

COVENANT CONTINUITY AND FIDELITY: INNER-BIBLICAL ALLUSION AND EXEGESIS IN MALACHI¹

Jonathan Gibson
(gibson_jonny@yahoo.com)

This thesis investigates how Malachi's inner-biblical interpretation of earlier source texts in the Hebrew Bible informs and shapes his central theme of covenant. While scholars generally acknowledge the importance of covenant in Malachi, to date, only a few studies have been devoted to this theme in the book. This study seeks to redress the imbalance in Malachian scholarship, by contributing a comprehensive analysis of covenant throughout the prophetic oracle. The core of Malachi's covenantal imagination is shaped by his reflection on an authoritative collection of texts. The mention of people, nations and places, Deuteronomic terminology, and rare words and unique word/root combinations exclusive to Malachi and only a few other texts encourages the book to be read in the context of received biblical texts.

While Malachi has been the focus of 'intertextuality' studies in recent decades, a comparison of literature reveals competing methodological approaches as to what constitutes an inner-biblical connection between Malachi and other parts of the Hebrew Bible. One of the repercussions of the diverse methodologies is that the interpretive significance of the inner-biblical connections within the book of Malachi becomes perplexing. This thesis provides the most recent discussion in over a decade on the inner-biblical connections contained in Malachi. By providing a more sober approach to what constitutes inner-biblical connections between Malachi and other parts of the Hebrew Bible, this study aims to free the text of Malachi from being overburdened by too many 'intertexts', and thus allows its central message of covenant to be seen with greater clarity and force.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the study, focusing on the covenant themes in Malachi and the book's inner-biblical interpretation. A

¹ Jonathan Gibson, 'Covenant Continuity and Fidelity: A Study of Inner-Biblical Allusion and Exegesis in Malachi' (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University 2013); Supervisor Professor R.P. Gordon; forthcoming in LHB/OTS (London: T&T Clark).

general overview of each is presented, together with a short history of previous research in the respective areas.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology adopted in the study. It commences with a brief discussion of the literary features and historical context of the book, before providing an extended review of 'intertextuality' and 'inner-biblical interpretation' in biblical studies. Criteria for evaluating the evidence for correspondence between texts and the likely direction of dependence are first established, before defining the different kinds of connections that may exist between texts. The relationship between covenant and Malachi's inner-biblical interpretation is then investigated in the subsequent chapters (3–9). These follow the generally accepted divisions of the book: 1:2-5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10-16; 2:17–3:6; 3:7-12; 3:13-21[4:3]; 3:22-24[4:4-6]. Each chapter begins with a translation and outline of the structure and theme on the pericope under investigation. This is followed by a short discussion on the particular covenant in view, before embarking on an analysis of the inner-biblical allusion and exegesis at play in the unit. The aim in each case is to determine the most likely source texts that Malachi intended his readers to recall. Once these are established, the interpretive significance of the inner-biblical allusion and exegesis within the argument of the book is explored.

Chapter 3 investigates the inner-biblical allusion and exegesis present in Malachi's first pericope (1:2-5) in relation to the patriarchal covenant: Deuteronomic resonances, the Jacob–Esau tradition (Gen. 25–36), and unique word/root combinations with various prophetic texts concerning Edom and Israel (esp. Ezek. 35–36). Attention to these possible connections enhances the theme of YHWH's covenant fidelity, seen in his electing and enduring love for Israel, and serves as a motivation for the people of post-exilic Judah to live up to their obligations within the respective covenants (Levitical: 1:6–2:9; Mosaic: 2:10-12; 3:7-12; and marital: 2:13-16).

Chapter 4 investigates the inner-biblical allusion and exegesis present in Malachi's second pericope (1:6–2:9) in relation to the Levitical covenant: laws regarding cultic sacrifices (Lev. 22:17-25; Deut. 15:21), Deuteronomic curses (Deut. 28:15-20), covenant with Levi (Num. 25:10-13 and Deut. 33:8-11), and the Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:23-27). The priests' failure to give honour to YHWH's name through obedience to the sacrificial laws (Lev. 22:17-25; Deut. 15:21) leads to a 'command' against them in the form of the Deuteronomic

curse (Deut. 28:20). In order to heighten the curse against the priests, Malachi puns their daily priestly blessing, producing a remarkable inversion — the Blessing has become an anti-Blessing.

Chapter 5 investigates the inner-biblical allusion and exegesis present in Malachi's third pericope (2:10-16) in relation to the covenant of marriage: the marriage of the first human pair (Gen. 2:23-24) as well as the divorce laws in Deut. 24:1-4. Due to a number of textual, exegetical, and syntactical issues in Mal. 2:15-16, extensive space is given to establishing the MT, before embarking on an analysis of the inner-biblical interpretation present in the text. The inner-biblical allusion to the account of the first holy matrimony in Gen. 2 exposes unfaithfulness to the marital (and subsequently Mosaic) covenant, while at the same time motivating Judahite men towards faithfulness in these respective marriages. The strong language against divorce *prima facie* suggests a tension with the divorce laws of Deut. 24:1-4. A close comparison of the passages, however, reveals that Mal. 2:15-16 neither contradicts nor supersedes the Mosaic law on divorce; rather, it possibly alludes to it: Malachi's exhortation against divorce for aversion finds its context in Deut. 24:1-4.

Chapter 6 investigates the inner-biblical allusion and exegesis present in Malachi's fourth pericope (2:17-3:6) in relation to the new covenant: the messenger of YHWH in the exodus (Exod. 23:20), the second exodus (Isa. 40:3), and the Day of YHWH (Joel 2:11). In the context of an accusation against YHWH's apparent indifference to evil-doers and his absence and failure to execute just judgement, YHWH announces he will send a messenger to prepare the way for his arrival. The words allude to Exod. 23:20 and evoke images of the first exodus and covenant; the next allusion to Isa. 40:3 also recalls exodus imagery and conjures up images of salvation. However, Malachi situates these positive exodus/new exodus images in an oracle of judgement. The surprise is heightened by an allusion to Joel 2:11, where the terror of the Day of YHWH is captured in the rhetorical question 'who can endure the day of his coming?' YHWH's comforting presence is transformed into something to be feared — a day of judgement. In this regard, YHWH has not changed in relation to his covenant word: he will punish those who break his laws — yet the children of Jacob will not be consumed.

Chapter 7 investigates the inner-biblical allusion and exegesis present in Malachi's fifth pericope (3:7-12) in relation to the Mosaic

covenant: theme of repentance (Zech. 1:2-6), Deuteronomic curse (Deut. 28) and blessing (Deut. 30:1-3, 9-10), and recall of Noahic flood (Gen. 7:11; 8:2). YHWH's call to repentance ('return to me') is set against the backdrop of a previous generation's repentance (Zech. 1:2-6). The allusion to Zech. 1:3 underlines the need for the present generation to repent: the repentance of their fathers (in the immediate generation) had not been maintained. While Malachi actualises the Deuteronomic curse in Mal. 3:7-9 (Deut. 28), some of the vocabulary used in his offer to bless, upon condition of repentance, demonstrates a reversal of the curse (Deut. 30). In order to add rhetorical effect and drama to the reversal of the Deuteronomic curse, Malachi exegetically transforms a text from the flood narrative (Gen. 7:11). What was an agent of curse — rain — will become an agent of blessing.

Chapter 8 investigates the inner-biblical allusion and exegesis present in Malachi's sixth pericope (3:13-21[4:3]) in relation to covenant renewal: Israel as YHWH's special possession (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). Malachi exegetically reapplies these texts to a group smaller than national Israel. Though there is a narrowing of the term, its application to the YHWH fearers ensures covenant continuity.

Chapter 9 investigates Malachi's conclusion (3:22-24[4:4-6]) as it relates to the book's central theme of covenant continuity and fidelity. Extensive space is given to analysing the compositional history and purpose of these closing verses. This chapter provides the most comprehensive case to date for the originality and integrality of Malachi's conclusion. Mal. 3:22-24[4:4-6] may exhibit 'canon consciousness' but its primary function is to close the book of Malachi. This lays the foundation for exploring how the theme of covenant continuity and fidelity comes to a climax in the book in relation to the Law of Moses and the (re)appearance of Elijah.

Chapter 10 provides a summary of the investigation, categorising the kinds of inner-biblical interpretation that Malachi uses, before assessing their interpretive significance for his central theme of covenant. When the function and rhetorical impact of Malachi's inner-biblical allusion and exegesis are observed within the argument of each pericope, the theme of covenant is enriched. Malachi's connections to earlier source texts are neither random nor casual; rather, they have been strategically employed to inform and shape his central theme of covenant continuity and fidelity.