

International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament

Aaron Schart

MALACHI



Kohlhammer

Kohlhammer

International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT)

Edited by:

Walter Dietrich, David M. Carr, Adele Berlin, Erhard Blum,
Irmtraud Fischer, Shimon Gesundheit, Walter Groß,
Gary Knoppers (†), Bernard M. Levinson, Ed Noort,
Helmut Utzschneider and Beate Ego
(Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books)

Cover:

Top: Panel from a four-part relief on the “Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III” (859–824 BCE) depicting the Israelite king Jehu (845–817 BCE; 2 Kings 9f) paying obeisance to the Assyrian “King of Kings.” The vassal has thrown himself to the ground in front of his overlord. Royal servants are standing behind the Assyrian king whereas Assyrian officers are standing behind Jehu. The remaining picture panels portray thirteen Israelite tribute bearers carrying heavy and precious gifts.

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Bottom left: One of ten reliefs on the bronze doors that constitute the eastern portal (the so-called “Gates of Paradise”) of the Baptistry of St. John of Florence, created 1424–1452 by Lorenzo Ghiberti (c. 1378–1455). Detail from the picture “Adam and Eve”; in the center is the creation of Eve: “And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” (Gen 2:22)

Photograph by George Reader

Bottom right: Detail of the Menorah in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem, created by Benno Elkan (1877–1960): Ezra reads the Law of Moses to the assembled nation (Neh 8). The bronze Menorah was created in London in 1956 and in the same year was given by the British as a gift to the State of Israel. A total of 29 reliefs portray scenes from the Hebrew bible and the history of the Jewish people.

Aaron Schart

Malachi

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Editors' Foreword

The International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT) offers a multi-perspectival interpretation of the books of the Old Testament to a broad, international audience of scholars, laypeople and pastors. Biblical commentaries too often reflect the fragmented character of contemporary biblical scholarship, where different geographical or methodological sub-groups of scholars pursue specific methodologies and/or theories with little engagement of alternative approaches. This series, published in English and German editions, brings together editors and authors from North America, Europe, and Israel with multiple exegetical perspectives.

From the outset the goal has been to publish a series that was “international, ecumenical and contemporary.” The international character is reflected in the composition of an editorial board with members from six countries and commentators representing a yet broader diversity of scholarly contexts.

The ecumenical dimension is reflected in at least two ways. First, both the editorial board and the list of authors includes scholars with a variety of religious perspectives, both Christian and Jewish. Second, the commentary series not only includes volumes on books in the Jewish Tanach/Protestant Old Testament, but also other books recognized as canonical parts of the Old Testament by diverse Christian confessions (thus including the Deuterocanonical Old Testament books).

When it comes to “contemporary,” one central distinguishing feature of this series is its attempt to bring together two broad families of perspectives in analysis of biblical books, perspectives often described as “synchronic” and “diachronic” and all too often understood as incompatible with each other. Historically, diachronic studies arose in Europe, while some of the better known early synchronic studies originated in North America and Israel. Nevertheless, historical studies have continued to be pursued around the world, and focused synchronic work has been done in an ever greater variety of settings. Building on these developments, we aim in this series to bring synchronic and diachronic methods into closer alignment, allowing these approaches to work in a complementary and mutually-informative rather than antagonistic manner.

Since these terms are used in varying ways within biblical studies, it makes sense to specify how they are understood in this series. Within IECOT we understand “synchronic” to embrace a variety of types of study of a biblical text *in one given stage of its development*, particularly its final stage(s) of development in existing manuscripts. “Synchronic” studies embrace non-historical narratological, reader-response and other approaches along with historically-informed exegesis of a particular stage of a biblical text. In contrast, we understand “diachronic” to embrace the full variety of modes of study of a biblical text *over time*.

This diachronic analysis may include use of manuscript evidence (where available) to identify documented pre-stages of a biblical text, judicious use of clues within the biblical text to reconstruct its formation over time, and also an examination of the ways in which a biblical text may be in dialogue with earlier biblical (and non-biblical) motifs, traditions, themes, etc. In other words, diachronic study focuses on what might be termed a “depth dimension” of a given text – how a

text (and its parts) has journeyed over time up to its present form, making the text part of a broader history of traditions, motifs and/or prior compositions. Synchronic analysis focuses on a particular moment (or moments) of that journey, with a particular focus on the final, canonized form (or forms) of the text. Together they represent, in our view, complementary ways of building a textual interpretation.

Of course, each biblical book is different, and each author or team of authors has different ideas of how to incorporate these perspectives into the commentary. The authors will present their ideas in the introduction to each volume. In addition, each author or team of authors will highlight specific contemporary methodological and hermeneutical perspectives – e.g. gender-critical, liberation-theological, reception-historical, social-historical – appropriate to their own strengths and to the biblical book being interpreted. The result, we hope and expect, will be a series of volumes that display a range of ways that various methodologies and discourses can be integrated into the interpretation of the diverse books of the Old Testament.

Fall 2012

The Editors

Author's Foreword

The writing called Malachi has attracted a wealth of commentary. Recent years in particular have seen a number of detailed and superior commentaries: as examples let me mention only those by Arndt Meinhold (2006) and Rainer Kessler (2011). Hence the present commentary is free to present a concentrated portrait without many footnotes. In accordance with the overall concept of this commentary series it first reads the texts “synchronically,” i.e., as a canonically given unit. Next, it devotes itself to a reconstruction of the text’s redaction history (the diachronic step). Finally, it combines these two approaches so as to perceive a final text that is clearly the end-product of a sequence of processes of redaction and so offers the meaning of the text thus developed to present readers as a basis for theological judgments. Since the redactional history of Malachi includes its linkage with the Christian Bible, the commentary will also treat the New Testament reception and interpretation of the text.

I am grateful to my editors, Helmut Utzschneider and Walter Dietrich; the former in particular offered me many concrete and helpful suggestions for shortening the text so that what originally was a significantly longer manuscript could be adapted to the length appropriate to this commentary series. I am grateful also to the publisher, in particular Florian Specker, for support and considerable patience.

Gratitude belongs also to my assistants, Sonja Bader, Nadine Kalweit, and Rene Mayer. I have had many stimulating conversations about Malachi with my father, Dieter Schart. Finally, I thank my wife, who has supported me through the many years in which the commentary has been a major influence on my aspirations and all too often my mood as well.

The book is dedicated to Mr. Professor Dr. Dr. h.c. Jörg Jeremias, for his eightieth birthday.

Mülheim, June 2019
Aaron Schart

Introduction

Malachi in the Canon

Christian tradition conceives Malachi as part of the “Old Testament,” that is, the fundamental part of the Bible to which the “New Testament” was added. As a result the “Old Testament” has been perceived within a particular salvation-historical framing: both testaments acknowledge the same God, while the words, destiny, and confession of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of Israel and all creation reveal the nature of God in a privileged way. The present commentary will therefore dedicate a separate section to the New Testament reception of the relevant portion of Malachi in each chapter.

Within the Old Testament the Malachi document belongs to the prophetic writings, and in particular it is one of the Twelve.¹ It is placed last in this collection, both in the Masoretic text and in the Greek version.² This commentary will also consider the location of the writing within the Book of the Twelve.

The Writing of
Malachi in the
Christian
Canon

The Text of the Malachi Document

While the surviving manuscripts differ among themselves, the various versions were nevertheless regarded as authoritative in different communities at different times. This poses the question: which version of the text should be taken as the basis for the commentary? As far as the Malachi document is concerned, the classic concept of the “original text” may suffice: it means that all surviving textual variants can be traced to a single text type. This original text is the one regarded as canonical in the Protestant tradition, even though the New Testament authors, beginning with Paul (Rom 9:13), preferred to use the Greek translation.

The original text has not survived, but with the exception of only a few passages it can be reconstructed. The starting point for the text-critical task is the so-called Masoretic text type, as attested by the earliest complete surviving manuscript of the Tanakh, *Codex Leningradensis* from the year 1008 CE. That codex is likewise the basis for the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (ed. Anthony Gelston,

The Original
Text

-
- 1 The title “Malachi document,” as opposed to the usual name “book of Malachi,” is intended to show that this writing represents only one part of a larger redacted work and therefore may not be interpreted in isolation. In this regard the present commentary derives from Schart, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuchs*.
 - 2 The only exception is ms. 4QXII^a in which, after the end of the Malachi text, one can still make out a few more letters, indicating that another writing must have followed. The first editor, Russell E. Fuller (“The Twelve”), identifies it with Jonah. Philippe Guillaume (“Unlikely”) and Mika Pajunen and Hanne von Weissenberg (“Book of Malachi”) are of a different opinion.

2010). The consonantal text of this type was probably regarded as standard among leading circles of Palestinian Judaism ca. 100 CE. Among the scrolls containing the Twelve Prophets from Cave 4 at Qumran only Scroll 4QXII^a preserves some text from the Malachi document, namely, some very fragmentary passages from Mal 2:10–3:24 [2:10–4:6 ET].³ Those contain only a very few deviations from *Codex Leningradensis*.

The Septuagint's *Vorlage* We can also see from the Septuagint translation of the Book of the Twelve Prophets that its Hebrew *Vorlage* was largely identical with the Masoretic text type.⁴

It is true that *Codex Leningradensis* contains a few passages in which the original text can no longer be reconstructed; for example, Mal 2:3b and 2:15 are altogether incomprehensible. The Septuagint already presupposed the faulty text, which means that it must have been created inadvertently quite soon after the completion of the Book of the Twelve. The faulty text cannot be corrected because meaningful conjectures have to deviate sharply from the consonantal text as it stands; such a situation makes it difficult to monitor or evaluate the conjectures.

The Greek Translation

From a Christian point of view the translation of the Malachi document into Greek is very significant since the New Testament authors used Malachi in Greek translation. In fact, the first Christian Bible contained the whole Old Testament in a Greek version. Regrettably, the fragmentary *Dodekapropheton* scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (8HevXII) contains no text from the Malachi document; as a result we have only the so-called Septuagint version at our disposal. It was very probably created by a single translator in the context of a translation of the whole Book of the Twelve.⁵

To maintain consistent clarity in distinguishing the Greek translation from the Hebrew version I use the phrase “Book of the Twelve” solely for the Hebrew version, referring to the Greek translation as the “*Dodekapropheton*” and its translator as the “*Dodekapropheton* translator”.⁶

3 Photos of 4QXII^a are accessible on the Internet in the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library: <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/manuscript/4Q76-1>.

4 Gelston, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 7*.

5 Schart, “Dodekapropheton: Einleitung.”

6 References to the Greek version will be indicated by “LXX,” e.g., Mal 1:1 LXX, while references without the “LXX” are to the Hebrew version. When it is important to distinguish the Masoretic version of a passage from the original Hebrew text I will append “MT,” e.g., Mal 1:1 MT. The same applies to the distinct versification in English, marked with “ET.”

The Greek translation is very literal: with few exceptions every morpheme in the Hebrew *Vorlage* is represented by its precise Greek equivalent. Even the sequence of words and syntax are strictly retained, to the point of occasional imitations of the Hebrew nominal clause.⁷

Septuagintal
Translation
Style

One measure of the great fidelity of the LXX to its Hebrew original is provided by passages that are incomprehensible in Hebrew: in such cases the *Dodekapropheton* translator renders the text mechanically, word for word, and leaves it to the reader to make sense of it. At MT-Mal 2:3b, for example, the phrase “and he shall lift you up to him” makes no sense in Hebrew. The Septuagint accommodates the predicate to the preceding subject, “ΥΗΩΗ,” but otherwise translates word for word without producing any sense: “and I will bring you to the same.” It is notoriously difficult to decide whether a deviation from the MT represents a different Hebrew *Vorlage*, a different understanding of the Hebrew (especially of the meaning of rare lexemes), an inadvertent mistake, or a deliberate alteration.

There are probably only three passages in which the *Dodekapropheton* translator had a consonantal text in his *Vorlage* that differed from that of *Codex Leningradensis*: The *Vorlage* for LXX-Mal 1:13 had צבאות [= “of hosts”]. In Mal 3:15 *zedîm* was incorrectly written as *zarîm*. In Mal 2:16 the verse began with כי אם שנאת *kî ’im šâne’tā*, attested also in 4QXII^a.

Passages in which the *Dodekapropheton* translator inserted additional words not attested in the Hebrew *Vorlage* occur six times (Mal 1:1; 1:7; 2:2; 3:3; 3:6a; 3:19 [4:1 ET]). In most cases the translator took the additional words from the immediate context in order to smooth the text.

It is important that the *Dodekapropheton* translator understood the Hebrew expression מלאכי in Mal 1:1 not as a proper name but as a title, “messenger of the Lord”. He identified this “messenger of the Lord” with Haggai, as we can infer from the borrowing of the injunction “do place it upon your hearts” from LXX-Hag 2:15.

“Malachi” as
Title:
“Messenger of
the Lord”

The *Dodekapropheton* translator avoided (evidently on purpose) some anthropomorphic divine statements (e.g., in Mal 1:7b; 1:13a; 2:3a), including the idea that a human can “tempt” or “test” (בחן) God (Mal 3:10, 15).

Anthropomor-
phism

It should be pointed out, from a Christian perspective, that the *Dodekapropheton* was adopted into the Christian canon of the Bible as part of the Greek version of Israel’s scriptures, which Christians refer to as the “Old Testament.” In the course of that editing project it appears that a single change was made to the documents of the *Dodekapropheton*, namely, a new way of writing the *nomina sacra*; that is, particular words that are connected directly with God (such as *Kyrios*, God, Christ, and Jesus) were written using only the first and last letters of the word, with a single horizontal line extended above them. This was meant to express the belief that both the Old Testament and the New Testament speak of the same God, self-revealed in Jesus Christ. The *Dodekapropheton* version of the Malachi document is preserved only in its Christian form. The perhaps oldest surviving, but unfortunately only fragmentary manuscript of the Christian version is represented

Writing the
nomina sacra

7 Thus, e.g., in Mal 1:8 the phrase אין רע (“not wrong/evil”) is quite literally translated as οὐ κακόν, “not wrong/evil,” without creating a complete sentence by the addition of a predicate such as ἔστιν.

by *Codex Washingtonensis* (third c. CE).⁸ The oldest complete versions are in *Codex Vaticanus* (fourth c. CE) and *Codex Sinaiticus* (fourth c. CE).⁹

Poetic Analysis of the Malachi Document

Poetic Analysis There is dispute over the question whether the text of the Malachi document represents poetry or “exalted prose.” Since poetic lines are more identifiable when they represent bicola, it seems best to focus on those within the framework of our analysis. A bicolon is certainly present when two cola of equal length in one line are semantically parallel to one another in synonymous, antithetical, or synthetic manner (*parallelismus membrorum*). Grammatical and phonetic parallelism regularly accompany this feature.

Judged according to these criteria the Malachi document contains some poetic lines, e.g., in Mal 1:2bβ//3a ; 1:3b; 1:4ay; 4b; 1:6; 2:10a; 2:17b; 3:1a; 3:2a; 3:2b; 3:5a; 3:6; 3:7aβ; 3:8aα; 3:9; 3:11aβ//bα; 3:12a//bα; 3:14a//bα; 3:18aβ//b; 3:24a [4:6a ET]. Malachi 1:14b can serve as an example because it also reveals how the poetic structure was misread by a later redactor:

Truly, a great king am I [—Y^{HWH} of hosts has said—] //
and my name is revered among the nations.

These lines express a self-predication by Y^{HWH}. If we ignore the formula “Y^{HWH} of hosts has said”, the bicolon contains two nominal clauses that are semantic synonyms. The first ends with “I” and the second begins with the synonymous phrase “my name.” The number of consonants is nearly identical in the two cola (12 + 13); the first contains one additional word, “truly,” י at the beginning of the line, introducing the statement. The statement itself consists of three words, each with its own accent (3 + 3). Within the caesura between the two cola stands the formula “Y^{HWH} of hosts has said”. That formula usually concludes preceding divine speech, yet here the words of God continue uninterruptedly in the second colon. Thus, the formula breaks the flow of thought and the poetic coherence of the line. For that reason it is probable that the quotation formula was secondarily inserted. The example shows that the basic stratum was poetic in form, but a redactor ignored the poetic shaping. We find this kind of reworking again and again, which suggests that the whole of the basic stratum was poetic in form. It is true that, despite intensive literary-critical efforts at reconstruction, some lines are left over; these are not as beautiful and balanced in form as is Mal 1:14b*, but they also have been and can be regarded as poetry.¹⁰

8 Sanders and Schmidt, *Minor Prophets and Facsimile*.

9 The codices have been published on the Internet. *Vaticanus* = https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1209; *Sinaiticus* = www.codexsinaiticus.org.

10 In the translation the colometric structure of the text will be represented by a double solidus: //.

Disputation Speech (Contentious Refutation)

From the point of view of form criticism, the Malachi document, apart from the superscription and the appendix in Mal 3:22–24 [4:4–6 ET], is a collection of so-called “disputation sequences” made up of “disputation speeches.” This form, moreover, exists here in a variant found only in the book of Malachi. In essence a *disputation speech* is an argumentative rejection of contrary opinions.¹¹ In order to simplify the presentation we will speak of the “prophet” as the one who utters the disputation speech; this person summarizes in his own words and from his own point of view the results of a disputation conducted in the name of YHWH with some other group.

The basic form of the disputation speech was defined by Egon Pfeiffer (1959).¹² According to him a disputation speech always contains three formal elements: first, a thesis containing a predicate about the nature of YHWH; second, a counter-arguing question from the opponents that is quoted word for word; third, the prophet’s rebuttal.

The basic form of the disputation speech

It is not the purpose of the disputation sequence or speech to record the real course of a disputation or to quote the opponents’ exact words. Instead, it is about sketching the content of a disputation in such a way as to depict it from the prophet’s point of view. That is, in the prophet’s eyes, the disputation has already been decided by YHWH: the opponents’ positions contradict YHWH’s will. Thus the disputation speech looks back at the real disputation in which the prophet’s divine claims were still in dispute. This also explains why the prophet knows the opponents’ counterquestions and introduces them in *qatal*, as something that has already happened in the past (“You have said ...”), because they were addressed to him in personal confrontation. The fact that such disputations on the oral level were problematic and, among other things, extended over longer periods of time may have formed the background for the talk of “wearying YHWH with words” (Mal 2:17).

The logic of the disputation speech

Although the prophet lays claim to YHWH’s authority for his presentation of the results of the disputation, we may suppose that, even so, not all of the prophet’s opponents would have accepted the prophet’s opinion. The very fact that it appeared necessary to describe the disputation and thus to supply readers with divinely-legitimated strategies for argumentation against particular counterquestions favors the supposition that, despite their refutation by the prophet, those opposing questions had not been silenced but had even become more virulent. Since the prophet occasionally argues in terms of the future (e.g., Mal 3:5; 3:19 [4:1 ET]), it seems that the content of such arguments is still a matter for debate, something to be settled in the future. Hence the description of the disputation also serves the purpose of assigning to God’s future action the answer to the question of which party to the disputation is right. The unfulfilled nature of future hopes has been further emphasized by the redaction’s insertion of clear references

11 For a general description of the genre of disputation speeches see Schar, “Disputationsswort.” One often sees the less-accurate term “discussion speech” as well. “Contentious refutation” is descriptive of the content of such speeches.

12 Pfeiffer, “Disputationsworte.”

to the “day of YHWH” (e.g., Mal 3:23 [4:5 ET]). The community that transmitted the Malachi document lived in this condition, between present controversy and a longing for affirmation.

The pattern of the disputation sequence	Within the Malachi document the disputation sequences follow a pattern that is not found elsewhere and therefore should be regarded as the creative achievement of the author. ¹³
Thesis	The disputation sequence begins with a thesis, thus formulating the starting point. Formally, this is either a divine self-proclamation (1:2; 1:6; 3:6; 3:13) or a prophetic speech (2:10; 2:17).
Quotation of the counter-position	In a second step the prophet describes the opponents’ position. This takes the form of a counterquestion; the prophet introduces it with “but you have said ...” in the form of a quotation. ¹⁴ The counterquestions are directed to YHWH when the thesis was formulated as divine speech. If, on the other hand, it took the form of prophetic speech the opponents’ answer is directed to the prophet. ¹⁵ It is repeatedly made clear that the prophet is not quoting the opponents in their original words but instead lets his own evaluation enter into his formulation of the opponents’ words, for example by polemically distorting their position.
Refutation of the opponents’ position	A third step produces a refutation of the counterquestion by means of a stacking of “arguments.” In this, the “disputation speech” proper, the prophet exhibits everything that could bring the opponents to insight: reproaches, references to the Torah and other traditional norms, examples and references to YHWH’s future intervention. Once the prophet has presented his “arguments” the matter has been clarified in the name of YHWH.
The Speaker	The Malachi document produces the impression that all six disputation speeches are uttered by the same speaker, though on different occasions. The speaker’s words are, obviously, spoken in the name of YHWH, a fact that is certified by the generic designation of the superscription, “word of YHWH” (Mal 1:1, the use of the prophetic messenger formula, “thus says YHWH” (Mal 1:4, and the formulae “says YHWH of hosts” (20x) and “says YHWH” (Mal 1:2bα; 3:13a).
	Although in general the prophet relates to his conversation partners as one who speaks for YHWH, there are three passages in which the prophet associates himself with the addressees as “we”: Mal 1:9a; 2:10; 2:17. ¹⁶
The Addressees	The superscription of the Malachi document suggests the idea that the prophet addresses all six disputation speeches “to Israel,” but in the text the hearers are, in part, more closely defined. In Mal 1:2, they are associated with Jacob and separated from Edom; in Mal 1:6b and 2:1 the hearers are addressed as “priests”; and in Mal 3:6 as “children” [lit. ‘sons’] of Jacob.” We may conclude from this that at least two different groups are addressed: on the one hand laypeople who identify with Jacob, and priests on the other hand. It is possible, though, that the words addressed to the laity are also intended for various groups. In particular, Mal 2:17 and 3:5 seem to address the victims of various forms of oppression, and Mal 3:13–21 [3:13–4:3 ET] is addressed to those who revere (or fear) YHWH.

13 Kessler, *Maleachi*, 45.

14 In Mal 1:7aβ the prophet quotes a second objection by the hearers. That doubling is the result of redactional reworking.

15 Kessler, *Maleachi*, 48.

16 Kessler, *Maleachi*, 49.