

## Reconciliation between Fathers and Sons in Mal 3:24: a Broader Ancient Near Eastern Perspective

PAUL A. KRUGER (UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH)

### ABSTRACT

*In the history of Malachi exegesis the passage in 3:24 has always been a crux for interpreters. It relates to the coming of Elijah "to reconcile fathers and sons." A wide array of suggestions have been advanced to explain the significance of this pronouncement, such as to view it (1) historically (in terms of the lifetime of the writer/s of the book), (2) or to see it as a metaphor (where the "fathers" symbolically represent the ancestors and the "sons" the Israelites), or (3) to take it as a literary device portraying a society in disarray, as was already proposed by Junker (1938) and Horst (1938). This contribution elaborates on the latter proposition and supplies more ancient Near Eastern comparative evidence (from the genres of the laments, wisdom and prophecy) to substantiate this claim.*

### A INTRODUCTION

The topic "children in the OT" has lately become a popular one in Hebrew Bible studies. This renewed interest must be seen against the background of an era lasting until the 1970's that Lux and Kunz-Lübcke call the "Kinderschweigen der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft."<sup>1</sup> They supply several reasons that could have contributed to the present new attention being devoted to children and matters relating to them:<sup>2</sup> (1) the upsurge in studies on the theme of "wisdom" in the Hebrew Bible, starting in the last quarter of the twentieth century, where issues such as the transmitters and the *Sitz im Leben* of education became the focus of interest;<sup>3</sup> (2) the "rediscovery" of the Book of Deuteronomy in which the topic of "learning" ("Lernen") enjoys a vital place;<sup>4</sup> and (3)

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<sup>1</sup> Rüdiger Lux and Andreas Kunz-Lübcke, "Das 'Kind' in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft. Skizzen zu einem Desiderat der Forschung," in "*Schaffe mir Kinder ...*": *Beiträge zur Kindheit im alten Israel und in seinen Nachbarkulturen* (ed. Rüdiger Lux & Andreas Kunz-Lübcke; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Lux and Kunz-Lübcke, "Das 'Kind' in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft," 12-14.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the recent study by Karin Finsterbusch, *Weisung für Israel: Studien zu religiösem Lehren und Lernen im Deuteronomium und in seinem Umfeld* (FAT 44; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). For the nature of education in the broader ancient Near Eastern contexts of Mesopotamia and Egypt, see Konrad Volk, "Methoden

the introduction of a theme in the study of religions which is not directly connected to the previous two aspects, but stimulated by, amongst others, Assmann's view that the phenomenon of monotheism is the trigger of violence. In this regard the subject of "violence against children" plays a significant role.<sup>5</sup>

Conflicts between children and parents are as old as humankind itself. The ideal was always, however, that there should be concord between the generations, as the following claim from the Sumerian ruler, Gudea from Lagash (c. 2130 B.C.E.), illustrates. His law reforms are aimed at achieving the following harmonious family situation:

Die Mutter stiess keine Flüche gegen ihr Kind aus, das Kind, das von seiner Mutter wegging, sagte seiner Mutter kein (böses) Wort ... Vor Gudea ... erschien niemand im Streit.<sup>6</sup>

A similar sentiment is echoed in another Sumerian text in which a son is instructed to treat his parents like "gods" and to maintain healthy family relations:

[Auf die Worte deines Vaters] achte [wie auf die deiner Gottheit!]  
Auf die Worte deiner Mutter achte wie auf die deiner Gottheit! [...]  
Deinem älteren Bruder Ehrfurcht zu erweisen, sollst du wissen!  
Auf das Wort deines älteren Bruders sollst du achten wie auf das  
deines Vaters!  
Deine ältere Schwester sollst du nicht erzürnen!  
Wende den Fluch in den Mund zurück!<sup>7</sup>

A similarly idyllic image of family solidarity reverberates at the end of the Sumerian city lament *The Lament for Nibru* (lines 287-290). When disastrous circumstances are eventually relieved, sound family relationships could well be pictured as follows:

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altmesopotamischer Erziehung nach Quellen der altbabylonischen Zeit," *Saeculum* 47 (1996): 178-216 and Erika Feucht, *Das Kind im Alten Ägypten: Die Stellung des Kindes in Familie und Gesellschaft nach altägyptischen Texten und Darstellungen* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1995), respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Lux and Kunz-Lübcke, "Das 'Kind' in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft," 13 refer to the recent important book by Andreas Michel, *Gott und Gewalt gegen Kinder im Alten Testament* (FAT 37; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) which deals with different manifestations of violence against children.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Jungbauer, "Ehre Vater und Mutter". *Der Weg des Elterngebots in der biblischen Tradition* (WUNT II/146; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Claus Wilcke, "Konflikte und ihre Bewältigung in Elternhaus und Schule im Alten Orient," in *Schau auf die Kleinen ... Das Kind in Religion, Kirche und Gesellschaft* (ed. Rüdiger Lux; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002), 13. See also Rikvah Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia* (Norman: Univ of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 71.

a time when no one is to speak hostile words to another, when a son is to respect his father (...) a time when the younger brother, fearing his big brother, is to show humility, a time when the elder child is to treat the younger child reasonably and to pay heed to his words.<sup>8</sup>

With these passages in mind, we may now turn to Mal 3:24, where a similar condition of restored family relationships is envisaged, viz. that between fathers and sons, and sons and fathers. The following aspects of this passage will be briefly presented: a translation of the text and a few introductory remarks (section B); how this proclamation was traditionally viewed, in other words, what kinds of explanations (e.g. historic, metaphorical, literal, etc.) have been proposed to understand this text (section C); and a suggestion to view the description as a literary device (section D).

## B THE TRANSLATION OF MAL 3:22-24

22. Remember (זכר)<sup>9</sup> the teaching (תורה) of Moses,<sup>10</sup> my servant (עבד),<sup>11</sup> to whom I commanded (צוה)<sup>12</sup> rules (חקים) and regulations (משפטים)<sup>13</sup> at Horeb (חרב)<sup>14</sup> for all Israel (כל ישראל).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Graham Cunningham et al., eds., "The Lament for Nibru," *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, n.p. [cited 10 November 2011], (ed. Jeremy A. Black et al.). Online: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.2.4#>.

<sup>9</sup> This is the only instance of the verb זכר in Malachi. The activity of "remembrance" is specifically associated with the book of Deuteronomy, where the exodus from Egypt is the most prominent event singled out for this action (Deut 5:15, 15:15; 16:3; 24:18, 22, etc.); see H. Eising, *ThWAT* II: 575.

<sup>10</sup> This is the sole occurrence of the combination "the teaching (תורה) of Moses" in the prophets. Elsewhere it is only attested in Deuteronomistic literature (Josh 8:31, 32; 23:6; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6; 23:25), the Chronicler (2 Chr 23:18; 30:16), Ezra 3:2; 7:6, Neh 8:1 and Dan 9:11.13. For a discussion of the Deuteronomistic terminology in the verse, see Henning G. Reventlow, *Die Propheten Haggai, Sacharja und Maleachi* (ATD 25/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 160 and Theodor Lescow, *Das Buch Maleachi: Texttheorie-Auslegung-Kanontheorie: Mit einem Exkurs über Jeremia 8,8-9* (AzTh 75; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1993), 169-170.

<sup>11</sup> The designation "Moses, the servant" occurs only here in the prophetic literature. Its provenance is mainly the Deuteronomistic (e.g. Deut 34:5; Josh 1:1, 2, 7, 13; 8:31) and Chronicist literature (1 Chr 6:34; 2 Chr 1:3; 2 Chr 24:9).

<sup>12</sup> The closest parallel to the sequence of linguistic items "teaching/Moses/my servant/command" is Josh 1:7: "Only be very strong and brave to obey the whole teaching (תורה) that my servant (עבד) Moses commanded (צוה) you." A few verses later (Josh 1:13) it is restated: "Remember (זכר; see also Mal 3:22: זכר, "remember") the word that Moses, the servant of YHWH commanded you," which clearly testifies to the fact that the redactor of Mal 3:22-24 consciously establishes a link between the tōrâ and the prophets: "Es ist höchst beachtlich, dass Mal 3,22-24 durch eine dtr geprägte Anspielung auf Jos 1,7 und Dtn 18,15 nicht nur das Buch Maleachi und das Zwölf-

23. Look, I am about to send (שלח)<sup>16</sup> to you, Elijah, the prophet,<sup>17</sup> before the great and terrible day of YHWH arrives.

24. And he will turn (שוב, Hi) the hearts (לב) of the fathers to (על)<sup>18</sup> the sons, and the hearts of the sons to their fathers so that I will not come and strike the earth with destruction (חרם).<sup>19</sup>

Malachi 3:22-24 are regarded by most commentators as two later appendices,<sup>20</sup> not only to the book itself, but to the canon as a whole.<sup>21</sup> Also

prophetenbuch, sondern den gesamten Kanonteil der Propheten abschliesst und damit die Schriftpropheten in die mosaische Sukzession stellt;" Timo Veijola, *Moses Erben: Studien zum Dekalog, zum Deuteronomismus und zum Schriftgelehrtentum* (BWANT 149; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 217, n. 165.

<sup>13</sup> Apart from this occurrence in Mal, this combination ("rules and regulations") is only attested in Deuteronomy (4:5, 8, 14).

<sup>14</sup> This is the only instance of חרב in the prophets. Its provenance is mainly the Book of Deuteronomy (1:2, 6, 19; 4:10, 15; 5:2; 9:8; 18:16; 28:69).

<sup>15</sup> This is the only appearance of this combination in the prophets. Elsewhere it is mainly attested in Deuteronomistic and Chronistic literature.

<sup>16</sup> For the combination אנכי (personal pronoun), plus the participle of שלח in the sense of "sending a prophet," cf. Jer 25:15 and 26:5.

<sup>17</sup> The only other cases in the Hebrew Bible where Elijah is designated a "prophet" is 1 Kgs 18:36 and 2 Chr 21:12. See Alexander von Bulmerincq, *Kommentar zum Buche des Propheten Maleachi* (Tartu: Mattiesen, 1932), 567.

<sup>18</sup> Mostly the combination "to bring back/return (שוב, hip'il) to (אֶל)" is used, but "to bring back/return (שוב, hip'il) to (על)" is also attested (e.g. Jer 16:5; 23:3; 24:6, etc.). The phrase "to bring back/return (שוב, hip'il) the heart (לב) to (על)" (Mal 3:24a), which is unique in the Hebrew Bible, "... hat gleichfalls mit Änderung des Sinnes bzw. der Gesinnung zu tun ..."; Arndt Meinhold, *Maleachi* (BKAT XIV/8; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006), 421.

<sup>19</sup> For the claim that in post-exilic times חרם signifies simply "kill"/"destroy" (Isa 43:28; Zech 14:11; Mal 3:24), see N. Lohfink, *ThWAT* III: 212, and more recently Rüdiger Schmitt, *Der "Heilige Krieg" im Pentateuch und im deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk: Studien zur Forschungs-, Rezeptions- und Religionsgeschichte von Krieg und Bann im Alten Testament* (AOAT 381; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011), 58.

<sup>20</sup> The most recent studies supporting this view are the following: Karl William Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Problems, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi* (BZAW 288; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 388; Martin Beck, *Der "Tag YHWH's" im Dodekapropheten: Studien im Spannungsfeld von Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte* (BZAW 356; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 298; Meinhold, *Maleachi*, 399; Paul-Gerhard Schwesig, *Die Rolle der Tag-YHWHs-Dichtungen im Dodekapropheten* (BZAW 366; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 269 and Jakob Wöhrle, *Der Abschluss des Zwölfprophetenbuches: Buchübergreifende Redaktionsprozesse in den späten Sammlungen* (BZAW 389; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 251, 421. Erich Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 583 describes these two additions as "Epilog 1": Mal 3:22 (with references to Josh 1:7, 13; Deut 5:1; 11:32; 12:1; 26:12) and "Epilog 2": Mal 3:23-24

with respect to genre there is a clear difference with regard to the preceding passages: instead of the preceding six disputation words,<sup>22</sup> here two independent sayings are used: v. 22 is cast in the form of reprimand (with the imperative) and v. 23f. is formulated as a promise (introduced by the particle הנה).<sup>23</sup>

Regarding content and syntax, likewise, no specific connections between vv. 22 and 23f. are evident.<sup>24</sup> In v. 22 the people are called upon to "remember" the t  r   of Moses, whilst v. 23-24 announces the coming of Elijah, who will bring about reconciliation between fathers and sons. A further argument against the original unity of vv. 22 and 23-24 is the fact that the "LXX die Reihenfolge der beiden Teilst  cke offensichtlich problemlos vertauschen kon-

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(with references to I Kgs 19 and Isa 66); see also Meinhold, *Maleachi*, 404-5 who supplies several arguments in substantiating this viewpoint. Those in favour of seeing these verses as the original conclusion of the Book of Malachi are in the minority; see e.g. Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* (SBL.DS 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 267.

<sup>21</sup> This canonical connection was classically formulated by Wilhelm Rudolph, *Haggai - Sacharja 1-8 - Sacharja 9-14 - Maleachi* (KAT XIII/4; G  tersloh: G  tersloher Verlagshaus, 1976), 291: "Nachdem nun so lange vom Wirken Jahwes durch seine Propheten die Rede gewesen ist, k  nnte die Thora, 'das Gesetz meines Knechtes Mose' in den Hintergrund treten. Aber das darf nicht geschehen, denn die Thora ist die Quintessenz der j  dischen Religion, und deshalb geh  rt es sich, dass die Erinnerung an sie auch den ganzen Prophetenkanon einrahmt." See, however, Karl Budde, *Geschichte der althebr  ischen Litteratur* (Leipzig: C F Amelangs Verlag, 1909), 175 who many years earlier already noticed the key function of Mal 3:23f. in the prophetic canon: "Dieser Anspruch (=Wiederkunft Elias vor dem Endgericht: PAK) soll wohl   berhaupt nicht zum Buch Maleachi geh  ren, sondern ist als Schlussformel f  r den gesamten Prophetenkanon gemeint."

<sup>22</sup> For the nature of the disputation words, see Rainer Kessler, "Maleachi – traumatisches Gedicht," in *Gottes Wahrnehmungen: Helmut Utzschneider zum 60. Geburtstag* (Ed. Stefan Gehrig and Stefan Seiler; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009), 160-176.

<sup>23</sup> See Reventlow, *Die Propheten Haggai, Sacharja und Maleachi*, 160.

<sup>24</sup> See Rudolph, *Haggai - Sacharja 1-8 - Sacharja 9-14 - Maleachi*, 291 and Beck, *Der "Tag YHWH's,"* 298. Aaron Schart, *Die Entstehung des Zw  lfprophetenbuchs: Neubearbeitungen von Amos im Rahmen schriften  bergreifender Redaktionsprozesse* (BZAW 260; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 300 holds that "die genaue Beziehung beider Teile zueinander bewusst in der Schwebe bleiben." Hearers/recipients are therefore challenged to decipher the significance of the connection; see also Thomas Hieke, *Kult und Ethos: Die Verschmelzung von rechtem Gottesdienst und gerechtem Handeln im Lesevorgang der Maleachischrift* (SBS 208; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2006), 80 for a similar idea. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 121, on the other hand, explains the close association between Moses and Elijah as the expression of a common experience: the theophany granted to both at the mountain of Horeb.

nte":<sup>25</sup> v. 22 is positioned after v. 23-24.<sup>26</sup> This reversal "clearly indicates that the final text was not yet fixed in the text traditions of the MT and LXX."<sup>27</sup>

On a literal and thematic level Mal 3:23 displays perceptible correlations with both Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20. All three passages record the sending of a heavenly being by Yahweh for a specific purpose: in Exod 23:20 it is a messenger (מלאך) who is "to guide" (שמר) the Israelites during their journey; in Mal 3:1<sup>28</sup> the task of the messenger (מלאך) is to "clear" (פנה, Pi) the way before the Lord. Malachi 3:23 proclaims the sending of yet another "messenger," this time called by a personal name (Elijah), and he is to resolve the discord between fathers and sons. The similarities at the beginning of these pronouncements can be represented as follows:

Exod 23:20α:	הנה	אנכי	שלה	מלאך	לפניך
Mal 3:1α:	הנני		שלה	מלאכי	
Mal 3:23a:	הנה	אנכי	שלה	(אליה) <sup>29</sup>	לכם

In other respects Mal 3:23-24 likewise supposes a "literary horizon"<sup>30</sup> broader than the book itself. Elsewhere too mention is made of the "day of the

<sup>25</sup> Lescow, *Das Buch Maleachi*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Different explanations are offered for this deviation, e.g. "offenbar, um nicht das Buch und damit den ganzen Prophetenkanon mit dieser furchtbaren Drohung ausklingen zu lassen"; Ernst Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (KAT XII; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), 567; see also Arndt Meinhold, "Mose und Elia am Gottesberg und am Ende des Prophetenkanons," *Leqach* 2 (2002): 32, n. 59. Or: "Näher liegt die Annahme, dass die Einheit vv. 23-24 den vv. 13-21 als aktualisierende Fortschreibung zugeordnet und mit der Umstellung der ursprüngliche Abschluss des Prophetenkanons wiederhergestellt wurde"; Lescow, *Das Buch Maleachi*, 168-69.

<sup>27</sup> Steven L. McKenzie and Howard N. Wallace, "Covenant Themes in Maleachi," *CBQ* 45 (1983): 560, n. 34.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of this text and its relationship with Mal 3:23f, see Adam S. van der Woude, "Der Engel des Bundes: Bemerkungen zu Maleachi 3,1c und seinem Kontext," in *Die Botschaft und die Boten: FS für H.W. Wolff* (ed. Jörg Jeremias and Lothar Perlit; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 289-300.

<sup>29</sup> Beck, *Der "Tag YHWH's,"* 305 surmises that Mal 3:23a is a citation from Exod 23:20.

<sup>30</sup> James Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 128; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 204.

Lord"<sup>31</sup> which is "coming" (בוא; Isa 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15, 2:1; 3:4; Zeph 2:2; Zech 14:1),<sup>32</sup> whilst Mal 3:23b is a direct quotation from Joel 3:4b.<sup>33</sup>

Elijah too is a well-known figure in the Hebrew Bible tradition (cf. the narratives in 1 Kgs 17-18; 2 Kgs 1), but the question is why he is specifically assigned to fulfil a particular task in preparation for the "day of Yahweh," since apart from Mal 3:24, nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible is mention made of Elijah's return. One possibility to explain this eventuality is to say: "Because he is available. Unlike an ordinary mortal, Elijah did not die."<sup>34</sup> Others link the declaration in Mal 3:24 ("the turning of the hearts of the fathers to the sons") with 1 Kgs 18:37, where it is explicitly stated that God, on account of Elijah's prayer, "has turned (סבב, *hip'ill*//שוב, *hip'il*: Mal 3:24) their hearts (לבם = the hearts of the people //לב אבות, Mal 3:24) back."<sup>35</sup> For others, such as Kellermann, Elijah's mediating abilities cover an even broader spectrum:

Elia erweist sich in seiner von den Schriften überlieferten Vita für diese Aufgabe als besonders geeignet. Er vermochte Unheil in Heil zu wenden (1 Kön 17,1; 18,41), nötigte sein Volk zur Umkehr (1 Kön 18), (...) Er trat als Prophet entsprechend Mal 3,1 unerwartet und plötzlich in die Szene (1 Kön 17,1; 18, 7.12; 21,20; 2 Kön 1,6; 2,16). Die Kraft seines Wortes bezwang sogar Könige (1 Kön 17,1f; 18; 21,17ff; 2 Kön 1; 2 Chr 21,12-15; Sir 48,1-4).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The "day of the Lord" has lately become a very popular theme in Hebrew Bible studies; see, e.g. Beck, *Der "Tag YHWH's,"* and Schwesig, *Die Rolle der Tag-JHWHs-Dichtungen.*

<sup>32</sup> Beck, *Der "Tag YHWH's,"* 306.

<sup>33</sup> Rudolph, *Haggai - Sacharja 1-8 - Sacharja 9-14 - Maleachi*, 291; Lescow, *Das Buch Maleachi*, 172, 174; Schart, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuchs*, 301 and Beck, *Der "Tag YHWH's,"* 306.

<sup>34</sup> Kristen H. Lindbeck, *Elijah and the Rabbis: Story and Theology* (New York: Colombia University, 2010), XII. For the Elijah-*redivivus* motif in early Judaism and the NT, see Eve-Marie Becker, "Elia *redivivus* im Markus-Evangelium?," in *Yearbook 2008: Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (ed. Hermann Lichtenberger and Ulrike Mittmann-Richert; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 587-625. Two other recent studies which should be mentioned too for the reception history of the Elijah figure in Judaism and the NT are Silvia Pellegrini, *Elia-Wegbereiter des Gottessohnes: eine text-semiotische Untersuchung im Markusevangelium* (HBS 26; Freiburg: Herder, 2000), and Johannes Majoros-Danowski, *Elia im Markusevangelium: Ein Buch im Kontext des Judentums* (BWANT N.F. 20; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Dieter Zeller, "Elia und Elischa im Frühjudentum," *BiKi* 41 (1986): 155.

<sup>36</sup> Ulrich Kellermann, "Wer kann Sünden vergeben ausser Elia?," in *Gottes Recht als Lebensraum: Festschrift für Hans Jochen Boecker* (ed. Peter Mommer, et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 170.

What is furthermore striking is that the order of reconciliatory events to be brought about by Elijah (Mal 3:24) is reversed. Being a patriarchal society, one might have anticipated that the act of reconciliation would have begun with the sons as the lesser partners in the relationship to take the first step to reconcile themselves with the *patria potestas*.<sup>37</sup> But here the order is turned around; Elijah's restorative deed will commence with the fathers: "And he (Elijah) will turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons." Meinhold is of the opinion that this should be explained in terms of the "Elterngebot" (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16; Lev 19:3a), where the primary responsibility rests with parents (fathers) to ensure that their sons behave in a proper manner, that is, in accordance with the codes of the *tôrâ*.<sup>38</sup> This could be true, but the answer should most probably be sought in another direction, namely that in an eschatological age (as is the case here) all strange and incongruous things could happen.<sup>39</sup> For example, the traditional husband-wife relationship could be reversed: "the wife will encompass the man" (Jer 31:22b).<sup>40</sup> Or in a political sense that "The few shall become thousand, the least a mighty nation" (Isa 60:22), or in a cosmic sense that "in the place of the thorn, a cypress shall come up; in the place of the briar, a myrtle shall rise" (Isa 55:13).

### C HOW WAS THIS PROCLAMATION IN MAL 3:24 VIEWED TRADITIONALLY?

The fact that the LXX deviates in its rendering of v. 24b already clearly signifies that the nature and parameters of Elijah's reconciliatory deed were not immediately evident and therefore perceived differently by its recipients. The first part of the pronouncement is a fairly literal rendering of the MT ("... he will restore [ἀποκαταστήσει] the heart of the father to the son"),<sup>41</sup> but the second part deviates in the sense that it conceives a society where the conflict resolution exceeds family relationships: "... and the heart of a man to his neighbor." In other words, Elijah's deed will also be beneficial to social structures broader than the family domain; the public realm is also encompassed.<sup>42</sup> In Ben Sira's later interpretation of this same text (Sir 48:10) Elijah's reconciling deed is even more extensive: a "national aspect of redemption" is

<sup>37</sup> Kellermann, "Wer kann Sünden vergeben ausser Elia?," 170.

<sup>38</sup> Meinhold, *Maleachi*, 427-428.

<sup>39</sup> "... when the absurd and the impossible become reality, it is a sign that we are passing into another world ... in the eschatology"; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Adunata," *JEOL* 8 (1943): 634; the translation from the Dutch is mine.

<sup>40</sup> See Paul A. Kruger, "A Woman Will 'encompass' a Man: a Short Note on Gender Reversal in Jer 31,22b," *Biblica* 89/3 (2008): 380-388.

<sup>41</sup> Note, however, that instead of "fathers"/"sons," as in the MT, the singular is used: "father"/"son"; see Majoros-Danowski, *Elija im Markusevangelium*, 81-82 for a possible explanation of this difference.

<sup>42</sup> "In der Septuagintafassung (...) wird eine gewisse Entpolitisierung deutlich"; Majoros-Danowski, *Elija im Markusevangelium*, 81.



added.<sup>43</sup> Whilst the first part of the announcement is a rather literal rendering of the MT ("... to turn [להשיב, ἐπιστρέψαι] the hearts of the fathers to their sons"), the second part ("... to reestablish [להבין, καταστήσαι]<sup>44</sup> the tribes of Israel")<sup>45</sup> anticipates a "politische Wiederherstellung der einstigen Grösse Israels."<sup>46</sup>

If one turns to modern explications (starting from the nineteenth century onwards) of the theme of reconciliation in the Malachi text, it seems that there is still no agreement as to what precisely this declaration hints at. In the next section a few of these proposals will be presented and their respective merits briefly evaluated. Lastly, a suggestion will be offered which appears to be the most feasible for comprehending the passage.

## 1 A Literal/Historical Explanation

A variety of proposals have been put forward to explain this crux, some more imaginative than others. One of the popular solutions is to regard the pronouncement as a reflection of real-life experiences in the time of Malachi. Compare Wellhausen who claims: "Seine (i.e. Elias: P.A.K.) Aufgabe, die Apokatastasis, besteht darin, *die Unreinigkeit und Zerrissenheit der damaligen Gemeinde ... zu heilen.*"<sup>47</sup> It is true that strained father-son relationships are an occasional topic in the book Malachi, e.g. in 1:6 where it is stated that Yahweh as father does not get the respect to which He is entitled from Israel, his son. Or as in 3:7, where the people (as the sons) are accused of turning away from God's commandments since the days of "their fathers" (the ancestors). In view of this, it is fair to speculate that the pronouncement should be interpreted in

<sup>43</sup> Aharon Wiener, *The Prophet Elijah in the Development of Judaism* (London: Routledge, 1978), 39; see also Kellermann, "Wer kann Sünden vergeben ausser Elia?," 172; Markus Öhler, *Elia im Neuen Testament* (BZ NW 88; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 6; Meinhold, *Maleachi* 423.

<sup>44</sup> For Richard Bauckham, "The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (ed. James M. Scott; JSJS 72; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 435-487 this declaration (להבין, καταστήσαι) does not refer to a political restoration, as is often claimed. He associates the Hebrew root כָּן (*hip'il*) with a nuance of meaning it frequently has in the Hebrew Bible, viz. "to prepare," and holds that Elijah's task in this context signifies "a more general preparation of the people for the eschatological coming of YHWH" (p. 441).

<sup>45</sup> For the translation, cf. Bauckham, "The Restoration of Israel," 440; Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 530.

<sup>46</sup> Öhler, *Elia im Neuen Testament*, 7. He regards this pronouncement in Ben Sira as a reference to Isa 49:6a (להקים את שבטי יעקב): "to reestablish the tribes of Jacob") and surmises that the servant of the Lord (Isa 49) is here consciously associated with the eschatological Elijah; see also Pellegrini, *Elia-Wegbereiter des Gottessohnes*, 198.

<sup>47</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1963), 211; see also Karl Marti, *Dodekapropheton* (KHCAT XIII; Tübingen: Mohr, 1904), 479.

terms of the book itself: "Der Verfasser dieses Verses will 'maleachisch' formulieren und verwendet deshalb Vokabeln, die in diesem Büchlein zentral sind."<sup>48</sup> But such an explanation becomes problematic if the presupposition is that vv. 22-24 are two later appendices which do not only have the book of Malachi in mind, but the broader canon (Tôrâ and Nebiim). Accordingly, a different explanatory context should be sought.

Some scholars are even more explicit about the reasons behind the perceived trouble in family circles: (1) it could have been elicited by complications as a result of the mixed marriages;<sup>49</sup> (2) another reason often advanced is that the conflict arose because of the difference in worldviews between the fathers, still defending traditional family values, and their more Hellenistically inclined sons.<sup>50</sup> But as Mathys fittingly remarks: "Wie hat man sich die von Elia versuchte Versöhnung zwischen Traditionalisten und Hellenisten vorzustellen? Sie kann nicht in Form eines religiösen Kompromisses erfolgen und folglich nur bedeuten, dass Elia die entzweiten Generationen einander menschlich wieder näherbringt."<sup>51</sup> Consequently also this explanation does not seem to be the most fitting.

## 2 A Metaphorical Interpretation

Another viewpoint defended since the time of Jerome and Calvin is that the description should be understood in a metaphoric sense, where the "fathers" represent the ancestors, and the "sons" the Israelites in the time of the author. See already Keil in the nineteenth century: "Die Väter sind vielmehr die Ahnherren des israelitischen Volks, die Patriarchen, (...) Die Söhne oder Kinder sind die entarteten Nachkommen zur Zeit Maleachi's und der

<sup>48</sup> Hans-Peter Mathys, "Anmerkungen zu Mal 3, 22-24," in *Vom Anfang und vom Ende: Fünf alttestamentliche Studien* (ed. Hans-Peter Mathys; Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 38; see also Josef M. Oesch, "Die Bedeutung der Tora für Israel nach dem Buch Maleachi," in *Die Tora als Kanon für Juden und Christen* (ed. Erich Zenger; HBS 10; Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 202 and Rolf Rendtorff, "Der 'Tag Jhwhs' im Zwölfprophetenbuch," in *Wort JHWH, das geschah ...* (*Hos 1,1*): *Studien zum Zwölfprophetenbuch* (ed. Erich Zenger; HBS 35; Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 10.

<sup>49</sup> J. Halévy, "Le prophète Malachie," *Revue Sémitique* 17 (1909): 44. Quoted by Meinhold, *Maleachi*, 426. For a summary of explanations, see Meinhold, *Maleachi*, 426-27.

<sup>50</sup> An opinion already defended by John M. P. Smith, *The Book of Malachi* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951), 83; see also Rudolph, *Haggai - Sacharja 1-8 - Sacharja 9-14 - Maleachi*, 291; Zeller, "Elija und Elischa im Frühjudentum," 155; Öhler, *Elia im Neuen Testament*, 5; Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching*, 390; Meinhold, "Mose und Elia am Gottesberg," 32 and Lux, "Die Kinder auf der Gasse," 197.

<sup>51</sup> Mathys, "Anmerkungen zu Mal 3, 22-24," 37; see also Reventlow, *Die Propheten Haggai, Sacharja und Maleachi*, 161: "Dabei an die Überwindung des Generationskonflikts (...) zu denken, ist wohl eine zu moderne Vorstellung."

Folgezeit."<sup>52</sup> Or to phrase it slightly differently: "dass die Väter (d.h. die Tradition des Bundes) die Söhne (d.h. die Nachkommenschaft Israels) zur Beachtung des Gesetzes aufruft, und dass die Söhne positiv antworten."<sup>53</sup> But such an explanation could, however, only be defended if the original unity of v. 22 (=law) and vv. 23-24 (= prophets) is presupposed, which is most probably not the case (see above). It is indeed true that the "fathers" often symbolically represents the ancestors and the "sons" the posterity of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, but the prophecy in Mal 3:24 does not give any indication that this larger context is assumed here.

### 3 A Literary Convention

Already in 1938 Junker, in his commentary on the twelve prophets, had the following to say on this proclamation in Malachi: "Jedoch der Zwiespalt zwischen Eltern und Kinder kann auch sehr wohl ein allgemeiner und stereotyper Zug in der Schilderung einer entarteten Zeit sein in der die natürlichsten und heiligsten Bände gelöst sind."<sup>54</sup> The only comparative evidence he supplies to defend his opinion, however, are two NT texts (Matt 10:35; Luke 1:17f.). In the same year (1938) Horst corroborated this opinion and supplies more supporting textual evidence.<sup>55</sup> And now more than half a century later, with the proliferation of new text translations, we are in a much better position to evaluate such claims and to supply additional examples.

The theme of collapsing family relations in times of chaos is attested in a variety of ancient Near Eastern literary genres (laments, wisdom, prophecy). In the ancient world it was of vital importance that family ties should be in harmony since this association is "the paradigm of all other relationships of authority and obedience. Disruption of the family bonds

<sup>52</sup> Carl F. Keil, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten* (BCAT 3/4; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1866), 698; see also recently Hieke, *Kult und Ethos*, 80 and Caryn A. Reeder, "Malachi 3:24 and the Eschatological Restoration of the 'Family,'" *CBQ* 69 (2007): 703.

<sup>53</sup> Pellegrini, *Elija-Wegbereiter des Gottessohnes*, 197, n. 81. A similar view is proposed by Hartmut Gese, "Die dreifache Gestaltwerdung des Alten Testaments," in *Mitte der Schrift: Ein jüdisch-christliches Gespräch* (ed. Martin A. Klopfenstein, et al.; Bern: Lang, 1987), 319: "er (i.e. Elia: PAK) wird das Herz der Väter zu den Söhnen wenden (= die Unterrichtung in der tradierten Lehre) und das Herz der Söhne zu ihren Vätern (= das entsprechende Lernen)."

<sup>54</sup> Hubert Junker, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten* (vol. 2; Bonn: Hanstein, 1938), 222.

<sup>55</sup> Friedrich Horst, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten: Maleachi* (HAT I/14; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1938), 267. For the broader ancient Near East, Horst, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, 267 refers to the *Prophecies of Neferti* (Nefer-Rehu) and the Akkadian *Shurpu* texts; for the Hebrew Bible he mentions Mic 7:1-7, Jer 9:1-5, and for early Judaism he points to *The Book of Jubilees* (23:16-23).

spelled the destruction of the entire social fabric."<sup>56</sup> Apart from the cases supplied by Horst in his commentary, the following data could be added to substantiate the proposition that the declaration in Mal 3:24 is not to be taken at face value, namely as a reference to "historical" conditions, but that it should rather be regarded as a literary *topos* portraying a scenario of the utmost disorder. The following selection of examples, drawn from different spheres of life (laments, wisdom, prophecy) may be advanced as illustrative material.

### 3a Conflict between Fathers and Sons in the Laments

Descriptions of distressing family relationships are popular *topoi* in Sumerian city and *balag* laments. According to these laments, such situations of turmoil are occasioned by the absence of the deity,<sup>57</sup> and during such turbu-

<sup>56</sup> Karel van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 13-14.

<sup>57</sup> The theme of "the absent god" and the consequences flowing from that are widely attested in ancient Near Eastern literature, especially in the Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian worlds. It is impossible to provide a representative list of studies dealing with this motif. Apart from the earlier contributions such as that of E. von Schuler, "Verschwundene Gottheiten," *WdM* 1: 207-208, more recent investigations include the following: Thomas Podella, *Šôm-Fasten: Kollektive Trauer um den verborgenen Gott im Alten Testament* (AOAT 224; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 50-61; Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (OBO 104; Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 183-212; Daniel I. Block, "Divine Abandonment: Ezekiel's Adaptation of an Ancient Near Eastern Motif," in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (ed. Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong; SBLSymS 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 15-42; John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California San Diego, 7; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 104ff, and more recently Christina Ehring, *Die Rückkehr JHWHs: Traditions- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Jesaja 40,1-11, Jesaja 52,7-10 und verwandten Texten* (WMANT 116; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007), especially Part 2 entitled "Der religionsgeschichtliche und traditions-geschichtliche Hintergrund des Motivs der Rückkehr JHWHs," 96-206, and Nathaniel B. Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 112ff. Suffice it here to state that this *topos* is typically associated with two possible scenarios: (1) the gods leave of their own free will, an explanation offered especially by the city laments; see Manfred Krebernik, "'Wo einer in Wut ist, kann kein anderer ihm raten.' Zum göttlichen Zorn im Alten Orient," in *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity* (ed. Reinhard G. Kratz und Hermann Spieckermann; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 51; (2) the gods leave on account of human wrongdoings. Especially in the biblical Book of Lamentations the idea of divine abandonment due to human sin, and the myriad of tragedies befalling Jerusalem as a result of that, is significant throughout; cf. Frederick W.

lent times one of the most crucial relationships perceived to be impacted on is the relationship between parents (fathers/mothers) and children. Scenarios such as the following are come across:<sup>58</sup>

die Mutter schaute weg (von) ihrer Tochter (...)  
 der Vater wandte sich von seinem Sohne ab (...)  
 in der Stadt wurde die Ehefrau verlassen, das Kind verlassen  
 (...) <sup>59</sup>

The congregational *balag* laments similarly continue the same thematic tradition. The following examples, amongst others, are attested:

My parents who cross the canal leaves the child (*on*) *the shore*.  
 My *new* father vanishes from (his) child.  
 (Even) the *experienced* father drowns (his) child.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to the deteriorating affiliations between parents (father/mother) and children, other worsening relationships (those between wives and husbands, brothers and sisters) are sometimes mentioned in the same breath. For example:

(In) your city a mother does not recognize her own child.  
 (In) Tintir the young girl does not recognize her own brother.  
 The husband who [...] his wife does not recognize her.  
 The parent who [...] his child does not recognize it.<sup>61</sup>

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Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology in the Book of Lamentations," *JSOT* 74 (1997): 29-60.

<sup>58</sup> For the examples referred to here, cf. Paul A. Kruger, "Disaster and the Topos of the World Upside Down: Selected Cases from the Ancient Near Eastern World," in *Disaster and Relief Management* (ed. Angelika Berlejung, Annette Zgoll and Joachim Quack; Oriental Religions in Antiquity; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, forthcoming).

<sup>59</sup> *The Lament over the Destruction of Ur*, Lines 233-235; the translation is by Willem H. Ph. Römer, *Die Klage über die Zerstörung von Ur* (AOAT 309; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 97.

<sup>60</sup> *uru amirabi*; Mark E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia* (vol. 1-2; Potomac, Md.: Capital Decisions Limited, 1988), 589.

<sup>61</sup> *ame amašana*, b+133-136; Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations*, 168. Elsewhere reports about discord between fathers and sons in disastrous times are also attested, e.g. in royal inscriptions. Cf. the following notice in the Standard Babylonian Recension of the *Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin*: "City will fight with city, household with household, father with son, brother with brother, young man with young man, friend with neighbor. They will not speak truth with one another. People will be taught lies and [...] aberrations" (Lines 138-142); Joan G. Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 7; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 325. Compare in the same vein the following description in Ashurbanipal's siege against Babylon (Prism C): "The mercy of the people had come to an

### 3b Conflict between fathers and sons in wisdom literature

Wisdom genres likewise bear witness to similar conflicts in the family, although the theme is not as pertinent as it is in the laments. The following examples may be mentioned. One excellent example of the adversity encountered in the family and social sphere during disastrous times is found in the Babylonian wisdom poem *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*.<sup>62</sup> What befalls the main character, Shubshi-meshre-Shakkan, on an individual level could be described as a total reversal of his accustomed world. I quote a few of these lines expressing his indignation about his current predicament when contrasted with his once glorious past:

My proud head bowed to the ground,  
 Terror weakened my stout heart.  
 A lad turned back my burly chest,  
 My ever-active arms were continually covered, they clutched  
 each other.  
 I, who walked about as a lord, learned to slink.  
 I was *once* dignified but became a slave.  
 From *my* extensive family I became alienated. (...)  
 My brother became a stranger,  
 My friend became an enemy and a demon.<sup>63</sup>

end. The father on his son, the mother on her daughter, had no mercy. The man abandoned his wife, [the father] deserted his beloved son"; Israel Eph'al, *The City Besieged: Siege and its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 130. Tablet III of *The Poem of Erra* paints a similar picture when describing the havoc planned by Erra: "I estrange people's hearts so father listens not to son, and daughter cavils spitefully to mother" (lines 9-10); Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2005), 897. In Egyptian "Chaosbeschreibungen" (e.g., in *The Prophecies of Neferti*, 44-45 and in *Admonitions of Ipuwer* 2, 13-14) as well, family discord is a recurrent theme; see Jan Assmann, *Stein und Zeit: Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), 273. The same applies to ancient Near Eastern catalogues of curses. Cf., e.g. the following imprecations in *Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty*: "Just as gall is bitter, so may you, your women, and your sons and your daughters be bitter towards each other" (Par 100:646-648); "as a caterpillar does not see and does not return to its cocoon, so may you not return to your women, your sons, your daughters, and to your houses" (Par 79:579-581). The translations are from Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (SAA II; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), 58, 53-54, respectively.

<sup>62</sup> For arguments to regard this poem as wisdom, see Amar Annus and Alan Lenzi, *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi: The Standard Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* (SAACT 7; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2010), 34ff.

<sup>63</sup> Tablet I, Lines 73ff, 84f; Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, 33. The nature and contents of the text are examined by Christoph Uehlinger, "Das Hiob-Buch im Kontext der altorientalischen Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte," in *Das Buch*

Note especially that all his interpersonal relations are impinged on, even that of his "extensive family," among whom most probably also includes the one with his father.<sup>64</sup>

Comparable statements are similarly enunciated in the *Babylonian Theodicy*.<sup>65</sup> They concern a dialogue between a sufferer and his friend who discuss the justness of the divine world order. The sufferer recounts various instances where, according to him, life and the behaviour of the gods are not at all fair. He lists a wide array of absurdities encountered in his public and private life; his family life also comes under the spotlight and here too the strangest things appear to occur. His concern is that the most central family values are discredited. This is expressed as follows:

A father hauls a boat up a channel,  
While his firstborn sprawls in bed.  
The eldest son makes his way like a lion,

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*Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.-19. August 2005* (ed. Thomas Krüger, et al.; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007), 137ff. and Dorothea Sitzler, "Vorwurf gegen Gott": *Ein religiöses Motiv im Alten Orient (Ägypten und Mesopotamien)* (StOR 32; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 84ff.

<sup>64</sup> This description is to be compared with the *locus classicus* of the feeling of estrangement on a social level in the Hebrew Bible, viz. Job 19:13-19. On this Klaus Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament: Untersuchungen zur Bestimmung und Zuordnung der Krankheits- und Heilungspsalmen* (BWANT 99; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 52 remarks: "Die Krankheit ist in Hi. 19,13ff. beschrieben als eine alle Lebensbeziehungen zersetzende Störung. Das ganze Sozialgefüge (V 13-19) ist – wie die innere Struktur des Körpers (V 20) – zerstört; *alle Verhältnisse sind auf den Kopf gestellt; (...)*" (my emphasis). All social relationships are seemingly perverted: alienation from brothers (v. 13a), acquaintances (v. 13b), kinsmen (v. 14a), friends (v. 14b, 19), household (v. 15-16), wife (v. 17a), etc.; see also Annette Schellenberg, "Hiob und Ipuwer: Zum Vergleich des alltestamentlichen Hiobbuches mit ägyptischen Texten im Allgemeinen und den *Admonitions* im Besonderen," in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen. Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.-19. August 2005* (ed. Thomas Krüger, et al.; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007), 67f. who refers to other instances of Job's inverted world.

<sup>65</sup> For recent discussions of the text, with references to earlier treatments, cf. Sara Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature: Expression, Instruction, Dialogue* (Leiden: Ex Oriente lux, 1992), 136ff; Sitzler, „Vorwurf gegen Gott,“ 99ff. and Christoph Uehlinger, "Qohelet im Horizont mesopotamischer, levantinischer und ägyptischer Weisheitsliteratur der persischen und hellenistischen Zeit," in *Das Buch Kohelet: Studien zur Struktur, Geschichte, Rezeption und Theologie* (ed. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger; BZAW 254; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 168ff. For translations, see Wolfram von Soden, "Der babylonische Theodizee," *TUAT* III/1: 143-157. and Foster, *Before the Muses*, 914-922.

The second son is content to drive a donkey.  
 The heir struts the street like a peddler,  
 The younger son makes provision for the destitute.<sup>66</sup>

This eventuality is explained as follows by Van der Toorn: "The traditional prerogatives of the first-born have lost significance. So has the family solidarity, it would seem. The interests of the individual prevail over the loyalty to family or village."<sup>67</sup>

### 3c Conflict between Fathers and Sons in Prophetic Literature<sup>68</sup>

In ancient Near Eastern prophetic literature, similarly, the theme of trouble between fathers and their sons occasionally appears. Reference will be made here to only two examples. The most depressing one is encountered in Mic 7:5-6, where a whole array of breakdowns in social ties in times of crisis are described, one of which is also the bond between fathers and sons:

5. Do not trust a friend, have no confidence in a companion.  
 Guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom.<sup>69</sup>

6. For the son treats the father disdainfully,  
 the daughter rises up against the mother,  
 the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,  
 a man's own household are his enemies.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Foster, *Before the Muses*, 920.

<sup>67</sup> Karel van der Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. Antti Laato and Johannes C. De Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 86.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Paul A. Kruger, "A World Turned on its Head in Ancient Near Eastern Prophetic Literature: A Powerful Strategy to Depict Chaotic Scenarios" (*VT*, forthcoming).

<sup>69</sup> "The one who lies in your bosom" refers to one's own wife.

<sup>70</sup> This scenario of chaos is reminiscent of similar conditions reported in a composite text of Esarhaddon (Babylon Versions A-G) relating to the reign of his predecessor: "[When] in the reign of a form[er king, there were] evil [omens, all the shr]ines ... Violence (and) murder was inflicted upon their bodies, and they oppressed the weak – they give them to the strong. Within the city there was oppression (and) accepting of bribes, and daily without ceasing they stole one another's goods. *The son in the marketplace has cursed his father, the slave [has disobeyed?] his master, [the female slave] does not listen to her mistress*" (Babylon B & G, Ep. 3). The translation is by Barbara N. Porter, *Images, Power, and Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon's Babylonian Policy* (Philadelphia: Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, 1993), 101f. (my emphasis); see also Rykle Borger, *Die Inschriften Assarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (AFO 9; Graz, 1956), 12; Mordechai Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Israel and Judah in the Eighth and Seventh*



Similar disaster *topoi* is also recounted in other prophetic texts. Compare, for example, the following summary of a related collapse of all social bonds in the *Shulgi Prophecy*, a contingency which was occasioned by the calamitous times of a former dispensation:

In that reign brother will devour his brother,  
people will sell their children for silver,<sup>71</sup>

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*Centuries B.C.E.* (SBLMS 19; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), 12; Moshe Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature," *VT* 27 (1977): 194; Block, "Divine Abandonment," 27 and Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 107. The theme of "gesellschaftliche Entsolidarisierung" (Rainer Kessler, *Micha: Übersetzt und ausgelegt* [HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 1999], 292), as described here in Mic 7, has a long "Wirkungsgeschichte." It is also attested in early Judaism, and in the NT. In the latter case the reversal of normal relationships is occasioned by the coming of Christ (Matt 10:35-36 and Luke 12:53); see also Christoph Heil, "Die Rezeption von Micha 7, 6 LXX in Q und Lukas," *ZNW* 88 (1997): 211-222 and Friedrich Fechter, *Die Familie in der Nachexilszeit: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung der Verwandtschaft in ausgewählten Texten des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 264; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 287-305. For early Judaism, cf. e.g. the following proclamation in the *Book of Jubilees* (ch. XXIII), where the writer deplores the many social-moral-religious misdeeds of his age, one of which is also the troublesome relationship between fathers and sons: (16) "Und in diesem Geschlecht werden die Kinder ihre Väter und ihre Alten schelten ..."; Klaus Berger, "Das Buch Jubiläen," in *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* (vol. 2/1-6; ed. Hermann Lichtenberger, et al.; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1973ff), 442. Cf. also in the same vein the following passage in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. It hails from the fifth (Iron) age: "The father will not be of equal mind with his children, and the children not at all of equal mind with their father. Nor will the guest be friend to the host, companion to companion, and brother to brother, as before. Forthwith they will pay no honor to their aging parents. Naturally, they will quarrel with them in harsh words, hard-hearted, and not knowing the revenge of the gods" (lines 182-187); the translation is by Ludwig Koenen, "Greece, the Near East, and Egypt: Cyclic Destruction in Hesiod and the Catalogue of Women," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 124 (1994): 15.

<sup>71</sup> It is interesting to observe that during eschatological times these disastrous family relationships are perceived to be completely healed, as is evident from another "prophetic" text, the *Marduk Prophecy*. The following favourable family scenario (Kol. III) is foreseen: "14' Der eine wird sich des anderen erbarmen. 15' Der Sohn wird seinen Vater wie einen Gott verehren, 16' die Mutter ihre Tochter [...]. 17' Die Braut wird bekränzt werden und ihren Gatten verehren. 18' Erbarmen wird der Menschheit dauerhaft sein"; Karl Hecker, "Die Marduk-Prophezie," *TUAT* 2/1: 68. According to Angelika Berlejung, "Notlösungen – Altorientalische Nachrichten über den Tempelkult in Nachkriegszeiten," in *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Ulrich Hübner und Ernst A. Knauf; OBO 186; Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 203 the

all lands will be thrown into complete disorder.  
 Man will forsake maid, maid will forsake man.  
 Mother will bar her door against daughter.<sup>72</sup>

## D CONCLUSION

The problematic saying in Mal 3:24 has mostly been interpreted from historical and symbolic/metaphorical angles. None of these suggestions, however, appears to explain the intent of this passage adequately. In line with the appearance of similar *topoi* in ancient Near Eastern genres of laments, wisdom and prophecy, it is proposed that this difficult passage should rather be seen as a literary device depicting a society in disarray. One of the popular themes often resorted to in such scenarios is the description of friction between family members, and especially between fathers and sons, as is the case here in Maleachi. That the eschatological Elijah is called upon to heal exactly this central relationship should therefore not come as a surprise. Once this vital affiliation has been repaired, the other social bonds would be rehabilitated naturally.

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*Marduk Prophecy* belongs to a corpus of texts focusing on the Elamite exile of the Marduk statue by Kutir-Nahhunte (c. 1157 BC) and its return by Nebuchadnezzar I (1124-1103 B.C.E.); see also Hecker, "Die Marduk-Prophezie," 65.

<sup>72</sup> It is to be noted that the disaster *topoi* (strife between father and sons) listed here also show affinities with apodoses in the omen literature. Cf. e.g. the following example: "If Ištar rises in winter at sunrise, in summer at sunset: son will be estranged? from father, mother will bar her door to her daughter, ..." (K.229: reverse ii [on E], Omen 18); see Erica Reiner and David Pingree, *Babylonian Planetary Omens, Part Three* (Cuneiform Monographs 11; Groningen: Styx Publications, 1998), 184. For a discussion of the latter phrase in the so-called "siege texts," see A. Leo Oppenheim, "Siege-Documents from Nippur," *Iraq* 17 (1955): 69-89.

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Paul A. Kruger, Department of Ancient Studies, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, Matieland, 7602. *Email*: pak@sun.ac.za