

“MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT” IN MALACHI 3:1 ONCE AGAIN

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Abstract: *This essay reviews work already done on identifying the agents in Malachi 3:1, especially “the messenger/angel of the covenant,” and presents seven arguments for the traditional messianic view that the figure is somehow identified with Yabweh and yet at the same time distinct from Yabweh, a figure who could only be the Messiah. Thus the New Testament identification of this figure in Malachi with Jesus as the Sent One is entirely appropriate according to standard exegesis. Although comparison is made to “the angel of Yabweh,” no argument is made that they are the same. Special attention is given to refuting the view that the two “messengers” in Malachi 3:1 refer to the same person.*

Key words: *inner-biblical exegesis, Malachi, messianic expectation in the Old Testament, angel of the Lord, use of אֲנִי clauses.*

Although an argument could be made that this topic has been beaten to death, I hope a summary of the discussion thus far might be helpful, and I hope that I might be able to press the discussion ahead a bit.¹ The TV show “Alfred Hitchcock Presents” aired from 1955 to 1965. It always began with a life-sized line drawing of a man in profile, into which the rotund Alfred Hitchcock walked, to the tune of “Funeral March of a Marionette” by Charles Gounod. The drawing fit him perfectly. The NT writers and (according to them) even Jesus himself declared that Jesus is found in the OT (cf. Luke 24:27; John 1:45; 5:39, 46; Acts 3:24; 10:43; 26:22). Christians disagree over how to describe the nature of that discovery and how certain “messianic passages” in the OT are to be interpreted, and the literature on that topic is vast.² But Jesus’s statement that Moses “wrote about me” (John 5:46; see

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¹ This paper is a revision and expansion of my “Malachi 3:1; 4:1–5” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy* (ed. Michael Rydelnick and Edwin A. Blum; Chicago: Moody, forthcoming).

² E.g. the popular presentations by T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible’s Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1998) and chapters by Iain M. Duguid and G. K. Beale in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture* (ed. Peter A. Lillback; Philadelphia: Westminster, 2016), 17–38. For a more thorough general study, see G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012). Additional stimulating studies are G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden But Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 320–64; Walter L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45–70; idem, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 145–79; Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 35–74; David J. H. Beldman and Jonathan Swales, “Biblical Theology and Theological Interpretation,” in *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation* (ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 149–70. See also David J. Reimer’s survey of OT scholarship in

also Heb. 11:26³) might suggest a degree of intentionality and understanding on Moses's part, although, as Peter Leithart says, to obtain the full meaning of OT texts, they must be read "in the light of 'the way things turned out.'"⁴ Richard Bauckham also explains, "God is to be trusted to be faithful to his promises, yet he remains free in his fulfillment of them."⁵

No NT writer would be shocked or disappointed to find that a book had been written that laid out the OT teaching about Jesus the Messiah. Paul wrote that "the sacred Scriptures [in the OT] ... are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). Like the line drawing, the OT leaves out a great deal that the NT fills in. Nevertheless, the NT revelation of Jesus fits perfectly the OT composite "line drawing" of him that is derived from so many OT passages (although it could be described as a dotted line). One of those passages, I believe, is the chiasmic verse, Mal 3:1:⁶

הִנְנִי שֹׁלֵחַ מַלְאָכִי 1a

"Look, I am sending my messenger,

וּפְתֹחַ דֶּרֶךְ לִפְנָי

and he will clear a path ahead of me.

וּפְתָאם יְבוֹא אֶל־הֵיכָלִי 1b

"Old Testament Christology," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; JSOTSS 270; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 380–400.

³ See Beale and Gladd, *Hidden But Now Revealed*, 357–58.

⁴ Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 67. He is quoting David Steinmetz, "Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method," in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 64–65. Steinmetz, a noted historian, presents a powerful analogy of the Bible to detective fiction (pp. 54–65).

⁵ Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 49.

⁶ Some scholars argue for the later editorial insertion of either v. 1a (see S. D. Snyman, *Malachi* [HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2015], 122, 130–31; Snyman, "Once Again: Investigating the Three Figures Mentioned in Malachi 3:1," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27.3 [2006]: 1032, 1041–42) or vv. 1b–4 (see D. L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster, 1995], 206–12; B. V. Malchow, "The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1," *JBL* 103 [1984]: 253; Rex Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* [CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 152; Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* [New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 176). I agree with many others (see Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 283; Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi* [AB 25D; New York: Doubleday, 1998], 260; Karl William Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Problems, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi* [BZAW 288; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000], 290–91; Jonathan Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity: A Study of Inner-Biblical Allusion and Exegesis in Malachi* [LHBOVS 625; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016], 27; Anthony R. Petterson, "The Identity of 'the Messenger of the Covenant' in Malachi 3:1: Lexical and Rhetorical Analyses," *BBR*, forthcoming), who see no need for textual surgery. (I am extremely grateful that Dr. Petterson graciously shared with me a copy of his forthcoming article.) Following the dictum of T. H. Gaster that "to emend is not to explain," I see 3:1–6 as a coherent unit fitting logically into the larger discourse. For a helpful review of redactional issues, see Richard M. Blaylock, "My Messenger, the LORD, and the Messenger of the Covenant: Malachi 3:1 Revisited," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20.3 (2016): 70–71, 75–76.

And suddenly he will come to his temple,

הָאֲדֹנָי אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם מְבַקְשִׁים

the Lord

whom you are seeking

וּמְלַאֲךְ הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם חֹפְצִים

even/and the messenger of the covenant

whom you delight in.

הִנֵּה־בָּא

Look, he is coming,”

:אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

says Yahweh of Armies.⁷

The primary challenge in interpreting this verse is to identify the various agents involved. They are as follows:

“I ... my ... me ... Yahweh of Armies”

“you ... your”

“my messenger ... he”

“he [will come] ... his [temple] ... the Lord [הָאֲדֹנָי]”

“the messenger of the covenant”

The first-person pronouns in 3:1a are identified in the last clause as **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**. The second person pronouns clearly refer to the people of Judah. The other three agents are less clear. The subject of the final clause of Yahweh’s speech, “Look, he is coming,” is ambiguous. The closest antecedent is “the messenger of the covenant,” but the subject in the parallel line to which it connects by repetition of the verb **בוא** is “the Lord.”

Although a few scholars consider “my messenger,” “the Lord,” and “the messenger of the covenant” as referring to the same person,⁸ most identify two or three agents. Some scholars recognizing two agents identify (in some way) “the Lord” and “the messenger of the covenant” as the same, understanding the *waw* conjunction on **וּמְלַאֲךְ** as explicative or exegetical, translated something like “even,” “yes,” or “that is.”⁹ Other scholars identify “my messenger” and “the mes-

⁷ In general, biblical quotations are my own translation, with influence from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

⁸ See Theodor Lescow, *Das Buch Maleachi* (AzTh 75; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1993), 119–20; A. S. Van der Woude, “Der Engel des Bundes: Bemerkungen zu Maleachi 3:1c und seinen Kontext,” in *Die Botschaft und die Boten* (ed. Jörg Jeremias and Lothar Perlt; Neukirchen-Vluy: Neukirchener, 1981), 289–300; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 211–12.

⁹ E.g. Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 130–33; Verhoef, *Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 289; Mignon R. Jacobs, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT);

senger of the covenant” as the same.¹⁰ Finally, Andrew Hill suggests that the three designations refer to three different agents, מַלְאָךְ הַבְּרִית being “the angel of the covenant,” “a third eschatological figure.”¹¹

The tradition of seeing “my messenger ... he” as a prophet fulfilled by John the Baptist, and the other two phrases fulfilled by the Messiah Jesus has a very long history. According to Calvin, for example, by “the Lord” Malachi “speaks distinctly of Christ, who is afterwards called the Angel or Messenger of the covenant.”¹² My purpose is to consider whether the textual evidence supports this tradition, especially since many contemporary scholars reject it. Rikk E. Watts, for example, concludes, “The key point is that Mal. 3 makes no mention of a messianic figure.”¹³

I. CONTEXT

Malachi 3:1 is widely acknowledged to be part of a unit that extends from at least 2:17 to 3:5, 3:6, 3:7a, or 3:12. My own view is that Malachi’s message is communicated in three interrelated and similarly structured addresses, 2:17–3:6 being a unit within the second address, which spans 2:10–3:6, titled “Judah Exhorted to Faithfulness.”¹⁴ As widely recognized, Mal 3:1 is closely attached to the immediately preceding verse, 2:17. The people have been grumbling to one another that Yahweh unjustly “delights in” (הִפְנִי) the wicked rather than rewarding their own faithfulness.¹⁵ They have been complaining in 2:17, “Where is the God of justice [הַמִּשְׁפָּט]?” Consequently, God says that Israel’s words had metaphorically “weari- ed” him, meaning that God’s patience was running out (cf. Isa 43:24).¹⁶

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 275. See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (IBHS) (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §39.2.1b; 39.2.4.

¹⁰ E.g. Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 289–90; Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (AOTC; Nottingham, UK/Downers Grove, IL: Apollos/IVP, 2015), 362; E. H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 429; Pamela J. Scalise, “Malachi,” in John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise, *Minor Prophets II* (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 350.

¹¹ Hill, *Malachi*, 265, 269, 286–88. He thinks it likely that מַלְאָךְ is “the Angel of Yahweh” and הַבְּרִית is “an alter-ego or surrogate of some kind for Yahweh” (p. 288). In Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (IOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 334, he suggests, “It is possible Malachi envisions YHWH in a processional flanked by two angelic retainers.” Malchow, “Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1,” 252–55, identifies them as a prophet, Yahweh, and a priestly messenger. Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (IOTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1972), 242–43, sees them as a prophet, Yahweh, and the angel of the Lord.

¹² John Calvin, *Zechariah, Malachi*, vol. 5 of *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom30.pdf>.

¹³ Rikk E. Watts, “Mark,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 119.

¹⁴ See E. Ray Clendenen, “Malachi,” in Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi* (NAC 21A; Nashville: B&H, 2004), 218–38; idem, “The Structure of Malachi: A Textlinguistic Study,” *CTR* 2 (1987): 3–17; idem, “Old Testament Prophets as Hortatory: Examples from Malachi,” *Journal of Textlinguistics and Translation* 6 (1993): 336–41.

¹⁵ That the people’s complaints are directed to one another rather than appropriately to God is brought out by Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant.’”

¹⁶ Elie Assis notes that this is one of three “oracles” in Malachi where “the main accusation ... is made by the people against God, and God justifies Himself against the accusations.” See “Mutual Re-

Amazingly, God condescends to answer them in 3:1–6. He says, in effect, “You want justice? I’ll give you the justice you deserve.” His answer announces a coming day of **מִשְׁפָּט** that will be different from what they expect or desire. These verses comprise four main predictions and their accompanying results.

1. See, I am going to send my messenger (v. 1).
2. Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to his temple (v. 1).
3. He will purify the sons of Levi (v. 3).
4. I will come to you for judgment [**לְמִשְׁפָּט**] (v. 5).¹⁷

The speaker throughout is God, Yahweh of Armies (see 3:1, 5). The bothersome person changes within 3:1 extend to 3:5. God refers to himself in the first person in predictions 1 and 4, but in the third person in predictions 2 and 3.

II. IDENTIFICATION OF “THE LORD [הַאֲדֹנָי]”

Most scholars identify “the Lord” (הַאֲדֹנָי) as referring to Yahweh. The Hebrew word אֲדֹנָי, “lord,” plus the definite article occurs only seven times elsewhere in Scripture, always in the phrase יהוה אֲדֹנָי. It therefore always refers to Yahweh (Exod 23:17; 34:23; Isa 1:24; 3:1; 10:16, 33; 19:4). Two more clues also convince us that “the Lord” here refers to God himself. First, he is identified as the one to whom the temple belongs. He “will suddenly come to *his* temple” (cf. 2 Sam 22:7; Pss 18:6; 27:4; 29:9; Jer 50:28; 51:11). Finally, the qualifying relative clause, “whom you are seeking,” is logically connected to the question in 2:17, “Where is the God of הַמִּשְׁפָּט?” R. T. France argues that אֲדֹנָי does not refer to God but to “my messenger,” since אֲדֹנָי can refer to man as “master, lord.”¹⁸ He claims that although אֲדֹנָי always refers to Yahweh, אֲדֹנָי is only a title whose meaning is determined by context. David Peterson identifies אֲדֹנָי and מַלְאָךְ הַבְּרִית as the same but thinks both refer to a minor deity or prophetic figure.¹⁹ But the usage of אֲדֹנָי elsewhere and the unlikelihood of Malachi using the term for a human prophetic messenger coming to “his temple” makes these views untenable. “The Lord” must refer to Yahweh.

criminations: God and Israel in the Book of Malachi,” *SJOT* 26 (2012): 215. These “mutual accusations” show a “fracture” in the covenantal relationship between God and his people, “highlighting the central issue of the book, which is the people’s sense of the erosion of their covenantal relationship with God” (218). My thanks to Anthony Petterson for alerting me to this article.

¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of the rhetorical structure of these verses, see Clendenen, “Malachi,” 383. As explained there (p. 400), whereas the first three predictions are followed by a result, the fourth in v. 5 is followed by an antithetical sentence in v. 6. “Many commentators regard v. 6 as beginning the fifth oracle or disputation. But this would break the pattern of the preceding three predictions, each of which is balanced by a following proposition. . . . Although the Lord is coming in judgment (v. 5), Jacob (see 1:2) will not be destroyed because their charges of his faithlessness (2:17) are false. The Lord is not a capricious God who may change his plans on a whim.”

¹⁸ R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1971), 91.

¹⁹ Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 210–12.

III. IDENTIFICATION OF “MY MESSENGER”

Most scholars identify מְלַאֲכִי, “my messenger,” as a human messenger, probably a prophet, although possibly also a priest²⁰ (cf. God’s prophetic “messengers” highlighted in 2 Chr 36:15–16). A parallel can be seen between 3:1a and 4:5[3:23] in that both clauses begin with הִנֵּה (“look/see!”) and the participle שֹׁלֵחַ (“sending”). In 4:5[3:23], God says, “Look, I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of Yahweh.”²¹ Although many consider 4:4–6[3:22–24] to be a later editorial addition to the book, a strong case can be made for it being original.²² Jesus and the Gospel writers in Matt 11:10–14 and Luke 7:27 (cf. Matt 17:10–13; Luke 1:17), as well as Paul in Acts 13:23–25,²³ interpret both passages (3:1; 4:5) as fulfilled by John the Baptist, and the one whose way he would prepare for as Jesus the Messiah.

Verbal and semantic parallels between Mal 3:1 and Isa 40:3 suggest an identification between “my messenger” and the “voice” that cries out, “Clear the way of Yahweh in the wilderness.”²⁴ The verb-object pair (פָּנֵה [piel] with פָּרַךְ) meaning “clear the way” occurs only four times, but only in these two passages is it God’s way being prepared. The identification between Malachi’s “messenger” and Isaiah’s “voice” is also made in Mark 1:2–3. Simon Gathercole points out that “prepare your way” in Mark 1:2 is “rephrased” by the Isa 40:3 quote in Mark 1:3 as “prepare the way for the Lord.”²⁵ The “voice” in Isa 40:3 is also connected to John the Baptist in Matt 3:3; Luke 3:4; and John 1:23.

Malachi 3:1 is quoted in Matt 11:10, Mark 1:2–3, and Luke 7:27, with changes that identify Jesus with “the Lord,” and, therefore, with Yahweh of Armies, whose

²⁰ Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 289–90; Malchow, “Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1,” 252–55. Blaylock, “My Messenger, the LORD, and the Messenger of the Covenant: Malachi 3:1 Revisited,” 81–82, argues that the priest’s being called “the messenger of Yahweh of Armies” in Mal 2:7 informs the use of “messenger” in 3:1. He argues that “Malachi 3:1 predicts the coming of a human prophetic priest who will prepare the way for the divine royal priest” (p. 84). This would fit, as he points out, the fulfillment of this prophecy by John the Baptist. However, connection with Elijah in 4:5 gives his prophetic status priority. Snyman, “Once Again,” 1041, rejects the priestly connection of “my messenger.”

²¹ Later Jewish literature also connects the messenger in Mal 3:1 with Elijah in Mal 4:5[3:23]. See the discussion of Ben Sira, 4Q521, and the LXX in David M. Miller, “The Messenger, the Lord, and the Coming Judgement in the Reception History of Malachi 3,” *NTS* 53 (2007): 6–11. Also see Exod. Rab. 32.9 on Mal 3:1. Early Christian writers also made the connection (Justin, *Dial.* 49). Some Jewish writers interpreted the messenger as a heavenly or spiritual being. See Hill, *Malachi*, 288.

²² See Clendenen, “Malachi,” 455; Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 245–70; Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity*, 213–56. M. H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets: Part 2* (FOTL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 568, argues that “the action narrated in 3:16 is explicated by a speech of Yahweh that extends from 3:17 through 3:24 [Heb].” Thus, “the claims of thematic discontinuity between [3:22–24 Heb] and the preceding parts of the book have been greatly overstated.” Jacobs, *Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 146, follows Floyd.

²³ On Acts 13 see Miller, “Messenger, the Lord, and the Coming Judgement,” 12–13.

²⁴ See, e.g., Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 138; Hill, *Malachi*, 266; Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity*, 174–76. Some scholars, however, downplay the significance of the connection (Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 287; Anthony S. Malone, “Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1?” *TynBul* 57.2 [2006]: 221).

²⁵ Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 244. (Blaylock also calls attention to Gathercole’s remark.)

temple he would enter and whose priests he would cleanse (Mal 3:2–4). Each NT quotation of Mal 3:1 changes Malachi’s “I am sending my messenger” to “I am sending my messenger ahead of you” (probably alluding to Exod 23:20²⁶), and changes “clear the way ahead of *me*” to “prepare your way ahead of you.” As Davies and Allison conclude, “So Jesus has replaced Yahweh.”²⁷

Verhoef’s view of “my messenger” as referring to “a pyramid of ‘forerunners,’ which eventually has its pinnacle in John the Baptist” is possible.²⁸ This could suggest that the prophet Malachi himself, whose name מְלַאֲכִי means “my messenger,” could be the first of many. Verhoef’s view, which takes the singular “messenger” as a collective, may be parallel to the view of many that the “prophet like [Moses]” in Deut 18:15 is also a collective.²⁹

IV. IDENTIFICATION OF “THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT”

Since the term מְלַאֲכִי is used twice in 3:1, both in “my messenger” and in “the messenger of the covenant,” the burden of proof is on those who disagree with identifying the two. I have seven arguments to support my contention that מְלַאֲכִי הַבְּרִיתִּי is to be identified with הַאֲדֹנָי rather than with מְלַאֲכִי.

1. *The chiastic (ABB’A’) structure of 3:1b.* The A lines both use the verb בוא, “come”—an imperfect in the first line, and a participle in the second:

²⁶ In Exod 23:20, God says to his people, “I am sending an angel [מְלַאֲכִי, a supernatural messenger from the heavenly court, as opposed to Malachi’s human ‘messenger’] ahead of you to protect you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared.” R. E. Watts argues that Mal 3:1 itself alludes to Exod 23:20: “In both cases the sending of the messenger prior to Yahweh’s personal intervention is the consequence of Israel’s faithlessness” (*Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 72). Hill, Malachi, 265, calls Mal 3:1 a “reworking” of Exod 23:20. Cf. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 392, who sees Mal 3:1 as alluding to Exod 23:20 and interpreting Isa 40:3. He says, “The Exodus text speaks of God’s sovereign guidance of Israel’s way to the land at the first exodus, and Malachi, utilizing the Exodus language, foresees another exodus, when God’s way will be prepared to come in judgment upon Israel” (695). Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity*, 170–74, brings additional clarity: “Malachi has adapted this key text [Exod 23:20] associated with the first exodus for his own purposes. In later identifying מְלַאֲכִי as Elijah the prophet, and therefore a human figure in 3:23 [4:5], Malachi has changed the messenger from one who is a heavenly angel, and at times nearly indistinguishable from YHWH, to an earthly messenger who is distinct from YHWH.” See also Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 136–41; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 209; Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. T. E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1350–52; Cilliers Breitenbach, “The Minor Prophets in Mark’s Gospel,” in *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament* (ed. Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise; LNTS 377; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 29–30. Others downplay or reject the connection of Mal 3:1 to Exod 23:20 (Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288; Malone, “Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1,” 231; Snyman, *Malachi*, 131).

²⁷ W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 1991), 250.

²⁸ Verhoef, *Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 288. Hill, *Malachi*, 288, judges Verhoef’s view as feasible. Also see William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 239.

²⁹ See Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 262; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 175; Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 444–45. William Dumbrell notes, “There is a hint that the messenger of 3:1 is to be identified with someone already on the scene, although his role will clearly be taken up in the Elijah figure of 4:4–6[3:23–24]” (*Faith of Israel*, 239; this citation is from Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant.’”)

- A—And suddenly he will **come** to his temple
 B—**הַאֲדֹנָי** whom you are seeking
 B'—**וּמַלְאֲכֵי הַבְּרִית** whom/which you delight in
 A'—Look, he is **coming**.

The B lines are structurally parallel and repeat the phrase **אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם**, “whom you,” followed by a verbal participle (line B) or a verbal adjective (line B') from roots that are roughly synonymous. The root **הִפְּץ** occurs four times in Malachi (1:10; 2:17; 3:1, 12) and refers to delighting in, being pleased with, or wanting/desiring something (or someone). Yahweh uses it to mock their charge that he “delights in” the wicked in 2:17. It occurs several times elsewhere as well in parallel with either **בָּקַשׁ** (Pss 40:14[15]; 70:2[3]; Eccl 12:10) or **דָּרַשׁ** (1 Chr 28:9; Ps 111:2; Isa 58:2), synonyms meaning to “seek.” Petterson rightly points out that parallelism does not in itself prove synonymy or identity.³⁰ He cites Adele Berlin’s discussion of the complexities of Hebrew parallelism, which “may contain equivalences and/or contrasts in its grammar and in its semantic content.” For example, “the practice of emending the text in order to create ‘better’ parallelism has no basis, and even deriving the meaning of an unknown word from its word pair is fraught with danger.”³¹ One of her examples is Ps 119:49, in which **כַּחֲסִדְךָ**, “according to your faithful love,” and **כַּמִּשְׁפָּטְךָ**, “according to your justice,” are parallel. We would not say that **חֲסִד** and **מִשְׁפָּט** mean the same thing. Nevertheless, there is a structural and semantic overlap in the two B lines of Mal 3:1, with the parallel between “the Lord **’āšer ’attem mēbaqšîm**” and “the messenger of the covenant **’āšer ’attem ḥāphēšîm**,” indicating that **הַאֲדֹנָי** and **הַבְּרִית** **מַלְאֲכֵי** are equivalent in some way. The interpreter has to determine how best to understand this “equivalence.”

This raises a problem, however. If **הַאֲדֹנָי** refers to God, how could he also be “the messenger of the covenant”? To be a messenger implies being sent. As Petterson stresses, “In all instances, a ‘messenger’ is an appointed delegate of a higher authority.”³² Who could send God? The alternative, advocated by Petterson, Merrill, and others (see note 8), is that “the messenger of the covenant” is another reference to “my messenger” and that the second half of the verse elaborates on the first half. This might be a reasonable solution if the parallel construction did not so strongly point to the identity of “the Lord” and “the messenger of the covenant.” This leads to my second argument.

³⁰ Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant.’” He also points out, “Significantly, 4QXII^a has “the lord” as a separate figure to “the messenger of the covenant” since **יָבֹא** (“he will come”) is changed to **יָבֹאוּ** (“they will come”). He cites Beate Ego, et al., eds., *Biblica Qumranica*, vol. 3B: *Minor Prophets* (Lieden: Brill, 2005), 191.

³¹ Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 127, 130.

³² Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant.’” We must acknowledge the words of Jesus in John 14:10, however, that “the words I speak to you I do not speak on my own [NIV, ESV, “on my own authority”].”

2. “Whom you delight in” would make no contextual sense if מְלַאֲכֵי הַקְּרִייתָ = מְלַאֲכֵי. If the second “messenger” is the same as the first, how would the second relative clause (“whom/which you delight in”) be understood? Nothing in the context suggests the addressees were *wanting* a messenger. Although it is true that their “delight” is ironic,³³ this does not eliminate the fact that 2:17 (“Where is the God of justice?”) says nothing about their looking for a “messenger.” It was God they were calling for. So if “the messenger of the covenant” refers to the Lord’s herald, “my messenger,” the following relative clause makes no sense. Merrill’s interpretation on the basis of John the Baptist’s message being “attractive to those who came to hear him”³⁴ would have no application whatsoever to Malachi’s audience.

On the other hand, if their delight is in a covenant,³⁵ this also seems out of place. Elsewhere, Malachi refers to the “covenant of Levi” that the priests were violating (2:4, 5, 8), the “covenant of our fathers” that the people were “profaning” (2:10), and the marital covenant that the men of Judah were violating (2:14). No other covenant is mentioned except in the designation, “messenger of the covenant,” which may allude to either the Mosaic covenant or the new covenant.³⁶ But were the people delighting in it? Petterson argues that “the people’s charge [in 2:17] against God, that he delights in those doing evil (i.e. those breaking the covenant), implies that those making the accusation are claiming to delight in the covenant (which is where the irony is, because they are not really keeping it at all).”³⁷ Although this is possible, it introduces an idea stated nowhere else in the context and disregards the close relationship between מְפַצֵּים “delighting in” and מְבַקְשִׁים “seeking.”

3. אֵלֹהֵי־יְהוָה is not the predicate for the previous line. This final element of the chiasm, “Look, he is coming,” offers three main challenges. One is the implied subject of the participle. Another is the syntactic relationship of אֵלֹהֵי־יְהוָה to the previous lines. And finally, what is the pragmatic function of these final two words of Yahweh’s speech?

Lambdin describes the majority of uses of אֵלֹהֵי as fitting one of three categories: (1) emphasizing “the immediacy, the here-and-now-ness, of the situation”; (2) “the vividness or importance of the fact stated”; or (3) in direct speech, introducing “a fact upon which a following statement or command is based.”³⁸ Waltke and O’Connor essentially follow Lambdin’s analysis (*IBHS* §16.3.5b, §40.2.1), as do

³³ Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 433; Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 362.

³⁴ Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 433.

³⁵ The view of William J. Dumbrell, “Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms,” *RTR* 35 (1976): 48; Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant.’”

³⁶ Jonathan Gibson suggests that in Mal 2:17–3:6, “the note of futurity, unique terminology and phraseology and an emphasis on divine intervention highlight new covenant conceptualities.” See *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity*, 181.

³⁷ Personal communication. Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 560, also suppose that Judah’s question in Mal 1:2, “How have you loved us?” amounts to an accusation that Yahweh was violating the Mosaic covenant.

³⁸ Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 168–70.

Arnold and Choi. According to the latter, הִנֵּה can function to mark “*introductory or transitional signals* within a dialogue” and has “a strong ‘overtone of feeling’ based on its nature as an exclamation.” Its translation depends on context and “the emotional mindset of the speaker.”³⁹ Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze prefer the designation “sentence deictic” or “focus particle” for הִנֵּה. They note that “it *always precedes the clause upon which it has a bearing*” [my emphasis] and “*points to the content of the clause that follows it,*” giving its content “a particular prominence within a larger context.” They identify two main uses: (1) to focus attention “*on events that are surprising or unexpected,*” often introducing “an important change of perspective in a story”; and (2) by which “speakers present themselves, someone else or something as available at the moment of speaking, perhaps “prepared for some event.”⁴⁰

In a later “exhaustive” examination by Cynthia Miller-Naudé and C. H. J. van der Merwe, they demonstrate that in the majority of cases הִנֵּה marks unexpectedness, noteworthiness, or newsworthiness. “In about two-thirds of its occurrences in our corpus [the Tanach], it is unambiguously clear that הִנֵּה is used to point to something either addressees or characters were not prepared for,” so “it is appropriate to identify the most typical use of הִנֵּה as a marker of mirativity.”⁴¹ Mirativity refers to linguistic marking of “new or unexpected” information, related to surprise or an “unprepared mind.”⁴²

Contrary to these studies of הִנֵּה, Merrill translates Mal 3:1, “and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight is coming.”⁴³ The NIV is similar: “the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come.” The presence of הִנֵּה in both these renderings is ignored, treating the participle בָּא as simply the predicate of the clause beginning with וּמֵלֶאֲדֵי הַבְּרִית. הִנֵּה, however, is a clause-initial particle. Its two uses in Mal 3:1 call attention to a coming event for which the Judahites are not prepared. The second use, in the clause הִנֵּה בָּא, probably also calls attention to the cause of a subsequent event. That is, “Look, he is coming!” followed by two rhetorical questions in 3:2 expressing the devastating results of his coming. The first question is, “But who can endure the day of his coming [אֵת־יְוִם בּוֹאִין]?”⁴⁴

We might also point out that although הִנֵּה בָּא occurs only here, the almost identical phrase with the feminine participle, הִנֵּה בָּאָה, occurs once in Jeremiah and

³⁹ Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), §4.5 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), §44.3.

⁴¹ C. L. Miller-Naudé and C. H. J. van der Merwe, “הִנֵּה and Mirativity in Biblical Hebrew,” *HS* 52 (2011): 80–81. This later study has been incorporated in van der Merwe, et al., *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar: Second Edition* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), §40.22, whose acquisition was too late for use here.

⁴² Miller-Naudé and van der Merwe, “הִנֵּה and Mirativity in Biblical Hebrew,” 56–57.

⁴³ Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 429 (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ That these two clauses are interrupted by הִנֵּה צְבָאוֹת אֲמַר, “says Yahweh of Armies,” is inconsequential, since the divine quotation formula in Malachi often interrupts clauses that logically go together. It comes between a concessive clause and the main clause in 1:2; a cause and result in 1:10, 1:14, and 2:8–9; a condition and consequence in 2:2, 2:16, and 3:10; a main clause and an adverbial clause in 3:17; and a main clause and a relative clause in 3:19.

seven times in Ezekiel. In Jer 10:22 it announces the desolation of exile coming on Judah from the north, called רַעַשׁ גְּדוֹלַת, a “great earthquake” or “tumult (of battle).” According to Daniel Block, the “rhetorical aim” of Ezekiel 7 is “to evoke a strong emotional reaction in the audience.”⁴⁵ In fact, “by means of a series of fragmentary exclamations the prophet works his audience to a frenzy. . . . Adding to the emotion is the sixfold repetition of the ominous *bā’/bā’â*, ‘It has arrived,’ and the twofold insertion of *hinnēh*”⁴⁶ Yahweh announces that the end (קֵץ) has come (בָּא) on Israel (7:2). He was sending (שָׁלַח) his “anger” against them for their “detestable practices” (תּוֹעֵבוֹת; 7:3; cf. Mal 2:11). In 7:5 he announces, “Look, one disaster after another is coming!” (הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ). In 7:6 he reiterates verse 2: “An end has come [בָּא]; the end has come [בָּא]! It has awakened against you. Look, it is coming! [הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ].” In 7:7 he declares, “Doom has come [בָּא] . . . the time has come [בָּא] . . . the day is near.” Then in 7:10 he repeats, “Here is the day! [הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם] Here it comes! [הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ] Doom is on its way.”

Ezekiel 21 heralds the coming of God’s sword against Jerusalem. In verse 7[12] God tells the prophet to groan, and when asked the reason for his groaning to say, “Because of the news. When it has come [כִּי־בָאָהּ] every heart will melt, all hands will hang limp, every spirit will grow faint, and all knees will run with water. Look, it is coming! [הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ].”⁴⁷

The phrase הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ is found in Ezek 30:9 announcing Egypt’s doom “on that day [בְּיוֹם הַהוּא].” But first God will send his messengers: “messengers will go out from me” (יֵצְאוּ מִלְּאֲכִים מִלְּפָנַי). Then anguish will be on them “on the day of Egypt’s doom. For look, it is coming! [כִּי הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ].”

Jerusalem’s coming devastation is again the topic of Ezek 33:33: “Yet when it comes [וּבָאָהּ]—and it definitely will [הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ]—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

In Ezekiel 39 God announces that he will wipe out the armies of Gog. Then he declares in verse 8, “Yes, it is coming [הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ], and it will happen. This is the declaration of the Lord GOD. This is the day I have spoken about.”

In these passages, it is not God who is coming as in Mal 3:1, but it is certainly not a prophetic message or warning; it is the disaster of divine judgment. In Ezek 30:9, it is even preceded by messengers from God. It is against this canonical context that Malachi’s use of הִנֵּה בָּאָהּ must be interpreted.

Finally, after identifying the one coming to his temple as “the Lord,” in answer to the people’s plea in 2:17, it seems highly unlikely one would speak of the prophetic messenger again as the one who is coming, especially since this second messenger’s role in verses 2–4 is to refine the personnel in the temple to which the Lord has come (see below).

Concerning the implied subject of the participle בָּא, “he is coming,” we have six possibilities.

⁴⁵ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 241.

⁴⁶ Block, *Ezekiel*, 251.

⁴⁷ Translation adjusted from that of Block, *Ezekiel*, 666.

a. If *הַאֲדוֹן*, *מְלַאכֵי*, and *הַבְּרִית* are the same person, the answer is easy. Otherwise, the subject could be any one of those.

b. We could argue for *מְלַאכֵי* as the subject on the basis of the parallel use of *הִנֵּה*, “look,” in the first clause of the divine speech and the fact that Yahweh is sending him.

c. We could argue for *הַאֲדוֹן* as the subject on the basis of the parallel use of the root *בּוֹא* in “and suddenly he will come to his temple.”

d–e. Or we could argue for *הַבְּרִית* as the subject on the basis of the nearest referent (which may or may not be the same as *מְלַאכֵי*).

f. Finally, if *הַאֲדוֹן* and *הַבְּרִית* refer to the same person, the weight of evidence would support that person being the subject over against *מְלַאכֵי*.

The choice will be based on the weight given to each of these arguments. On the basis of the chiasmic structure in 3:1 and my determination of the divine subject of 3:2–6 (see below), options c. or, preferably, f. are the most likely.

4. *Verses 2–4, describing refining the Levites, hardly fits anyone but God.* The two rhetorical questions beginning Mal 3:2–4 are “But who can endure *בּוֹאוֹ* [the day of his coming]?⁴⁸ And who will be able to stand when he appears?” The infinitive construct *בּוֹאוֹ*, “his coming,” echoes the two uses of the verb *בּוֹא* in 3:1 and has the same subject. This clause gives the consequence of the previous *הִנֵּה* clause, “Look, he is coming.” Whereas most scholars see the coming one in verses 2–4 as Yahweh,⁴⁹ Merrill, Watts, Scalise, and Boda identify the agent of refinement and purification here to be “the messenger of the covenant,” who is also “my messenger.” They understand 3:1a–b as announcing the coming of a messenger and then the Lord. Then 3:1c–4 elaborates on the work of that messenger who would “clear a path” for the Lord by purifying the Levitical priesthood before the Lord comes in 3:5 to bring judgment on the wicked.⁵⁰

Considering the agent of refining to be the human prophetic messenger fails on several counts, some of which we have already discussed. Here I question the appropriateness of ascribing the work in Mal 3:2–4 to anyone less than Yahweh. The first rhetorical question, “Who can endure the day of his coming?” uses the verb *כּוּל* in the pilpel, which usually means “sustain” or “provide for,” but can also mean “contain,” “hold,” or “endure” (here and in Prov 18:14). The hiphil carries the meaning “endure” in Jer 10:10 and Joel 2:11. According to Jeremiah, the na-

⁴⁸ Cf. “the day is coming” and “the coming day” in 4:1[3:19], and “the coming of the day of Yahweh” in 4:5[3:23].

⁴⁹ E.g. Beth Glazier-McDonald, “Mal’ak habbərīt: The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1,” *HAR* 11 (1987): 94; Jacobs, *Haggai and Malachi*, 275.

⁵⁰ See Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 433; Watts, “Mark,” 117; Scalise, “Malachi,” 350; Mark J. Boda, “The Gospel According to Malachi,” in *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter’s 60th Birthday* (ed. L. K. Fuller Dow, C. A. Evans and A. W. Pitts; Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2016), 358, 364. Boda’s earlier view was that the two messengers of 3:1—either angel or prophet—would prepare the people for the Lord’s coming by his preaching. “Then YHWH with this messenger at his side will refine the Levites” according to 3:2–4. See Mark Boda, “Figuring the Future: The Prophets and Messiah,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (ed. S. E. Porter; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 71. He also questions there whether the “day of his coming” in 3:2 carries “the eschatological weight that is often placed upon it.”

tions’ idols are “stupid and foolish,” but “Yahweh is the true God; he is the living God and eternal King. The earth quakes at his wrath, and the nations cannot endure his rage.” Jonathan Gibson argues, however, that Mal 3:2 is actually alluding to Joel 2:11. The context in Joel is a call to “return to Yahweh your God” (2:12–13) because “the day of Yahweh is coming,” bringing a large and powerful army (2:1–2). Then verses 10–11 declare, “The earth quakes before them; the sky shakes. The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars cease their shining. . . . Indeed, the day of Yahweh is terrible and dreadful—who can endure it?” Besides Mal 3:2 and Joel 2:11 sharing the context of the day of Yahweh and the call to return to him, Gibson points out that the combination of the interrogative **מִי** and the root **כּוּל** is unique to these two passages. Malachi’s allusion to Joel also adds to the element of surprise. Yes, Yahweh is coming, but who will survive it?⁵¹ Irony and unexpectedness have already been introduced by the use of **הִנֵּה** and the word **פְּתָאִם**, “suddenly,” which, according to Steven Tuell, “is used for calamitous surprises: ambush, destruction, and sudden death (e.g. Num 6:9; Josh 11:7; Jer 4:20).”⁵²

The question “Who can stand when he appears?” is used almost exclusively of the Lord in his wrath (1 Sam 6:20; Jer 49:19//50:44; Nah 1:6; Pss 76:7[8]; 130:3; 147:17), and about one-third of the uses of the verb for “appears” (niphals of **רָאָה**) speak of a divine appearance. The work of the coming one twice in these verses uses the verb **צָרַף**, “refine,” the figurative uses of which almost all have God as the agent.⁵³ Although priests could perform ceremonial acts resulting in the ritual “cleansing” (piel of **טָהַר**) of people (Lev 14:11; 16:30; Num 8:6–7, 15, 21; Neh 12:30), the direct purification of people could only be performed by God (Jer 33:8; Ezek 24:13; 36:25, 33; 37:23; Ps 51:2[4])⁵⁴ and was an essential element promised in new covenant texts. They describe the work of cleansing and judging by the one who is “coming.” The one who was coming to refine and purify the “sons of Levi” in verses 2–4 was almost certainly the same one who was coming “for judgment” in verses 5–6, which all agree was God.⁵⁵ In addition, almost every verse in which a

⁵¹ Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity*, 177–80. He also quotes Hill, *Malachi*, 271: “His imminent coming will be more than a surprise, it will be inimical.”

⁵² Steven Tuell, *Reading Nahum–Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2016), 249. Gibson agrees that “the context [of **פְּתָאִם**] is one of disaster and judgement” in all of its 25 uses except 2 Chr 29:36 (*Covenant Continuity and Fidelity*, 180).

⁵³ The verb occurs 29 times, ten of which are of a literal craftsman. God is the refiner 11 times (Judg 7:4; Isa 1:25; 48:10; Jer 9:7; Zech 13:9; Pss 17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 105:19; Dan 11:35; 12:10). God’s “word” is said to be “refined” (qal passive) five times. Only once is a prophet perhaps the agent of refining, in Jer 6:29. But in 6:27–30 Jeremiah is only explicitly called Israel’s “assayer” (**בְּחֹרֵן**). Who the refiner is in v. 29 is ambiguous. Although Holladay concludes it is Jeremiah, the result of the process is a failure (William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 229–33). See also William McKane, *Jeremiah*, Volume 1: I–XXV (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 153–57.

⁵⁴ Tuell affirms, “As Malachi also recognizes, only God can cleanse the stain of sin” (*Reading Nahum–Malachi*, 249).

⁵⁵ Cf. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, 70 (although he seems to have changed his view in Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 117); also Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 363; Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity*, 169. Mark Boda identifies the two messengers of 3:1 as the same—either angel or prophet, who would prepare the people for the Lord by his

collocation occurs of singular יום, “day,” and the participle or infinitive of בוא, “coming,” it involves God bringing judgment of destruction, including Mal 4:1[3:19]: “‘For look, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,’ says Yahweh of Armies, ‘not leaving them root or branches.’”⁵⁶

According to David Miller, the view that “the Lord” is the coming one who purifies the sons of Levi is also that of Paul/Luke in Acts 13:23–25.⁵⁷

So, although Petterson rightly points out that elsewhere in Malachi the term מלאך is used of a human prophetic or priestly figure (1:1; 2:7; 3:1a; cf. 4:5–6[3:23–24]),⁵⁸ this cannot be true of מלאך הברית because of the structural identification of the figure with האדון in Mal 3:1b, its relation to “the God of המשפט” in 2:17, and its identification with the divine “coming” in 3:2–5, who would purify and judge.

So we are left with מלאך הברית, “the messenger of the covenant,” referring to the same person as האדון, “the Lord,” which refers to Yahweh, however improbable that may appear. To quote Sherlock Holmes, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”⁵⁹ But is it, in fact, possible?

Before trying to grapple with the relationship between God and מלאך הברית, we should clarify the rhetorical impact of these verses. First, R. Michael Fox has drawn from the historical-cultural context of Malachi and argued that it would have been received against the backdrop of Persian imperial messengers from Xerxes who were terrorizing “city after city by sending his royal messengers to their kings and leaders and demanding offerings of earth and water as tokens of submission and compliance.” He further claims, “The arrival of imperial royal messengers in provinces such as Yehud and cities such as Jerusalem was a regular occurrence as these heralds proclaimed the king’s demands.”⁶⁰ “The royal messenger concept,” he argues, “is a root metaphor undergirding the entire book of Malachi.”⁶¹ It was a royal message received (literally) “by the hand of Malachi,” that is, “my messenger” (Mal 1:1) from “Yahweh of Armies,” the “great King,” whose “name will be great among the nations, from the rising of the sun to its setting ... [and] feared among

preaching. “Then YHWH with this messenger at his side will refine the Levites” according to 3:2–4 (“Figuring the Future: The Prophets and Messiah,” 71).

⁵⁶ That is, 9 verses (Isa 13:9; Jer 47:4; Ezek 7:10; 30:9; 39:8; Joel 2:1; Zech 14:1; Mal 3:2; 4:1[3:19]). The exceptions are when the subject is David (1 Sam 29:6), Gog (Ezek 38:18), a priest (Ezek 44:27), or nations (Zech 12:9).

⁵⁷ Miller, “Messenger, the Lord, and the Coming,” 16. Petterson agrees that God, not the messenger, is in view in 3:2–4, since “the actions in these verses are elsewhere associated with God (e.g. Isa 1:25; 48:9–11; Jer 6:27–30; 9:6 [Heb. 9:7]; Ezek 22:17–22; Zech 13:9). LXX also connects them with God’s activity.” See Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant.’”

⁵⁸ Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant.’”

⁵⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four* (1890; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 41.

⁶⁰ R. Michael Fox, *A Message from the Great King: Reading Malachi in Light of Ancient Persian Royal Messenger Texts from the Time of Xerxes* (Siphrut 17; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 21.

⁶¹ Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 27.

the nations” (Mal 1:11, 14). Fox also explains, “If previous pericopes are decorated with messenger micrometaphors, then this text [3:1–7] is something of a messenger apex in Malachi.”

The second factor is the impact of the הַגָּה clauses discussed above, plus the use of פְּתָאֵם, “suddenly,” combining to create an element of unexpected doom. One additional factor to reckon with in the speech is the nature of this second “messenger,” brought out by Glazier-McDonald: “Therefore, it can be none other than Yahweh who is the מְלַאֲךְ הַבְּרִית, the covenant enforcer of Mal 3:1e. On his day, he will reestablish his covenant and enforce its justice thereby satisfying those who questioned him in 2:17.”⁶² My understanding of the speech might be best expressed by a paraphrase:

You claim to want the God of justice to come. Well, I, Yahweh of Armies, the Great King, am coming. But I will be preceded by my prophetic, royal herald, who will prepare the way by declaring the charges against you. Then, suddenly, that sovereign Lord you claim to seek will come to His temple—that One you claim to “delight” in is coming as the covenant Enforcer, the royal Messenger of the covenant you are breaking. But who can endure the day of His coming?

What, then, is the theological significance of God referring to himself as “the messenger of the covenant” (מְלַאֲךְ הַבְּרִית)? I agree with those who argue that מְלַאֲךְ הַבְּרִית in Mal 3:1 may be at least compared to מְלַאֲךְ יְהוָה, “the messenger/angel of Yahweh.”

5. מְלַאֲךְ הַבְּרִית may be compared with מְלַאֲךְ יְהוָה based on the similarity of function between the two. The phrase מְלַאֲךְ הַבְּרִית occurs nowhere else in the OT. Some have argued that God speaking of himself in the third person (“the Lord you seek,” “his temple,” “the messenger of the covenant,” “he is coming”) requires a messianic interpretation.⁶³ Andrew Malone correctly points out that this is not necessarily the case.⁶⁴ In Zech 3:2, for example, we find, “Yahweh said to Satan: ‘Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! May Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!’”⁶⁵ Malone argues further that by changing “me” to “you” in Matt 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27, it is the Gospels that introduce a distinction between Yahweh and the one whose way would be prepared by “my messenger.”⁶⁶ He points out that “New Testament commentators [citing D. A. Carson, R. H. Gundry, M. D. Hooker, R. T. France, I. H. Marshall, and D. L. Bock] regularly refuse to see messianic intention in Malachi’s original words.”⁶⁷ He seems to think this trumps the OT scholars he cites who do find in Malachi a reference to the Messiah (D. Stuart, J. A. Motyer, O. P. Rob-

⁶² Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 132.

⁶³ Cf. W. A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 228; J. S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 454.

⁶⁴ Malone, “Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1,” 222–24.

⁶⁵ Note, however, Mark Boda’s comment: “Even when Yahweh spoke in v. 2, the speech refers to him in the third person, suggesting that it was actually spoken by the messenger of Yahweh” (*The Book of Zechariah* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 227; see also 232).

⁶⁶ Malone, “Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1,” 224.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

ertson, W. Kaiser, D. I. Block, J. B. Payne). But the issue will not be decided by counting scholars.

Malone also rejects the identification of מְלַאֲכֵי יְהוָה with מְלַאֲכֵי הַבְּרִית or מְלַאֲכֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, “the angel/messenger of Yahweh/God.” מְלַאֲכֵי יְהוָה occurs 59 times and מְלַאֲכֵי הָאֱלֹהִים 9 times. Though sometimes referring to human messengers (Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7), the “angel” is often treated as if he were Yahweh (Gen 16:7–14; 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Exod 3:2–6; 14:19–25; Num 22:20–38; Judg 2:1–5; 6:11–24; 13:8–22; cf. Gen 18:1–19:1; 31:11–13; 32:24–30 [with Hos 12:4]; 48:15–16; Zech 12:8). Verhoef believes that the relationship between “the angel/messenger of the covenant” and “the Lord” “is clearly the same as elsewhere in the OT where ‘the angel of the Lord’ is both identified with and distinguished from God.”⁶⁸ Malone charges this view with being “obviously inconsistent,”⁶⁹ as if it is based simply on the similar use of the word מְלַאֲכֵי (which we have determined refers to two different individuals in Mal 3:1).⁷⁰ Rather, the identification of מְלַאֲכֵי הַבְּרִית with מְלַאֲכֵי יְהוָה is based primarily on the similarity of function between the two. Both are “identified with and distinguished from God.” Both are “messengers” sent by God who can at the same time speak and be addressed and even *described* as God. Since they were representatives, messengers in the biblical world could speak in the first person as if they were the sender and could at times be addressed as if they were the person who sent them (cf. 2 Sam 3:12–13; 1 Kgs 20:2–6).⁷¹ But the מְלַאֲכֵי יְהוָה and מְלַאֲכֵי הָאֱלֹהִים passages listed above seem to go beyond that.⁷²

However, before we say that the “angel of Yahweh” in these passages must be the Messiah or the “preincarnate Christ,” we must take seriously Bruce Waltke’s point. Nowhere does the NT make such an identification. As Waltke says, “The New Testament never lowers the identity of the Son of God to an angel of any sort.”⁷³ An angel is a supernatural, created being.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Verhoef, *Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 289. Cf. R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 327; Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 131.

⁶⁹ Malone, “Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1,” 225.

⁷⁰ Andrew S. Malone, *Knowing Jesus in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Christophanies* (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity, 2015), 95, has argued that the Angel of the Lord is “another divine title for God” and the two are “completely identical” (p. 125). This citation is from Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant,’” who prefers the view that “the angel of the Lord” is “an appearance of God in a different form.”

⁷¹ See Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 182–83, 191. Also see the argument in René. A. López, “Identifying the ‘Angel of the Lord’ in the Book of Judges: A Model for Reconsidering the Referent in Other Old Testament Loci,” *BBR* 20 (2010): 1–18. Note the critique of López by Andrew S. Malone, “Distinguishing the Angel of the Lord,” *BBR* 21 (2011): 297–314. Also on messengers in the ancient Near East, see J. T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and the Message in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989). On royal messengers in Achaemenid Persia, see Fox, *Message from the Great King*, 45–71.

⁷² See M. F. Rooker, “Theophany,” in *DOTP* 864. For a contrary view, see John H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 462–66.

⁷³ B. K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 363. See also W. G. MacDonald, “Christology and ‘The Angel of the Lord,’” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 324–35, who argues for translating the phrase as indefinite (“an angel of the Lord”) in both testaments, whereas Wallace argues that a particular

Also, the one who announced the birth of the Messiah to Joseph (Matt 1:20) and the one who rolled away the stone from Jesus’s tomb (Matt 28:2) is identified as *ἄγγελος κυρίου* (without the article), “an angel of the Lord.” The absence of the article, however, does not necessarily mean that the phrase is indefinite. As Dan Wallace explains, “It is not necessary for a noun to have the article in order for it to be definite.”⁷⁵ In Luke 11:13 the phrase *πνεῦμα ἅγιον*, without the article, is correctly rendered “the Holy Spirit,” and in Luke 1:35 *υἰὸς θεοῦ* is correctly rendered “the Son of God.”⁷⁶ Regarding *ἄγγελος κυρίου*, Wallace says, “Although most scholars treat *ἄγγελος κυρίου* in the NT as ‘an angel of the Lord,’ there is no *linguistic* basis for doing so.”⁷⁷ The Septuagint often renders יהוה מלאך as *ἄγγελος κυρίου* (e.g. Gen 16:7–11; 22:11, 15; Exod 3:2; Judg 2:1; 6:11–12,22; 13:2). So did Christ announce his own birth and move his own stone? Besides, “angels” are created beings. The apostle Paul declared, “For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:16; cf. Neh 9:6; Ps 148:2, 5). So, if יהוה מלאך is to be identified in certain passages as a divine manifestation of some sort—whether the preincarnate Christ or otherwise—it would be better rendered “the messenger of Yahweh.”

Whether יהוה מלאך in Mal 3:1 is another name for יהוה מלאך is uncertain. Malachi presents us, however, with one who is both God and God’s messenger, who comes regarding the covenant. A similar relationship may be said to exist in the OT between Yahweh and his promised Messiah. According to Hos 3:4–5, after Israel lived “many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols, . . . the people of Israel will return and seek Yahweh their God and David their king.” As Duane Garrett explains,

The prophecy that they would seek “David their king” is messianic. The phrase does not mean simply that the Israelites would again submit to the Davidic monarchy and so undo Jeroboam’s rebellion. Had that been the point, we would expect the text to say that they would return to the “house of David.” Instead we see “David their king” set alongside of Yahweh as the one to whom the people return in pious fear. This “David” cannot be the historical king, who was long dead, but is the messianic king for whom he is a figure.⁷⁸

angel is in view in both testaments (Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 252).

⁷⁴ The NT never portrays Jesus, the Son of God, as a creature who worships God and simply does his will. In fact, it strongly distinguishes Jesus from the angels (Matt 4:6, 11; 13:41; 16:27; 24:36; 25:31; Mark 1:13; John 1:51; Col 2:18; 2 Thess 1:7; Heb 2:2–5; 1 Pet 3:21–22; Rev 5:11–12; 14:10). The first chapter of Hebrews is especially strong in this regard (see especially Heb 1:5–6, 13).

⁷⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 243.

⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 248–52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁷⁸ Duane Garrett, *Hosea, Joel* (NAC 19A; Nashville: B&H, 1997), 104. Garrett also says that the phrase rendered “in the last days” “is better translated ‘at the end of the days.’ The ‘end’ (*ahārīt*) is the time of fulfillment, when the final outcome of God’s program is realized. The word creates a distance between the age of fulfillment and the age of the prophet himself.”

According to Hosea, the people would seek “David” just as they would seek Yahweh. Then the next sentence in Hos 3:5 equates seeking Yahweh and David with “They will come with awe to Yahweh and to his goodness in the last days.” Alongside יהוה מְלָאֲכָד passages and Yahweh/Davidic Messiah passages, we may suggest that attention might be given to “servant of Yahweh” passages having similar characteristics.⁷⁹

Such a mysterious relationship between Yahweh and one sent by him is what is happening in Mal 3:1. Regardless of how we understand יהוה מְלָאֲכָד, in Mal 3:1 there is one who is both God and his “messenger”—one who is sent from God to convey the word of God and to do the work of God, especially regarding the covenant.⁸⁰ God’s covenant with Israel underlies the entire book, which has sometimes been categorized as a “covenant lawsuit.”⁸¹ In fact, as argued elsewhere, “The primary mark of the prophetic genre is its apparent intention to preserve the covenant by calling for behavioral changes on the part of the covenant people” (cf. 2 Kgs 17:13).⁸² Malachi begins with God’s declaration of covenant love for Israel, which may be defined as his sovereignly determined attitude of affection and compassion that motivates him to establish and zealously maintain a relationship with sinful people and to seek their highest good in spite of their rebelliousness. It is that God who was coming as “the messenger of the covenant” to purify (3:2–4), to judge (3:5–6), to renew his covenant with those who feared him (3:16–17), to heal them (4:2), and to eliminate the wicked (4:1, 3), thus producing a people who would recognize his greatness (Mal 1:5) and worship him in righteousness (3:3–4) in a “delightful land” (3:12). In the NT, “Jesus takes on the role of the ‘messenger of the covenant’ in Mal. 3:1.”⁸³

Like Alfred Hitchcock, Jesus walked into that OT outline of a God-Man sent as the messenger of the covenant, and he declared the Father’s love and became his “righteous Servant” to carry away iniquity (Isa 53:11). Jesus’s role as the messenger of the covenant may be seen in the multiple times he is described as “sent” by the

⁷⁹ Anthony Petterson (*Behold Your King: The Hope for the House of David in the Book of Zechariah* [New York: T&T Clark, 2009], 94–95) cites Alec Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 14–16), Richard Schultz (“The King in the Book of Isaiah,” in *The Lord’s Anointed* [ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 141–65), and Barry Webb (*The Message of Isaiah: On Eagle’s Wings* [Leicester: IVP, 1996], 233–34) as arguing that “the future Davidic king and the Servant are two portraits of the one person based on several factors including: (1) the royal elements of the servant songs, especially the Servant’s role in bringing forth justice; (2) the endowment of both with the Spirit as a sign of the divine choice and empowerment (Isa 11:1–2; 42:1); (3) the confirmation of the Davidic covenant in Isa 55:3–5 so close after the exaltation of the servant; and (4) the link between the Servant and the future king in the reference in Isa 37:35 to ‘my Servant David.’”

⁸⁰ Cf. McKenzie and Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” 549–63.

⁸¹ J. O’Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* (SBLDS 121; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 63. But see the critique in Hill, *Malachi*, 31–33.

⁸² E. R. Clendenen, “Interpreting the Minor Prophets for Preaching,” *Faith & Mission* 13 (1995): 57.

⁸³ David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 303.

Father.⁸⁴ As Douglas Stuart explains, the conundrum of Mal 3:1 is the conundrum of the NT: “How can God both send and be sent? ... How can [Christ] be sent by God and also be God in the flesh?” The answer, he says, “to the partial extent that humans can comprehend it, is found in the doctrine of the Trinity.”⁸⁵

6. *Establishing justice was a primary function of Yahweh’s Messiah.* My final two arguments are that the very things מְלֹאֵךְ הַבְּרִית is said to do when he comes in Mal 3:1–6 are prophesied of the Messiah elsewhere. Wolter Rose defines the OT Messiah as “a future royal figure sent by God who will bring salvation to God’s people and the world and establish a kingdom characterized by features like peace and justice.”⁸⁶ Justice (מִשְׁפָּט) or judgment is described in Mal 3:5–6. The first reference to God’s anointed king is in 1 Sam 2:10: “Yahweh will judge the ends of the earth. He will give power to his king; he will lift up the horn of his anointed.” Yahweh’s chosen king turned out to be his servant David (cf. 1 Sam 13:14; 2 Sam 5:2; 19:21; 23:1), among whose descendants would be the eschatological Messiah (2 Sam 7:9–20; Jer 30:9), who would “reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice [מִשְׁפָּט] and righteousness from now on and forever” (Isa 9:7).⁸⁷ This Davidic King would be “judging [שֹׁפֵט] and pursuing what is right, quick to execute justice” (Isa 16:5). He would be “a Righteous Branch for David. He will reign wisely as king and administer justice [מִשְׁפָּט] and righteousness in the land” and would be named “Yahweh Is Our Righteousness” (Jer 23:5–6; cf. 33:15). Through Ezekiel the Lord declared, “I will judge [שֹׁפֵט] between one sheep and another. I will establish over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will shepherd them. He will tend them himself and will be their shepherd. I, Yahweh, will be their God, and my servant David will be a prince among them.” (Ezek 34:22–24; cf. 37:24–25).

7. *Reestablishing temple worship was also associated with the Messiah.* Another less commonly appreciated role of the Messiah would be purification and reestablishing temple worship. Most of these are in the “Branch/Sprout” (צֶמַח) passages. For example, Isa 4:2–4 states,

On that day the Sprout of Yahweh will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of Israel’s survivors. Whoever remains in Zion and whoever is left in Jerusalem will be called holy—all in Jerusalem who are recorded for life—when the Lord [אֲדֹנָי] has washed away the filth [צֹאֵן] of

⁸⁴ Matt 10:40; 15:24; 21:37; Mark 9:37; Luke 4:18, 43; 10:16; John 3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:23–24, 30, 36–38; 6:29, 38–39, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28–29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44–45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21; Acts 3:20, 26; 10:36; Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4; 1 John 4:9–10, 14.

⁸⁵ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1353.

⁸⁶ Wolter H. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel: Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period* (JSOTSS 304; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 23.

⁸⁷ Cf. Daniel I. Block, “My Servant David: Ancient Israel’s Vision of the Messiah,” in *Israel’s Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. R. S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 36–49.

the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodguilt from the heart of Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment [מִשְׁפָּט] and a spirit of burning [בָּעֵר].⁸⁸

The glorious “day” in Isa 4:2, associated with the “Sprout,” is said to follow a time of divine cleansing.

The man of God who brought God’s message of judgment (cf. 1 Sam 3:13) on Eli also promised, “I will raise up a faithful priest for myself. He will do whatever is in my heart and mind. I will establish a lasting dynasty for him, and he will walk before my anointed one for all time” (1 Sam 2:35). Then after announcing again the “Righteous Sprout [צֶמַח],”⁸⁹ who would “administer justice [מִשְׁפָּט] and righteousness in the land,” and that “David will never fail to have a man sitting on the throne of the house of Israel,” God promised through Jeremiah, “The Levitical priests will never fail to have a man always before me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices” (Jer 33:15, 17–18). The Lord then underlines his promise in verses 20–22:

If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night so that day and night cease to come at their regular time, then also my covenant with my servant David may be broken. If that could happen, then he would not have a son reigning on his throne and the Levitical priests would not be my ministers. Even as the stars of heaven cannot be counted, and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so too I will make innumerable the descendants of my servant David and the Levites who minister to me.

Isaiah and Jeremiah are alluded to in another “Sprout” passage, in Zech 3:3–8, which also involves cleansing.

Now Joshua was dressed with filthy [צוֹא] clothes as he stood before the angel. So the angel of Yahweh spoke to those standing before him, “Take off his filthy [צוֹא] clothes!” Then he said to him, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with festive robes.” ... “Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your colleagues sitting before you; indeed, these men are a sign that I am about to bring my servant, the Sprout.” (Zech 3:3–4, 8)

In the context of the purification of the priesthood, the מְלֹאךְ יְהוָה declares to Joshua the high priest and his “colleagues” assisting him at the temple that their presence amounts to a “sign” that the Lord will bring his messianic “Sprout.” As Boda explains, “Since Jeremiah 33 intertwines the fates of both Davidic and ‘Levitical priestly’ lines, the reemergence of priestly service in Zechariah’s fourth vision re-

⁸⁸ The verb בָּעֵר, “to burn,” is used in Mal 4:1[3:19]: “For look, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,” says of Yahweh of Armies, ‘not leaving them root or branches.’”

⁸⁹ Boda (*Book of Zechariah*, 253–54) and Petterson (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 87, 90) agree that “branch” is not the best translation. Petterson prefers “Shoot,” which “captures better both the idea of something new, and the idea of small or humble beginnings, whereas ‘Branch,’ suggests something older and more established.” Boda prefers the translation “sprout.” The term צֶמַח, he says, “refers to vegetation growth, whether on the ground (Gen. 19:25; Isa. 4:2; 61:11; Ezek. 16:7; Ps. 65:11[10]), on grain plants (Hos. 8:7), or on a tree (Ezek. 17:9–10).”

port [Zech 3:1–10] is a sign foreshadowing the reemergence of the royal line through the Sprout figure.”⁹⁰

The link between “Branch/Sprout” and priest is most clearly seen in Zech 6:12–13: “Here is a man whose name is Sprout; he will sprout forth from his place and build Yahweh’s temple. Yes, he will build Yahweh’s temple; he will be clothed in splendor and will sit on his throne and rule. There will also be a priest on his throne, and there will be peaceful counsel between the two of them.”⁹¹

The view of these passages that makes the most sense to me is that the OT prophesies a Messiah with a dual role of King and Priest, who would bring judgment/justice, righteousness, cleansing, and ultimately comfort. The description of a period of “seventy weeks” in Dan 9:24–27, though very difficult, at least seems to trace the rest of human history until its culmination in the heavenly kingdom.⁹² Through the efforts of one referred to as “an Anointed One, the ruler” in 9:25 (מְשִׁיחַ נָגִיד), God’s ultimate plan will be accomplished: “to bring the rebellion to an end, to put a stop to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place” (9:24). The appearance of the Messiah in Mal 3:1, therefore, would be fitting in the context of a prediction of God’s cleansing of his Levitical priests and of divine מְשַׁפֵּט.

V. CONCLUSION

I must point out that although he does not see מְלֹאֵךְ הַבְּרִית as fulfilled by Jesus, Petterson does not deny that Mal 3:1 is messianic. But he argues on the basis of “a strong hope for a future ideal Davidic king across the Book of the Twelve.” Malachi and his readers, he thinks, would understand the coming of Yahweh to entail the coming of the Davidic Messiah.⁹³ His argument is cogent. Nevertheless, I believe the explanation of the use of the phrase מְלֹאֵךְ הַבְּרִית in Mal 3:1 that best accounts for all the data is that the verse is more explicitly messianic.⁹⁴ But however we arrive at it, as Daniel Block asserts, “In the Malachi passages, the messenger/prophet announces the coming of the messiah.”⁹⁵ The view of Anthony Malone that the NT has simply “appropriated” the verse (“whereby the attributes

⁹⁰ Boda, *Book of Zechariah*, 255.

⁹¹ Petterson is probably correct in translating 6:13b as “and he will be a priest by his throne, and a counsel of peace will be between the two” (*Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 181). Probably in view here is the messianic King/Priest (cf. Psalm 110) ruling beside Yahweh, providing “peace for the community” (see 187–91).

⁹² See James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology* (NSBT; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 117.

⁹³ Petterson, “Identity of ‘the Messenger of the Covenant.’” He shows, for example, that in Zechariah 9 “the return of YHWH to his temple (9:8) climaxes in the Davidic king coming to Jerusalem (9:9–10). Cf. Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 146–48; Petterson, “The Shape of the Davidic Hope across the Book of the Twelve,” *JOT* 35 (2010): 225–46.

⁹⁴ Stuart, “Malachi,” 1351.

⁹⁵ Block, “My Servant David,” 32.

and activities of YHWH himself are recognised in and ascribed to Jesus⁹⁶) is inadequate.

We might compare the situation in Mal 3:1 to God's words in Gen 1:26: "Let us make man in our image." Speaking of this and similar OT passages that suggest a plurality in God, Robert Letham explains,

The NT gives us the principle that the OT contains in seed form what is more fully made known in the NT, and on that basis we may look back to the earlier writings, much as at the end of a detective mystery we reread the plot, seeing clues that we missed the first time but are now given fresh meaning by our knowledge of the whole.⁹⁷

The view of Christ in the OT proposed by Beale and Gladd seems to be appropriate to the evidence. They speak of the "full meaning" of certain OT passages as "hidden until a later point in time when the interpretation is revealed to and understood by those who believe." Nevertheless, it is "indeed actually 'there' in the Old Testament text: it is simply partially 'hidden' or latent."⁹⁸ Furthermore, they propose that "*the Old Testament authors had some kind of anticipation of a time when a fuller revelation would be given,*" and they "knew that the meaning of their words would eventually be eclipsed by a fuller, more complete form of revelation."⁹⁹ The OT writers may even sometimes have had "some inkling of how the meaning of their texts would or could be later interpreted."¹⁰⁰

I believe that when we have the NT interpretation of such passages as Mal 2:17–3:6, we are able to look back at those passages and find that the new revelation was hidden there all along in full view, awaiting the NT's interpretive glasses. We might also compare our experience to that of Dr. Watson, who is reported to have remarked to Sherlock Holmes, "When I hear you give your reasons, the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled, until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours." To which Holmes replies, "Quite so, you see, but you do not observe."¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Malone, "Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1," 228.

⁹⁷ Robert Letham, *Union with Christ in Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 11.

⁹⁸ Beale and Gladd, *Hidden But Now Revealed*, 329–30.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 336 (emphasis original).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 337. See Martin J. Selman's discussion of OT messianic concepts being expressed in "imprecise and mysterious terms" in "Messianic Mysteries," in *The Lord's Anointed*, 283. Also, Robert Letham's comparison of the OT to a detective mystery in *Union with Christ in Scripture, History, and Theology*, 11 (following the lines of Steinmetz; see my note 4).

¹⁰¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia," in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.