It is widely agreed that the contents of Malachi's prophecy fall into six clearly marked sections or oracle units that, generally speaking, imitate the form of an oral debate. Each unit is introduced by a statement of Yahweh or the prophet which is then challenged by the priests or people and finally defended by Yahweh himself in words of reproach or doom.1 Mal 2:17 introduces not only the fourth oracle unit (2:17–3:5), but serves as the stage-setter for the rest of Malachi's prophecy (3:6–3:24). At issue throughout is God's justice or the lack of it. It is never more explicit than in Deut 30:15f that men's actions are consequential. Obedience to God's will brings blessing while suffering is the outgrowth of sin and disobedience. To the men of Malachi's day, however, just the opposite appeared to be true. It was the evil among them who prospered. Their evil deeds were not chance occurrences or things done under the stress of desire, but had become almost habitual so as to cause justifiable anger, even dissipation of faith. Thus, the people requested a demonstration of Yahweh's judgeship, proof of the biblical axiom. "If," they ask, "it is not

true that evil doers are Yahweh’s favorites, why then doesn’t he come to punish them?” (cf. 2:17f, ʿayyēḥ ʿēlōhē hammīṣpāṭ). Malachi responds decisively by affirming that Yahweh will surely come and soon (3:1). He will first cleanse the priesthood so that proper sacrifices might be offered (3:2–4). Then he will cleanse the immorality of the people (3:5). When all have been reconciled to him, blessing and fertility will ensue (3:6–12). Such words, however, had lost their ability to engender hope and trust; overuse and experience to the contrary had divested them of their power. Indeed, the prophetic defense of God’s justice had failed to convince the people. Malachi’s contemporaries were unable to accept promises of future vindication at face value; they wanted Yahweh himself—now! And they challenged him again, as if daring him to appear. “In what way does religion pay?” they asked; “What is to be gained by being so meticulous in the ritual observances?” After all, it was the wicked who prospered! (3:13–15). To these condemnations Malachi again responds by announcing the imminence of Yahweh’s day of judgment, when the wicked will be annihilated and the faithful vindicated (3:16–21). This time, however, Malachi goes beyond shopworn phrases; he announces that prior to judgment Yahweh will send his messenger to prepare the way, to restore harmony and turn the hearts of all to Yahweh (3:23–24). It is not the nameless messenger of 3:1; this time he has a name—Elijah. Clearly, succinctly, Mal 2:17 outlines the dilemma that motivates the remainder of the prophecy. The people have stated their case—God is unjust; it is left to Malachi and through him, Yahweh, to prove them wrong.

Mal 3:1 is an interpretative crux. Just who is being spoken of here and how many are involved? Is the malʾāḵ of 3:1a to be identified with the malʾāḵ habbērīt of 3:1e or are they distinct? Do hāʾādōn of 3:1d and malʾāḵ habbērīt of 3:1e have the same referent? How much of this verse and what follows (3:2–5) is original to the prophecy? To answer these questions intelligently is to provide a key to the entire prophecy, for this verse is pivotal; it looks back to the past of the prophecy itself (1:11), answers questions posed by the present (2:17) and points toward the future (3:22f).

Although Mal 3:1 employs three titles—malʾāḵ, malʾāḵ habbērīt, ʿādōn, it is generally agreed that only two figures are indicated. D. L. Petersen (1977, p. 42) equates malʾāḵ with malʾāḵ habbērīt and contends that both terms refer to the prophetic forerunner whose task is preparatory to the coming of Yahweh’s day, the Yôm Yahweh: “He is the judging figure whose work of purification will allow the requisite purity of cult for Yahweh to appear,” Yahweh being the ʿādōn, the Lord.
Similarly, B. V. Malchow (1984, pp. 253-55) distinguishes the *malʿāk habbērīt* and the *ādōn*. He maintains, however, that the *malʿāk habbērīt* is a priestly messenger since in Malachi *bērīt* “is primarily used of the covenant with Levi (2:4-5, 8)” and in 2:7 a priest “is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts,” (1984, p. 253). Malchow (1984, p. 254) contends that

the likelihood of this interpretation increases when one considers the function of the messenger of the covenant. According to vv 3-4, he will purify the Levites so that they will offer right sacrifices in the future. It is consistent that the purifier of the Levites should himself arise from that group.

Going a step farther, Malchow (1984, p. 254) connects this priestly messenger whose coming the Israelite community desired (3:1b) with a priestly messiah. He traces a trajectory beginning with Zech 4:11-14 which introduces

the idea of anointed ones from Judah and Levi. It continues with Zech 6:9-14, probably originally a description of the messianic crowning of Zerubbabel. After he disappeared and the high priest became the political leader of the community, someone altered the text and substituted Joshua’s name for Zerubbabel’s. Thus, the passage became a description of a royal priest. Next, Dan 11:22 . . . again deals with a royal priest by designating Onias III “the prince of the covenant.” What is new here is the explicit connection of the royal priest with a covenant, as in Mal 3:1 (1984, pp. 254-55).

Viewing Mal 3:1b-4 as the work of an interpolator, Malchow (1984, p. 255) concludes that this section was written shortly after Daniel in 165 B.C. “Perhaps,” he writes, “Israelites began to look for a future priest because of the disruptions in the high priesthood which began under Antiochus Epiphanes. Mal 3:2-4, then, promises that such irregularities will be remedied” (1984, p. 255).

Malchow is not alone in viewing Mal 3:1b-4 as an addition to the prophecy (Mason, 1977, p. 152; Horst, 1954, p. 271; Dentan, 1956, p. 6.1137). Rex Mason (1977, p. 152) remarks that these verses are in the third person while 1a and 5 are in the first. Thus, they are “an elaboration of the original oracle,” (ibid). Sequentially, v. 5 “concerns itself with wrongdoers in general and continues the answers to the questions of 2:17,” (ibid.).

The scholarly tendency to view these verses as secondary is unwarranted both linguistically and thematically. Such abrupt changes of person in poetic (or prophetic) language are not at all unusual, cf. Isa 42:20; 54:14; 61:7; Deut 32:15; Job 16:7; Lam 3:1. W. Rudolph
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(1976, p. 278) contends that Yahweh’s speaking of himself in the third person “elevates not only the solemnity but underlines the majesty of his appearance.” Finally and most crucially, I believe, Mal 3:1b–4 are integral to the sense of the oracle unit; they flow directly out of the previous section, 2:10–16, where a desecrated covenant calls for Yahweh’s intervention, and are paralleled in 3:13–21, where the burning, purificatory aspect of Yahweh’s day is similarly stressed.

To understand the significance of this passage, it is necessary to look at Exod 23:20f. In the Book of the Covenant too, the messenger of Yahweh appears. The relationship between Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20 is too striking to be accidental. In fact, the passage in Malachi appears to be a reworking of the Exodus text:

Mal 3:1

Exod 23:20

The messenger of the Exodus passage is to bring the Israelites to the place Yahweh has prepared for them. Yahweh says: “Be attentive to him and heed his voice. Do not rebel against him, for he will not forgive your sin for my name is in him. But if you heed his voice and carry out all I tell you, I will be an enemy of your enemies and a foe to your foes” (23:20–22). D. L. Petersen (1977, p. 43) contends that the coming help of Yahweh by means of the messenger (maPîlûs) is dependent upon Israel’s obedience to the laws of the Book of the Covenant. He says that “in Malachi, the coming of Yahweh depends upon the arrival of the messenger [maPîlûs] who will function as a covenant enforcer”—maPîlûs habbêrit (1977, p. 43). Several objections to this hypothesis can be raised, however. First, the verse itself seems to make a sharp distinction between the maPîlûs on the one hand and the ādôn and the maPîlûs habbêrit on the other. Yahweh sends his messenger preparatory to his own coming, to announce his imminent arrival. To effect a transition, the adverb pitûm is used. Then, suddenly (pitûm) Yahweh himself, hā’ādôn, arrives in his temple, the messenger of the covenant comes. The verse itself equates not the maPîlûs and maPîlûs habbêrit, but the

2. Indeed, the covenant Yahweh as maPîlûs habbêrit is coming to enforce is described in 2:10 as the bêrit ‘ābôtēnû, “the covenant of our fathers,” the profanation of which is graphically described in 2:10–16 and cf. below, pp. 5f.
"ādōn and the malʿak habbērīt. This corresponds well with the Exodus passage where the roles of Yahweh and his messenger seem to merge (23:21f). There are many other instances in the Old Testament of such coalescence—the messenger blends into and is swallowed up by Yahweh (cf. Gen 16:7, 13; Exod 13:19, 24f; Num 22:22–35). In Exod 3, the call of Moses, a malʿak Yahweh appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush (3:2). When the curious Moses approached the sight, it was Yahweh who spoke to him from the bush (3:4f). A similar situation is found in Judg 6:11f. A malʿak Yahweh appeared to Gideon and announced that Yahweh was with him. When Gideon expressed skepticism, Yahweh turned to him (vayyipen ʿelāw Yahweh) and spoke. In all these instances, the messenger (malʿak) is Yahweh’s mode of self revelation (cf. North, 1970, pp. 33–34).

Petersen’s equation of the forerunner malʿak and the malʿak habbērīt is problematic in another sense. As covenant enforcer, Petersen says (1977, p. 43), it is the task of the malʿak habbērīt to bring Israel back into line. Obedience to the law becomes the prerequisite for Yahweh’s coming. The curse in 3:24b, however, recognizes the distinct possibility that the malʿak will be unable to create the requisite ritual and ethical purity for Yahweh’s coming. If this is the case, it must be inferred from Petersen’s argument that Yahweh will not come. This is plainly contrary to the tenor of this verse, the prophecy as a whole (cf. 3:12–21; 22–24) and Israelite prophecy in general (cf. Joel 1:15; Zeph 1:4f; 2:1–11; Hag 2:22; Zech 14:6f).

If the "ādōn is identified with the malʿak habbērīt, the covenant enforcer, the verse assumes an unprecedented power. This oracle unit is replete with Yôm Yahweh imagery. Celebrated through the cultus, the Yôm Yahweh is the day “in which the deity shows himself as he really is—a ‘showing’ which takes place in the temple where he lives” (cf. Mal 3:1–2) (Ahlström, 1971, p. 66). The Yôm Yahweh is the “day of his enthronement as King,” (cf. Mal 1:11, 14; Pss 47:1, 8f; 96:1, 3f; 98:3f). It is the day when he “comes” (Mal 3:2a; cf. Pss 96:13; 98:9) and “makes himself known,” i.e., reveals himself and his will (Mal 3:2b; cf. Pss 93:5; 98:2; 99:7); it is the day when he repeats the theophany of Mt. Sinai (Pss 97:3f; 99:7). Specifically, it is the day when he renews the election of Israel (Ps 47:5) and the covenant with his people (Pss 95:6f; 99:6f). As

G. W. Ahlström (1971, p. 69) maintains: "The cultic day of Yahweh is a
day of his coming, his theophany, his war against his enemies, and his
reestablishment of the covenant, complete with its accompanying šēdāqāh,
for his people." Therefore, it can be none other than Yahweh who is the
\textit{mal'āḵ habbērīt}, the covenant enforcer of Mal 3:1e. On his day, he will
reestablish his covenant and enforce its justice thereby satisfying those
who questioned him in 2:17. This description of Yahweh accords well
with Mal 3:13–21, an oracle unit parallel in thought to 2:17–3:5. On
Yahweh's day he will spare all those who serve him (3:17, 20) and totally
annihilate all the wicked within the community (3:19).

Finally, ascribing all the action in verses 1–5, with the exception of
3:1a, b, to Yahweh creates a dramatic flow, a crescendo that is denied by
Petersen's analysis. By contending that these verses describe the function
of the \textit{mal'āḵ}, he is ascribing to the messenger traits generally associated
with Yahweh alone. It is not the messenger who appears (3:2) in order to
purify (3:2–4) and judge (3:5), as Petersen would have it; it is Yahweh.
As the text states: "And suddenly the Lord whom you seek will enter his
temple" (3:1c, d), and when he comes, "who will be able to stand when
he appears?" (3:2a, b). Indeed, the \textit{Yôm} Yahweh is the festival of his
epiphany, the day of his cultic coming (Mowinckel, 1962, 1.107; Ahlström,
1971, p. 69); it is the day when he purifies (Mal 3:2f and cf. Isa 1:25;
4:4–5; Ezek 32:25) and the day when he judges (Mal 3:5 and cf. Jer

The central characters of this verse are two: the forerunner messenger
(\textit{mal'āḵ}) whose task it is to smooth the way and Yahweh, the \textit{ādōn}, the
\textit{mal'āḵ habbērīt}, who is coming for judgment and restoration.\footnote{This hypothesis has been cogently argued by van Hoonaker (1908, pp. 730–31) and Chary (1954, pp. 176–79), among others, cf. Rudolph, p. 278 and M.-J. Lagrange, "Notes sur les prophéties messianiques des derniers prophètes," \textit{RB} 15 (1906) 82.} As van
Hoonacker (1908, p. 731) insists:

Dans Malachie l'ange de l'alliance indique personellement Jahvé, comme
ayant donné la loi en apparition d'ange. On concevait l'alliance actuelle-
ment existante comme ayant été contractée entre le peuple hébreu et Jahvé
se manifestant par la Mal'akh; c'est en vertu de cette conception que Jahvé
porte le titre d'ange de l'alliance.

Malachi employed that title in order to evoke themes through con-
textuality: the somber aspect of the \textit{Yôm} Yahweh could not be missed,
for the allusion to the messenger of the covenant was inevitably related
to the contextual sequence of the Exodus passage. It was to insinuate
that Yahweh was coming to contract "une alliance nouvelle que Malachie rappelle que le Seigneur qui va paraître est l'ange de l'alliance d'autrefois (van Hoonacker, 1908, p. 731)."

A full appreciation of Mal 3:1 rests on the recognition that Malachi is a unity. The individual verses and oracle units do not stand alone but are, in fact, interrelated and thus, the thematic dependence of one on the other requires that the whole be viewed before judgments can be passed on individual parts. The axis around which Malachi's prophecy revolves is the covenant concept, the relationship between Yahweh and Israel initiated at Mt. Sinai (cf. 2:5, 8, 10; 3:1, 7). This is the theme by which he binds together Israel's history, past and present. Like both his prophetic predecessors and the deuteronomists, Malachi created a covenant paradigm as an overview of Israel's history. Faithfulness to Yahweh ensures blessing (3:16-17, 20-22); unfaithfulness brings disaster (3:9). Malachi's contemporaries profaned the covenant concluded at Mt. Sinai. Chief among their sins is apostasy; they are adulterers (3:5),

5. J. M. P. Smith (1912, p. 3) remarked that "the essential unity of Malachi has never been called into question." However, that assertion is belied by the relatively large number of verses that are considered to be later additions. Exegetes generally excise either parts or all of Mal 1:11-14; 2:7; 2:11-12; 2:15-16 and 3:22-24, to mention but a few examples. The grounds for these deletions are not well documented, especially with regard to 3:22-24, usually understood as a colophon to the prophetic canon. However, for other verses, reasons range from metri causa to the assertion that the verse in question either has only narrow connections with what precedes or follows, is totally superfluous, or does not fit into the historical context. All too often it has been the case that scholars have compartmentalized history; that is, they have brought to their study of Malachi preconceived ideas about what could or could not have happened in the period and so have forced the prophecy to conform to a false chronology. The major consequence of this prejudgment is that much that is original to Malachi is excised as secondary in an attempt to resolve the dissonance produced between the new ideas introduced by the prophet and the old presuppositions brought by scholars to their investigation. This is particularly the case in those sections banning intermarriage (2:11-12) and stressing the importance of the law as a community guide (2:7; 3:22). Moreover, it is precisely these verses which make it very clear that the yardstick against which the genuineness of Malachi's prophecy is measured is the work of Nehemiah and Ezra.

6. The question and answer schema employed by the prophet suggests actual dialogue between Malachi and his contemporaries. He may even have confronted separately the different segments of the population—the priests, evildoers and Yahweh fearers. If it is the case that Malachi's prophecy was not given all at once, but over a period of time, "one has to reckon with a period of oral transmission . . . a period of the prophet's own memorization of his utterances," (Ahlström, 1971, p. 137). At some later date, perhaps shortly after he had delivered his final oracle, either Malachi or a disciple trained by him, wrote the message down in its entirety. From this point of view, the whole of the prophecy may be considered the conscious literary product of Malachi.
worshipers of foreign gods (2:10–16). Therefore, they stand under a present curse (3:9) and under the threat of future judgment (3:1–5). In the third oracle unit (Mal 2:10–16), the major theme is intermarriage, the prime pitfall of which is the resultant incorporation into the Yahweh cult of the cultic rites of other gods (cf. 2:13). In 2:10d, those who intermarry are accused of profaning the covenant of their fathers (lēhallēl bērīt ʿabōtēnū). Such a covenant was made at Sinai with the Exodus fathers and is detailed in both Exod 34:10f and Deut 7:1f. Not only does the covenant make explicit the connection between intermarriage and apostasy but it avows that turning away from Yahweh can be the result of any close contact between the Israelites and their neighbors (cf. Exod 34:15; Deut 7:16. It is precisely this theme which is highlighted in Exod 23:24–33, in the Book of the Covenant. Indeed, immediately after Yahweh adjures the Israelites to heed his messenger, maʾăšēh, and carry out all he tells them (Exod 23:23), Yahweh demands the total allegiance of the covenant community (23:25). The inhabitants of the country are to be driven out; their gods destroyed (23:23f). The passage concludes:

... I will give the inhabitants of the country into your power, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not stay in your land for fear they make you sin against me; for then you would worship their gods and in this way you would be ensnared (31–33).

Although the Exodus fathers agreed to abide by the covenant stipulations enjoined at Sinai, their promise was forgotten almost immediately, cf. Num 25. Moreover, the prophetic indictments of both Jeremiah (7:25f) and Ezekiel (20:5–26) which highlight Israel's recalcitrance, her refusal to obey Yahweh's injunctions, assert that the rebellion which began with the Exodus fathers has continued to the present time (cf. Jer 7:30f; Ezek 20:27f). This appears to be the thrust of Malachi's argument as well. Although he condemns in detail the covenant faithlessness of his own generation—they intermarry (2:10–16), they commit adultery (3:5)—it is not viewed as a contemporary aberration. In 3:7a Malachi is at great pains to point out that apostasy had its roots in the wilderness with the very generation that contracted the covenant. It is significant that Malachi defines the people's sin as "turning away from and not observing Yahweh's statutes" (sartem mēhuqqay vēlō ʾsemartem).

In the deuteronomistic exposition of the covenant with the Exodus fathers Yahweh states: “Therefore you shall observe the commandment (ham-miṣvāh), the statutes (ḥāhuqqīm) and the decrees (hammišpāṭīm) which I enjoin upon you today” (Deut 7:11). The use of the word ḥōq (cf. ḥaq, “to cut, inscribe, engrave” [BDB, 349]) strongly implies the immutability of the covenant stipulations. Therefore, the prophet’s avowal that unfaithfulness began in the wilderness days is not intended to reduce the guilt of his contemporaries, but to increase it. The covenant has not been abrogated; its conditions have not changed. Yahweh alone is to be Israel’s God (Exod 20:3-6; 23:25; 34:14; Deut 7:9). Indeed, this exclusivity is the yardstick against which Israel’s covenant obedience, past and present, is judged. Malachi’s description of the Yôm Yahweh in 3:1-5 issues as a challenge, and therefore, a summons to decision (cf. 3:6-7). If his people, the covenant community, remain on their present course of apostasy, they will feel the devastating strength of Yahweh’s anger (3:2) for he is, above all, the covenant enforcer, the malʾak habbērīt (3:1). If, however, they heed his warnings and return to (ṣūḥ ʾel, 3:7) Yahweh alone, curse will turn into blessing, judgment will be averted (3:7, 10-11).

Malachi’s use of the word šēdaqāh is pivotal here (3:3). Indeed, it gives perspective to the oracle unit (2:17-3:5) as a whole. The right order, šēdaqāh, can be established only by a proper covenant relationship with Yahweh since, after all, that order was instituted by him (Ahlström, 1971, p. 97). It is especially significant that Malachi describes Yahweh as the covenant enforcer, malʾak habbērīt, reestablishing the correct relationship with his people on the day when he comes (3:1). Further, the maintenance of the covenant relationship is contingent upon a correct Yahweh cult (ibid.). Therefore, it should not be at all surprising that Yahweh’s first order of concentration are the priests (3:3). Their cleansing results in an interior rededication to God’s service that manifests itself in the offering of sacrifices according to covenant

8. According to Rudolph (1976, pp. 279-80), Mal 3:3-4 disturbs the unity of the oracle unit. Whereas in 3:2 Yahweh simply eliminates evildoers from the heart of the community, in 3:3-4 the implication is that the Levites as a group, despite their irresponsible attitude toward Yahweh and his cult, will be cleansed. Rudolph (1976, p. 280) suggests that these verses owe their present place to what he calls “the catchword principle of the redactor”: mēśāreph (3:2c)—mēśāreph (3:3a), and he concludes that they belong with 1:6-2:9 where the prophet discusses the need for a Levitical renovation. In point of fact, these verses do not disturb the unity of the oracle unit but are integral to it. There is a very perceptible progression and specification within this section. Yahweh’s coming will bring with it a purification of his people (3:2). That this does not necessarily involve an irrevocable
stipulations, in accordance with divine norms (bisdäqāh). Moreover, it follows that a reverent, conscientious priesthood will not permit the improper, blemished offerings that the people were previously wont to bring (1:14). Thus, the sacrifices of Judah and Jerusalem, the cult congregation, will once again be pleasing to Yahweh (3:4); they will be ritually correct and properly offered.

The Yōm Yahweh scenario envisioned in Mal 3:1–5 is reflected in 1:11 as well. The problem has been to reconcile these passages. Van Hoonacker (1908, p. 729) remarks that the eschatological renovation announced in v. 11 was envisaged as a “répudiation du sacerdoce et des sacrifices lévithiques. Au chap. 3 la note dominante est tout autre.” According to M. Rehm (1961, p. 201), Mal 1:11 looks forward to a messianic age in which the prescriptions of the law of the single sanctuary and the Levitical priesthood will be impossible, when the plan of salvation must revert to former institutions, as when sacrifice was the prerogative of every family head. His analysis, however, seems to leave out of perspective the prophecy of 3:1–5 on the Levitical priesthood. When Malachi’s obvious devotion to cult and priestly purity is taken into account, it is hardly realistic to interpret his messianic teaching apart from these. Therefore, if 1:11 is to be taken as a reference to the messianic age, it must be reconciled with 3:1–5; the solution cannot be found in denying the manifestly messianic character of 3:1–5. Significantly, both the oracle unit in which 1:11 appears (1:6–2:9) and 3:1–5 deal with priest and cult and both advance the thesis that prevailing conditions will be transformed; the future will be the inverse of the present. Taken as complementary parts of a single vision, it becomes evident that there is movement from a general formulation (1:11) to one that is more specific (3:1–5). According to 1:11, sacrifices will not cease but the manner in which they are offered and those who offer them will be changed. A pure sacrifice, a sacrifice made with the proper intent, will replace the impure (muqtār muggāš lišmī uminḥāh jēḥōrāh). These thoughts are particularized in 3:1–5. Those who offer the sacrifice, the Levites, will be cleansed (3:3) and it is their purification and reorientation

elimination of the wicked can be inferred from Mal 3:7, šūbū ʾelāy vēʾāsūbgh ʾālekem. The cleansing work will first be done to Levi (3:3) who was also the principle object of the reproaches formulated in 1:6–2:9. Then the immorality of the people will be purged (3:5). The cult will be purified through the purification of the Levites. The post-exilic community will regroup around the temple, their sacrifices once again pleasing to Yahweh (3:3d–3:4).
that will result in offerings proffered biṣdāqāh (3:3), in offerings that are pleasing to Yahweh (3:4). Significantly, M.-J. Lagrange (1906, p. 81) contends that in 1:11 Malachi “songe encore aux Lévites mais aux Lévites purifiés (3:3), an un sacrifice offert au nom du Yahvé connu comme tel.” Recognizing the interrelatedness of 1:11 and 3:1-5, Chary (1954, p. 178) remarks that “les deux pointes messianiques du livre relèvent du domaine cultuel: au jour de Yahweh, il purifiera les lévites pour les rendre aptes au culte parfait: Mal. 3:3-4, et de même, à l'époque messianique, l'offrande sacrificielle sera parfaite: 1:11.”

The movement from general (1:11) to particular (3:3-4) is complemented by parallel movement from the nations (1:11) to Israel (3:3-4), a movement from universalism to particularism. In 1:11 it is stated that proper sacrifice will be offered everywhere (bēgōl-māqōm) and that Yahweh’s name will be great among the nations. In 2:17f “l'horizon est limité à Israel et même plus strictement à Juda et Jerusalem, c'est-à-dire la communauté postexilienne regroupée autour du temple” (Chary, 1955, p. 179).

The description of movement that begins on the outer reaches and culminates in the center is not uncommon in the OT. In Joel 2:21f, the admonition to rejoice and be glad is given first to the country, then to the beasts of the field, and finally in v. 23 to the בֵּית בָּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, the population and cult congregation of Jerusalem. The composition starts with the outer circle and proceeds to the inner circle, the center, so that the בֵּית בָּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל get an assurance that what is necessary for life will be restored, namely the life-giving rain which gives an abundant harvest (Ahlström, 1971, pp. 6-7).

Similarly, Ps 89:6f begins with the cosmic aspects of Yahweh’s actions and moves to the center (vv. 11ff), that is, the cult congregation of Jerusalem, the cultic procession and the people rejoicing over Yahweh’s deeds (Ahlström, 1959, p. 91) (cf. also Amos 1-2; Isa 66:18–24; Gen 1:1f; Pss 24; 29; 95:3–8; 97).

What characterizes the fourth oracle unit (2:17–3:5) above all else is the constant sensation of movement toward Israel (Glazier-McDonald, 1987, p. 124). Yahweh is coming (bā'; yāḥō', 3:1), drawing ever nearer (qārah ʾtel, 3:5). As the malʾak habbērīt, Yahweh hāʾādōn moves in dramatic approach to reestablish sēdāqāh, right order (3:2-4). Only by viewing this oracle unit within the wider context of the prophecy as a whole does this sense of movement find its highest expression. The eschatological renewal that beings with the nations (1:11) culminates in the transformation of Yahweh’s own people (3:1-5).


