

# PRIESTLY LANGUAGE IN THE BOOK OF MALACHI

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The fallen state of the Levitical priesthood in the Book of Malachi can hardly be doubted given the nature of the harsh language used to describe it in Mal 1:6–2:9. Called “scorners” of God’s name (Mal 1:6), they are accused of defiling the holy altar by bringing “lame and sick animals” into the sanctuary (1:8)—not even the Persian governor (*pehā*) would accept such an offering! The priests also bring stolen animals to the temple for offerings (1:13). All of these affronts to Yahweh’s name result in the prophet announcing that God has cursed them in their generation (2:2). But an even sharper rebuke of their priestly offspring is threatened for the future: “I will fling dung, the dung of your festival offering, on your faces; and it will carry you with it” (2:3).<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, so passionate and articulate is Malachi’s diatribe against the priestly and cultic behavior of postexilic Judah that one scholar has argued (Fishbane, 1985, pp. 332–42) that the prophet’s words constitute an artfully crafted “aggadic exegesis” of Num 6:23–27, the Priestly Benediction. Fishbane skillfully points out that all the key terms of the Priestly Blessing are either “alluded to or played upon” (p. 332) with ironic force in Mal 1:6–2:9. The effect of the prophet’s inverted language is to curse the actions of the priests. The threat of suspending God’s covenant with Levi thus becomes the occasion for arousing prophetic consciousness which ultimately manifests itself in the exegetical diatribe. Fishbane’s arguments are convincing and his analysis underscores both the creative style of the postexilic prophet and the emergence

1. All of the translations used in this essay are the author’s unless otherwise noted. Many of the quotes from Malachi are based on a preliminary draft of a translation intended for use in the *Anchor Bible* volume on Deutero-Zechariah and Malachi, co-authored with C. L. Meyers. I would like to thank my doctoral student, Julia M. O’Brien, for her work on Malachi. Our collaboration has been most fruitful.

of a new "prosaic" form of prophetic speech that are characteristic of postexilic prophecy in general (Meyers and Meyers, 1987, pp. lxi–lxv).

Unfortunately, his analysis does not help us with the question of overriding concern to students of the Book of Malachi: What has contributed to such a complete reversal in the priestly administration of the Second Temple since the days of the high priest of the restoration period, Joshua ben Jehozadak? In many ways the Book of First Zechariah can be interpreted as a justification for the renewal of the office of "high priest" and a rationalization for the expansion of the powers of the priesthood in the postexilic era. In particular, the investiture of Joshua in chapter 3 and his extraordinary "access" (*mahlèkîm*) into the Heavenly Council is the most eloquent testimony of the prophet to the high priest's expanded duties and consecrated rule in the affairs of the restoration community.<sup>2</sup> If we may date the Book of Malachi to the mid-fifth century B.C.E. or slightly earlier (Hill, 1983), the attack on the priesthood enumerated in Mal 1:6–2:9 comes some sixty-five years after Zechariah's eloquent oracular and visionary elucidation and support of the temple and its priestly administration. Joshua the high priest ruled together with the Persian appointed governor, first with Zerubbabel ben-Shealtiel (Meyers and Meyers, 1987, pp. 8–13), and then for sometime afterward with a certain Elnathan, whose name and identity has only recently been revealed through the discovery of a hoard of Persian bullae from the restoration era (Avigad, 1976). By the reign of Xerxes (486–465), the list of governors becomes conjectural and the rule of the Yehudite high priest somewhat speculative.

All this is to say that the attack on priesthood in the Book of Malachi is quite unexpected in view of the strong theocratic foundations of the Second Temple in the time of the prophets Haggai and First Zechariah. The intensity of Malachi's negative feeling *vis à vis* the priesthood and cult suggests that the anonymous prophet<sup>3</sup> may himself have been either a priest or Temple prophet (Blenkinsopp, 1983, p. 240); otherwise the

2. Chapter 3 of the Book of Zechariah is the most obvious place to find those duties enumerated. Joshua's change in apparel, the return to an old idiom for his title, "high priest," and his involvement in the refoundation ceremony of the temple indicate his central role in the reorganization of Yehud (Judah) in the restoration period. Verses 7–10 provide an unusual glimpse of priestly duties early in the history of the Second Temple. For details on these matters see Meyers and Meyers (1987, pp. 178ff.).

3. Anonymity or pseudoanonymity is a feature of late prophecy and intertestamental writing that begins with Malachi. The prophet's name, or title of the book, actually means "my messenger." No details are available on the identity of the author of this work, however. On this point see Rudolph (1976, pp. 247–48).

loss of religious enthusiasm so soon after the refounding of the temple is difficult to comprehend. One thing is certain, however: the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah after 445 B.C.E. do not arise *in vacuo*. If nothing else the account of the religious problems of their day regarding intermarriage (Ezra 9:2), laxity in sabbath observance (Neh 13:15–22), and the continuing corruption of the Levitical and Kohathite priesthood (Neh 13:10–13, 29–30) is a strong reminder that all had not been right in Yehud for some time.

In light of these radically altered circumstances, i.e., a marked deterioration in the status and perceived place of the Levitical priesthood along with other priests in society over the course of only a half century or more, what might Malachi's language regarding "priests" tell us about their position in the time of Malachi? To put it in a slightly different way, what do Malachi's words regarding priests and priesthood tell us about the prophet himself and prophecy's relation to the Law and to the temple establishment?

Freedman is only one of many contemporary scholars who have recently argued that the sixth century with the Persian period was an era of singular importance in Judah's compiling a written history of its past. Freedman (1983) calls the narration of Israel's past from Genesis through II Kings the Primary History—others call it the Deuteronomic History, focusing only on that which is presented in the Former Prophets (Cross, 1975). What is important about such observations is that the impact of Judah's destruction and exile in 587/6 B.C.E. has become definitive in shaping the subsequent interpretation and organization of a common past. That most scholars assign the creative response of editing Israel's writings of this period, the Law and Former Prophets, to the Persian period, says something most revealing about the seventy years which separate the destruction of Jerusalem (586) from the rebuilding of its temple (516). Although it is difficult to date this editorial activity with precision, it would seem that much of it had been concluded when the Second Temple was refounded and rededicated (516 or 515 B.C.E., according to Ezra 3:10–13; 6:15–17), though formal presentation of the Law Code is not actually mentioned until Ezra presented it to the public in a reading (Neh 8:1–12) on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Recognition in biblical scholarship of the early emergence of the unofficial canon of Scripture, possibly accelerated and brought to completion by the activities of Darius I<sup>4</sup> (Meyers and Meyers, 1987,

4. Darius is regarded as "lawgiver" by Herodotus mainly because his efforts to reorganize the provinces resulted in the gathering and subsequent codification of local laws. His

pp. xxx–xxxv; Cook, 1983, pp. 72–73), forces one to discard some long-held views of higher criticism. One is the “lateness” (ca. 450–400 B.C.E.) of the Priestly Code or P source of the Pentateuch (Wellhausen, 1878). In his classic statement on the documentary hypothesis Wellhausen argues that the Levites are downgraded to mere temple servants in the P document. There is in P, in other words, a sharp distinction between Kohathite priest (i.e., *kōhānīm*) and common Levites (Driver, 1913, p. 82), with the former in a position of control and power. Some contemporary scholars, therefore (e.g., Rivkin, 1976), argue that since Malachi does not seem to reflect the Aaronide revolution in which Levitical priestly duties had been downgraded and those of the Kohathite priests elevated, the Priestly Code could only have come into prominence after Malachi. Another scholar (Hanson, 1979, pp. 268–69) argues that the period of the end of prophecy (ca. 515–450 B.C.E.) presupposes a bitter struggle between Aaronid or Kohathite priests and Levites, the former representing the corrupt rule of the theocratic party which came to power in the days of Haggai and First Zechariah.

The priestly language of the Book of Malachi provides a useful vehicle for reexamining this longstanding question. Moreover, it seems quite reasonable to expect that the language of Malachi would reflect both the language of the Law and at least the Former Prophets or unofficial canon, if an early Persian period date may be assumed for this redaction. In fact, several scholars have stressed that the language of Malachi is replete with Deuteronomic phraseology (Blenkinsopp, 1983, p. 242; Dumbrell, 1976, pp. 45–47). For example, Malachi refers to the sacred mountain where God presented the Decalogue to Moses as “Horeb” rather than “Sinai” (3:22). Also, Malachi uses the Deuteronomic terms “abomination” (*tô<sup>c</sup>ēbāh*) in 2:11<sup>5</sup> and “special treasure” (*sēgullāh*) in 3:17.<sup>6</sup> The prophet also stresses the common Deuteronomic themes of God’s love of Israel (Mal 1:2; Deut 7:7–8) and the father-son relationship (Mal 1:6; 2:10; 3:17; Deut 1:21; 32:56). Even more important,

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policy of encouraging local governments and populations to adhere to their ancestral laws and customs within the framework of the Persian Empire undoubtedly resulted in some of the creative literary work that was undertaken during his reign.

5. See also in this connection the following texts: Deut 12:31; 13:14; 17:4; 18:9, 12; 20:18; 23:18; 27:15.

6. See also Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; cf. Exod 19:5 and Ps 138:4. Ms. O’Brien will explore in her dissertation whether covenant language in Malachi is mediated through D or possibly transmitted through ancient Near Eastern covenant renewal language. Petersen (1977, p. 43) contends that some portions of Malachi, especially 3:1ff., are dependent upon the Book of the Covenant (Exod 23:20–21).

Blenkinsopp (1983, p. 242) has pointed out that Malachi is dependent on Deuteronomic law pertaining to sacrificial offering rather than on the Priestly (P) legislation (Mal 1:8; 13–14; Deut 18:1–8). On the surface of it one might be inclined to agree with Wellhausen or Rivkin that P had not yet come into existence or that reform of the priesthood had never occurred because of such heavy dependence on D.

The question of the degree of Deuteronomic influence on the thinking and language of Malachi is even more complex when considering the terms used in the Book of Deuteronomy for “priests” and “Levites.” In Deut 18:1 the Revised Standard Version translates: “The Levitical priests, that is all the tribe of Levi . . .” The new Jewish Publication Society similarly translates: “The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi. . . .” The fact of the matter is that the Hebrew text is quite clear in intending that verse 1 be understood as does the Authorized Version translate: “The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance in Israel.” Wright, in a very convincing article (1954, pp. 325–27), argues that the expression, “the priests the Levites,”<sup>7</sup> in Deuteronomy may refer to altar clergy as does the single term “priests.” The simple term “Levites,” however, refers to clergy who are scattered through the country and whose primary role and obligations are teaching and exposition (Wright, pp. 328–29). The Book of Deuteronomy thus has two very specific and alternative ways of identifying priests within Judah. A dominant earlier assumption had been that D or its compilers recognized no such clerical distinctions. For P, the Priestly Code, the term “priest” is reserved solely for altar clergy, and P draws a sharp distinction between “priests” and “Levites.” But the twofold division of labor within the priesthood, teaching and service, however, is one that is maintained in the Priestly Code and is a feature that is characteristic of the priesthood from the beginning. The prophet Malachi, in our view, thus seems to reflect not only the language of D but of P also, while at the same time alluding to the twofold role of priesthood.

This interpretation of Malachi is borne out through examination of several key phrases and idioms in the book. One of these expressions occurs in 2:7: “For the lips of a priest keep knowledge, so that people seek a ruling from his mouth.” This rather idealized statement of the teaching priest, referred to in the P style as *kōhēn* and not as Levite, is also cast in typical postexilic idiom. The use of the verb *bqš* (“to seek”)

7. See also Deut 17:9; 17:18; 21:5; 24:8; 27:9; 31:9. Cf. the verses in Josh 3:3; 8:33; and 1 Kgs 8:3–11 which refer to the practice of the “priests the Levites” who bear the Ark of the Covenant.

plus the singular *tôrāh* ("the ruling") without the definite article is unique. It is analogous to the expression "to ask the priests (*kōhānīm*) for a ruling" in Haggai 2:11 where the idiom is *šʿl* ("to ask") plus *tôrāh* ("ruling"). This unique idiom also preserves the noun in the singular and without the definite article (Meyers, 1983, pp. 70–71). The two expressions, however, are clearly related and reflect the changing role of the priesthood at these times.

The development of the singular usage of "ruling" as a specific instruction of the teaching clergy may be related to a number of Pentateuchal passages, especially Exod 12:49; Lev 7:7; and Num 15:16, 29. In the majority of instances in which *tôrāh* occurs, its meaning may be wrongly translated as "law" and associated with the book of statutes and commandments which Moses gave to Israel, as in the case of the well-known conclusion to the Book of Malachi in 3:22: "Remember the law (or *tôrāh*) of Moses my servant, which I commanded to him at Horeb, over all Israel, statutes and judgments."

Of the total of 220 occurrences of *tôrāh* in the Bible only 52 may be translated as "law," "statute," "judgment" or "ruling" and hence may be viewed as independent of the book or law of Moses's statutes and judgments. In both Mal 2:7 and in 3:22 we see the inventiveness of the prophet at work. In the former instance a new idiom similar in construction to the one in Hag 2:11 but using a different verb is coined to describe the function of a teaching priest to whom individuals turn for specific advice on religious matters. In the latter instance the prophet's innovativeness is again apparent: Malachi has taken the unique expression, "law of Moses" (with *tôrāh* in the singular) and wedded it to the more expected "statutes" and "judgments" without ever utilizing the anticipated or understood word, "book" as in Neh 8:1; II Chron 34:14; and Josh 8:31; 23:6; II Kgs 14:6. Also, the separation of "law of Moses" from the words "statutes and judgments" serves to highlight the role of Moses as a recipient of God's law in the form of *tôrāh*, "law" and "book," quite obviously consisting of "statutes and judgments." Mal 3:22 is followed by the vision of the eschatological prophet Elijah in 3:23, who will come "before the great and awesome day of the Lord." Although many scholars have questioned the originality of this verse (Rudolph, 1976, p. 293), its inclusion at this point in the text may well reflect an original desire on the part of the prophet or editor to temper heuristic, Deuteronomic teaching with strong prophetic, eschatological language, as is the case also with the final verse, verse 24.

Whatever else the coining of new idioms by the author of the Book of Malachi may signify, it surely points to the fact that prophecy and

priesthood have moved very close together in this period. The idealized portrait of the teaching priest depicted in Mal 2:5–6 is consonant with the general movement toward theocratic rule in the Second Temple. The good priest of 2:7 is in fact equated with “a messenger of the Lord of Hosts,” a quasi-prophetic individual who figures centrally in the prophecies of First Zechariah (Meyers and Meyers, 1987, *ad loc*), once again indicating that the boundaries between teaching priest and prophet-sage were fading in the Persian period. In this connection it is important to recall that the delegation from Bethel in Zech 7:2–4 directs their inquiry to both prophet and priests (Meyers and Meyers, 1987, *ad loc*). The priests (*kōhānīm*) in that oracle were associated with the temple establishment and are clearly not altar clergy but teaching priests serving together with the prophet. Their answer is couched in Deuteronomic language (7:9–10) of broad humanistic content. First Zechariah like Malachi, however, has conjoined such material of a heuristic nature with a more explicit reference to earlier prophetic materials as in the case of Zech 1:4, 7 where he specifically refers his audience to the “earlier prophets.”

Although the idealized priest of Mal 2:5–6 is referred to as *kōhēn*, the promise of the renewal of the covenant with the priests is expressed as the “covenant with Levi” (*bērītī ʿet-lēwī*), the very one that is corrupted in 2:8 and referred to as the covenant of Levi” (*bērūt hallēwī*). In light of the observations of Wright (1954) it would seem that this usage of “Levi” to connote the teaching clergy and not altar clergy is perfectly in order. The fact that it falls proximate to the use of *kōhēn* in the same sense only means that Malachi, unlike Deuteronomy, or even P, feels free to utilize these terms for the teaching priesthood, probably because the altar functions of the priesthood in a theocratic environment had grown closer and closer to that of a teacher.

Therefore it is not surprising to note that the term “covenant of Levi” in Mal 2:8, with its close variant in verse 4, is unique in the Bible. It should be apparent why the prophet has chosen “Levi” for this idiom: The tribe of Levi is the symbol *par excellence* of the priesthood in the postexilic period but with the additional association of teaching. The term *kōhēn* is most easily associated with altar duties; therefore the terms are mixed or used interchangeably in the idealized statement on priesthood. The long diatribe which began in 1:6 seems to focus more on violation of the altar clergy—hence the use of the term *kōhānīm* in 1:6 and 2:1. When the diatribe resumes in 2:8 after the insertion of the statement on the ideal priest, the focus of verses 8 and 9 shifts to wrong priestly instruction. The threat of suspending the divine blessing (2:2)

thus arises both because of cultic violation by the altar clergy and because of improper instruction by the teaching priests also. Fishbane's cogent remarks on the inverted language of the prophet with regard to the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:23–27 (1983, pp. 332–33) do not go far enough. Malachi's indictment of the priestly establishment is total, going far beyond cultic violations to equally outrageous affronts to God's name, i.e. improper teaching.

Yet you have turned from this way and have caused many to stumble with your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, spoke the Lord of Hosts. Thus I have made you despised and lowly before all the people because you do not keep my ways and you show partiality in your instruction. (vv. 8–9)

Although the phrase “covenant of Levi” is unique it is possible to trace its origin or the source of its inspiration in the Pentateuch. Numbers 25:10–13 recounts the “covenant of peace” between Yahweh and Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, who caused God to turn back his wrath against the Israelites for their wanton behavior at Baal-Peor (Num 25:1–5). Verse 13 understands that God's “covenant of peace” between Him and Phinehas will also be an “eternal covenant of priesthood” because Phinehas took passionate action in behalf of Yahweh, thus making expiation for Israel's sins. In an echo of this in Nehemiah 13:29, the author of that work mentions that the “covenant of priests and Levites” has been violated. This covenant is also linked to the eternal “covenant of Abraham” in Genesis 14:13, the only other place where “covenant” occurs with a proper name.

The creative power of the postexilic prophet to invent new phrases that seem to so capture the very essence of their broader views is evident also in the unique phrase “true instruction” (*tôrāt ʿemet*) of Mal 2:6. In a variation on themes enunciated in Part Three of the oracles of First Zechariah (7:9, *mišpaṭ ʿemet*; 8:16; see Meyers and Meyers, 1987, *ad loc*) that have the mark of heuristic, Deuteronomic speech, Malachi describes the ideal teaching priest as one who has “true instruction in his mouth, and no injustice on his lips.” In Zechariah the teaching is directed to the population at large. In Ezek 18:8, perhaps the source of inspiration for both Zechariah and Malachi, a righteous man is defined, among other ways, as one who “executes true justice (*mišpaṭ ʿemet*) between man and man” (cf. Eccles 12:10). This persistent inventiveness of the prophet to choose phrases and expressions that are completely new yet evocative of other well-known prophetic utterances reveals how much the prophet desired to be a part of the chain of inspired tradition.

The new idioms attested in Malachi, however, also reveal how closely the language of the prophet approaches that of the sage, the teacher, the priest in Yehud.

In the years following Malachi's prophetic ministry, that is, in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E., urgent steps were undertaken in Yehud to correct many of the abuses alluded to in the Book of Malachi. These are known as the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (Williamson, 1985, pp. xxi-xlvi). The difficulties which are presupposed in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are virtually identical to those presumed in Malachi: cultic violations of every sort, improper sacrifices, intermarriage, improper teaching, etc. Nehemiah is normally credited with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem to protect the holy city from its enemies. Archaeological research suggests, however, that his efforts may in fact reflect more upon Persian desires to protect their own interests after the Egyptian satrapal revolt of 485 B.C.E.<sup>8</sup> Ezra, on the other hand, is depicted in the sources as Israel's most highly regarded religious leader since Moses. Moses, according to tradition, that is supported by the Book of Malachi, is the first among the prophets and is the lawgiver who met God face to face at Horeb/Sinai. Ezra on the other hand is depicted as the chief expounder or interpreter of the law since Aaron (Ezra 7:1-6). His priestly, Aaronid lineage, is carefully delineated in his commission from the Persian king, and in 7:6 he is depicted also as a "scribe skilled in the law of Moses" (cf. Ps 45:7). Ezra's entry into Judean history, therefore, signals the ultimate triumph of the priesthood in the Second Temple and the ascendancy of the ideal of the teaching priest into leadership position. In the seventh month, on the first day of the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), sometime between 445-400 B.C.E., Ezra read from the scroll of the Law of Moses (Neh 8:1-6.). On the

8. My graduate student, Kenneth Høglund, is currently completing a doctoral dissertation on this subject at Duke. In this work he examines the classical sources concerning the probability and details of the revolt and the archaeological remains in Syro-Palestine which may have come in response to that event. It is in this context of Persian imperial response to agitation in the provinces that he views the building activities of Nehemiah and the mission of Ezra. Persian aims were to consolidate their hold over the satrapies of Egypt and Eber Nahara by fortifying the routes to the Mediterranean from Persia. Nehemiah's building in Jerusalem is associated with strengthening Persian control in the capital of Yehud, thereby providing an alternative overland communication route via the Judean desert between Egypt and Ecbatana. In this connection see my forthcoming essay in the F. M. Cross Festschrift, "The Persian Period and the Judean Restoration: From Zerubbabel to Nehemiah," Philadelphia. Cf. also the work of Stern (1982) on the historical, archaeological, and literary problems of this era.

second day (Neh 8:13), Ezra gathered all the heads of the clans of the people, all the priests (*kōhānīm*) and all the Levites so that he could instruct them in the words of the law. Ezra's mission is crowned with success because he is able to interpret the law for his leaders, the heads of the clans, the Levites and the Kohathite priests. Though there are some clear references to altar clergy (e.g., Ezek 10:5; Neh 10:29, 35; 11:20), in Ezra and Nehemiah the emphasis is clearly on the instructional role of the clergy who must continue with their tasks as temple clergy regardless of their expanded functions in the instructional arena.

It is possible that the ever-closing ties between the priesthood and the tolerant Persian government, especially in areas of revenue sharing caused Malachi to reflect negatively on the *status quo* in the temple. For as we noted earlier, apparently some priests offered improper sacrifices (Mal 1:6–8), not anticipating their rejection by either God or the Persian appointed governor. Whatever the reason for Malachi's vitriolic outbursts, it is clear that both priest and Levite filled vital roles in the redirecting of Judean religion on the eve of Nehemiah's mission and Ezra's reforms.

### *Conclusions*

This brief look at the question of the nature of the priesthood in the time of Malachi and the language used by that prophet to describe aspects of the priesthood has been most revealing. First it provides an unusual glimpse at the final moment of Hebrew prophecy in the mid-fifth century B.C.E. just prior to the work of Nehemiah and Ezra. Often presumed to be overly narrow in its concerns and too provincial in its purview (Dumbrell, 1976, p. 12), the Book of Malachi has been viewed as a likely contributor to the demise of classical prophecy. Its theocratic frame of reference and preoccupation with the temple cult run counter to the traditional orientation of prophecy—so the argument goes. Others suggest that Malachi, by espousing a particular theological cause albeit cast in cultic terms, presupposes a rift in the priestly ranks, one that is strengthened by the prophet's apparent bias in favor of the establishment—a contributing factor in the demise of prophecy.

But the language and idiom of the prophet, however, makes it difficult to agree with this line of reasoning. We have argued that there is a strong Deuteronomic influence in Malachi, a factor which, if accepted, supports the existence of D and its historical presentation of Israel's past (the Deuteronomic history) by the late sixth or early fifth century. Moreover, the terminology of Malachi also seems to demonstrate

familiarity with the Priestly Code (P). Indeed, the diatribe against priesthood in 1:6–2:9, cast as an inverted prose exegesis of the Priestly Blessing (Num 6:23–27), contains a rather idealized statement (Mal 2:4–7) on priesthood that focuses on the teaching aspect of the clergy, a factor that figures predominantly in the postexilic history of Judah. The rest of the diatribe, however, is largely concerned with cultic abuses. The identification of the literary character of this diatribe by Fishbane (1985) contributes further to our presumption that Malachi is also familiar with P, if not all the Pentateuch. Indeed, the mixing of D and P language in the Book of Malachi has led many commentators astray. Its existence, however, may signify nothing more than the author's dependency on written components of the unofficial canon, i.e., what Freedman calls the Primary History (Gen-Kings). No complex history of the priesthood need account for the side-by-side use of "Levite" with "priest."

Some of the new idioms coined by the prophet points to new directions in the development of Judaism in the Second Temple. "To request a ruling" of the priest foreshadows the practice of rabbinic judgment and the role of a sage in society. Its closest parallel in Haggai 2:11 indicates that the process had already begun at the very beginning of the Second Temple period, ca. 520 B.C.E. In Zechariah 7:3 a ritual problem pertaining to celebration of a fast day is posed by the delegation from Bethel to priests and prophets. In this connection Malachi's designation of both the anonymous author of the Book of Malachi (1:1) and the ideal priest (2:7) as "messenger" is suggestive of the fact that prophecy and priesthood have drawn even closer together in the fifth century.

Although prophets continue to exist in Second Temple times, Malachi is to all intents and purposes the last of the writing prophets. But inspired writing does not cease with Malachi. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah and I and II Chronicles are the last major works to emanate from the second half of the fifth century. As the Law and Former and Latter Prophets came to assume their fixed proto-canonical form in the Persian period, Judean literary activity of any kind was bound to reflect a dependency on that written body of authoritative literature. With the priesthood assuming more and more of the function of interpreting God's word, most notably in the figure of Ezra, prophets pass from the scene. Rabbinic tradition assumes a peaceful transition from prophet to sage (Aboth 1:1) and the language of Malachi points to the fact that the process was well advanced in his day. By concluding his work with reference to the "law of Moses" (Mal 3:22) and coupling it with the mention of Elijah, the eschatological prophet (3:23), the author or editor

of the Book of Malachi is concluding the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets on a note of authority—the emerging authority of Law and Prophets—and hope, the announcement of the Day of Yahweh by Elijah who, in both early Jewish and Christian texts of the Roman period, becomes the perfect symbol of hope.

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