

A Second Temple Priestly Elijah Tradition in Malachi

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ABSTRACT

This article demonstrates that the figures of Phineas and Elijah are conflated within the Hebrew Bible. This conflation occurs via literary connections between portrayals of Elijah in Kings and Phineas in Numbers. The conflation is shown to be assumed by the book of Malachi and is considered important for understanding key texts within the book of Malachi. This conflation makes sense of the eschatological Elijah tradition found in the appendix of Malachi which is otherwise unprecedented within the Hebrew Bible. The resulting priestly Elijah via the conflation of the prophet with the priest Phineas is shown to have rhetorical power for the book of Malachi which castigates corrupt priests serving in the second temple. The tradition of conflating Elijah and Phineas is shown to be present in other Second Temple Jewish texts which enhances the plausibility that Malachi shares in this tradition.

KEYWORDS: Malachi, Phineas, inner-biblical allusion, Kings, priestly, Elijah

A INTRODUCTION

Several Second Temple Jewish texts conflate the persons of Phineas and Elijah.¹ A greater number of Second Temple Jewish texts refer to Elijah as an eschatological high priest. Elijah appears in the eschatological conclusion of Malachi which focuses heavily on castigating corrupt priests. This study argues that the traditions which conflate Phineas and Elijah and see Elijah as a heavenly high priest who will return at the dawn of the eschaton are present and active in the final form of Malachi and grow out of details found in the Hebrew Bible, specifically, in Numbers and 1 Kings. In this study, I examine Mal 1:10, 2:4–7,

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Submitted: 08/10/2025; peer-reviewed: 05/03/2026; accepted: 05/03/2026. Matthew Montgomery, "A Second Temple Priestly Elijah Tradition in Malachi," *Old Testament Essays* 39 no. 1 (2026): 1-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2026/v39n1a4>.

¹ Thanks to Pablo Seguel for reviewing a draft of this article, and thanks to Mark Boda for graciously engaging with its contents after hearing a presentation at a symposium.

3:1, and 3:23–24² BHS [4:5–6] and argue that these texts can be read together most cogently in light of these aforementioned Elijah traditions. These passages are addressed in their literary contexts and are read together synchronically.³

B YHWH'S DESIRE FOR AN IDEAL PRIEST IN MALACHI (MAL 1:10)

I begin with a more general point that is not directly connected to the Elijah-Phineas tradition. Beginning in Mal 1:6, YHWH, through his prophet, begins to voice grievances against the priests⁴ who are in charge of animal sacrifice at the second temple. Critiquing the corrupt priesthood is one of the primary goals of the book of Malachi.⁵ In light of the insulting sacrifices being brought by the people and sacrificed by the priests, YHWH in v. 10 wonders:

<p>מי גם־בכם ויסגר דלתים ולא־תאירו מתבחי חנם מידכם</p>	<p>Is there even (one) from among you that will shut my doors and not kindle vanity (on) my altar?</p>
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In light of priestly corruption, YHWH expresses his desire that the temple be closed down and its doors shut up, with the hope that an ideal priest would stand up against corruption⁶ and put a stop to the offering of insulting sacrifices. Again, while this point is more general and not explicitly participating in the Elijah-Phineas tradition as our next passages will be, it is nevertheless the case that Mal 1:10 begins to conjure up the hope of an ideal priest who will stand up for YHWH and righteousness in the midst of corruption.

² When referencing the last six verses of Malachi in this study, I follow the BHS versification rather than that of ETs.

³ The choice to work synchronically with the final form of Malachi does not deny the diachronic formation of the book and or the late addition of its appendix/appendices.

⁴ I recognise the ongoing scholarly debate pertaining to hypothetical social settings and power struggles between priestly groups behind the text of Malachi. I do not, however, engage in this debate here as I have chosen to prioritise the literary context of the relevant passages of Malachi over hypothetical social settings behind the text. Cf. Julia M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi* (SBLDS 121; Atlanta: SBL Press, 1988); Jon L. Berquist, "The Social Setting of Malachi," *BTB* 19 (1989): 121–126; Paul L. Redditt, "The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 240–255.

⁵ Cf. Eric M. Meyers, "Priestly Language in the Book of Malachi," *HAR* 10 (1986): 225–237; Blessing Onoriode Boloje and Alphonso Groenewald, "Literary Analysis of Covenant Themes in the Book of Malachi," *OTE* 28 (2015): 273.

⁶ Cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1984), 312; Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (BO; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 727; Eugene H. Merrill, "Malachi," in *Daniel-Malachi* (EBC 8; ed. David E. Garland and Tremper Longman III; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 848.

C YHWH'S COVENANT WITH LEVI (MAL 2:4-7)

In a similar vein, Mal 2:4-7 continues expressing hope for a less corrupted, more idealised priesthood, which is contrasted by the current priestly corruption before (vv. 1-3) and after (vv. 8-9) our verses of interest.⁷ In Mal 2:4-7, the idealised priesthood that contrasts with the priestly corruption of Malachi's day is spoken of by YHWH in terms of a "covenant with Levi." As has been suggested in some previous studies⁸ (though often with too little evidence given), this unique concept is best understood via numerous allusions to Num 25 in Mal 2:4-7.⁹ In Num 25, YHWH makes a covenant with Phineas after the priest acts in jealousy for YHWH's name when the Israelites break their covenant with YHWH.¹⁰ In my view, compelling thematic and lexical ties between Num 25 and Mal 2:4-7 include the following:¹¹

- 1) The idea of a covenant of peace is not especially common. The only places in the Hebrew Bible where ברית is modified by שלום are Num 25:12, Isa

⁷ Thus, Hill speaks of "the comparison of Levitical ideal with the current realities of priestly function." Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi* (AYBC; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 220.

⁸ Cf. Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* (SBLDS 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 79-80; Alicia R. Hein, *The Prophet Is the People: An Answer to "Why Elijah?" in Second Temple Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (VT Sup 199; Leiden: Brill, 2025), 64-89; D.G. Clark, *Elijah as Eschatological High Priest: An Examination of the Elijah Tradition in Mal. 3:23-24* (PhD Diss., University of Notre Dame, 1975), 230; Meyers, "Priestly Language," 232; José R. Villalón, "Sources Vétéro-Testamentaires de la Doctrine Qumranienne des Deux Messies," *Revue de Qumrân* 8 (1972): 60-61; Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (AOTC; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 339-340; Michael B. Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2018), 496-497; Merrill, *Malachi*, 852; Sheree Lear, *Scribal Composition: Malachi as a Test Case* (FRLANT 270; Göttingen: V&R Academic, 2018), 121-146.

⁹ This is not mutually exclusive with possible allusions to Deut 33:8-11 which is also regularly mentioned in the scholarly literature. However, exploring this possibility is outside the scope of this study. Cf. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 317; Lear, *Scribal Composition*, 131.

¹⁰ When Phineas' name is spelled in English in Jewish tradition, it is typically spelled Pinchas. To avoid confusion, I will refer to him as "Phineas" in this study except when quoting a Jewish text.

¹¹ In his monograph on inner-biblical allusion in Malachi, Gibson does not find an allusion to Num 25 in Mal 2:4-7. In my estimation, this is because Gibson fails to appreciate the thematic parallels between the texts and writes off multiple lexical connections because they do not "match exactly." This assumes a wooden/rigid function of inner-biblical allusion which is often much more subtle and creative. Jonathan Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity: A Study of Inner-Biblical Allusion and Exegesis in Malachi* (LHBOTS 625; London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 100-104.

- 54:10, Ezek 34:25; 37:26 and Mal 2:5. The covenant of peace in Isa 54 is explicitly Noahic and universalised with all of creation and Ezekiel's is explicitly Davidic and eschatological; thus, neither is similar to Mal 2:5.
- 2) A *priestly* covenant of peace is found only in Num 25:12 and Mal 2:5.¹² Though the name Levi does not appear in Num 25, Phineas is explicitly said to be a "son of Aaron the priest" in v. 11.
 - 3) The priestly covenants of peace in Num 25:12 and Mal 2:5 are both found in contexts lamenting the covenant infidelity of God's people. In Num 25, God's people worship Baal Peor after marrying Midianite women. In Malachi, God's people and priests are corrupting (Mal 2:8) and profaning (Mal 2:10) YHWH's covenant(s).¹³
 - 4) In both texts, the solution to covenant infidelity is an ideal priest.¹⁴
 - 5) The description of the priestly covenant of peace also being a covenant of life in Mal 2:5 is a fitting description of the covenant YHWH makes with Phineas since the covenant is brought about by Phineas' actions that stopped the plague that was killing the people (Num 25:8).
 - 6) Malachi 2:6 claims that the ideal priest "turned many from iniquity" (שוב). This is a fitting description of Phineas' action that stops the people's covenant infidelity and thereby "turns back" (שוב) YHWH's anger in Num 25:11.
 - 7) The emphasis of the ideal priest fearing YHWH's name in Mal 2:5 is a fitting description of Phineas' jealousy for YHWH in Num 25:11–13.¹⁵

Thus, the rhetoric of Malachi castigates priestly compromise and infidelity and hopes for a priest who will have the fidelity and courage to stand up and be faithful to YHWH (cf. my brief comments on Mal 1:10 above). Based on the allusions above, I follow the wording of Lear in arguing that "the Ideal Levite is Phineas."¹⁶ In this context, an allusion to Phineas and his jealousy for YHWH and his covenant in Mal 2:4–7 fits exceptionally well and enhances the

¹² Cf. Jer. 33:21 where a covenant with Levi is mentioned. However, the covenant in Jeremiah is not a "covenant of peace."

¹³ Though the covenants referred to in Mal 2:8 and 10 are likely different, they are both broken in a literary context that contrasts them with an idealised Levitical covenant of peace.

¹⁴ I take "Levi" in Mal 2:4–7 to be a corporate representative of the priestly tribe and the ideal role of its members. Cf. Meyers, "Priestly Language," 231.

¹⁵ This is contra McKenzie and Wallace who speak of Phineas' jealousy in Num 25 as if it is incompatible with Levi fearing YHWH's name in Mal 2:5. This is not the case. While the two are not the same, describing Phineas' dramatic reaction to covenant idolatry as a manifestation of his fear for YHWH's name is compatible and reasonable. Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, "Covenant Themes in Malachi," *CBQ* 45 (1983): 550.

¹⁶ Lear, *Scribal Composition*, 132. "The phrase from 1 Kgs 17:24, ודבר־יהוה בפִּיךָ אַמַּת, is nearly identical to 2:6a in Malachi, except דבר־יהוה is replaced in Malachi with the term תּוֹרָה."

overall communicative intent of the book. However, Phineas is not the only person in the Hebrew Bible linked with our ideal Levite. Of the ideal Levite, Mal 2:6 states: "the torah of truth was in his mouth." Lear has rightly noted that "the elements of בפי + אמת + pronoun occur elsewhere only in 1 Kgs 17:24 in the HB." The verse from 1 Kgs 17 records the widow's response to Elijah after he raises her son from the dead. Thus, a conflation of Phineas and Elijah has begun in Mal 2:4–7, as the ideal Levite is linked with both individuals.

Furthermore, the ideal Levite in Mal 2:7 is described as the "messenger of YHWH of hosts." Other than the superscription containing the name Malachi (Mal 1:1), this is the first occurrence of the important מלאך root in Malachi and ought to influence how we understand the infamously enigmatic Mal 3:1. It is to this that I now turn.

D YHWH'S IDEAL LEVITE MESSENGER (MAL 2:7) AND "MY MESSENGER" (MAL 3:1)

Analysing Mal 3:1 is challenging since it is widely recognised to be both very important for the book and yet nearly impossible to make clear sense of; no solution is without its problems.¹⁷ In this section, I make one point about the verse without attempting to address every debatable facet of the verse. For instance, I remain agnostic as to the relationship of מלאך הברית with האדון or מלאכי. I find it best to be tentative in identifying how many individuals are referred to in the verse¹⁸ (possibly three, where האדון = YHWH?).¹⁹ It is also outside of my scope here to address the important observation that the verse appears to contain two inner-biblical allusions (compare Mal 3:1 with Exod 23:20 and Isa 40:3).²⁰

The point I would like to make is that in the book of Malachi, we have already been introduced to YHWH's messenger. In Mal 2:7, YHWH's messenger is the lofty, idealised priest ("Levi") whose description contains allusions to Phineas in Num 25 and Elijah in 1 Kgs 17. Therefore, when YHWH declares that

¹⁷ In my judgment, something in the text's history is probably to blame for the numerous awkward features in these lines. I find it likely that some of the phrases are not original to the book of Malachi and were never thoroughly edited to fit their context in the book.

¹⁸ Cf. the recent thorough treatment of the problems here by Ray E. Clendenen, "Messenger of the Covenant' in Malachi 3:1 Once Again," *JETS* 62 (2019): 81–102. Cf. Beth Glazier-McDonald, "Mal'ak Habberit: The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1," *HAR* 11 (1987): 93–104; S.D. Snyman, "Once Again: Investigating the Identity of the Three Figures Mentioned in Malachi 3:1," *VE* 27 (2006): 1031–1044; Andrew S. Malone, "Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1?," *TB* 57 (2006): 215–228; James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi* (SHBC; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 1048–1051.

¹⁹ Cf. Hill, *Malachi*, 268.

²⁰ Cf. Shepherd, *Book of the Twelve*, 488–489. See Hein for a strong interpretation of these allusions. Hein, *The Prophet is the People*, 73–76.

he is sending "my messenger,"²¹ just eleven verses later, we have already been prepared by Mal 2:7 to view the messenger of 3:1 as an idealised priestly figure.²² While one might presuppose along with Childs²³ that the idealised priestly messenger of YHWH in 2:7 is quite a different category of messenger from that of 3:1, it is not at all evident from the text of Malachi why the lofty, idealised priestly figure of 2:7 could not prepare us to read the eschatological figure of 3:1 in a priestly light.

The textual facts are that in 2:7, we have the statement "he (the idealised Levi) is the messenger of YHWH of hosts," followed eleven verses later by YHWH proclaiming, "I send my messenger." That most commentaries do not even reference the two verses in the same paragraph and instead look at other uses of מלאך in the Hebrew Bible (even though they rightly acknowledge that מלאך is nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible used to describe a priest)²⁴ is, in my judgment, a significant oversight.²⁵ Given the unique nature of an idealised "Levi" being presented as a מלאך of YHWH in a book that emphasises the term מלאך, should we not look within Malachi itself for direction on how to understand it?²⁶ Reading Mal 2:7 in relation to Mal 3:2–4 is, in fact, fitting. Malachi 3:2–4 describes a scenario in which a messenger ushers in an era of refining and

²¹ I do not take מלאכי in Mal 3:1a to be YHWH. Thus, with the majority (but by no means all) of scholars, it seems evident to me that there are at least two individuals in the verse; namely YHWH and someone who is not YHWH.

²² Cf. Lear, *Scribal Composition*, 133–134; Hein, *The Prophet is the People*, 64–89. Alexander Zeron, "The Martyrdom of Phineas-Elijah," *JBL* 98, (1979): 99–100.; Bruce V. Malchow, "The Messenger of the Covenant in Mal 3:1," *JBL* 103 (1984): 252–255; Villalón, "Des Deux Messies," 60; Clark, *High Priest*, 230. When commenting on v. 7b, Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 318, tries to draw a sharp distinction between the way in which priests and prophets are messengers of YHWH. Though Smith does not mention Mal 3:1 here, I presume that he felt the need to draw a sharp line here because he sensed that the messenger of YHWH in Mal 2:7 had the potential to inform how one reads Mal 3:1. Ironically, it is precisely this priest-prophet distinction that the eschatological Elijah tradition blurs (cf. the following sections of this study). This is contra Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 70–71, who maintains that the priestly vocation trumped the prophetic in the post-exilic community.

²³ Cf. Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 493. Cf. Shepherd, *Book of the Twelve*, 489.

²⁴ Hill, *Malachi*, 212; Petterson, *Malachi*, 341.

²⁵ For instances of commentators treating Mal 2:7 without consideration of 3:1, cf. David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 191–192; Hill, *Malachi*, 210–213; Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 318; Petterson, *Malachi*, 341. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 731.; Richard A. Taylor and Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi* (NAC; Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2005), 314; Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 71–72; Nogalski, *Micah-Malachi*, 1027; Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 177–181.; Shepherd, *Book of the Twelve*, 489; Merrill, *Malachi*, 852.

²⁶ Cf. Malchow, "The Messenger," 253.

purifying for "the sons of Levi."²⁷ Who better purifies corrupt priests than an idealised, eschatological priest?

The identification of the messenger in Mal 3:1 as an idealised priestly figure is not mutually exclusive with a prophetic identity for the messenger via connections to Mal 3:23.²⁸ Given the close lexical and syntactic similarities between Mal 3:1 and 3:23 (הנה and the *Qal* masculine participle of שלח in both verses), it is best to view "Elijah the prophet" in Mal 3:23 as the same as "my messenger" in Mal 3:1.²⁹ While "Elijah the prophet" is undoubtedly explicitly an eschatological prophet in Mal 3:23, Elijah in the Second Temple period is more than *just* an ideal prophet. We have already seen that Elijah and Phineas are equated when both are matched with the ideal Levite, YHWH's messenger, in Mal 2:4–7. Furthermore, there exists an entire tradition in Second Temple Judaism that, taking its cue from the Hebrew Bible itself, conflates Phineas the high priest and Elijah. This results in numerous texts that speak of Elijah in priestly terms. Elijah then becomes an idealised high-priestly figure in the heavens who will bring about the eschatological age (analogous to the vibrant life of Melchizedek in Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism). Below, I explore this tradition and its roots in the Hebrew Bible before integrating it with my argument regarding Malachi.

E ELIJAH AS A PHINEAS-LIKE HIGH PRIEST IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND EARLY JEWISH TRADITION

In 1 Kgs 18–19, allusions to Num 25 invite readers to compare Elijah's actions with Phineas' actions.³⁰ The relevant links are:

- 1) In 1 Kgs 19:9–18, we find YHWH and Elijah speaking together in the aftermath of Elijah's showdown with the priests of Baal (1 Kgs 18:7–46) and subsequent flight into the wilderness to escape Jezebel's threats (1 Kgs 19:1–3). When describing these events, Elijah tells YHWH that he has been קנא קנאתי ("very jealous") for YHWH in vv. 10 and 14. This calls to mind Num 25:11 where Phineas is בקנאו את־קנאתי ("jealous with my jealousy"). These are the only two doublet-emphatic occurrences of קנא applied to a human in Genesis-Kings and the occurrences are further

²⁷ In context, the phrase refers to priests.

²⁸ Cf. Hein, *The Prophet is the People*, 27–89, for how both Kings and Malachi both hope for an idealised "prophet like Moses" per Deut 18 and 34. Thanks to Mark Boda for pointing out to me that the conflation of prophetic and priestly/Levite roles is part of a broader trend in biblical literature. Cf. the characterisation of Moses in Torah, and Samuel in the books of Samuel and 1 Chronicles. Cf. also Ps. 110.

²⁹ Cf. Elie Assis, "Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope: A New Reading of Malachi 3,22–24," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 209, 214–215; Clendenen, "Messenger of the Covenant," 86.

³⁰ Brueggemann makes this connection: Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (SHBC; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 241; cf. also Lear, 121.

remarkable for their positive connotation since human jealousy is considered bad in the majority of the cases in the Hebrew Bible.

- 2) In these texts, Elijah and Phineas both take extreme measures to halt Israel's worship of a Baal deity.
- 3) Both Elijah and Phineas kill the idolaters out of their jealousy for YHWH.
- 4) In both cases, the idolaters are killed "before all the children of Israel" (1 Kgs 18:20; Num 25:6).
- 5) The narratives conclude with a plague (Num 25:8–9) and a famine (1 Kgs 18:41–46) ceasing due to the jealous actions of the protagonists.

These allusions have the effect of presenting Elijah and his actions as analogous to Phineas in Num 25 where YHWH makes a priestly, perpetual covenant of peace in the aftermath of Phineas' jealous actions. It results in Elijah being presented in a priestly manner. This relationship between these opponents of Baal idolatry in the Hebrew Bible is likely the inspiration for a similar conflation of Phineas and Elijah found in Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, a Jewish text that originated at some point between the second century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.³¹ While recounting Phineas' death, *Biblical Antiquities* 48:1a reads as follows:

And in that time Phineas laid himself down to die, and the LORD said to him, "Behold you have passed the 120 years that have been established for every man. And now rise up and go from here and dwell in Danaben on the mountain and dwell there many years. And I will command my eagle, and he will nourish you there, and you will not come down to mankind until the time arrives and you be tested in that time; and you will shut up the heaven then, and by your mouth it will be opened up."

In this text, God describes events in Phineas' life in a way that mirrors Elijah's life in 1 Kings.³² Elijah shuts and opens the heavens (1 Kgs 17:1, 18:41–45), is fed in the wilderness by a bird (1 Kgs 17:4–6) and avoids a natural death (2 Kgs 2:11).

The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan also picks up the tradition of conflating Elijah and Phineas. Exodus 6:18b of the Targum reads: "and he (Kohath) lived until he saw Phineas, who is Elijah the high priest who will be sent in the exile of Israel in the end of days."³³ Similarly, in Num 25:12b of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, while YHWH is making his covenant of peace with Phineas, YHWH

³¹ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Vol. 2; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2015), 299. The excerpt from *Biblical Antiquities* above is a reproduction of the translation in Charlesworth's volume.

³² Lear, *Scribal Composition*, 141.

³³ חייא עד דחמא ית פנחס הוא אליהו כהנא רבא דעתיד למשתלחא לגלותא דישׂראל בסוף יומיא

proclaims that he will "make him (Phineas) an angel of the covenant and he shall live forever so as to proclaim redemption at the end of days."³⁴

In the Targum of Exod 6:18b, Phineas the high priest is bluntly equated with Elijah, which results in Elijah fully taking on the high priestly role that comes with being conflated with Phineas the high priest.³⁵ Phineas–Elijah has also taken on an eschatological role; he will be sent "in the end of days." Elijah is a fitting candidate for such a role since, in the Hebrew Bible, Elijah does not die but is taken up by God into the heavens via a whirlwind. Furthermore, in the Targum of Num 25:12b, Phineas has become the eschatological messenger of the covenant from Mal 3:1b.³⁶ Although *my* argument in this article pertains only to "my messenger" in Mal 3:1a and I make no claims about the messenger of the covenant in 3:1b, this connection in the Targum is evidence that the authors/editors of the Targum preserved a reading that understood the Phineas–Elijah eschatological high priest tradition to be present in Malachi.³⁷

While Biblical Antiquities and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan were not written in the Persian period when the bulk of Malachi was composed, it is quite probable that these texts preserve traditions that existed in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The tradition is attested broadly enough that Ohler can suggest that the conflation of Elijah and Phineas is "certainly older than Ps.-Philo and is well attested in targumic traditions."³⁸ I suggest, for reasons that will become more evident in the next section of this article, that the Elijah–Phineas tradition is indeed present in Malachi and that it has important ramifications for how we read key verses in the book. The appendix (or appendices) of Malachi are widely considered to be late additions, furthering the likelihood that the Elijah–Phineas tradition was known when the text of Malachi was finalised. This is especially likely since Elijah-as-high-priest and Elijah-as-eschatological-figure are most often found together in Second Temple Jewish literature³⁹ and we know that Elijah had already become an eschatological figure by the time the

³⁴ מלאך קיים ויחי לעלם למבשרא גאולתא בסוף יומיא

³⁵ It is also probable that Elijah offering a sacrifice at the end of a priestly showdown (1 Kgs 18:38) and anointing kings (1 Kgs 19:15–16) encouraged a priestly understanding of the prophet. Cf. John Poirier, "The Endtime Return of Elijah and Moses at Qumran," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10 (2003): 228.

³⁶ Confusingly, Lear suggests that the phrase, "messenger of the covenant," alludes to Mal 2:7. The connection with 3:1b is far stronger. Lear, *Scribal Composition*, 144.

³⁷ For additional references to an eschatological high priestly Elijah in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, cf. Exod 40:10, Deut 30:4 and Deut 33:11. Additional Second Temple Jewish texts that evidence an eschatological and/or priestly Elijah tradition include Sir 48 and Lives of the Prophets 21:1 as well as (probably) 4Q521 f2iii:1–7.

³⁸ Markus Ohler, "The Expectation of Elijah and the Presence of the Kingdom of God," *JBL* 118 (1999): 461. Cf. S.M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (SNTSMS 117; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 96.

³⁹ See the texts referenced in note 25 above.

last verses of Malachi were written (cf. Mal 3:23–24). Having touched on the tradition of conflating Elijah and Phineas in the Hebrew Bible and its reception in early Jewish texts,⁴⁰ I now return to the text of Malachi and argue that these traditions are leveraged as part of the text's communicative effort.

F ELIJAH–PHINEAS AND THE END OF THE WORLD (MAL 3:23–24)

To begin this section, I would like to sum up the argument thus far. One of the primary goals of Malachi's rhetoric is to condemn unfaithful priests and to call out for a faithful priest to stand against disgraceful sacrifices taking place in YHWH's temple (Mal 1:10). Malachi 2:4–7 then alludes to Phineas' moment of jealous covenant faithfulness in order to paint a portrait of an ideal priest who in turn is called YHWH's messenger in 2:7. Additionally, Mal 2:6 alludes to 1 Kgs 17 where Elijah raises a child from the dead. Thus, Mal 2:4–7 begins to conflate Elijah and Phineas by equating them both to the ideal Levite, YHWH's messenger. It is then a very short step of eleven verses later in Mal 3:1 to connect "my messenger" with the ideal priestly messenger of 2:7. This suggests that in Mal 3:1, we have an ideal priestly "messenger" in the mould of Phineas and Elijah. We then have Elijah the prophet introduced by name in Mal 3:23 BHS [4:5 ET], who is connected to the messenger of Mal 3:1 via their shared introductions (Look! I am sending...). This suggests that "my messenger" in Mal 3:1 is both priestly and prophetic. Finally, I now suggest that one of the main reasons why Elijah appears in the climactic appendix of Malachi is precisely because he is the great eschatological high priest in the mould of Phineas.⁴¹ In his showdown with the apostate priests (1 Kgs 18), Elijah has already proven that he, like Phineas, will do whatever it takes to purify a corrupt Judahite priesthood. As the prophet/priest who never died, Elijah's return will signal the arrival of YHWH's great day of purifying and judgment (Mal 3:2–5).⁴² As

⁴⁰ Rabbinic Judaism has by no means universally accepted the Phineas-Elijah tradition though. For an overview of this, see Moshe Lavee, "Literary Canonization at Work: The Authority of Aggadic Midrash and the Evolution of Havdalah Poetry in the Genizah," *AJSR* 37 (2013): 285–313.

⁴¹ This is not mutually exclusive with the idea that Moses (Torah) and Elijah (Prophets) feature at the conclusion of the prophetic corpus to bring together the law and the prophets in a canon-conscious editorial move. In Malachi, Elijah is explicitly prophetic and implicitly priestly. Cf. Stephen B. Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020); Nogalski, *Micah-Malachi*, 1067–1070; Childs, *Introduction*, 497.

⁴² Due to what I consider an involved redactional history, it is now unclear who the subject of the verbs is when the sons of Levi are purified. It would seem natural to understand YHWH as the one doing the refining, but it could equally be the messenger of the covenant. Of course, it also matters whether one equates YHWH with the messenger of the covenant in v. 1 or not. The commentaries often assume a subject for the verbs without adequate defence.

YHWH's priestly messenger (Mal 2:7, 3:1), Elijah will embody what it means to be a faithful priest (Mal 1:10, 2:4–7) filled with jealousy of and fear for YHWH's name. The factors discussed above have, in fact, prepared the reader of Malachi to conflate Elijah and Phineas.⁴³ Allusions to Phineas in Num 25 and Elijah in 1 Kgs 17 are part of the sketch of the ideal priest ("Levi") in Mal 2:4–7. This ideal priest of Mal 2:7 is connected to 3:1 by being called YHWH's messenger. Therefore, "my messenger" in 3:1 is best read as an idealised, Phineas–Elijah-like priest. Elijah the prophet is then promptly connected to the same messenger of 3:1 via their matching introductions (cf. 3:1 and 3:23). Thus, "my messenger" in 3:1 is connected to both Elijah the prophet (3:23) and an idealised Phineas–Elijah-like priest (2:4–7). To put it more plainly, Malachi's "my messenger" in 3:1 is Elijah–Phineas. These conclusions reflect those of Clark, whose study on the eschatological priesthood of Elijah is the most extensive to date. Clark states that:

Once Elijah became identified with this covenant messenger (Mal. 3:1), it was only a short step to the Elijah-Phineas identity since Mal. 2:7 describes the descendants of Phinehas, who is the ideal priest, as the messenger of the Lord of hosts. Hence, through 3:1 Elijah was associated with the priest of 2:7 and through 2:7, which is part of the context of 2:4-7, he is also associated with Phinehas whose covenant is referred to in 2:5.⁴⁴

G CONCLUSION

Thus, Malachi assumes and participates in the Second Temple tradition of conflating Elijah and Phineas.⁴⁵ In doing so, the text suggests that the messenger figure who will prepare the way for YHWH's day of eschatological judgment and refinement is a priestly prophetic figure. The identification of this tradition in Malachi makes the sudden appearance of Elijah in its appendix more fitting. Elijah as the heavenly, eschatological high priest (assumed in the Phineas–Elijah tradition), will return to bring about YHWH's day of refinement and destruction for the corrupted Second Temple priesthood. As he did in his prophetic ministry in the Monarchic period, Elijah continues eschatologically to challenge unfaithful priests among God's people.

⁴³ I therefore agree with Childs who argues that the references to Moses and Elijah in Malachi's conclusion provide a theological context that is founded in the authoritative traditions of Israel. Childs, *Introduction*, 495.

⁴⁴ Clark, *High Priest*, 230. I have added the parenthetical reference to Mal 3:1 and adjusted some punctuations and phrasing to increase clarity. Cf. Lear, *Scribal Composition*, 133–134; Zeron, "Martyrdom of Phineas-Elijah," 99–100.

⁴⁵ Contra Childs and Lear who suggest that the Malachi appendix functions to establish Elijah's eschatological role. Childs, *Introduction*, 496; Lear, *Scribal Composition*, 134.

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