

Abstract

Marriage as a Covenant: A study of biblical law and ethics governing marriage developed from the perspective of Malachi

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The purpose of the present study is to investigate Malachi's teaching concerning marriage as a *בְּרִית* in Malachi 2:10-16, especially in the light of recent interpretations which deny this identification.

In particular, after an examination of the context and literary structure of the book of Malachi (Chapter 1), it is argued that Malachi refers to literal marriage in 2:10-16, rather than intending a metaphor for Israel's relation to Yahweh, and that the *בְּרִית* mentioned in 2:14 refers specifically to the marriage relationship, not to the Sinaitic covenant (Chapter 2). Reflecting this identification of marriage as a *בְּרִית*, Malachi condemns literal divorce when based on aversion (Chapter 3), which viewpoint does not contradict Deuteronomy 24:1-4, as often alleged. Moreover, the relationship between divorce and mixed marriage in Malachi 2:10-16, while problematic, may be deemed neither artificial, nor an evidence for a figurative interpretation of marriage in Malachi, as some scholars have supposed based on an assumed toleration of polygyny in Malachi's day (Chapter 4).

After thus exploring the coherence of Malachi's theory of marriage, the study investigates the corroboration which Malachi sought for his understanding in the allusion which he makes in 2:15 to Genesis 2 (Chapter 5).

Finally, an attempt is made to answer several more fundamental objections which have been advanced against the identification of marriage as a *בְּרִית* in the Old Testament period. In particular, it is argued that for marriage to constitute a *בְּרִית* in its normal sense, it must be accompanied by a ratifying oath and/or oath-sign -- though these need not be explicitly self-maledictory (Chapter 6). As against those who deny that marriage was accompanied by such an oath, it is suggested that in the biblical period marriage was probably ratified by *verba solemnia*, as well as by the complementary oath-sign of sexual union (Chapter 7). After examining texts other than Malachi 2:14 which similarly identify marriage as a *בְּרִית* (i.e., Proverbs 2, Ezekiel 16, 1 Samuel 18-20, etc.), consideration is given to the supposed contradiction between Malachi's view of marriage as a *בְּרִית* and the apparent indifference of the Old Testament to a husband's sexual fidelity (Chapter 8).