Debate continues concerning the meaning and implications of Malachi 3:1. In this contested verse, YHWH responds to the complaints and accusations of his people by saying, “Behold, I am sending my messenger, and he will clear a way before me. And suddenly, he will come to his temple; the Lord whom you are seeking and the messenger of the covenant in whom you are delighting; behold, he is coming, says YHWH of hosts.”¹ No scholarly consensus exists as to (1) the presence and significance of redactions in the text,² (2) the passage/s to which the author alludes, and (3) the number and nature of the person/s described in the verse. Each of these individual problems has elicited a variety of proposed solutions, resulting in a plethora of interpretations. In light of the current exegetical gridlock, I will argue that Malachi 3:1 (as it stands) refers to the sending of a priestly, prophetic messenger and the arrival of YHWH himself, depicted as a royal priest. I will make my case in three stages. First, I will provide a review of recent scholarship in the English-speaking world on Malachi 3:1. Next, I will “clear a way” by tackling the issues of redactions and allusions in relation to the text in question. Lastly, I will examine the verse in its context and build
on the preparatory work already accomplished in order to suggest a fresh interpretation of Malachi’s prophecy.

**Review of Literature**

**Redactions and Malachi 3:1**

Scholars disagree regarding the presence of editorial activity within Malachi 3:1. Broadly speaking, three approaches are current in the literature: (1) taking 3:1b-4 as an editorial insertion, (2) taking 3:1a as an editorial insertion, and (3) denying signs of growth in 3:1.

*Taking 3:1b-4 as an Editorial Insertion*

Some scholars believe that 3:5 originally followed 3:1a as the answer to the accusation posed against YHWH in 2:17. Those who make this argument typically point to the shift from the first person forms in 3:1a to the third persons forms in 3:1b-4 back to the first person forms in 3:5 in order to support their assertion that 3:1b-4 is unoriginal. Despite agreeing that 3:1b-3:4 represents a later insertion, these scholars voice different explanations for the presence of this supposedly additional material. Bruce Malchow claims that the insertion reflects an early form of the expectation of a priestly messiah. Paul Redditt on the other hand believes that 3:1b-4 was written by a dissident Levitical editor as an encouragement to a group of disenfranchised Levites. A third opinion comes from David Petersen, who argues that 3:1b-4 represents an eschatological commentary meant to expand on the identity of the messenger in 3:1a. Thus, agreement regarding the redactional character of 3:1b-4 has not resulted in a unified perspective on the reductor or his intentions.

*Taking 3:1a as an Editorial Insertion*

Not all scholars who detect redactional activity in 3:1 agree that it is the latter half which represents the addition. S. D. Snyman argues in fact that 3:1b-4 is original, while 3:1a was inserted at a later time. While he also uses the shift in persons to make his case, Snyman says that it is actually the first person form present in 3:1a that needs to be explained. He also states that 3:1b-4 could easily function as the answer to the question of 2:17. Snyman theorizes that originally, the text promised the immediate arrival of YHWH
(who was described as “the Lord” and “the messenger of the covenant”) to
 purify the priesthood and to judge the wicked. When the promise tarried,
 a redactor responded by inserting a second figure into the text in order to
 account for the delay.13 When YHWH still failed to come after a significant
 amount of time, a second redaction (3:22-24 MT) was added in order to
 push this expectation into the eschaton.14

No Signs of Growth in 3:1
Others are not convinced that 3:1 shows the marks of any editorial work.
Glazier-McDonald, for example, argues forcefully that 2:17-3:5 be understood
as original.15 She notes that there are lexical and thematic links which forge
the section together. She points out that shifts in person are not uncommon in
poetic or prophetic language.16 Finally, she claims that the 3:1-4 are “integral
to the sense of the oracle unit.”17 Verhoef concludes that the evidence adduced
for redactions in 3:1 are “so slight and so dependent on subjective factors
that it is best to accept the text as it stands.”18 Hill likewise sees 2:17-3:5 as
being authentic due to the chiastic structures, the rhetorical style, and the
eschatological emphasis present in the section.19 K.W. Weyde also dismisses
the notion of editorial activity in Malachi 3:1 by arguing that the shift in
person can be explained as “conventional language,” and by observing that
Malachi often elaborates on previous statements with clarifying phrases.20
O’Brien critiques those scholars who detect editorial work in several verses in
Malachi (including 3:1). She says that “the ascription of each of these verses
to an editor is based solely upon a given scholar’s opinion that its ideas do
not comport well with the structure and theme of the work.”21 Watts believes
that Malachi as a whole shows little signs of growth, stating that “The literary
structure of the book is reasonably clear with little reason to think of earlier
sources or much later redaction.”22 Thus a good number of scholars have
not been persuaded of the presence of any editorial activity in Malachi 3:1.

Allusions and Malachi 3:1
Scholars also disagree regarding the presence and significance of allusions
in Malachi 3:1. Many argue that a proper understanding of 3:1 depends
upon recognizing an allusion to Exodus 23:20.23 Petersen, for instance,
argues on the basis of this connection that “my messenger” (מלאכי) must
be a “covenant enforcer.”24 a figure given the task of enabling the people to
obey the stipulations of the covenant, thereby allowing YHWH to come and visit his people. 25 Though she disputes Petersen’s view, Glazier-McDonald also asserts that Malachi’s pairing of “the Lord” (האדון) with “the messenger of the covenant” (מלאך הברית) “corresponds well with the Exodus passage where the roles of Yahweh and his messenger seem to merge.” 26 Douglas Stuart remarks that Malachi borrows the language of Exodus at this point because both messengers precede a mighty act of victory which YHWH will accomplish for his people. 27 Pamela J. Scalise understands Malachi to be likening the first messenger to YHWH’s angel in Exodus 23 because both “usher in a new age in the life of Israel in which divine blessings are offered to those who will abandon false worship and obey God.” 28 Mark Boda contends that the connection to Exodus 23:20 means that “the earthly roles of prophet, king, and priest are possibly being likened to (or even assuming) the ancient role of the מלאך who led Israel into the conquest of the land, now with the purpose of cleansing the people.” 29 Despite the popularity of this proposed intertextual relationship, others nevertheless downplay the significance of an allusion to Exodus 23:20. Weyde expresses uncertainty regarding the importance of this connection. 30 Andrew Malone questions the influence of Exodus 23:20 on Malachi 3:1 because he views the two texts as having significant differences. 31 Snyman also casts doubt on the alleged inter-biblical relationship because he believes Malachi’s “messenger” is human while the figure in Exodus is angelic. 32

Isaiah 40:3 is also often posited as the inspiration behind 3:1. 33 Those who make this connection typically claim that the background behind the Isaiah text is the ANE practice of sending messengers ahead of a visiting king in order to alert the people and to clear the path before him. 34 Thus, Glazier-McDonald understands Malachi to be depicting “the day when he (YHWH) was to appear” and when He would “become enthroned as king.” 35 Hill goes further when he states, “Malachi employs the processional motif of Second Isaiah as a metaphor assuring the restoration community of Yahweh’s eventual covenant presence in Jerusalem.” 36 Some however are less enthused about the possible interpretative gains to be found by making this connection. Verhoef believes that the connection is present, but he warns that Isaiah 40 presents a “somewhat different context” from Malachi 3:1. 37 Malone expresses his thoughts on the matter by saying, “Mal 3:1 may also contain an allusion to Isa 40:3-5, but this makes no additional impact on
The Number and Nature of the Figure/s
Perhaps the most notorious problem in the book of Malachi relates to the three figures depicted in 3:1. What did Malachi (or the later redactor) intend to communicate by the three titles “my messenger” (מלאכי), “the Lord” (האדון), and “the messenger of the covenant” (מלאך הברית)? Interpretations can be grouped into three major divisions (each with respective subdivisions): the one-person approach, the two-person approach, and the three-person approach.39

One-person Approach
Though by no means the most popular treatment, some scholars believe that Malachi should be understood as referring to a single person assigned three different titles. C. D. Isbell defends this view, while arguing that this solitary messenger should be understood as a human noble.41 William Dumbrell likewise posits a single individual when he says,

the two nouns, ‘my messenger’ and ‘messenger of the covenant’ are to be identified. On any view, since the speaker of 3:1 is Yahweh, the ‘Lord whom you seek’ would appear to be distinguished from him, and may thus refer to the presence of the messenger whose presence will be fully representative.42

Two-person Approach
One popular approach involves distinguishing two persons in the text. Those who adopt this view divide as to which of the three titles refer to the same person. For instance, several scholars understand Malachi to be referring to two persons: “the Lord” (האדון) and a forerunner, identified as “my messenger” (מלאכי) and “the messenger of the covenant” (מלאך הברית).43 Malchow argues that “it is doubtful that the original author … means to identify ‘the messenger of the covenant’ with ‘the Lord.’”44 Weyde claims that the author refers to the “messenger of the covenant” in order to clarify the identity of “my messenger.”45 Scalise believes the two “messengers” should be identified based on a pattern of repetition which she detects in the text.46 Nogalski also suggests that these two titles are referring to the same person, though without further comment.47
Others agree that Malachi refers to two persons, but they believe that it is better to identify “the Lord” with “the messenger of the covenant.” These argue that Malachi speaks of the sending of a messenger ( מלאך ) and the coming of YHWH, who is called both “the Lord” ( אדון ) and “the messenger of the covenant” ( מלאך הברית ). Some base their claims partly on a chiastic structure in the text that may suggest this identification. Glazier-McDonald asserts that through this interpretation “the verse assumes unprecedented power.” Some of those who identify “the Lord” with the “messenger of the covenant” believe this figure to be messianic, while others deny any reference to the Messiah.

Three-person approach
Others understand Malachi to be referring to three separate individuals. This is the position taken by Hill. He states, “it seems likely that both the original writer and the original audience most naturally would have understood ‘my angel,’ ‘The Lord,’ and ‘the angel of the covenant’ as titles for three separate divine beings.” He then seeks to distinguish the three beings from one another. Hill identifies “my messenger” as the angel of YHWH, who is “the essence of Yahweh” manifest visibly in human form. He states that “the Lord” is clearly Yahweh himself. The third figure is then attributed to the influence of ANE processional mythology, in which “the deity enters his abode accompanied by angelic attendants.” Thus, Hill suggests that the “messenger of the covenant” is another member of the divine assembly of YHWH accompanying “the Lord” as he proceeds to the temple. Rashi also understands Malachi to be referring to three divine beings, though he would see “my messenger” as the angel of death, “the Lord” as YHWH, and “the messenger of the covenant” as the angel of the Lord.

Clearing the Way: Redactions and Allusions in Malachi 3:1

The preceding review of literature demonstrates that no agreement currently exists with respect to the interpretation of Malachi 3:1. This in turn is due in large part to differing opinions regarding the presence (or absence) of redactions and allusions in the verse. Thus, before analyzing the text, it will be necessary to address these two issues.
Redactions in Malachi 3:1?
Many scholars today acknowledge the presence of redactions in the OT. However, the field of redaction criticism (as well as source criticism and form criticism) remains problematic. No clear, objective, agreed upon method exists for recognizing an editor’s fingerprints. This is why Collins wrote over ten years ago (and his statement remains true today), “Unfortunately, the criteria for establishing authentic words are not very clear, which means there is very little agreement and even less certainty as to which words are authentic and which are not.” This problem is compounded by three features that are unfortunately common in the practice of redaction criticism: (1) a readiness to detect an editor’s work on the basis of minor pieces of evidence, (2) a propensity for ingenious, yet unfounded, speculations regarding the motivations, social standing, and political agenda of alleged redactors, and (3) a deeper interest in solving puzzles behind the text rather than in examining the text as it stands. Thus, the results of redaction criticism often fail to convince and often detract from the goal of understanding the final form of the text. The treatment of Malachi 3:1 in biblical scholarship serves as a case in point.

In my judgment, an examination of Malachi 3:1 reveals no persuasive reasons for positing an insertion. First of all, there is no textual evidence for the existence of a different version of Mal 3:1. The few discrepancies that exist between the Hebrew textual witnesses of 3:1 can be explained without positing a separate Hebrew Vorlage. The same can be said of the witness from the LXX. This conclusion is supported by the fact that none of the scholars who posit a redaction in 3:1 do so on the basis of manuscript evidence. Second, the book of Malachi as a whole does not claim to use previously existing, written sources. This should at least caution scholars as they study the text. Third, the shift in person within 3:1-5 need not suggest editorial activity. As Glazier-McDonald has shown, this construction is attested elsewhere. Furthermore, this literary technique could have been intentionally employed by the original author. So for instance, if Verhoef’s interpretation of 2:17-3:5 is right, then the shift in persons could be a structural marker indicating that 3:2-4 addresses the accusation of 2:17 while 3:5 addresses the question of 2:17. Another plausible explanation (which I prefer) is that 3:1b-5 describes a single event twice. The shift in person functions to increase the dramatic tension of the section.
though Malachi 3:1 is difficult, the text is quite intelligible without having to presuppose the existence of a redactor. Thus, students of Malachi should focus their energies on understanding 3:1 as it stands instead of insisting on the presence of a mythical redactor.

**Allusions in Malachi 3:1?**

Scholars note the difficulty of detecting a genuine allusion. Various criteria have been proposed in order to guard interpreters against the ever-present dangers of eisegesis. Benjamin Sommer, for example, warns against alleging an allusion solely on the basis of repeated vocabulary. He states,

> If two texts share vocabulary items that are commonplace in Biblical Hebrew, the parallel between them is most likely coincidental. If they share terms that often appear together in biblical or ancient Near Eastern texts, then there is a strong likelihood that they independently draw on traditional vocabulary clusters.

According to Sommer, a cumulative case is required to demonstrate the presence of an allusion. This case must consist of evidence like the use of rare vocabulary clusters or the frequent repetition of particular ideas or themes which are clearly rooted in an older text. Weyde agrees in large part with Sommer’s assessment. He states, “Use of common terminology in two texts – catchwords – does not always seem to be a tenable criterion for claiming intertextuality.” He adds to that by saying, “A common motif is not necessarily a tenable criterion for suggesting a case of allusion.” According to Weyde, the occurrence of vocabulary repetition and common motifs are a necessary, yet not always sufficient, criteria for positing an allusion. This in turn is similar to Derek Bass’s criteria for allusions, though for him, “contextual awareness is the critical criterion for identifying, confirming, and analyzing quotation and allusion since two passages may share verbal parallels or other lexical links, yet contain no formal connection.” Taking these criteria together, in order to demonstrate the presence of a genuine allusion in Malachi 3:1, it must be shown both that (1) there are significant lexical links (rare words or uncommon word clusters) and (2) the two passages share a common context. Do either Exodus 23:20 or Isaiah 40:3 meet these criteria in relation to Malachi 3:1?
Exodus 23:20
Weyde rightly notes that the terminological similarities between Malachi 3:1 and Exodus 23:20 are indisputable. Five roots are repeated between these two texts: הנה ("behold"), שלח ("to send"), פנה ("face/before"), מלאך ("messenger") and דרך ("way"). Furthermore, these words occur together only in these texts, which indicates a rare vocabulary cluster. Though there are minor lexical and syntactical differences between the two texts, these cannot discount the possibility of an allusion; at most, they demonstrate that Malachi was not quoting the Exodus material. Thus, the lexical links should be viewed as evidence for an allusion to Exodus 23:20 in Malachi 3:1.

While the lexical evidence favors the presence of an allusion, a few commentators suggest that contextual differences between Malachi 3:1 and Exodus 23:20 weigh heavily against that conclusion. An initial reading reveals noticeable differences. Malachi 3:1 is part of the fourth disputation between the prophet and the people. The people were back in the land after exile and had been accusing God of delighting in evildoers and of being unjust. YHWH responds with an eschatological depiction of His coming, which would be preceded by the coming of "my messenger." The messenger’s task was simply to "clear a way before" YHWH, after which YHWH Himself would come to purify and judge his people. Exodus 23:20 on the other hand occurs towards the end of the Book of the Covenant, within which YHWH provides authoritative stipulations so that he might establish Israel as a "kingdom of priests" and as a "holy nation." Part of that covenant involves God bringing his people into Canaan and dispossessing its inhabitants. God therefore sends a messenger figure before Israel as their guardian on the way to the land of promise. The messenger’s role would be “to guard” (לְשָׁמַר) God’s people and “to bring” (לָבֵשׁל) them to the place established by YHWH. There are no hints in the context that any of this is to be fulfilled in the eschaton. Thus, a cursory examination of the verses in their context may lead readers to conclude that Malachi was not alluding to Exodus.

However, beneath these surface-level differences lies a deeper common contextual similarity: both Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 belong in sections that focus on YHWH’s purpose to establish a holy priesthood and a holy nation. Thus, in predicting God’s work of restoring the priesthood and sanctifying his people (3:2–5), Malachi may have been drawn to Exodus 23:20 because of the presence of a similar theme. Furthermore, the differences
between texts could be explained as expressions of the same divine purpose manifesting itself in different redemptive-historical situations. So on the one hand, Exodus 19:1–24:11 describes a situation where the establishment of the priestly nation is still prospective: Israel may or may not fulfill God’s intention of transforming them into a kingdom of priests. The messenger of Exodus 23:20 is then sent as a means of encouraging the nation’s obedience so that YHWH’s purpose might come to fruition. Malachi on the other hand must address a situation wherein the people and the priesthood have become completely corrupt. The prophet is aware that God’s original intent (Exod 19:4–6) has not come to fruition. Since he is convinced of God’s commitment to establishing a holy priesthood (Mal 1:6–14; 2:1–9) and a holy nation (Mal 2:10–16; 3:5–6), Malachi predicts that a second messenger will be dispatched. This messenger would not be instructed to guard Israel on the way to the promised land; instead, he would be sent to make preparations so that God himself might come to purify the sons of Levi and to destroy the wicked elements within Israel. Malachi 3:1 should then be understood as predicting the eschatological accomplishment of God’s long-disclosed purpose of establishing a holy priesthood and a holy nation. Thus, a similar contextual theme undergirds both Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1. If Bass is right to claim that shared context is decisive in determining the presence of an allusion (and I think he is), then Malachi 3:1 probably does allude to Exodus 23:20.

Isaiah 40:3
Isaiah 40:3 says, “A voice is crying out: In the wilderness, prepare (נפש) the way (דרך) of YHWH! Smoothen a highway in the desert-plain for our God!” Lexically speaking, the only similarities between the Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 are the two words נשפ and דרך. In the piel stem, the root נשפ is relatively infrequent, while דרך is quite common. However, the combination of the piel verb נשפ with דרך as its direct object only occurs in four places: Isaiah 40:3, 57:14, 62:10, and Malachi 3:1. This should count as a rare verbal cluster and it therefore tilts the evidence in favor of a genuine allusion.

Contextually speaking, Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 have several things in common. Both texts find themselves in eschatological sections of their respective works. Both texts depict a figure given the role of clearing a path. Both texts speak of a way being prepared so that YHWH Himself may tread
upon it in order to come to his people. However, there are also important differences between the two passages. Isaiah 40:3 depicts YHWH’s arrival in a setting of consolation for the people; Malachi 3:1 depicts YHWH coming in order to purify and judge. Isaiah sees YHWH coming in order to accomplish a second exodus for his exiled people; Malachi on the other hand does not depict the day of YHWH’s coming as a second exodus. Does this decisively rule out an allusion to Isaiah 40:3? Not necessarily. Malachi may have been alluding to Isaiah 40:3 with a hint of irony. The blaspheming community clamors for God to come and judge those they see as evil (2:17). Malachi responds with language reminiscent of Isaiah 40:3, assuring them that the King is in fact coming (Mal 3:1). The positive connotation of Isaiah 40:3 would seem initially encouraging, as would the refinement of “the sons of Levi” (Mal 3:2-4). But in the end, Malachi delivers the punchline: “Then I will draw near to you for judgment” (Mal 3:5). The allusion to Isaiah 40:3 then heightens the rhetorical impact of Malachi 3:1 and adds to the royal imagery. Furthermore, Malachi may be leading readers to understand “the voice” in Isaiah 40:3 in light of the messenger’s voice in Exodus 23:20. This may suggest that YHWH’s messenger would prepare the way for God’s coming (Mal 3:1) through a kind of proclamation (Isa 40:3) which could only be ignored at the cost of divine judgment (Exod 23:20). Thus, given the rare vocabulary cluster and the contextual similarities, readers should probably see an allusion to Isaiah 40:3 in Malachi 3:1.

Analyzing the Text: A Fresh Interpretation of Malachi 3:1

The Context

Having hopefully cleared the way, I now turn to the most difficult problem in Malachi 3:1, which is deciphering Malachi’s intention. What did Malachi mean when he said, “Behold, I am sending my messenger, and he will clear a way before me. And suddenly, he will come to his temple; the Lord whom you are seeking and the messenger of the covenant in whom you are delighting; Behold, he is coming, says YHWH of hosts”? As has already been mentioned, Mal 3:1 occurs in the fourth major section (2:17-3:6) of the book. The section begins with a jarring accusation from the prophet: “You have worn YHWH out with your words.” The prophet then anticipates the people’s defensive response: “But you will say: How have we wearied
Malachi then depicts the people’s attitudes by putting words in their mouths that mirror the dispositions of their hearts: “When you say, ‘All who do evil are good in the eyes of YHWH! And in them He delights!’ or ‘Where is the God of justice?’” The people harbored bitter thoughts towards YHWH, believing him to be perverse, unjust, and slow to act. YHWH however is none of these things, and in 3:1, Malachi begins to unpack just how YHWH will demonstrate his holy character once again.

**My Messenger**

The demonstration of God’s character would begin with the sending of a messenger. But who or what is he? First, it must be repeated that Mal 3:1 shows no signs of redaction. Thus, in pursuing an interpretation of this text, one should avoid distracting oneself with theories dependent on redaction criticism. Second, though the allusions to Exodus and Isaiah should inform our understanding of “my messenger,” they should not be seen as providing a one-to-one identification of the figure in Malachi 3:1. Malachi’s allusion to these texts may provide insight into the messenger’s role and function without necessarily determining his nature. With these guidelines in mind, should the first messenger be understood as human or angelic? While 3:1 by itself is not decisive, the book of Malachi hints towards a human messenger.

First, in Malachi 2:7, the prophet states, “For the lips of a priest guard knowledge and they will seek torah from his mouth; for he is the messenger of YHWH of hosts.” The messenger (מלאך) of 2:7 is clearly human, and this would suggest that the messenger in 3:1 is human as well. Second, Malachi 3:23-24 (MT; 4:5-6 ET) probably alludes back to 3:1 and identifies the messenger with a human being: Elijah. Third, the superscription which begins the book (1:1) indicates that it was delivered by the hand of “Malachi” (מלאכי), who was most likely a human being. Lastly, the phrase “and suddenly” (ופתאם) should be understood as marking a sharp distinction between the messenger and the figure/s that follow. Thus, “my messenger” cannot be identified with “the Lord” (אדון) or “the messenger of the covenant (מלאך הברית), who perhaps may be non-human/s.

The evidence then seems to suggest that the first messenger was a human being. But is that all we are meant to learn about him? I surmise that Malachi intends to portray the sent messenger as both prophet and priest. A number of scholars have recognized a prophetic backdrop for “my messenger.”
These typically argue as follows: (1) the connection between Malachi 3:1 and 3:22-24 demonstrates that this figure is prophetic, (2) the OT refers to prophets as “messengers” (מ לאכים), and (3) in the post-exilic era, prophets had replaced the role of the kings of the past, and thus, a prophet could take the eschatological role assigned to the Davidic monarch. While I agree that Malachi’s depiction of the messenger has prophetic overtones, I also believe that many scholars overlook the significance of the obvious: Malachi explicitly identifies the priest as the messenger of YHWH in 2:7. Given such a clear statement, it seems strange that some do not believe it possible for “my messenger” (מלאך) in 3:1 to be a priest. Though there are connections to Malachi 3:22-24, the repetition of “messenger” (מלאך) forms a more apparent connection to 2:7. Thus, if it is appropriate to identify the first messenger on the basis of the Elijah prophesy, it should be even more apt to view this figure in light Malachi 2:7. While it is suggestive that the designation “messenger” is elsewhere used of prophets, the fact that Malachi practically defines his use of the term in 2:7 should shed considerable light on the occurrence of the same word in 3:1.

Three other hints corroborate this interpretation of the identity of “my messenger.” First, there are multiple connections between 2:17-3:6 and 1:6-2:9. Among the examples noted by Snyman are the following: (1) the offerings mentioned in 1:10, 11, and 13 are brought up again in 3:3-4, (2) “pure offerings” (מנחה טהורה) are mentioned in 1:11 while in 3:3, YHWH sits to purify (מטהר) the sons of Levi, (3) the root “evil” (רע) is repeated in 1:8 and 2:17, (4) as I have noted, מלאך (“messenger”) is common to 2:7 and 3:1, (5) priests turned from YHWH’s ways (דרכי) in 2:9 while the messenger of 3:1 prepares a way (דרך) for YHWH, and (6) Mal 2:5 says Levi feared (וייראני) YHWH while 3:5 says God’s people did not fear him (ולא יראוני). Furthermore, the context between the two sections is related because both deal with judgment upon the priests. This would suggest a cultic backdrop for 3:1, which would increase the likelihood that Malachi intends his readers to view the messenger as a priest. Second, Malachi 3:22-24 (MT), which connects Elijah to the messenger of 3:1, is linked to the description of Levi in 2:6. Both Levi and Elijah “turned”
individuals: Levi turned many from iniquity and Elijah would turn the hearts of fathers towards sons and sons towards fathers. Furthermore, the call to remember the torah given in 3:22 would bring to mind 2:6-9, the only other place in the book where the word occurs. This would suggest that Elijah (who is identified with the messenger of 3:1) also fulfills a priestly role. Lastly, there are good reasons to think that Malachi himself may have been a priest. This could account for both his concern for and knowledge of priestly abuses (1:6-2:9, 3:1-4). This could also explain why he used the root מלאך (“messenger”) to denote priests in 2:7. If Malachi the prophet was also a priest, then 2:7 would function as a powerful play on words, reminding a corrupt priesthood that they too were called to be messengers of YHWH, just as Malachi had been. If it is legitimate to view Malachi as a priest, then the designation “my messenger” of 3:1, which is identical in form to the name, would suggest that the sent messenger would be a priest.

The Lord and Messenger of the Covenant

So far, we have determined that YHWH would come to his people by sending a human prophet/priest to prepare his way. This then leaves us with two figures: “the Lord” (האדון) and “the messenger of the covenant” (הברית מלאך). How should we understand them? I believe an examination of the text leads to four conclusions.

First, the two should not be identified with “my messenger” of 3:1. As mentioned earlier, the ופתאם construction (“and suddenly”) serves to separate the person and activity of the first messenger (מלאך) from the two figures that follow. Furthermore, the nature of the first messenger’s task in light of the ANE background leads to this interpretation. Messengers were not sent to prepare paths for themselves. They were sent ahead of their kings in order to clear the roads for their coming. Therefore, it seems more likely that the sent messenger prepares the way for the coming of the Lord and the messenger of the covenant.

Second, “the Lord” should be understood to be YHWH. I come to this conclusion for the following reasons: (1) the singular word為什麼 (“Lord”) with the definite article always refers to YHWH in the OT, (2) the context, which includes the complaints of the people in 2:17 and the preparatory work of the messenger in 3:1, prepares readers to expect the coming of YHWH,
(3) the temple, which belongs to YHWH, is said to belong to “the Lord”, and (4) the allusion to Isaiah 40:3 points in this direction because the path is being prepared for YHWH.

Third, the two titles (“the Lord” and “the messenger of the covenant”) refer to the same person. Several observations lend credence to this claim. For starters, the author employed a chiastic structure in 3:1b, which suggests that he identified “the Lord” and “the messenger of the covenant” with one another. Also noteworthy, the relative clauses which state that the people were “seeking” the Lord and “desiring” the messenger of the covenant supports this interpretation. This is because the people in 2:17 were clamoring for the coming of “the God of justice,” and there is no evidence in the text that they desired a second figure. Most decisively perhaps, verses 2-4 do not depict the actions of a duo, but of a single figure. Malachi 3:2, for instance, states, “But who is going to endure the day of his coming, and who is going to stand when he appears? For he is like a refining fire and like a washing soap.” The singular pronouns would be problematic if Malachi envisioned two distinct figures coming to refine the sons of Levi.

Fourth, Malachi 3:1 depicts YHWH as a coming king. Several factors in Malachi 3:1 point to royal imagery. To start with, the preparatory work of the messenger and the allusion to Isa 40:3 imply that YHWH is coming to his people as a king. The use of the word היכל for temple also connotes YHWH’s kingship, as does the title האדון (“the Lord”). Additionally, YHWH’s kingship is a theme emphasized forcefully elsewhere in the book. These clues help readers to discern that Malachi intended to depict YHWH as a royal figure.

Lastly, there are a number of good reasons to believe that Malachi intended to portray YHWH’s coming with priestly connotations. These reasons would include: (1) the section (2:17-3:6) is filled with cultic terminology, which would make the presence of a priestly figure appropriate, (2) the fact that the temple is YHWH’s destination suggests this interpretation, (3) YHWH’s mission suits this interpretation, for he comes to refine and purify “the sons of Levi,” (4) the title “messenger of the covenant” (מלאך הברית) given to YHWH strongly suggests this interpretation. This last point deserves to be unpacked.

I have already pointed out that Malachi practically defines the “messenger” (מלאך) as a priest in 2:7. It would be surprising if Malachi used the word just a few verses later without intending to draw readers back to his previous...
usage. But what is even more significant is the use of “covenant” (ברית) in conjunction with “messenger” (מלאך). This combination almost undoubtedly alludes back to 2:4-7. The lexical links Malachi created would immediately draw readers’ attention back to the priest as the messenger of YHWH and to the covenant with Levi. This becomes even more apparent when one considers the congruence between the two sections: in 2:4, YHWH expresses His desire to preserve the covenant with Levi and in 3:2-4, He comes to refine and purify of the “sons of Levi.” The accumulated evidence then provides good grounds for understanding, not only the forerunner, but also the coming Lord in priestly terms.

Conclusion

After “preparing the way” and laboring in the text, I have come to three conclusions. First, Malachi 3:1 ought to be read as a whole and in light of the original author’s intent, rather than that of a posited redactor. I have tried to demonstrate that there are no persuasive reasons for claiming the presence of editorial activity in the verse. Second, a study of vocabulary links and contextual similarity reveals that Malachi 3:1 alludes to Isaiah 40:3 and to Exodus 23:20. Lastly, Malachi 3:1 predicts the coming of a human prophetic priest who will prepare the way for the divine royal priest.

If this interpretation is correct, then Malachi 3:1 becomes quite significant in light of its use in the NT. First of all, the synoptic interpretation of Malachi 3:1 would seem to accord with the prophet’s intentions. When Mark (Mark 1:2), Matthew (Matt 11:10), and Luke (Luke 1:76, 7:27) claim that John the Baptist is the sent messenger of Malachi 3:1, the fact that John is both a prophet and a priest would add legitimacy to their interpretation. Second, this reading of Malachi 3:1 may inform our reading of John’s ministry. John’s proclamation of repentance should be seen as the preparatory work prophesied in Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Furthermore, John is revealed to be the typological fulfillment of the messenger spoken of in Exodus 23:20, who now preaches repentance in order to guard God’s people from eschatological judgment. Lastly, this understanding of Malachi 3:1 sheds light on the identity of Christ as portrayed in the gospels. By depicting John the Baptist as the messenger of Malachi 3:1, the gospel writers present Jesus as “the Lord” and “the messenger of the covenant.” This means in turn that
Matthew, Mark, and Luke all identify Jesus with YHWH; they understand God’s promise to visit his people as being fulfilled in Christ.\textsuperscript{150} It would also suggest that they understood Jesus to be a royal priest, which would be consistent with the Messianic expectations of the OT.\textsuperscript{151} Furthermore, these inner-biblical connections provide readers with hints that Jesus is the true Israel. God’s desire to establish Israel as an obedient kingdom of priests is fulfilled in the Jesus, the perfect priest-king.\textsuperscript{152} Altogether, Malachi 3:1 proves to be a marvelous passage which may prepare the way for a clearer vision of the glory of Christ.

\textsuperscript{1} All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. While this translation is slightly wooden, it preserves a chiastic structure which will be important for the interpretation presented later in the paper.


\textsuperscript{3} Scholars are divided as to whether “Malachi” (מַלְאכִּי) should be understood as a title or a name. On the one hand, many believe that the term could refer to a title which was derived from the reference in Mal 3:1 to “my messenger” (See Julia M. O’Brien, \textit{Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi} [Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004], 287; Bruce V. Malchow, "The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1,” \textit{Journal of Biblical Literature} 103 [1984]: 252; David L. Petersen, \textit{Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary} [London: SCM, 1995], 165–66; J. M. P. Smith, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Malachi (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 19; Terry W. Eddinger, \textit{Malachi: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text} (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 8). These typically argue that (1) the LXX translation points in this direction, (2) no one would have named their son “my messenger,” (3) there are no other individuals in the OT who have that name, and (4) some Jewish and early Christian traditions believed that Ezra was the מַלְאכִּי. On the other hand, several scholars maintain that the word refers to the name of the prophet (See Walter C. Kaiser, \textit{Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love} [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984], 13; Andrew E. Hill, \textit{Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary} (vol. 25D, The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 15–18; Pamela J. Scalise, “Malachi,” in \textit{Minor Prophets II} (New International Biblical Commentary 18; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 320; Charles L. Feinberg, \textit{The Minor Prophets} (Chicago: Moody, 1977), 249; Joyce G. Baldwin, \textit{Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary} (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 28; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 226; Beth Glazier-McDonald, \textit{Malachi: The Divine Messenger} (SBL Dissertation Series 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 28–29; Pieter A. Verhoef, \textit{The Books of Haggai and
See S. D. Snyman, "Once Again: Investigating the Identity of the Three Figures Mentioned in Malachi 3:1,"
Commenting on the character of the redactor, Petersen says, "This commentator is, therefore, not a utopian
Redditt suspects that the original author was a Levitical reformer responsible for two collections of material.
Malachi (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 156. For evidence, they point out that (1) no other
prophetic book has come to us anonymously, (2) there are Jewish traditions that take מַלָּכִי as a name, (3)
the name has analogies in other names in the OT, (4) יְהוָה could be a name which means "messeger of
YHWH" or "YHWH is my angel," and (5) none of the arguments against taking מַלָּכִי as a personal name are
decisive. Rex Mason, Preaching the Tradition: Homily and Hermeneutics After the Exile (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1990), 236). On the other hand thinks the issue cannot be resolved, while Ralph Smith,
Mishu-Malachi (vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 298 believes the
discussion to be unimportant. While certainty is impossible, I tend towards understanding "Malachi" to
be the prophet's name.

In 1987, J.D.W. Watts claimed that "the unity of the book [i.e. Malachi] has been rarely challenged except for
the last three verses." If Watts was correct, then Malachi scholarship has changed in the past two decades.
Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 206–12; Malchow, "Messenger," 253; Paul L Redditt, "The Book of
Tradition, 249–50.

Other arguments are also used to make the case that 3:1b-4 was the work of a later redactor. Though Redditt
("Malachi in Its Social Setting," 247) also notes the shift in person, he says, "The real key is that a new
audience was being addressed, one that had been seeking the Lord and that delighted in his messenger
and his covenant." In addition to the shift in person, Mason (Mason, Preaching and Tradition, 249–50) also
to points to the "hopeless confusion" over the identity of the messenger and the "quite different emphasis on
the purification of the priesthood rather than judgment of sinners" as signs of growth in the text.

He sees the redaction of Malachi 3:1b-4 as part of a trajectory which began with the prophecy regarding
Zerubbabel and Joshua in Zech 4:11-14 and which ended with the expectation of a messiah from Levi

Collins (The Mantle of Elijah, 20:32) suggests that the terms "redactor," "writer," and "editor" all be distin-
guished from one another. He designates the individual/s who collected literary material during "pre-book
phase" the redactor/s. Writers on the other hand were those individual/s responsible for using the redacted
materials to produce books. Finally, editors were those individual/s who produced revisions of those books,
resulting in the final forms that remain today. Despite his proposal, I will be using editor and redactor syn-
nonymously for three reasons. First of all, few scholars have followed Collins' schema. Second, the attempt to
delineate between the work of a "redactor" and an "editor" (using Collin's definitions) is too speculative to
be helpful. Lastly, it is not altogether clear why a single individual could not be responsible for collecting the
prophetic material, arranging it meaningfully into a book, and inserting editorial comments for theological and
canonical purposes.

Redditt suspects that the original author was a Levitical reformer responsible for two collections of material.
The first corrected the moral failures of the people while the second addressed the abuses of the Zadokite
priests. Underlying this second critique was a desire to downplay the prevailing distinction between
Zadokites and Levites. Redditt then argues that the redactor followed in the original author's footsteps, but
broadened his critique to include the mainline Levitical party. Redditt believes the redactor represented a
group of disenfranchised Levites who were ostracized for aligning themselves with the original reformer.
This redactor then arranged the original material and added to it in order to assure his fellow dissenters that
they would be elevated on the day of YHWH while the rest of the Levites would be judged. See "Malachi
in Its Social Setting," 251-54.

Commenting on the character of the redactor, Petersen says, "This commentator is, therefore, not a utopian
but a realist, one who could imagine a proper prior moment and one who could imagine Levites acting
properly in the ritual ambit." See Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 211.

S. D. Snyman, "Once Again: Investigating the Identity of the Three Figures Mentioned in Malachi 3:1,"

Since 3:4 contains no third person forms, Snyman argues that this verse is problematic for those who rely
on the shift in person to claim 3:1b-4 as an editorial addition. See "Once Again," 1032–33.

Though Snyman does not cite him as a source, his theory seems like an extension of Michael Fishbane's
explanation for the inner biblical exegesis of the post-exilic period. Fishbane posits that the tension between
the trust in the authority of past prophetic words and the failure of those words to materialize led to the
re-appropriation and reinterpretation of those prior texts to fit the current historical situation. As he states
regarding the use of earlier prophetic material by later redactors, "reinterpretation is necessary precisely
because the original oracle-revelation was not yet – or not conclusively – actualized." And again, "As these ... were believed to be God's words, and so testified to divine involvement in history, failed expectations were not abandoned but rather reinterpreted." See the discussion in Michael Fishbane, "Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 3 (1980): 354–59.

Snyman, "Once Again," 1041–43; In fact, Snyman believes 3:22 and 3:23–24 should be attributed to two separate redactors. See *Malachi*, 184.


Glazier-McDonald, "Mal'ak," 96.


Julia M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* (SBL Dissertation Series 121; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 56. While O'Brien states this as a critique, it turns out that this is precisely the kind of "evidence" some Biblical scholars look for in order to identify redactions. See for instance Müller, Pakkala, and Romeny, *Evidence of Editing*, 221.

Watts, "Introduction," 375; he cites only Mal 3:22-24 (MT) as being potentially late.


Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 131. Hill also seems to suggest that the connection allows us to identify "my messenger" (Media) as the angel of the Lord. See Hill, *Malachi*, 25D: 265.


While Weyde says that lexical links between the two verses are undeniable, he seems to voice uncertainty regarding the presence of an actual allusion because of the differing circumstances behind both passages. See Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 288:288.


Snyman, "Once Again," 1042.


As Kaiser (Malachi: *God's Unchanging Love*, 80) states, "The situation was a familiar one in the ancient Orient, for whenever a king was about to arrive at a town or village, messengers were sent ahead in order to allow the town and villages to make the necessary preparations to receive their royal guest. Likewise, God would be announced by a promised forerunner." See also Snyman, *Malachi*, 132.

Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 138. She also claims that Ps 24 is important for interpreting Mal 3:1. She builds her case on the use of סעט ("to come") and וצמ ("seeking") in both texts. See *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, 136-41.


Malone, "Messiah Announced," 221, fn 21; emphasis mine.

58 Many who have written on the issue suggest that edited material can be detected by noticing (1) inconsistencies, (2) incoherent syntax, (3) changes in perspective, style, or topic, and (4) redundancy. (See for example Müller, Pakkala, and Romeny, Evidence of Editing, 221; Barton, Reading the Old Testament, 24; Marvin A. Sweeney, "Formation and Form in Prophetic Literature," in Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future (ed. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards; Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 250.

59 For a brief overview of German scholars who hold this view, see Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:286–87. David M. Miller ("The Messenger, the Lord, and the Coming Judgment in the Reception History of Malachi 3," New Testament Studies 53, no. 1 [2007]: 4) depicts Petersen as a proponent of this view. While Miller may be right, Petersen's position is muddled. The difficulty stems from his insistence on a later redactor's work. See Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 211.

60 Charles D. Isbell, Malachi (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 59.


64 See Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:289–90.

65 She believes that, in Mal 3:1-5, the author emphasizes the same scenario through repetition. Thus, the activity of “my messenger” corresponds with that of the “messenger of the covenant” (purifying the sons of Levi), while the activity of “the Lord” corresponds to the activity of YHWH (executing the judgment of the people). See Scalise, "Malachi," 350.


67 Glazier-McDonald, Malachi: The Divine Messenger, 128–34; Eddinger, Malachi, 78; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 220–25; Snyman, "Once Again," 1038–41. Verhoef (The Books of Haggai and Malachi, 288–89) tries to nuance his view by seeing both an identification and a distinction being made between “the Lord” and “the messenger of the covenant.” Though it is not clear whether Petersen holds to the one-person approach or the two-person approach, he also identifies “the Lord” with “the messenger of the covenant.” See Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 211.

68 Snyman nuances his view when he says, “Yahweh as the Lord and the angel/messenger of the covenant are then almost identical figures, but at the same time they must be distinguished from one another. The angel/messenger of the covenant is not the Lord, but in the angel/messenger of the covenant, the Lord himself is met.” See Malachi, 134.


70 Glazier-McDonald, Malachi: The Divine Messenger, 131. However, she also makes the untenable assertion that the prophetic author intentionally used a deceptive double entendre when he referenced נביא. Glazier-McDonald believes that he used this particular title because the people would assume he was speaking about himself, when he was actually referring to the future Elijah. See Malachi: The Divine Messenger, 135.


73 The description of his position is taken from Hill, Malachi, 25D:288–89.

74 Hill however does state that it is possible for “my messenger” and “the messenger of the covenant” to be two titles for one divine person. See Malachi, 25D:289.

75 As cited in Hill, Malachi, 25D:287. Paul Redditt also seems holds to the three-person approach. He identifies "my messenger" as the original prophetical source of the bulk of the material and “the Lord” as YHWH. He then states that the identity of the third figure “is lost to us,” though another redactor identified him as Elijah in Mal 3:23-24 (MT). See Redditt, "Malachi in Its Social Setting," 250.


77 Many who have written on the issue suggest that edited material can be detected by noticing (1) inconsistencies, (2) incoherent syntax, (3) changes in perspective, style, or topic, and (4) redundancy. (See for example Müller, Pakkala, and Romeny, Evidence of Editing, 221; Barton, Reading the Old Testament, 24; Marvin A. Sweeney, "Formation and Form in Prophetic Literature," in Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future (ed. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards; Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 88.
The witnesses to the MT (Aleppo codex and Leningrad codex) are identical. Four discrepancies exist.

This may seem like a strange description of redaction criticism, since the field originally arose as a means of treating the final forms of the texts and of going beyond the diachronic interests of source critics and form critics. However, redaction criticism still rests firmly on source critical and form critical conclusions, and many redaction critics focus most of their energies to differentiating between the ideology behind the original sources and that of the subsequent editors.

The people's complaints in 2:17 should probably be understood as being directed primarily (not exclusively) towards the abuses of the priests. The numerous lexical connections between 2:17-3:6 and 1:6-2:9 would support this interpretation (see Snyman, "Once Again," 1037–38). This reading also provides the basis for YHWH's response in 3:1-4, where He speaks of refining the "sons of Levi" (3:1-4). However, the end of the
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section reveals that the people clamoring for God’s justice failed to recognize their own culpability. Thus, the Lord’s coming would bring judgment not only upon sinful priests, but upon those who were questioning YHWH while disregarding His covenant (3:5). The shift from the third person forms in 3:1b-4 to the first person form of 3:5 would then be functioning rhetorically to heighten the text’s impact on initial readers, highlighting the fact that those who questioned God’s justice would themselves experience that justice on the day of the Lord.

68 Contra Mason, Preaching and Tradition, 249–50. Redditt (“Malachi in Its Social Setting,” 247) is also mistaken when he suggests that 3:1-5 is unintelligible as it stands. He makes this claim because he sees 3:1b as addressing a new audience. I will argue that 3:1-5 addresses the same audience: those who were blaspheming God by doubting His justice. The fact that they are “seeking” the Lord and “delighting” in His coming only highlights the irony of the situation. For similar interpretations, see Verhoef, The Books of Haggai and Malachi, 289–90; Scalise, “Malachi,” 349; Scalise, “To Fear or Not to Fear,” 413; Baldwin, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary, 265; Kaiser, Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love, 79.

69 I would argue that it is more fruitful to assume the work of a single author unless there is decisive evidence to posit the work of a redactor. Evidence would include (1) clearly anachronistic statements in non-prophetic material, (2) statements in the text that acknowledge the use of other sources, (3) manuscript evidence which strongly suggests the existence of different Vorlagen, and (4) the survival of parallel texts whose similarity strongly suggests that one borrowed from the other or that both borrowed from the same sources.

70 In many ways, finding evidence for a redactor is like trying to find evidence for the existence of Bigfoot: once one is convinced that he exists, evidence for his existence begins to abound.

71 Vanhoozer defines allusions when he says, “To allude is to refer to something—a person, place, event, or other text—indirectly.” See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 256.


75 Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:51.

76 Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:52.

77 Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:52.

78 Derek Bass, “Hosea’s Use of Scripture: An Analysis of His Hermeneutics” (Ph.D. diss, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 100; emphasis original.

79 Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:288. Even those who argue against an allusion do not do so on the basis of lexical differences between the texts.


81 Most commentators agree on the divisions of the book, though there is still much discussion on form criticism in relation to the book of Malachi. For a thorough discussion of the forms (Gattungen) found in Malachi, see Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:14–48.

82 With respect to the reported words of the people, I agree with Weyde when he says, “The words of the addressees, though they might be real citations in some cases, are probably fictitious; the prophet interprets their opinion and incorporates it in his message.” See Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:12.


84 If Mal 3:23-24 (MT) describes the same messenger, then his preparatory work would consist of turning the hearts of fathers to their sons and sons to their fathers. This too is dissimilar from the role of the messenger in Exod 23:20. See Exod 23:20-33

85 See Exod 23:20-33.

86 Exodus 19:4-6 reveals the importance of the priesthood and the nation for understanding Exod 19:1–24:11. There are at least two reasons that this is so. First, Exod 19:4–6 disclose the Lord’s purpose for the
establishment of the covenant unpacked in Exod 20–24 (in fact, Gentry refers to the verses as a climax of the section; see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2012], 309–15). It only makes sense that Moses intended for readers to keep this purpose in mind as they read the entire section. Second, Exod 19:4–6 reveals that the nation and the priesthood were meant to be coterminous. Thus, when Moses addresses the nation of Israel throughout Exod 19–24, he is speaking to those who were also called to be priests.

Other differing circumstances would include the facts that (1) a priestly class within the nation of Israel had been previously established, (2) the people were not on the way to the promised land but were currently inhabiting it, and (3) the covenant established at Sinai had already been broken (Mal 3:5).

Given the strong lexical links between Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20, it may also be significant that “treasured possession” (םַקָּבָלָה) is found in both Mal 3:17 and Exod 19:5. The root is rare, only occurring eight times. And it is only used of God’s people six times (Exod 19:5, Deut 7:6, 14:2, 26:18, Ps 135:4, and Mal 3:17). Given that (1) Malachi already alludes to the book of the covenant and (2) Exod 19:5 probably provides the impetus for the later descriptions of Israel as God’s “treasured possession,” there is a strong likelihood that Mal 3:17 displays an awareness of Exod 19:5. This in turn provides more reason to see its influence in Mal 3:1.


Other contextual features have been put forth in order to argue for an allusion from Mal 3:1 to Exod 23:20. Stuart (“Minor Prophets,” 1350–52) claims that both texts describe a mighty act of victory won by YHWH for Israel. Petersen (*Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 210) believes that the messenger figure in both texts enables the people of Israel to keep the covenant stipulations. O’Brien (*Priest and Levite*, 74) states that the two messenger figures are linked because “both in covenant making and covenant lawsuit, the figure of the messenger is central.” Rikk E. Watts posits that Malachi’s use of Exod 23:20 is “an ironic recapitulation of the first [Exodus]” (see “Mark” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 118).

This represents a change in my views since the initial presentation of this paper at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. My thanks go to Dr. Jim Hamilton and to those who took part in his seminar entitled “Methods in Biblical Theology,” which met in the Spring of 2015. Their feedback was instrumental in leading me to rethink my conclusions.


An Accordance search reveals that מַקָּבָלָה occurs 706 times.

The reason that an allusion to Isa 57 or 62 should not be posited is because the contexts differ significantly.


In Isaiah, the figure is simply described as a voice crying in the wilderness (הָנָה). This figure seems to be working to prepare a way for YHWH by calling for that path to be made clear.


I would be happy to help you with your questions or any other assistance you may need. Please provide me with the details or the specific tasks you have in mind.
My Messenger, the LORD, and the Messenger of the Covenant: Malachi 3:1 Revisited


Isa 42:19, 44:26, Hag 1:13, 2 Chr 36:15-16; However, Weyde claims that Eccl 5:5 uses עליה to refer to a priest. See Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:197.


Though in my opinion, Malchow wrongly sees 3:1b–4 as a later interpolation and he errs in his explanation for the origin of the priestly terminology in Mal 3, he is right to give due respect to the influence that Malachi 2:7 should have on interpretations of 3:1. See Malchow, "Messenger." See also Weyde, Prophecy and Teaching, 288:289.

Verhoef (The Books of Haggai and Malachi, 288) argues against a priestly identification by saying, "The fact that the messenger of 3:1 is sent indicates that he may not be identified with the priests who are also called 'messengers of the Lord' in 2:7." It is difficult to understand how the sending in 3:1 militates against a priestly identification. Snyman ("Once Again," 1041) claims that the messenger cannot be a priest because 2:1-9 utters a scathing critique and a curse against the priesthood. However, he fails to recognize that YHWH's desire is to preserve the covenant with Levi (2:4), that God's plan is to refine (not destroy) the priesthood, and that YHWH's critique and curse fall on unfaithful priests and not the priesthood in and of itself.

Snyman ("Once Again," 1037) rightly says, "When Malachi 1:6-2:9 and 2:17-3:7a are examined a surprisingly close connection between these two units is found."

In Malachi, roots related to תора occur only in 1:11 and 3:3.

In Malachi, תורה only occurs in 2:8 and 3:1.

The use of תוריה ("he turned back") and תורה ("torah") connect Mal 2:6 to Mal 3:22-24. The former word occurs in Malachi only in 2:6 and 3:24, while the second occurs only in 2:6-9 and 3:22.

So also Assis, "Moses, Elijah, Messianic Hope," 209.


This was not unheard of in Israel's history, for both Jeremiah (Jer 1:1) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:3) were of priestly descent.


The waw would be functioning as a disjunctive indicating a shift in scene and in participants. See Waltke and O'Connor, IBHS, §39.2.3a.


Glazier-McDonald, Malachi: The Divine Messenger, 128–34; Eddinger, Malachi, 78; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 220–25; Snyman, "Once Again," 1038–41. Verhoef (The Books of Haggai and Malachi, 288–89) tries to nuance his view by seeing both an identification and a distinction being made between "the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant." Though it is not clear whether Petersen holds to the one-person approach or the two-person approach, he also identifies "the Lord" with "the messenger of the covenant." See Petersen, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi, 211.

The chiastic structure works as follows: (A) "And suddenly He will come to His temple, (B) the Lord whom you are seeking, (B') and the messenger of the covenant in whom you are delighting, (A') Behold, He is coming." For similar arguments based on the structure, see Snyman, "Once Again," 1040; Malone, "Messiah Announced," 219; Verhoef, The Books of Haggai and Malachi, 288–89.

Commentators who do not see the Lord and the messenger of the covenant as one person often flounder in attempting to account for the people's desire for the messenger. Malchow ("Messenger," 254–55) posits that their desire is to be explained by a growing expectation for a priestly Messiah. But his hypothesis is based on his presupposition of editorial activity in 3:1. Weyde (Prophecy and Teaching, 288:289–90) agrees with Malchow regarding the desire for a priestly messenger (although he disputes Malchow's claims of...
Thus Rikk E. Watts says, “Because John clearly functions as Malachi’s Elijah, Israel must listen to him if
these considerations also conflict with the view that Malachi is predicting the coming of the Messiah.
The purification of the “sons of Levi” presents difficulties for Christian interpreters. Does Malachi envision
for this reason, I believe that the covenant referred to in the phrase “messenger of the covenant” is the
They are to avoid the curse that Yahweh’s coming might occasion” (see “Mark” in
He mistaken? Though more work needs to be done on this issue, there are at least three possible ways forward in my estimation. First, it is possible that Malachi was not using the phrase “sons of Levi” in a strict manner. O’Brien (Priest and Levite, 143–44) has demonstrated quite convincingly that Malachi used the designation “sons of Levi” synonymously with the term “priest.” Garrett (Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch [Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000], 233) has also made the case that the OT can use the term “Levite” as a “loose synonym” for priest. This seems to be the case in Isa 66:21 when YHWH says of non-Israelites, “And I will even take some among them as priests and as Levites.” Thus, it may be possible that Malachi was simply saying that YHWH would work in the coming age to produce a pure priesthood. This would then be consistent with the NT perspective and with Malachi’s own vision in 1:11. Second, it is possible that the prophet used the expression “sons of Levi” to refer specifically to the ethnic group, though the NT fulfilled this prediction through the establishment of a universal priesthood. Third, it is possible that Malachi refers specifically to the descendants of Levi, and the fulfillment of this promise is still future. If Rom 11:25 refers to a future ingathering of ethnic Israel, it is plausible that the refinement of the sons of Levi will be included in that act of God. These considerations also conflict with the view that Malachi is predicting the coming of the Messiah. Instead, the prophet is envisioning the arrival of God Himself. The NT fulfillment is consistent with Malachi’s expectations however, because God did come to His people in the person of Jesus, the Christ. See

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See also Simon J. Gathercole, The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 244.

The OT speaks repeatedly of a coming king in the line of David (see for instance Isa 9:6 [ET 9:7], 16:5, 22:22, Jer 23:5, 30:9, Ezek 34:23). God also promises to raise up a “faithful priest,” for whom YHWH would build a “sure house” (1 Sam 2:35). Furthermore, there are hints in the OT that these two offices would come together in a single person (see Ps 110:2-4; Zech 6:13).

Matthew especially presents Jesus as the true Israel (see Matt 2:13–15, 4:1–11, 11:10, 12:15–21). As Hamilton (God’s Glory, 364) notes, the evangelist “presents Jesus as recapitulating the history of Israel.” See also Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 439; Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant, 105–6; Blomberg, “Matthew,” 8 & 18.