

## A THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE HAGGAI/ZECHARIAH/MALACHI CORPUS

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In a previously published article the thesis was proposed that the last three books of the canon of the twelve form a useful literary unit not only for the study of early postexilic Judaism (sixth-fifth centuries B.C.) but, more importantly, for a clearer understanding of the messages of the books themselves. More specifically, it was suggested that the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi (together referred to as "the HZM corpus") have been tied together in form and message with five literary connectors that are discernible in the present form of the text.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the present study is to go further in this direction by developing the theme of the HZM corpus—that is, the unified message of what has traditionally been called Haggai through Malachi. Through a style of rhetorical questioning, the messages of the prophets of the return are closely related to each other. The author begins with the inquiries of Haggai's sermons (1:4; 2:3, 11-12), moves to the curious prophet of the night visions, Zechariah (chaps. 1-6), who preaches his sermons with a style much like that of his contemporary (cf. Zech 7:5-7; 8:6), then concludes his work with the six sermons of YHWH's mysterious "messenger," in which the audience asks the questions and the prophet responds (Mal 1:2, 6-7; 2:10, 14, 17; 3:7, 13). The question/answer schema is broken periodically by several brief interludes (Hag 1:12-15; 2:20-23; Zech 6:9-15; Mal 4:4-5) and one major oracular section (Zechariah 9-14).

The method utilized herein is to examine the thematic development of the interrogative material, noticing especially where that pattern is broken by narrative interludes.<sup>2</sup> In this regard it is maintained that the major interruption, Zechariah 9-14, holds an important key to the central thrust of the work as a whole. The present arrangement of the prophets' materials conveys a literary profile of the generation that rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A foundational discussion of these five literary connectors in the HZM corpus was set forth in my earlier study, "Literary Connectors and a Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi Corpus," *JETS* 27/3 (1984) 277-289.

<sup>2</sup>The units have been determined by means of a study of the indicators in the text as it now stands. We are not concerned with the possible prehistory of some materials, such as Hag 2:15-19 (cf. *infra*, n. 7). Rather, our questions are directed at how this unit (as well as the larger unit of vv 10-19) functions in its present location in HZM. In general the method of approach is similar although not identical to that of B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 463-498.

<sup>3</sup>The generation referred to is that which returned with Zerubbabel in the spring of 521 B.C. and saw the completion of the temple in 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15). In our dating of Malachi this is also the generation to which the "messenger of YHWH" spoke early in the fifth century.

## I. THE SERMONS OF HAGGAI

The first segment of the HZM corpus is related to the ministry of Haggai the prophet, 520 B.C. In its extant form the material easily divides into three sermon-units (1:3-11; 2:1-9, 10-19) regarding the economic and spiritual conditions of the remnant community that began the major rebuilding work on the temple. The book is introduced by an historical reference providing the setting for the first sermon (1:1-2), which in turn is followed by an historical commentary showing the results of that sermon (vv 12-15). After the second and third messages a final notation is made concerning a personal encounter of the prophet with the Judahite governor Zerubbabel.<sup>4</sup>

1. *Interrogative preaching.* A pattern quickly becomes evident when the three sermon-units in Haggai are compared. Each begins with a rhetorical question that in turn receives a twofold response in the body of the exhortation.

The first comes as a reaction to the community's attitude that it was not time to rebuild the temple (1:1-2). The prophet asks whether they should continue to improve their own houses while the "house" of YHWH lies in ruins (v 4). His twofold response reveals that their economic distress had been caused by inverted priorities (v 9). The structure of the sermon is made clear by the identical phrase that introduces its two elements ("consider your plight," vv 5, 7).

The second sermon is similar in style to the first. The introductory question highlights the comparison between the present house and the elaborate worship center constructed for YHWH by Solomon. The prophet asks for the opinion of the remnant, evaluating it in the phrase "like it [this temple], like nothing" (2:3b). Again the outline of the message is twofold: (1) "work," for God is with you now (vv 4-5); (2) "hope," for a day is coming when YHWH will establish his universal rule (vv 6-9).

Finally, in its extant form<sup>5</sup> the third sermon evidences the same pattern as the first two. Here, however, the rhetorical question is developed more extensively. The prophet directs his question to the priests for a ruling on the *torah* regarding clean and unclean meats (v 11). His point is that the people had become contaminated and are therefore themselves "unclean" (v 14).<sup>6</sup> Here, as in the first section, the twofold response is clearly identifiable by means of the same

<sup>4</sup>The encounter with Zerubbabel is sometimes treated as simply a fourth oracle (e.g. Childs, *Introduction* 467). But here we would distinguish between the literary structure of the first three sermons (a rhetorical question with a twofold response) and this last section, which contains none of these elements.

<sup>5</sup>E. Sellin (*Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der jüdischen Gemeinde nach dem Babylonischen Exil* [Leipzig: Stuttgart, 1900-01], 2. 50) was among the first to suggest the relocation of 2:15-19. He was soon followed by J. W. Rothstein (*Juden und Samaritaner: Die grundlegende Scheidung von Judentum und Heidentum* [BWANT 3; Leipzig: Stuttgart, 1908] 53), whose location of this segment after 1:15a has come to be commonly accepted by critical scholarship. The present study supports Childs' assertion that the section 2:10-19 is a "deliberate unity" in the book's present form (*Introduction* 467).

<sup>6</sup>Precisely what caused the contamination is difficult to determine. Perhaps it was interaction with the Samaritans (cf. Ezra 4:1-5), or maybe it refers to the defilement remaining from the exile (cf. Zech 3:1-10), or possibly it relates only to the disobedience shown in Hag 1:1-11. One's conclusion on the matter does not significantly affect our thesis at this point.

phrase introducing each element ("consider from this day," vv 15, 18).<sup>7</sup> The answer comes with the announcement that the times of distress will soon blossom into times of harvest (v 19).

Mitchell's contention that these "brief fragments, in passing through the hands of an editor, may have lost more or less of the impress of Haggai's personality"<sup>8</sup> seems unlikely. Rather, it appears that the writer has been careful to preserve this original structural element, which was such an integral part of Haggai's preaching.

2. *Historical emphasis.* Though brief, the historical emphases in the book form the very backbone of the material. As Thomas points out, "Haggai differs from most other prophetic books in the Old Testament in that while the others are mainly collections of prophetic utterances, Haggai is more in the nature of a report on the prophet's utterances and on the effect they produced upon his hearers."<sup>9</sup> The introductory statement gives the reader his first impression of the character of the community in Judah in 520 B.C. They said that the time had not come, whereas YHWH had proclaimed precisely the opposite (1:1-2). Yet after the prophet speaks the people respond in obedience and reverence (at least temporarily), beginning some work on the temple site (vv 12-14).

Although no specific narrative portions occur in the second and third messages, the impression is clearly conveyed that the community is discouraged (2:3-4) and somehow in a state of "uncleanness" (v 14) before YHWH (a noticeable change from the more immediate results seen above). Consequently the reader is left with a degree of anxiety regarding the returnees. Will they continue as a community of faith, or will they lapse once again into their state of uncleanness? The only "answer" given in this segment of HZM is really no answer at all, but instead a report of Haggai's words to the governor (vv 20-23). While much debate has transpired regarding the lineage of Zerubbabel and his function in this prophetic oracle,<sup>10</sup> one thing that seems clear is that he stood at that moment in history as a Davidic symbol (signet).<sup>11</sup> Whatever choice the community would

<sup>7</sup>The chronological difficulty is practically erased if one understands the reference in 2:18b as referring back to the initial foundation-laying ceremony by Zerubbabel in the preceding spring (521 B.C.), before Haggai's first sermon. The thought of vv 18-19, then, is that the remnant is to "consider from this day onward" [twenty-fourth of the ninth month, 520 B.C.] that although they have had economic distress since the foundation-laying [second month, 520 B.C.], "from this day [twenty-fourth of the ninth month, 520 B.C.] blessing will come.

<sup>8</sup>H. G. Mitchell, *Haggai and Zechariah* (ICC; Edinburgh; Clark, 1912) 36.

<sup>9</sup>D. Winton Thomas, "The Book of Haggai," in *IB* 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956) 1037. See also Smith's comment that Haggai represents "the collector's choice of oracles through which the prophet had most profoundly influenced the reconstruction of the Temple" (D. A. Smith, "Haggai," in *Broadman Bible Commentary* [Nashville: Broadman, 1972], 7. 293).

<sup>10</sup>Questions abound regarding the lineage of Zerubbabel, his possible identification with Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1), the theological connotations regarding him in the light of the curse on his ancestor Jehoiachin (Jer 22:24-30), and his function in relation to the prophetic word in Hag 2:20-23. For an introduction to some of the literature see B. T. Dahlberg, "Sheshbazzar," in *IDB* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4. 325-326.

<sup>11</sup>He represented this to the people at the time Haggai and Zechariah spoke, regardless of his fate

make, they had the assurance that YHWH, God of the covenantal promises to David and his seed, stood at their side.<sup>12</sup>

3. *Summary of Haggai*. Childs has touched on an important point in concluding that a "theological dynamic is established by the intertwining of oracles which is only correctly understood by a holistic reading of the book."<sup>13</sup> This book of Haggai introduces its reader to the generation of returnees involved in the rebuilding of YHWH's house in Jerusalem as those who had been viewed as capable of changing from disobedience to reverence and obedience, then back again to fear and uncleanness—all within a period of approximately three months. The material begins with reference to "this people" as represented in their political leader (1:1) and ends in a similar fashion (2:23). In order to find the outcome to the dilemma, the reader must continue into the adjoining literature, linked by precise dating formulae.

## II. THE VISIONS AND SERMONS OF ZECHARIAH 1-8

The book of Zechariah is treated presently as a literary unity for the purpose of analysis. In the HZM corpus it stands as "the middle member of a trilogy of prophets, dividing its relationships with its members evenly."<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the connecting links mentioned above,<sup>15</sup> a structural unity of Zechariah 1-14 has been demonstrated by Baldwin,<sup>16</sup> who follows closely the work of Lamarche.<sup>17</sup> The primary focus of the present study, however, is on the writer's use of interrogatives and historical notations (as was observed in the Haggai material) rather than on any chiasmic structure that may be present, although the latter would further support these conclusions.

1. *Interrogative material in Zechariah 1-6*. Each of the eight night visions is colored by the use of a question/answer dialogue between the prophet and the interpreting angel. Sometimes the prophet inquires of the angel regarding the details of his vision (1:9, 19, 21; 2:2; 4:4, 11, 12; 5:6, 10; 6:4), while at other times the angel rhetorically questions the prophet (3:2; 4:2, 5, 7, 13; 5:2). Both literary

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thereafter (see the suggestions by L. Waterman, "The Camouflaged Purge of Three Messianic Conspirators," *JNES* 13 [1954] 73-78).

<sup>12</sup>The prophet's message may well imply a reversal of the curse on Jehoiachin in view of what God wished to do in the new age.

<sup>13</sup>Childs, *Introduction* 470.

<sup>14</sup>J. D. W. Watts, "Zechariah," in *Broadman's Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1972), 7. 308.

<sup>15</sup>See *supra*, n. 1.

<sup>16</sup>In addition to the chiasmic patterns in the smaller units of Zechariah, Baldwin argues further for a pattern of "prose/poetry/prose" that is generally evident in chaps. 1-8/9-11/12-14 respectively; cf. her rather detailed outline of the book: J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1972) 63.

<sup>17</sup>P. Lamarche, *Zacharie 9-14: Structure Littéraire et Messianisme* (Paris: Gabalda, 1961) 112-113.

devices are used in the latter fashion for the purpose of drawing the reader into the experience of the prophet.

Whereas Baldwin's analysis finds the emphasis of the pattern on the fourth and fifth visions, this study sees it focused specifically on the fifth, the vision of the lampstand (4:1-4). Here the literary device is repeated almost to the point of distraction. Questions from the prophet (vv 4, 11, 12), from the angel (vv 2, 5, 13) and a general rhetorical question (v 7) all combine to create a literary climax at this point in the text.<sup>18</sup>

2. *Historical emphases in Zechariah 1-6.* Two distinct historical sections stand out in the first portion of the Zechariah material. The first, 1:1-6, forms an introduction to the visions, linking them with the Haggai corpus and placing them within a "*heilsgeschichtliche* sequence" to the people's history of disobedience and the repentance of the fathers.<sup>19</sup> The placing of this brief unit at the beginning of the Zechariah material, along with the separate dating attached to it, gives greater emphasis to this element in the message.

The second distinct unit, 6:9-16, comes as a conclusion to the visionary section. It is much like the concluding oracle from Haggai to Zerubbabel (Hag 2:20-23). Here Zerubbabel is implied (Zech 6:12-13a) alongside Joshua the priest (vv 11, 13b), who is to stand at his side (cf. 4:14). In order to complete the picture the community as a whole is involved in the encounter as in Haggai (cf. Hag 1:12, 14; 2:2, 4). They, with their leader, are challenged to "diligent obedience" so that God's will might come to pass (Zech 6:15).

In addition to these segments some narrative emphases can be seen in this section. It is proposed that the structure is three pairs framed by another pair (see Table) rather than the chiasmic structure suggested by Baldwin.<sup>20</sup> The historical emphasis, as in Haggai, is upon the recently returned remnant<sup>21</sup> who had begun to rebuild the house of YHWH at Jerusalem. In similar fashion their uncleanness (Zechariah 5) is set in tension with the challenge to obedience (6:15). Finally, the two leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, are presented as representatives of the community (3:8; 4:9, 14; 6:9-15).

<sup>18</sup>One should notice here also an emphasis on Zerubbabel and the temple that links this climax with identical themes in the Haggai section.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Childs, *Introduction* 476.

<sup>20</sup>See *supra*, n. 16.

<sup>21</sup>Notice the references to Babylon in this section (2:6; 5:11; 6:6-9), which are reminiscent of Isaiah 40-55. The return from exile seems so recent in this material that Galling has suggested the possibility that it should be dated much closer to 519 B.C. (K. Galling, "Die Exilwende in der Sicht des Propheten Sacharja," *Studien zur Geschichte Israel im persischen Zeitalter* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1964] 117). We would suggest that the connection is best explained by a return of Zerubbabel and a large number of the returnees in the spring of 521 B.C. (see *supra*, n. 3).

## Table

- 1: All the land remains at rest (1:11)
- 2: Judah is disgraced by the recent exile (1:21)
- 3: Israel is scattered (2:6-7)
- 4: Joshua and friends are a symbol of the goodwill toward Judah (3:8)
- 5: Zerubbabel had begun temple reconstruction and will effect its completion (4:9)
- 6: Stealing and false swearing exist in the land (5:3)
- 7: Iniquity exists in the land (5:6)
- 8: The Spirit of God is at rest in the north (6:8)

3. *The sermons of Zechariah 7-8.* This portion of the HZM corpus is set off from Zechariah 1-6 by the specific dating formulae that have provided a framework for the book thus far. In these messages the scene changes from the second year of Darius Hystaspes to his fourth (November, 518 B.C.). Presumably, in the passing of these two years the community had accomplished some work toward the completion of the temple.

It is difficult to determine the best place(s) for the dividing of this section of the material into separate literary units. The introductory formulae "Then came the word of YHWH of Hosts, saying" (7:4, 8; 8:1, 18) and "Thus says YHWH (of Hosts)" (7:9; 8:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 14, 19, 20, 23) occur repeatedly in the text, making it difficult to distinguish where mere repetition for emphasis differs from a valid introductory usage.<sup>22</sup>

However, in view of the significance of the interrogative material in Haggai/Zechariah 1-6 it seems likely that the two questions in Zech 7:5; 8:6 would be the literary indicators marking the main sections of the sermons. Also, considering that the combination of the two introductory formulae occurs only once between these questions (8:1), it appears evident that the unit is composed of two sermons. The first, 7:1-14, focuses on the challenge to genuineness in worship; the second, 8:1-23, consists mainly of an oracle of salvation regarding the future of the remnant. In each case the interrogatives express the subject of the sermon. The question regarding sincerity of fasting (7:5) represents genuineness in worship, whereas the rhetorical question in 8:6 speaks of the new and "marvelous" thing that YHWH is doing "in the sight of the remnant of this people in these days."

Although no purely historical units occur in this section (except 7:1-3), an updated profile of the remnant is provided through the sermonic material. The

<sup>22</sup>Notice a similar phenomenon in the Haggai corpus; also cf. R. Mason, "The Purpose of the 'Editorial Framework' of the Book of Haggai," *VT* 27 (1977) 413-421, who assigns this repetition to the secondary editing of the book.

need for a strong challenge, similar to that of the pre-exilic prophets,<sup>23</sup> is still present two years after Haggai's first sermon (Hag 1:1-15). Whereas this challenge is more clearly seen in Zechariah 7, it is also visible at least once in the salvation oracle of chap. 8 (vv 16-17).

4. *Summary of Zechariah 1-8.* In the material directly linked with the person of Zechariah and related to the precise historical situation shared with Haggai, a profile of the remnant community is seen that is virtually identical to that of Haggai. A challenge to covenant fidelity permeates the entire section, along with the constant reassurance that YHWH was with them and was prepared to bring blessing if obedience had been forthcoming.

The same key figures are also prominent here as in Haggai, although Joshua receives more emphasis than formerly. The section closes with an affirmation that God would be with them through the person of Zerubbabel even as he had promised the remnant at the close of Haggai's book.

A major significance of chaps. 7-8 lies in the two-year shift in perspective. Whereas the reader was left with a measure of anxiety at the close of Haggai, he becomes increasingly pessimistic regarding the character of the remnant here. Neither prophetic challenge nor comforting assurance from YHWH had brought a noticeable change in their lifestyle.

### III. THE ORACLES OF ZECHARIAH 9-14

Introductory questions have been addressed above as far as is practical in this study. Consequently the primary purpose at this juncture is to analyze the general literary structure and message of Zechariah 9-14 as it relates to the HZM corpus.

1. *Structural elements.* The material divides quite naturally into two oracles, as can be seen by the *maššā'* titles.<sup>24</sup> The first (9:1-11:3) consists, in general, of God's blessing for Israel and judgment on her enemies. The second (chs. 12-14) is similar, although with a far more narrow emphasis on Judah and Jerusalem. The prose section in 11:4-17 is best understood as being transitional in nature.<sup>25</sup>

2. *The oracles and Zech 11:4-17.* In the extant form of the book the oracles function in a manner similar to those found in the Haggai/Zechariah 1-8 material. Older elements of prophetic speech are recalled to remind Judah of her relation to the "fathers" and the "former prophets" (cf. Zech 1:1-6). Some of the material

<sup>23</sup>See Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8; Jer 7:1-15.

<sup>24</sup>See *supra*, n. 1.

<sup>25</sup>So T. J. Finley, "The Sheep Merchants of Zechariah 11," *Grace Journal* 3/1 (1982) 60; also note Rudolph's suggestion that it should be linked with the material in 11:1-3 as a conclusion (W. Rudolph, *Haggai, Sacharja 1-8, Sacharja 9-14, Maleachi* [Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1976] 199-200).

may even have had a pre-exilic *Vorlage*, as Watts suggests.<sup>26</sup> But, as Finley observes, the difficulty lies not with the oracles but with the transitional section (11:4-17): "After all of these positive assertions, it is astonishing to find Israel described as a 'flock of slaughter' concerning which YHWH says, 'I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land.'"<sup>27</sup>

The explanation is to be found in the pattern that has been demonstrated in the earlier portions of the HZM corpus. Consistently the writer has woven together salvation oracles with his profile of the remnant community. Here again he provides his readers with this composition, but now the profile has changed significantly. No longer is there merely a challenge to the returnees. Rather, they are pictured as a "flock of slaughter" governed by shepherds who take no pity on their sheep.

Precisely how long it had taken for the situation to reach this degree of decay is not of great concern to the Biblical writer. Presumably the temple had been completed by this time, since no imperative remains regarding its rebuilding. If the reader is meant to relate the oracles of chaps. 9-14 with the earlier portions of the corpus (Haggai/Zechariah 1-8), then perhaps two decades (at the most) should be proposed to have elapsed before this stage of the spiritual transition within the community was reached.

Once again the leadership plays a key role in the message of the prophet, although now there is a major change: No specifics are given (in contrast to Haggai/Zechariah 1-8) to connect the "shepherds" with a Davidic symbol or the priesthood. Regarding the people, the rulers and the precise historical situation, the writer remains vague, even elusive.<sup>28</sup>

3. *Summary of Zechariah 1-14.* In the book of Zechariah one sees the remnant pass through a spiritual metamorphosis. At its outset the challenge was: "Do not be like your fathers!" (1:4). Two years later they are charged with a lack of sincerity in worship (7:5-7), and again they are reminded of the resemblance of the present situation to that which existed before the exile (v 7). Finally (presumably at a yet later date) they are depicted as a "flock of slaughter" (11:7).

There is also a change that takes place regarding the leadership within the remnant community. In the night visions Joshua and his friends are "men of a sign" (3:8). Similarly Zerubbabel is pictured as a victor over the "great mountain" that stands in the way of his rebuilding the temple (4:7). Together they are the anointed of YHWH (lit. "sons of fresh oil") who stand by the side of the Lord of the whole earth (v 14). Two years later they are still seen in this capacity (7:9-14), although Zerubbabel is no longer mentioned by name. Finally, both are judged to be "worthless shepherds" who are to be destroyed by YHWH "in one month" (11:8).

The assertion by Greathouse that Zechariah 9-14 reveals "a new set of histori-

<sup>26</sup>Watts suggests this regarding the oracle in chaps. 9-11 ("Zechariah" 309); similarly Baldwin, regarding portions of chaps. 9-14 (*Haggai* 63-64).

<sup>27</sup>Finley, "Sheep Merchants" 61.

<sup>28</sup>Again Baldwin's observations are perceptive: "It is obvious that someone has arranged the material systematically, on the general plan of progression from the known to the unknown" (*Haggai* 74).



cal forces" and "a different spirit" that is "in sharp contrast to Zechariah 1-8" is in fact too strong.<sup>29</sup> Rather, the reader has been prepared from the outset for a failure on the part of the people. In the face of overwhelming promises of blessing they could return but a few weeks of voluntary labor toward the rebuilding project. Those actually shown to be responsible for the reconstruction are Joshua and Zerubbabel, but even they only respond as motivation is given by Haggai and Zechariah. The attitude of the people as well as their leadership, which occasionally had been exposed in earlier sections of the account, is now fully revealed. The comparison made by Zechariah with the former prophets (1:4; 7:7) had been tragically accurate.<sup>30</sup>

#### IV. THE ORACLE OF MALACHI

In this segment of the HZM corpus one encounters the tragic conclusion of the forty years on which the writer has focused. Although no specific dates are provided, as had been done in the earlier portions of Haggai and Zechariah, it seems clear that the temple has been completed (1:10; 2:11; 3:1, 10) and the nation of Edom has been "laid waste" (1:3), bringing the reader into the early fifth century B.C.<sup>31</sup>

1. *Structural elements.* The literary structure of Malachi's sermons is easily identified by observing the more rigid usage of the interrogative element.<sup>32</sup> In its broader form it bears a remarkable resemblance to Zechariah 1-6. There, a series of night visions with a strong interrogative element is followed by a brief historical epilogue. Here, a series of sermons with a similar flavor is also followed by a brief historical epilogue (3:16-4:6). In both, the historical emphasis is quite evident.

<sup>29</sup>W. M. Greathouse, "Zechariah, Malachi," in *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966) 338.

<sup>30</sup>References to similar instances of spiritual defection after the passing of a great leader can be found throughout the Samuel-Kings history (with which the writer is obviously familiar); e.g. consider the sharp contrasts between the reigns of Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh, or those of Josiah and his sons/grandson.

<sup>31</sup>In contrast to the position that the events described in Malachi took place more than a half century later than the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah (C. L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* [Chicago: Moody, 1976] 249-250); also, Thomas connects the message of Malachi to that of Ezra and Nehemiah, suggesting a date around the middle of the fifth century; cf. "The Book of Haggai" 1118.

As has been demonstrated by J. D. W. Watts (*Obadiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969] 11-19), there is no clear reason to date Malachi later than early in the fifth century B.C., thus suggesting the possibility of its being contemporary with the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, which are so clearly dated at the close of the sixth century B.C. The objective factors involved in determining the *terminus a quo* for the ministry of Malachi include the rebuilding of the temple (Adar, 515 B.C.) and the desolation of Edom (Mal 1:3). The argument that a longer period of time would be necessary to account for the spiritual deterioration of the people is not consistent with the significant change that took place in the attitude of the community in less than one month in Hag 1:15-2:3. In contrast, forty to fifty years is clearly sufficient time for a change in both religious fervor and lifestyle.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Mason, *Haggai* 135-162, who sees essentially the same six divisions as the present study.

2. *Historical elements.* Rather than being an "oracle" in the formal sense of *maššā'*, this book of sermons takes on this connotation in that it condemns Israel by giving a report of her dialogue with YHWH's messenger, who assumes the role of master debater in an age of rationalism.<sup>33</sup> In each sermon the purpose is to reveal the character of the remnant community at this juncture in their history.<sup>34</sup>

3. *The distinctive contribution of Malachi.* At least two aspects of this material stand out as representing a significant progression beyond the Haggai/Zechariah portions of HZM. The first concerns the tone of the Malachi material as a whole. Whereas the Haggai/Zechariah segments contained a number of salvation oracles throughout, Malachi reveals mere whispers of hope, always seasoned with a conditional element (cf. 1:1-5; 3:4-5, 11-12; 4:5-6). In his estimation the situation has worsened to the point of an extreme pessimism.

Second, it should be noted that the community itself is directly the object of the exhortation, along with its priesthood. Although it is difficult to ascertain the precise nature and/or function of the shepherds in Zechariah 11, a change has clearly occurred by the time of Malachi in that the leadership is specifically identified. Further, the "flock" is not portrayed as one to be pitied but rather "deserving of condemnation," having played a primary role in the corruption.

4. *Summary of Malachi.* As with the disappointing conclusion to the Samuel-Kings history, so here the profile of the community of the return is not one of an uplifting nature. The sketch ends with a picture of Judah in a worse condition than that portrayed at the beginning of the book. A religious laxity had set in almost immediately after the death of the initial leadership. Within the lifetime of those who returned under Zerubbabel in the spring of 521 B.C., the community had returned to much of the spiritual decline that had effected their captivity nearly a century earlier.

No salvation oracle concludes the HZM corpus. Rather, the last segment (Malachi) begins with the assurance that "Yahweh still loves Israel, notwithstanding the fact that appearances seem to tell against a belief in such love."<sup>35</sup> Yet the theme of the book reminds the remnant that her election "does not alter the judgment of God who establishes a distinction between the righteous and wicked of Israel in terms of obedience to the divine law."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup>The thought is Bennett's, who feels that Malachi's use of dialogue reflects the historical situation in which the prophet lived and in which he had the wisdom "to recognize the need for change in prophetic methodology" (T. M. Bennett, "Malachi," in *Broadman Bible Commentary* [Nashville: Broadman, 1972], 7. 369).

<sup>34</sup>With the possible exception of the first sermon (1:2-5), which demonstrates the character of YHWH in contrast to that of the community; see *supra*, n. 1.

<sup>35</sup>J. M. Powis, *Malachi* (ICC; Edinburgh; Clark, 1912) 3.

<sup>36</sup>Childs, *Introduction* 497.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

It has been the purpose of this study to demonstrate that a literary and thematic unity exists among the last three booklets of the book of the twelve—specifically, that the Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi corpus comprises a useful literary unit for an historical study of early postexilic Israel (c. 520-480 B.C.). After examining several connecting links of a literary nature as well as the development of a specific theme and literary style, it is felt that sufficient evidence has been found to warrant such a thesis. Further, it is maintained that the theme woven into the collections of the prophets' sermons and visions, and discernible by a holistic reading of the text, differs significantly from the positive eschatological tones of some of the individual sermons. Instead it is quite negative. In this work one is provided with a counterpart to such pre-exilic prophet-historians as the writer of the Samuel-Kings history. There, one finds a confession before YHWH of the people's failure prior to the captivity; here, it is discovered that the postexilic community (indeed, even the remnant) found the need to make a similar confession.