of pastoral need for a community of faith. They must meet the constant threats of loss of faith or, at least, of apathy towards that faith and its observance through disappointment and disillusion' (Mason 1990: 261).

7. Compare Lescow's very critical evaluation (1993: 179-84).

Zech. 8 it is the 'oath of falsehood' (8.17), whereas in Malachi it is Esau. Only six times does Yahweh hate something in first person speech (Jer. 12.8; 44.4; Hos. 9.15; Amos 5.29). This seems statistically remarkable, but it needs to be clarified whether the allusion makes any specific sense in a larger concept of coherence or contrast between the passages involved.

(4) *Fourth Argument: Zech. 8.21-22//Mal. 1.9.* Both passages contain the phrase 'to entreat the favor'. This phrase occurs 16 times, but the imperative used in Mal. 1.9 is only employed one other time in 1 Kgs 13.6 (Weyde 2000: 134). Since the concept of entreating Yahweh is of great theological value, it may well not be by chance that this phrase occurs here and there. Nogalski rightly asks: 'Given that these two passages consistently use the same vocabulary to contrast radically different situations, and that one can sometimes detect one or the other passage appears to be shaping the contrast, the question arises: why do the passages contrast situations as they do?' (Nogalski 1993b: 199). And his answer is:

The Haggai-Zechariah (1-8) corpus depicts a very hopeful and positive view of the times surrounding the building of the temple... Malachi, with its portrayal of the abuses of both people and priest, presents a shocking contrast to the hope in Zechariah... The situation has gone full circle, as if Jerusalem's destruction and Yahweh's subsequent deliverance have been for naught. The circular pattern of judgment, punishment, and deliverance begins again in precisely the place where one would expect a different, more hopeful, beginning. In this light, the calls of Zechariah to learn from the mistakes of the fathers (especially 1.2-6; 7.9-14, 8.9-13,14f) appear even more poignant, precisely because they went unheeded, despite the optimism with which they were delivered. (Nogalski 1993b: 200)

Although Nogalski's interpretation of the thematic progression from Zechariah to Malachi seems well taken, this does not at all exclude the possibility that Zech. 9-14 stood between Zech. 8 and Mal. 1.⁸

b. *Was the Malachi Grundschrift Attached to Zechariah 13?*

Steck has proposed the thesis that the basic layer of Malachi followed Zech. 13. His hypothesis is very complicated and therefore difficult to evaluate. His strongest argument seems to be that Zech. 13.8-9; Mal. 3.2

8. This is demonstrated by the fact that Nogalski's position resembles very much the synchronic reading of the Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus by Pierce (1984). Another problem is that Nogalski does not compare Zech. 14 and Mal. 1. It would be interesting to see how many allusions he would find in this case.

and 3.13-21 have the concept of purifying punishment (*Läuterungsgericht*) in common. Again, the main question is why a thematic allusion between the passages must imply that they once followed one another immediately.

c. *Was the Malachi Grundschrift Attached to Zechariah (9–)14?*

As a result, one is left with the simplest thesis, namely, that the basic layer in Malachi was attached to Zechariah after ch. 14 was added to the pre-existing corpus of prophetic writings.

(1) *First Argument.* As is well known, the strongest argument for the thesis that Malachi already had Zech. 9–14 in mind is based on the superscription in Mal. 1.1, which is of the same type as the superscriptions in Zech. 9.1 and Zech. 12.1.⁹ In addition, Petersen has observed that there is a certain move behind the arrangement of the superscriptions: the first addresses a foreign nation (Zech. 9.1), the second concerns Israel (Zech. 12.1; preposition על), and the third refers to Israel's being directly addressed (Mal. 1.1).¹⁰

(2) *Second Argument.* In Zech. 14.20-21, the phrase 'house of Yahweh' occurs twice. Also mentioned is the holiness of this place. This is a fitting thematic link to Mal. 1, where prominent installations of the temple and the levitical priesthood are mentioned.

(3) *Third Argument.* The strongest verbal allusions between Zech. 14 and Malachi are in Zech. 14.9 and Mal. 1.14aβb. I quote Myers and Myers:

Although 'Yahweh of Hosts' is surely, as indicated above, disproportionately frequent in postexilic prophecy, 'king' appears in Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi only here (vv. 16-17) and in Mal. 1.14 ('I am a great king, says Yahweh of Hosts', and 'my name is revered among the nations') in relationship to God. (Myers and Meyers 1993: 467)

9. Nogalski assumes that Mal. 1.1 is the oldest superscription, and that Zech. 9.1 and 12.1 were modeled after Mal. 1.1. However, this is questionable. Bosshard and Kratz, as well as Steck, argue that the superscription in Mal. 1.1 was inserted as part of the last layer in Malachi. This is questionable, too.

10. 'If I am correct in understanding Malachi as the third in a series of deutero-prophetic collections, the sequence of prepositions relating these collections to various nations or territories is especially significant: *b-* against a foreign nation (Zech. 9:1), '*al-*concerning Israel (Zech. 12:1), and '*el* to Israel (Mal. 1:1)' (Petersen 1995: 165).

It seems very obvious to me that the redactor who inserted Mal. 1.11aβb and 14b did so in order to underline and strengthen the linkage between Mal. 1 and Zech. 14, and thus stitch together these two writings within the Book of the Twelve. The redactor probably found it unsatisfying that the Joel–Obadiah corpus would conclude with Zech. 14, so Malachi was attached to Zech. 14. The redactor already had the text of Malachi in a fixed form. Some verbal allusions to the Joel–Obadiah corpus already existed within this pre-existing version of Malachi, for example the allusions to Zech. 8.20-23, the theme of worldwide reverence toward Yahweh in Zech. 14, and the allusion from Mal. 1.11aα to Zech. 14.9 (שׁוּ). The very same redactor may have inserted Zech. 14.20-21 in order to focus the reader on the place that is relevant in Mal. 1.6–2.9. The allusions were there because in the redactor's community it was common to preach and read the Book of the Ten as respected scripture and be inspired by it.

(4) *Summary.* The thesis that the basic layer in Malachi was originally attached to Zech. 14 seems to be more sound and probable than the others that have been proposed, especially since it does not exclude the possibility that the redactor who added Malachi to the pre-existing corpus also wanted to allude to Zech. 8.20-23. To be sure, I do not think that Zechariah and Malachi formed a literary stratum from the very beginning. The evidence is far too weak.¹¹ The redactor who attached Malachi had before him a collection of oracles, the basic layer of Malachi. This collection already shared themes and vocabulary, especially with redactional passages in Haggai–Zech. 1–14. In order to strengthen the coherence between Haggai–Zechariah, on the one hand, and the basic layer in Malachi, on the other, the redactor inserted some passages into Malachi (e.g. Mal. 1.11aβb, 14b) which presuppose Malachi's position after Zech. 14 and within the Book of the 'Twelve'. What does this mean?

3. *What Meaning is Conveyed by the Redactional Arrangement?*

Whatever source-critical hypotheses one considers plausible, in the end one has to explain the final, canonical order. How is Malachi's meaning to be construed when it is read after Zech. 14? In fact, Zech. 14 would form a

11. On the contrary, lexemes and concepts prominent in Zech. 14 are not mentioned in the basic layer of Malachi: Yahweh as king, holiness, סְכוּרָה, aggression of the nations, and others. In addition, the formulas which structure the text within Zech. 14 (e.g. וְהָיָה בְּיוֹם הַהוּא) are not used in Malachi.

glorious and satisfying end of the book. What would be more appropriate for a prophetic book, which has as one of its most central topics the coming of the Day of the Lord, than to close with a magnificent description of this event? Zech. 14 is in my view written to form the end of the Joel–Obadiah corpus. All the tensions within the Book of the Twelve are solved, and a scenario for the end time is established which is complex enough to include all aspects of the future of all the prophets within the book.¹² Why is it that something follows Zech. 14? Why does Yahweh need to send his messenger after his last prophet Zechariah has summed up the history of prophecy in such an elegant manner?¹³

a. Arguing the Tradition

Already the form of this last writing is important. The disputation speeches attempt to persuade the addressees.¹⁴ At the same time they involve the reader of Malachi in typical debates. Again and again, the point is not that the opponents consciously disregard Yahweh and his laws, but that they appear surprised over the attacks of the prophet. One gets the impression that the opponents have a generally positive attitude towards the basic norms, which the prophet propagates. In addition, they are convinced that they practice these norms. It is typical that the hearers do not contradict the basic contentions of the speeches but rather ask *כִּי כֵן* ('how is that?'). However, there are obviously differences between the hearer and the

12. 'Ch. 14 is a summary of the eschatological teaching of almost all the preceding prophets: the assault on Jerusalem, the destruction of the City, cosmic phenomena, Yahweh's final victory, the conversion of the gentiles and their pilgrimage to the newly established City. This is certainly not intra-historical eschatology; it derives from a general picture gleaned from all the prophets and made to live in cultic circles around 331. It is the final eschatological summary, and conclusive re-interpretation of all prophecy from Amos to Zechariah' (Grech 1969: 253-54). 'Ein wesentlicher Unterschied zwischen Sach 14 und Sach 9, 1–13, 9 in Bezug auf die Anspielungen auf die älteren Texte besteht darin, daß Sach 14 einen gesamten Entwurf der eschatologischen Erwartung vorlegt und dazu die traditionsgeschichtlich vorgegebenen Vorstellungen ausbaut, während die Aussagen in Sach 9, 1–13, 9 von den Bezugstexten inspiriert, beeinflusst oder vorgeprägt sind' (Tai 1996: 229). For example, the earthquake is mentioned in Zech. 14.5, which once confirmed the message of Amos; and Zech. 14.8 alludes to Joel 4.18.

13. 'Der Übergang vom Sacharjabuch zu Maleachi ist überraschend. Nach dem endzeitlichen Kampf um Jerusalem (Sach 14) ist nun wieder von Problemen des gegenwärtigen Lebens die Rede' (Rendtorff 1983: 254).

14. In my view it is probable that the disputation speeches report real discussions in a condensed form.

prophet about the right practice in everyday life. The shift from Zech. 14 to Malachi redirects the focus from the tremendous end time vision to the small-scale problems of the proper *halachah*.

b. *The Present Situation is Important for the Future*

Malachi recognizes that the promised, glorious future of Zion is already effective in his time. This can best be demonstrated in the case of the nations. Everywhere the name of Yahweh is revered, and at the same time Edom's final destruction is already on the way. But still this future is 'impeded by the unworthy behavior of the priests in the temple, the very place where God's name should be honored most' (Collins 1993: 81). One gets the impression that if the 'religious laxity' of the hearers could be overcome, the final victory of the Kingdom of God could materialize (Pierce 1984: 410). It is not enough to wait until the day comes. Here and now one has to act as if it were already near.

c. *No Mention of Edom*

Zechariah 14 does not mention Edom, although it is one of Yahweh's preeminent enemies.

Although Zech. 14 tried to include all aspects of the Joel–Obadiah corpus, one thing was not included within the scenario: What will happen to Edom, who is—according to Obadiah—the pre-eminent enemy of Yahweh? Malachi 1 states clearly that Edom will in this present age be destroyed forever.

d. *God Judges Individuals Not Nations*

The pre-eminent achievement of Zech. 14 is the idea that after the nations conquer Jerusalem and are subsequently defeated by Yahweh, their remnant will finally take part in the cult of Israel. Within Zech. 14 the actors involved in the end time are nations. In Malachi, however, particularly in 3.13-21, it is clear that in the end God will judge every single person. The survivors of Israel and the nations, who will, according to Zech. 14, together celebrate the Feast of Booths, are not morally qualified in any sense. They are simply the ones who escaped destruction in the last days, for whatever reason. Yahweh's kingdom does justice to nations but ignores the fate of the individual person. In contrast, Mal. 3 states firmly that the final judgment will take into account every single life, even every single action (Koenen 1994: 65).

e. Eschatological Visions Must be Counterbalanced by Torah-Practice
 Bosshard and Kratz have rightly observed that only in Mal. 2.17–3.5 and 3.13–21 can an eschatological perspective be detected. Both passages have more features in common than a shared theme. (1) Both disputation speeches state in the very first sentence that they are reactions to pre-supposed attacks from the ‘you-group’. The phrase ‘your words’ occurs in Mal. 2.17 and 3.13. This clearly shows that the prophet is attacked by the ‘you-group’ and needs to defend his case. (2) In both cases the ‘you-group’ doubts that the wicked get their just punishment while the people who cling to Yahweh get an adequate reward. (3) The rejoinder to this line of reasoning is, in both instances, based on the expectation that the future will bring a definite differentiation between the two groups. The wicked will be punished and the righteous will be rewarded for being ridiculed in the present time.

We have two lines of argumentation within Malachi. The first (Mal. 1.6–2.9; 2.10–16; 3.6–12) tries to motivate the hearers/readers to wholeheartedly fulfill the Torah, especially in cultic matters. Specific passages of the written Torah play an important role and are cited: Mal. 1.8 cites Lev. 22.18–25, and Mal. 2.4 cites Deut. 18.1–8. Malachi defends the position that the duties of a righteous Israelite are clearly stated in the Torah. If one fulfills the Torah partially (e.g. Mal. 3.10), or gives it a low priority (e.g. 1.7), or, in the worst case, misleads others with it (e.g. 2.8–9), one does not do justice to Yahweh who loves his people like a father. In the disputation speeches Malachi is aggressive and confronts people who do not heed the Torah.

The second line of argument (Mal. 2.17–3.5; 3.13–21) treats different problems. Malachi defends the argument that righteous behavior in the present will be rewarded with overwhelming blessing in the future. The righteous must not give up, but transform their expectations. The reward will be fully experienced when the final day comes. So, what Malachi really wants is to encourage a life according to the norms of the Torah. But he also needs to address the claim that such a life is futile. If Malachi cannot answer those questions, his demand to follow the Torah will go unheard. The coming day of Yahweh is not a single event in the far future and therefore irrelevant, but an event that in the dimension ‘before Yahweh’ (3.16) already is reality and by virtue of its anticipation affects the present. Every action is registered and archived in a book. Nothing escapes the just sentence of Yahweh. It is wise to have this final judgment in mind.

4. *Summary*

The glorious vision of the final day of the Lord in Zech. 14 once formed the end of the Joel–Obadiah corpus. However, the redactors of the canonical Book of the Twelve were not satisfied with this ending. They attached the writing of Malachi in order to prevent readers of the eschatological visions from misunderstanding them. The hope that Yahweh will be universally acknowledged, and that the nations and Israel will celebrate together in peaceful harmony, is needed and gives strength to the believers. However, there also needs to be a counterbalancing emphasis on not neglecting the everyday practice of Torah, which is the lifelong task of every single person.

In this respect Malachi represents an important hermeneutical guide for reading the Book of the Twelve from a canonical perspective. It is not allowed to stop reading after Zech. 14. The visions of Zechariah have to be put in their place.