

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH AND MALACHI ON DIVORCE: EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES IN HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

Researcher: Russel Rwizi

Primary adviser: Elisha Kwabena Marfo, PhD

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The purpose of this research is to conduct a comprehensive study of divorce in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, with a focus on exploring the perspectives within these texts in light of their historical and theological contexts. By examining the textual evidence and analyzing the social and religious background during the respective periods of these books, this study aims to shed light on the complexities of divorce as portrayed in ancient Jewish society.

The research method employed in this study involves a careful examination of the relevant passages regarding divorce from the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi. The analysis includes a comparison of the language, themes, and implications of these passages, highlighting any apparent conflicts or discrepancies. Additionally, this study delves into the historical and theological contexts of these books, considering

the cultural norms, religious practices, and sociopolitical circumstances that might have influenced the perspectives on divorce through a comparative approach.

This comparative study's findings reveal divergent divorce stances within Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi. Ezra-Nehemiah viewed the post-exilic marriages to pagan women as rebellious and invalid, recognizing Israel's history of apostasy through similar intermarriages. Here, divorce was used as an instrument to restore purity, identity, and covenant faithfulness. On the contrary, Malachi criticizes the practice of divorcing one's wife, emphasizing the unfaithfulness and violation of the covenant that divorce presents. These contrasting messages can be attributed to the differing historical contexts, social and cultural changes, as well as evolving theological understandings during this period.

The conclusions drawn from this research highlight the complexities of forming a coherent and consistent position on divorce by examining seemingly contradictory messages within religious texts. Nevertheless, the research emphasized that divorce goes against God's blueprint and is not sanctioned within His intended framework. Instead, God's ideal for marriage is an everlasting dedication demonstrated through a solemn promise made before Him. Although divorce is not part of God's plan, it is an unfortunate occurrence in human existence that cannot be disregarded. Thus, it should be acknowledged as a backdrop in which God persists in actively pursuing His redemptive objectives. Therefore, this study contributes to the scholarships on biblical texts elucidating the multi-layered nature of ancient Jewish attitudes towards divorce and provides a foundation for further research and discussion on this topic.

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A thesis

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE

Advisor: Elisha Kwabena Marfo, PhD

Program Coordinator, MABTS
Melak Tsegaw, PhD

Reader: Melak Tsegaw, PhD

Dean, Theological Seminary
Feliks Poniatowski, PhD

External Examiner
Tabua Tuima, PhD

Date: April 2024

I dedicate this study to all Christians, particularly Adventist Christians

who are anticipating the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I also dedicate this work to my dearest wife, Sipephisiwe,

the Rwizi, Ndhlovu, and Masuku families as an

ingredient to keep families

together in the Lord.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The concepts of divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi are rooted in their historical and theological contexts.¹ In Ezra 10:2-3, Ezra commanded the Jewish men to end their marriages with foreign wives, as these marriages were considered to be against the Law. Nehemiah opposed those who had married foreign women and outrageously spoke against the marriages (Neh 13:23-30). In Malachi 2:14-16, the prophet condemned the practice of divorce and expressed God's hatred for it. While both books address the issue of divorce, they present seemingly contrasting views on the subject. By examining the historical and theological contexts of these two books, one can gain a clearer understanding of the reasons behind these contradictory messages. Thus, a comparative study of the two books becomes handy in bringing this understanding.

In Ezra-Nehemiah, divorce is addressed surrounding the circumstances of the Israelites' arrival from Babylonian exile. In contrast, Malachi's text addresses divorce during the Jewish post-exilic period, which was marked by social and economic upheaval. For instance, the Yehud people during the writing of Ezra-Nehemiah were

¹ A. E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham, UK: Inter Varsity, 2015), 371–377.

concerned with preserving their religious and cultural identity in the face of foreign influences, and intermarriages were seen as a threat to this identity.² This finds support also in Christian Frevel.³ In Ezra 9:2, the Israelites had intermarried and diluted the sacred race with people from other nations. In contrast, Malachi was written at a time when the Jewish community was struggling with social and economic problems, and divorce may have been seen as a way to address some of the resulting challenges.⁴ Stephen R. Miller and Max E. Anders in support of this notion state that “despite the spiritual revival led by Ezra and the rebuilding efforts by Nehemiah, discouragement faced the people, due to difficult economic conditions and continued Persian rule.”⁵

The issue of divorce in these two books can be seen as both textual and theological in nature. The textual aspect involves examining the specific passages in which divorce is discussed and interpreting their meaning within the context of the larger narrative. In Malachi 2:16, there is a grammatical issue that arises. The passage states, “יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה אָמַר שְׂלַח כִּי־שָׁנָא.” The difficulty lies in the interpretation of the phrase שְׂלַח שָׁנָא. Some scholars like Miller and Anders suggest, that the subject ‘he’ refers to God being the one who hates divorce⁶, while others like Rashi, and

² H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 16 (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1985), 18–19.

³ “Unwanted foreign influence is brought into the holy sphere where its impact is fatal. The use of בָּדֵל can be seen as a further indicator of the logic that is operant here, as it implies the vital separation of pure-impure; holy-profane.” Christian Frevel, ed., *Mixed Marriages: Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period* (New York: T & T. Clark International, 2011), 129.

⁴ O. F. Reed, *Hosea through Malachi*, Beacon Bible Commentary (BBC) 5 (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 488.

⁵ S. R. Miller and M. E. Anders, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (HOTC) 20 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 420.

⁶ *Ibid*, 457.

David Kimchi in Hugenberger, argue that the subject is the husband, who if he hates should divorce her.⁷ And in Ezra 10: 3 כָּל־נָשִׁים לְהוֹצִיא לְאֵלֵינוּ גְּכֹרֶת־בְּרִית וְעַתָּה this phrase presents a syntactical issue, especially the translation of the term לְהוֹצִיא.

The theological aspect involves exploring the underlying beliefs and values that inform the authors' perspectives on divorce. Both Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi emphasize the importance of faithfulness and covenant loyalty to God. Thus, from a theological perspective, divorce can be viewed as a breach of the covenant bond between Yahweh and His children. It goes against the underlying principles of faithfulness and commitment. The authors may view divorce as a reflection of the brokenness and unfaithfulness that existed within the Israelite community during their respective periods.

The different perspectives on the matter are presented as such, Ezra-Nehemiah commands the divorce of those who married non-Israelites, while Malachi appears to argue against any form of divorce. This notion finds support in Pieter Venter who noted that “the actions taken in Ezra-Nehemiah to dissolve mixed marriages might seem harsh to modern ears.”⁸ The two texts here, present cases of marriages that were canceled, because the children of God were in union with foreign women.

On the other hand, Blessing Boloje and Alphonso Groenewald commenting on Malachi 2:10-16, write, “Intermarriage and divorce were seen as disrespectful and sinful acts in the eyes of Yahweh, and were seen as a violation of the covenant both

⁷ Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 52 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1994), 58.

⁸Pieter M. Venter, “The Dissolving of Marriages in Ezra 9–10 and Nehemiah 13 Revisited,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74 (February 2018): 1-13, accessed 24 September 2023, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/4854>.

socially and religiously.”⁹ Thus, the traditional interpretation of Malachi 2:16 condemns divorce as a whole.¹⁰ The traditional Christian approach to the text takes this text as an unquestionable denunciation or prohibition of divorce. The issue of unfaithfulness leads to a condemnation of divorce in the post-exilic community. However, Matthews acknowledges that taking the text of Malachi as suggesting physical marriage contradicts the claims forged by Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 9:1-10:5; Neh 13:23-31),¹¹ to dissolve mixed marriages. There is also ambiguity in verse 16 of Malachi, but it is clear that divorce is condemned as an act of violence against the divorced.¹² Thus, from this standpoint, Malachi’s passage appears to be leaving no chance for any form of divorce.

Moreover, whereas looking at the texts of Ezra-Nehemiah divorce appears permissible, targeting a certain group, the foreign women married to Israelite men. Bob Becking adding his argument to the voice of others, asserts that the covenant is upheld and marriages with foreigners are stopped and terminated.¹³ This problem is solved by Ezra and the elders of the community in ending these marriages by sending away foreign women.¹⁴ Thus, these drastic steps are deemed to be motivated by the quest to be distinct and an allusion to the Mosaic law. Comparing to Malachi’s

⁹Blessing Boloje, & Alphonso Groenewald, “Marriage and Divorce in Malachi 2:10–16: An Ethical Reading of the Abomination to Yahweh for Faith Communities,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35 (2014): 4.

¹⁰ Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 48.

¹¹ Victor H. Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 368.

¹² H. Wayne House and J. Carl Laney, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1990), 29–30.

¹³ B. Becking, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Historical commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven, The Netherlands: Peeters, 2018), 153.

¹⁴ Bob Becking, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity*, *Forschungen Zum Alten Testament* 80 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 58.

passage, Petterson notes that “Malachi’s rhetoric seems designed to serve as a deterrent to divorce.”¹⁵ In the same vein, Carl Laney notes that “The prophet Malachi ends in (vv. 16) by stating that God strongly disapproves of divorce, thus both the family and community, must see to it that marriage is not to be broken by divorce.”¹⁶ Thus, divorce is seen as a violation of the union between spouses, and emphasis is on the importance of faithfulness in marriage.

In this regard, one would see a seemingly clear contrast in how the divorce issue was handled in these two contexts. To a modern mind, this presents a problematic understanding, especially when attempting to deal with a divorce case from an Old Testament perspective. Hence, this research employs a comparative approach to the historical, cultural, and theological contexts of these books, to bring out a plausible understanding of the different ways in which divorce is viewed and the reasons why God’s hate for the practice is expressed differently.

Statement of the Problem

The seemingly contradictory messages on divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi have sparked debates among scholars, leading to confusion about the historical and theological contexts of these books. The existing studies seem not to be utilizing a comparative exegesis approach in attempting this topic. This has made it seem as if the Bible contradicts itself. This seeming contradiction may give rise to doubt concerning the inspiration of Scripture. Therefore, this research will attempt to

¹⁵ R. D. Patterson and A. E. Hill, *Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (CBC) 10 (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale, 2008), 355.

¹⁶ J. C. Laney, *The Divorce Myth: A Biblical Examination of Divorce and Remarriage* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany, 1981), 44–45. It is not only a violation of God’s original plan for marriage, but divorce violates the marriage covenant to which the Lord is a witness. Divorce is treachery against life’s most intimate companion and is a grievous sin which God hates.

explore the reasons behind these apparent contradictions and provide a nuanced understanding of the attitudes towards divorce in post-exilic Judaism by answering these existing questions.

What are the historical and theological contexts of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, and how do they shed light on attitudes towards divorce in post-exilic Judaism? How do the seemingly contradictory messages on divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi reflect the social and cultural shifts that took place after the exile?

Purpose and Significance

This thesis seeks to provide a plausible understanding of the messages of Nehemiah and Malachi on divorce and their historical and theological contexts. By using a comparative exegesis approach, the study aims to offer insights into the apparent contradiction between Nehemiah's commandment of divorce for those who married non-Israelites and Malachi's apparent opposition to divorce. This study will help the reader gain a well-rounded perspective on the subject. The researcher will immensely benefit from this thorough and rewarding exercise of analyzing these passages in a comparative approach. Finally, the thesis will provide recommendations for further research and practical application of these insights to the contemporary church and society.

Definition of Terms

Divorce in general can be defined as a legal dissolution of a marriage relationship. According to Patricia Diedrick divorce is viewed "as an extremely damaging life occurrence bringing diverse consequences that vary from distress to

solace.”¹⁷ In Ezra-Nehemiah, divorce is addressed in the context of the Israelite community returning home and rediscovering their religious identity. Ezra, one of the central figures in the book, believes that intermarriage with foreign women should be dissolved to ensure the purity of the people. Therefore, divorce is seen as a means of reestablishing the proper religious and social order. In Malachi, divorce is portrayed as a miniature of the nation’s unfaithfulness to their covenant obligations and as a cause of social and spiritual decay (Mal 2:10-16). Thus, the definition of what constitutes divorce can also be explored in a comparative study of the two books. For instance, Malachi seems to denounce divorce absolutely (Mal 2:16), while Ezra-Nehemiah allows it under certain circumstances. This raises questions about what constitutes a valid reason for divorce and what the process of divorce should look like.

Delimitations of the Study

The topic of divorce is wide, and it is contained in numerous passages of the Scriptures. It is important to note that these biblical texts cannot be fully explored in one document, so this thesis will concentrate only on a comparative study of how the topic is addressed from the standpoint of Ezra 10:1-17, Nehemiah 13:23-31 and Malachi 2:10-16. Moreover, in as much as this study will look at how this topic fits within the broader context of biblical ethics and morality, the major focus is on examining the historical, cultural, and theological contexts of the passages. These two Bible passages are chosen because they present the aspects that suit the demand of the topic.

¹⁷ Patricia Diedrick, “Gender Differences in Divorce Adjustment,” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 14 (1991): 33.

Methodology

To answer the research questions, this study will employ a comparative approach, using textual analysis and historical research to examine the texts under study in their socio-historical, cultural, and theological contexts. A comparative approach in biblical-theological research offers a methodology for exploring and interpreting the Scriptures by considering their relationship to other texts, traditions, or historical contexts, thereby enriching the understating of the biblical message and its implications. It seeks to draw comparisons and identify similarities and differences between various biblical texts. The researcher will use secondary sources such as commentaries, scholarly articles, and books to furnish a comprehensive apprehension of the socio-historical and theological milieu of these books.

This thesis will first provide a detailed textual analysis of the selected passages, (Ezra 10:1-17), (Neh 13:23-31), and (Mal 2:10-16). It will examine the language, themes, and perspectives presented by each text about divorce, and look for any contradictions or inconsistencies in their messages. Secondly, it will consider the historical research on the two books by considering factors such as political events, social norms, and religious practices that may have influenced their perspectives on divorce.

Then, explore the theological contexts of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, including the beliefs and values that shaped their views on divorce, and analyze how they fit into the theological framework of the Hebrew Bible on the subject. Also, provide a comparative analysis, by contrasting and comparing the findings of the first three steps, and by looking for patterns, similarities, and differences in the way Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi address divorce. Finally, the thesis will interpret the results of the comparative analysis, discuss the implications, and explore possible explanations

for the contradictory messages on divorce in the two books within their historical and theological contexts. Then, provides a conclusion that summarizes the findings of the comparative approach

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of divorce in biblical texts, particularly within the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, presents intriguing challenges due to the apparent seemingly contradictory messages found within these texts. This literature review aims to explore scholarly works that have examined the methodologies employed in studying these texts and shed light on the contradictory nature of their messages. By focusing on the approaches and methodologies used by various researchers, this review aims to provide insights into methodological gaps in the interpretation and understanding of the topic. This review will also evaluate the strengths and limitations of the existing research, which enables a comprehensive understanding of the seemingly contradictory messages surrounding divorce within Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi.

In an attempt to deal with the texts: Ezra 10:1-44, Nehemiah 13:23-31 and Malachi 2:10-16, on the concept of divorce, scholars have employed various methodologies. Some have used the historical-cultural analysis that aims to comprehend the historical setting of a passage, including the text's sources, reduction, and transmission.¹ Pieter Venter in support of the approach notes that "it is important to take a historical perspective when examining these passages, as they belong to a

¹ Paul R. Noble, "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches to Biblical Interpretation," *Oxford University Press Literature and Theology* 7 (1993): 130-48, accessed 19 October 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23924860>.

specific period with unique circumstances.”² Other scholars have employed the literary analysis method which is a synchronic approach that examines the text’s structure, language, and literary devices to understand its meaning and message.³ Given the Literary analysis, Tamara Cohn Eskenazi argues that the distinctive themes of Ezra-Nehemiah can be understood by analyzing the literary elements and internal dynamics of the book.⁴ Scholars like David Instone-Brewer have also employed a theological approach that seeks to understand the theological perspectives present in the texts. Instone-Brewer’s approach does note, that the OT views marital union as a covenantal relationship joining God and his people and that divorce is seen as a violation of this covenant.⁵ This method highlights the theological themes present in the texts and how they relate. Other scholars have also employed the social science approach.

Divorce In Ezra-Nehemiah: Historical-Cultural Analysis

Ezra-Nehemiah’s text is part of the Hebrew Scriptures and provides important historical information about the post-exilic period in Jewish history⁶. This text depicts the return of the Israelites from Babylonian exile, as well as their efforts to reconstruct

² Venter, “The Dissolving of Marriages in Ezra 9–10 and Nehemiah 13 Revisited,” 1-13.

³ A. R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 38.

⁴ Tamara C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*, Monograph series / the Society of Biblical Literature 36 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), 3.

⁵ D. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 66–67.

⁶ L. L. Grabbe, *Ezra - Nehemiah*, Old Testament Readings (OTR) (London: Routledge, 2009), 1.

the magnificent Jerusalem and the house of God. Divorce is mentioned in this context, precisely in line with marriages to foreign women.⁷

Jiri Moskala notes that “without a knowledge of history, we cannot understand Ezra and Nehemiah’s text.”⁸ Thus, historical markers in these books are intermingled with instructions given to the people of God, and the 23 chapters of Ezra-Nehemiah form one story that covers serious theological themes. Bob Becking, states that the rigid measures of Ezra and Nehemiah are hard to comprehend in light of what the Laws of Israel say regarding the safety and care that should be rendered to the less privileged.⁹ Thus, according to Christopher Smith, some attempts have been made to understand the steps taken in light of their socio-historical contexts, that is to see in them symbols of a threatened community looking for its identity in the Persian empire.¹⁰ Looking at the text of Ezra-Nehemiah itself, David Jazen construes the “impurity” mentioned in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13:23-31 as a social category interpreting the acts of persons involved as disruptions of the internal consistency of the Yehud society.¹¹

Donald P. Moffat notes that “the book of Ezra-Nehemiah was written during a time when the Yehud community was struggling to maintain their identity in the face

⁷ Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *Ezra-Nehemiah: An Introduction and Study Guide: Israel’s Quest for Identity*, T&T Clark Study Guides to the Old Testament 13 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 86.

⁸ J. Moskala, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019), 12.

⁹ Becking, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity*, 61.

¹⁰ Christopher Smith Daniel, “The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Postexilic Judean Community,” in *Second Temple Studies 2* (1994): 243–265.

¹¹ David Janzen, *Witch-Hunts, Purity and Social Boundaries: The Expulsion of the Foreign Women in Ezra 9-10*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 350 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 17.

of forces from within and from without.”¹² Hence, the historical setting that gave birth to Ezra-Nehemiah’s text shows that the identity of the community is a relevant issue regarding the social setting in Yehud. Moffat continues to add that, the events narrated in the book focus on the establishment of a new community led by those who returned from exile.¹³ It relates those events as a re-settlement agenda spearheaded by elements who came back from Babylonian exile. Their focus was to establish the people of Israel again. Tamara C. Eskenazi shows that the second element in the author’s mind was the establishment of the Jewish community.¹⁴ Thus, the social drama of dissolving intermarriages emerges from among people dealing with such issues as identity formation.

In the same vein, Katherine E. Southwood states, “The biblical text reflects the culture shock experienced by Jewish exiles upon their return to Yehud, and the divorces that were mandated symbolize their feeling of alienation.”¹⁵ Southwood continues to argue that, the passage illuminates the writer’s perspective and, as such, it contains socio-historical importance. In an attempt to establish the reason behind the marital challenges, Southwood alludes to Ezra 9-10 which portrays the fears of those who returned and the emerging narrowing of borders concerning other people

¹² D. P. Moffat, *Ezra’s Social Drama: Identity Formation, Marriage and Social Conflict in Ezra 9 And 10* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 137.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 39–42.

¹⁵ Katherine Southwood, *Ethnicity and the Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10: An Anthropological Approach*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 598.

groups.¹⁶ Thus, the marital crisis is a symptom of deeper problems related to identity formation and heightened ethnic consciousness among those who came back.¹⁷

Scholars perceive that the authors of Ezra-Nehemiah's text were influenced by certain traditions. Various paradigms, particularly the Deuteronomic view of the covenant with Yahweh, supported the establishment project in Yehud. Given this, Donald P. Moffat notes, that the Exodus narrative serves as a foundational paradigm shaping the restoration project and ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah, influencing the thinking and actions of the post-exilic community in Yehud.¹⁸ Susan Niditch asserts, "The impressive exodus account includes heritages of Egyptian escape, covenant, wilderness roaming, and the defeat of Canaan. This reflects a broad scope of heritage, that could have been available among the people through written or oral forms."¹⁹ Moffat further argues that these paradigms, including the Exodus narrative, influenced the writer's presentation of the restoration project and shaped the ideology behind the mixed marriage controversy.²⁰ Klaus Koch agrees with Moffat that, the persuasion of the golah people, and the contemplation of Ezra and his team reflected in the intermarriage crisis are founded in "Exodus-shaped" preconceptions.²¹ Thus, the

¹⁶ Southwood, *Ethnicity and the Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10*, 600.

¹⁷ Lena S. Tiemeyer, "Ethnicity and the Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10: An Anthropological Approach," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 64 (October 2013): 4, accessed 11 September 2023, <https://academic.oup.com/jts/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/jts/flt142>.

¹⁸ Moffat, *Ezra's Social Drama: Identity Formation, Marriage and Social Conflict in Ezra 9 and 10*, 138.

¹⁹ Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 103–110.

²⁰ Moffat, *Ezra's Social Drama: Identity Formation, Marriage and Social Conflict in Ezra 9 and 10*, 139–140.

²¹ Klaus Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *Journal of Semitic Studies* XIX 2 (1974): 173–97, accessed 11 September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/XIX.2.173>.

Exodus narrative is not just an analogy, but an integral cultural model that influences the post-exilic Israelites in Jerusalem.

Therefore, it can be summed up that, scholars using a historical-cultural approach examine, socio-cultural background in regards to the time when the books were written, and how these factors may have influenced the author's views on divorce. Notably, the text's focus on rebuilding God's house and restoring the Israelite community in Yehud may have influenced the authors' attitudes towards divorce, which was seen as a threat to the community's stability.

Divorce in Malachi: Historical-Cultural Analysis

The divorce issue in Malachi 2:10-16 needs to be understood in its historical, cultural, social, and linguistic context. Eugene H. Merrill notes that the book was authored during the Persian rule after the Israelites came back from exile in Babylon and were trying to rebuild their community and religious life.²² It was during this time, around 432-431 BC, that God raised the prophet Malachi to address the spiritual corruption that had taken hold among the people, including the priests.²³ During this period, there were many social and religious challenges that the Israelites faced. The Persian empire allowed for religious freedom, but the Israelites were still under the rule of a foreign power.²⁴ Thus, during this period the Jews' political history was closely intertwined with the Persian throne. Hence, it created tension between their religious practices and the influence of the surrounding cultures.

²² H. Eugene Merrill, "Haggai and Malachi," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (TEBC)*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 8:1465.

²³ Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 41.

²⁴ P. A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (TNICOT)* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 366.

The Israelite society at this time was returning to its ancestral land and reestablishing its religious practices. They were rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem and revitalizing their religious rituals. Max Anders and Miller note that “despondency and divine torpor appears to have laid hold upon the community of faith, this was also true of the Priests. Despite the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah to bring about spiritual revival and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the community was still in despondency due to difficult economic realities and Persian dominance.”²⁵ Thus, the issue of divorce reflects the challenges that the Israelites faced in maintaining fidelity to their religious and cultural heritage, they were given to religious cynicism and political skepticism.²⁶ Further, Allen, P. Ross alludes that the divorce issue in Malachi 2:10-16 highlights the breakdown of family and marital relationships among the Israelites.²⁷ One would assume that this was likely influenced by the wider cultural context of the Persian empire, where divorce was permissible and practiced.

Divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah: Literary Analysis approach

By closely examining the literary features, structure, and narrative strategies of the texts, scholars aim to identify and interpret the intended messages about divorce. Helyer, L, suggests that investigating the rhetorical devices, themes, and characters within the texts helps unravel the contradictions and provides a more comprehensive understanding.²⁸ Tamara Eskenazi notes that Ezra-Nehemiah’s distinctive perspective

²⁵ Miller and Anders, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 420.

²⁶ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 324.

²⁷ A. P. Ross, *Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis* (Wooster, Ohio: Weaver Book, 2016), 147.

²⁸ L Helyer, “Persuasive Strategies in Ezra-Nehemiah,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 (2009): 15.

comes to the fore when one explores the book utilizing a literary approach, that is, utilizing primarily literary methods rather than historical tools.²⁹ The term “literary approach” is currently attached to related, but by no means identical, methods of biblical analysis that share certain presuppositions, chief among them is a focus on what Meir Sternberg calls “discourse-oriented analysis.”³⁰

According to Eskenazi, there are compelling grounds that make it necessary to conduct a literary study of Ezra-Nehemiah in this era.³¹ Further, the literary approach as employed by Mark A. Throntveit, leads to three returns in Ezra-Nehemiah. Thus, “the return in Ezra 1-7, Ezra 7:27-10:44 and the return in Nehemiah 1:7-7:3.” These returns led to the rebuilding of a religious society. In the rebuilding process, the restoration community took several remedial actions, among them was the sending away of women from other nations to which they were married.³² Thus, this action was meant to renew the congregation and give it a suitable identity. Pieter Venter adds that “embedded in this comprehensive identity theme are three interconnected motifs: return from bondage, construction of the temple, and conflicts arising from

²⁹ Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 3.

³⁰ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature 453 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), 15.

³¹ “First, Ezra-Nehemiah is exceptionally literary in that it displays a remarkable reverence for the written word. This reverence manifests itself in the many ways the written text is authoritative and paradigmatic for the life of the community. It is from a written text that the messages of God are conveyed in Ezra-Nehemiah, as the public reading of the book of the Torah clearly illustrates (Neh 8). It is also from the written text that other effective powers are exercised, as the interplay of authorizing correspondence (Ezra 4-5) and the written oath of the people of Israel (Neh 10:1) indicate. Ezra-Nehemiah thus demonstrates a self-consciousness about the power and significance in the written text – are taken here as an invitation to the analysis of the book that attends to its literary dimensions.” Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 5.

³² Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox, 1992), 100.

intermarriages.”³³ A literary analysis of the Ezra-Nehemiah text highlights that, the dissolution of intermarriages had the specific aim of excluding the local population from the community of returning exiles. Thus, Van Wyk asserts that “the core problem in these conflicts revolved around gaining entry into the community of returned exiles.”³⁴

Jan Clauss in Frevel argues that “the overall identity of the community is shaped by these themes and their interconnection. By examining the context, semantics, and reference within the text, we can better understand the meaning of the narrative.”³⁵ Also, Saul Olyan notes, that beyond the structural and content aspects, there is a notable underlying terminology unique to Ezra-Nehemiah’s dealing with intermarriages, which has consistently been seen as crucial for comprehending and conceptualizing this phenomenon.³⁶ Clauss continues to argue that, “this notable array of terminological and structural intrusion with the temple restorations of Chronicles may equally assist to explain another lexematical attribute in dealing with intermarriages-the use of יָשַׁב (Hiphil) for “to marry”(Ezra 10:2,19; Neh 13:23).”³⁷ Thus a connection is set up by the intentional shaping of the mixed marriages crisis after the Chronistic temple restorations on compositional and frequent semantic

³³ Venter, “The Dissolving of Marriages in Ezra 9–10 and Nehemiah 13 Revisited,” 3.

³⁴ Wouter C. Van Wyk and A. P.B. Breytenbach, “The Nature of the Conflict in Ezra-Nehemiah,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 57 (January 2001): 1263, accessed 14 September 2023, <http://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/1889>.

³⁵ Clauss Jan, “Understanding the Mixed Marriages of Ezra-Nehemiah in the Light of Temple-Building and the Book’s Concept of Jerusalem,” in *Mixed Marriages. Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period*, ed. Christian Frevel (London. T&T Clark, 2011), 109.

³⁶ Saul Olyan, “Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35 (2004): 1–16, accessed 14 September 2023, https://brill.com/view/journals/jsj/35/1/article-p1_1.xml.

³⁷ Jan, “Understanding the Mixed Marriages of Ezra-Nehemiah,” 129.

levels. Israel as a nation is not the focus, rather, the society's indispensable connection to institutions holy to YHWH is underscored.³⁸

One can deduce that Israel's unique status does not stem solely from itself, but is fundamentally rooted in the holiness of YHWH. As a result, Israel cannot be separated from its connection to God in understanding its significance. According to Clauss, this declaration conveys along implications for the exegesis or exposition of intermarriages.³⁹ Therefore, the current presentation of the book shifts the focus from Israel's holiness being solely centered on ethnicity to a more nuanced perspective. Hence, the severance of intermarriages serves as a way to illustrate the sacredness of the city and the people's awareness of their proximity to God in their way of life.

Divorce in Malachi: Literary Analysis Approach

Malachi is a prophetic text that is related and independent, and it is included in the 12 Prophets and the Hebrew canon.⁴⁰ Scholars generally agree that the book is composed of several prophecies, each with a similar structure. The different dialogues of Malachi are alternatively directed to people (1:2-5; 2:10-16; 2:17-3:5; 3:13-21) and against the priests (1:6-2:9).⁴¹ Jonathan Gibson notes that acknowledging the independence of Malachi allows for an examination of its interpretation within its context. Its placement at the end of the Law and the Prophets also proposes an

³⁸ Jan, "Understanding Mixed Marriages," 130.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁰ David L. Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy: Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles*, Monograph Series - Society of Biblical Literature 23 (Missoula, Missouri: Society of Biblical Literature, 1977), 42.

⁴¹ Ross, *Malachi Then and Now*, 526.

exploration of its interrelatedness to the other portions of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴² Although the form of Malachi's composition has been extensively considered,⁴³ its progression and connection to prophetic tradition are emphasized by the preliminary words of the superscription. Thus, Thomas E. McComiskey adds that the book of Malachi consists of a salutation and six prophetic oracles, with the final one potentially summarizing the overall message of the book.⁴⁴

Allan P. Ross argues that the material for the exposition must come from the text. The scholar must therefore study the text to identify the literary structure and motifs that form the unit.⁴⁵ The pericope (Mal 2:10-16) is considered the most challenging in the book. It presents difficulties in translation, interpretation, context, and the extensive motif of the prophet's address.⁴⁶ In Malachi 1:6-2:9 the prophet's judgement is mainly upon the priests, and in Malachi 2:10-16 the focus is on the community's wrongdoing in the sphere of marriage. The structure of the text (Mal 2:10-16) according to Ross is highlighted in the footnote.⁴⁷

⁴² Jonathan Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity: A Study of Inner-Biblical Allusion and Exegesis in Malachi*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 625 (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 25.

⁴³ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 325.

⁴⁴ T. Edward McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1992), 1247.

⁴⁵ Ross, *Malachi Then and Now*, 20–21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 525–526.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 526–527. “Sentences 1 and 2 (v10 a and b) are parallel and convey the deepest motivation for the accusation that follows. Sentences 3-7 pronounce the accusation, first in general terms (sentences 3-6, v 10c-11c), and then with a specific application (sentence 7). The “broken faith” and “desecration” of sentence 3-6 are specified in sentence 7 as marriages between the covenant people and the daughters of heathen nations, who are adherents of the religion of foreign gods. In sentence 8 (v12) the judgement is pronounced upon two related categories of people: those who have contracted mixed marriages, and those (being the same people) who notwithstanding their transgression indulged in offering the Lord. Sentences 9-22 (v13-16), concerns divorce. sentences 9-13 (v 13-14) introduce, in the well-known pattern of statement-question-answer, the accusation of being unfaithful toward the legal wife. Sentences 14-16 (v15a-c) suggest, in an elliptical manner, the very foundation of marriage fidelity and therefore of the prohibition of divorce. It consists of the intimate bond between God and the married couple, and between the couple themselves and in the deep concern for the kingdom of

According to David Garland and Longman, a notable aspect of Malachi is the use of dialogue, where the Lord asks rhetorical questions to the audience or vice versa the people would in turn address questions to Yahweh.⁴⁸ As for style and genre, the work is fundamentally prose, though there are some snatchers of poetry here and there, for instance (1:6-8a; 4:4-6). In addition, literary devices exist such as rhythmical patterns (1:11; 3:1,6-7), figures of speech (1:6,9; 2:3,6-7; 3:2; 4:1-2), and chiasm (1:2-3; 2:7a-b,17a-b; 3:1c-d,11; 4:6a).⁴⁹ Pieter A. Verhoef, applies a structural analysis to Malachi's text, examining the division of the book into sections, analyzing the sentences and poetry, and considering numerous literary mechanisms.⁵⁰

It can be summed up that, a literary analysis approach focuses on the structure and content of the texts themselves. Thus, the passage's structure (Mal 2:10-16) which includes a dialogue between God and the people, emphasizes the importance of the covenant bond connecting God to his children. Therefore, it can be deemed that Malachi's view on divorce is based on this covenantal relationship, and that divorce is seen as a breach of this relationship.

Divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah: Social Science Analysis

The intermarriage crisis in Ezra-Nehemiah is a fascinating and difficult story, it has been a fruitful base for research using social science methods in contemporary

God. Sentences 17-22 (v 15d-16) conclude with an admonition to "guard their spirits", and not to break faith with the wife of their youth. The reason for this admonishment is God's displeasure with two related transgressions of his people: divorce and violence."

⁴⁸ Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, *Daniel-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009),1474.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 381.

periods.⁵¹ These approaches encompass disciplines like anthropology, archaeology, economics, psychology, sociology, and political science.⁵² Although all these faculties have had an impact on contemporary expositions of biblical matters, in biblical research, social science refers specifically to applying anthropological and sociological propositions and frameworks.⁵³ Further, the intermarriage argument in Ezra is characterized by contravention, calamity, remedy, and redemption, which are elements of a social drama process. Therefore, analyzing these processes helps to uncover the symbols and paradigms underlying the narrative, this enables the account to be clearer.⁵⁴ Daniel Smith understands the purity of the time after the exile as an attempt to establish social boundaries and provide a sense of social solidarity and identity.⁵⁵ In this fashion, Smith demonstrates the value of the social science method for looking behind a prevailing ideology and finding its social significance, something that a strictly theological or historical approach could not do as well.⁵⁶

The extensive divorce described in Ezra-Nehemiah is a perplexing text, and a social scientific approach can provide insights into the social issues behind the events. Employing the social scientific approach, David Janzen notes that, “the decision of the Jerusalem temple community to force divorces and send away foreign women

⁵¹ Jon L. Berquist, ed., *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, Semeia studies 50 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 49–71.

⁵² Charles E. Carter and Carol L. Meyers, ed., *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, Sources for biblical and theological study 6 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 289–292.

⁵³ P. Francis Esler, ed., *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 3–4.

⁵⁴ Moffat, *Ezra's Social Drama: Identity Formation, Marriage and Social Conflict in Ezra 9 and 10*, 136.

⁵⁵ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, Overtures to biblical theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 145–146.

⁵⁶ Carter and Meyers, *Community, Identity, and Ideology*, 292.

was seen as a ritual act of purification, akin to a witch-hunt.”⁵⁷ Donald P. Moffat states that the language used by Shecaniah in Ezra, describes marital unions as socially intolerable and the women as toxic in the community.⁵⁸ This methodology or approach allows scholars to provide an understanding of the social structure of reality of the Israelite society in Jerusalem.

Divorce in Malachi: Social-Science Analysis

From a social science perspective, this passage (Mal 2:10-16) can be analyzed in terms of the impact of divorce on individuals and society, the reasons behind divorce, and the implications of violating the marital covenant. Vincent Cheung asserts that, when an individual fails to uphold their commitment to God, it not only impacts their relationship with God but also has consequences for their social interactions with other people.⁵⁹ Thus, the passage also brings allusions to the emotional and social consequences of divorce. Divorce was a prevalent issue in ancient Israel, and it often led to social stigma, economic hardship, and emotional trauma for both parties. Through the lens of social science, we can understand how divorce disrupts social networks, affects children and families, and contributes to feelings of isolation and alienation among divorced individuals.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Janzen, *Witch-Hunts, Purity and Social Boundaries*, 19.

⁵⁸ Moffat, *Ezra's Social Drama: Identity Formation, Marriage and Social Conflict in Ezra 9 and 10*, 126.

⁵⁹ V. Cheung, “Commentary on Malachi,” accessed 14 September 2023, <https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=hbW4BQAAQBAJ>.

⁶⁰ Jude O. Ezeokana, *Divorce: It's Psychological Effects on the Divorced Women and Their Children: A Study on the Igbos of Southern Nigeria*, European university studies. Series VI, Psychology 627 (New York: P. Lang, 1999), 77–78.

Malachi emphasizes the importance of fidelity and commitment in marriage, highlighting the significance of upholding the marital covenant.⁶¹ Thus, employing the social science lenses, this can be interpreted as a call for strengthening marital relationships, promoting communication and conflict resolution skills, and addressing underlying issues that may lead to divorce. By focusing on building healthy relationships and fostering resilience in marriages, societies can reduce the prevalence of divorce and its negative consequences. A good marriage is a gift and social good. The Malachi passage reminds us to cherish the marital covenant and remain faithful to it, for the social good of the individual and the society.⁶²

Moreover, the marital instructions given by God provide the necessary foundation for a significant and authoritative ethical system.⁶³ Consequently, obeying these commandments is the only appropriate basis for demonstrating fidelity and ethical behavior in personal social interactions. Although someone who lacks faithfulness towards God might seem loyal to their spouse or friends, the absence of faithfulness to God as the underlying framework renders all their seemingly faithful actions superficial, socially wrong, and ultimately sinful.⁶⁴ Thus, by examining allusions to social and cultural factors in the passage, society can work towards creating lasting ethical values and supportive environments for healthy marriages that meet God's ideals.

⁶¹ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 55–58.

⁶² Gary V. Smith and Timothy D. Sprankle, *Zephaniah - Malachi: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2020), 322.

⁶³ Cheung, *Commentary on Malachi*, 98.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah: Theological Approach

In the texts of Ezra-Nehemiah, divorce is addressed within the context of the Israelites' return from exile and their efforts to rebuild their community and spiritual identity. From the theological standpoint, divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah is examined through the lens of God's expectations for the covenantal relationship between His people, the consequences of violating this covenant, and the themes of restoration and renewal.⁶⁵

In Ezra's passionate outburst, his main concern was that people were breaking their covenant with God and risking facing His anger and judgement (Ezra 9:14). This issue went beyond simply getting rid of foreign women, as it was about purifying and separating God's people for His will and purpose (vv.11), to avoid divine consequences.⁶⁶ As a result, the emphasis on the covenant relationship in the memoirs of both Ezra and Nehemiah is not surprising. The covenant had been the foundation of the relationship between the Lord and His people since the time of the patriarchs. Not only did the covenant define the relationship with the Lord, but it also described the relationship among the covenant partners, the Jewish people.⁶⁷ However, the increasing prevalence of mixed marriages posed a threat to the purity of the Lord's religion. Hence, determined leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah were crucial in taking strict measures to safeguard the purity of their faith.

⁶⁵ M. Levering, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (BTCB) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2007), 107.

⁶⁶ D. Cave, *Ezra & Nehemiah: Free to Build* (Nottingham: Crossway, 1993), 111.

⁶⁷ F. C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (TNICOT) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 17–18.

Overall, the theological approach in Ezra-Nehemiah emphasizes the themes of purity, identity, repentance, and restoration. Despite the Israelites' past failures and sins, God extends His mercy and compassion, inviting them to return to Him and rebuild their community based on faithfulness and obedience to His Law. Divorce catalyzes spiritual transformation and a renewed commitment to God's will.

Divorce in Malachi: Theological Approach

The topic of divorce in the book of Malachi holds significant theological importance as it addresses the issue of marital dissolution within the religious context of ancient Israel. By considering multiple sources and their arguments, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theological approach to divorce in Malachi. Page, H. Kelley alludes that, the primary theological framework for discussing divorce in Malachi is rooted in the understanding of marital unions as a covenant connection between Yahweh and His children.⁶⁸ This perspective asserts that marriage is a sacred bond established by God, highlighting the theological significance of fidelity and faithfulness within the marital relationship. Ralph, L. Smith adds that the violation of this covenant through divorce raises concerns related to the theological understanding of breaking the promises made before God.⁶⁹

Addressing the issue of divorce in Malachi, David W. Baker notes that, “lack of covenant faithfulness spreads through many aspects of the life of the covenant people.”⁷⁰ Thus, Malachi denounces the practice of divorce resulting from covenantal

⁶⁸ P. H. Kelley, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Layman's Bible book commentary 14 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1984), 153–155.

⁶⁹ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Themes (Dallas: Word Publishers, 1990), 92–93.

⁷⁰ D. W. Baker, *Joel, Obadiah, Malachi*, The NIV Application Commentary: *from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 250.

infidelity. James Nogalski states that “Malachi 2:10-16 likely reveals traditions related to Judah’s unfaithfulness to God, which plays a significant role in Malachi’s critique of modern practices.”⁷¹ The prophet challenges the Israelites by asking if the Lord has not made them one in flesh and spirit (Mal 2:15). This passage emphasizes the theological foundation of marriage, rooted in the oneness of spouses as ordained by God. Divorce in cases of betrayal represents a rupture of this covenant bond and is therefore condemned from a theological standpoint.⁷² In Malachi 2:16, it is stated, “For I hate divorce, says the Lord.” This declaration further establishes the theological position against divorce in the book.⁷³ Walter C. Kaiser further notes that the strong language used here illustrates the serious consequences of divorce and its contradiction to divine will. Theological interpretations of this verse often emphasize the divine intent for lifelong commitment, love, and reconciliation within the marital relationship.⁷⁴

It can be summed up that a theological examination of divorce in Malachi’s text reveals the significance of marriage as a covenant relationship established by God. The condemnation of divorce in Malachi is rooted in the understanding of God’s intentions for lifelong commitment, love, and fidelity within the marital bond. This theological perspective highlights the importance of honoring the covenant and pursuing reconciliation and restoration in marital relationships. Incorporating these

⁷¹ J. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah--Malachi*, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (TSHBC) (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2011), 1034.

⁷² Verhoef, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 542–544.

⁷³ Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 62.

⁷⁴ W. C. Kaiser, *Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 51–75.

theological insights from the book of Malachi can guide how contemporary believers approach the topic of divorce within a theological framework.

Summary

In conducting a comprehensive literature review on the topic of divorce as portrayed in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, a methodological approach was used, incorporating a historical-cultural analysis, literary analysis, the social science approach, and the theological perspective. Various sources were consulted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contradictory messages present in these texts.

The historical-cultural analysis allowed for an exploration of the historical context surrounding divorce in the post-exilic period. Thus, Lester Grabbe notes that the review of Ezra-Nehemiah for historical objectives differs from that required for literary and theological objectives. A historical study must investigate the relationship of the literature to real historical circumstances.⁷⁵ Therefore, this approach sheds light on the cultural and societal norms that may have influenced the laws and attitudes towards divorce found in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi.

Literary analysis was employed to examine the nuances and inconsistencies in the portrayal of divorce within these books. By analyzing narrative structure, character development, and the use of imagery and symbolism, a deeper understanding of the contrasting messages emerged. The social approach provided insights into the societal implications of divorce during the period in question. By considering factors such as gender dynamics, economic realities, and social standing, a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding divorce was attained. Finally, the theological approach examined the theological motivations and beliefs

⁷⁵ Grabbe, *Ezra - Nehemiah*, 122.

that could have shaped the divergent messages on divorce in these texts. This perspective considered the significance of the covenant of God, the role of repentance, and the call for fidelity and commitment within the religious context of the post-exilic community. In light of the various methodologies, it appears that the concept of divorce in the selected texts of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi has not been comprehensively considered from the angle of a comparative approach. In light of this, then, this study will employ the comparative approach, which compares different texts or traditions to understand their similarities and differences.

A comparative study provides a platform to analyze and compare the perspectives on divorce presented in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, exploring socio-historical and theological settings in which these texts have been authored. This comparative analysis can provide valuable insights into the differences and similarities, shedding light on the reasons behind the seemingly contrasting messages on divorce in these books. Additionally, a comparative study can help identify any possible themes or patterns related to divorce that emerge from the comparison of these texts. By examining the broader biblical and cultural context, allows for a deeper comprehension of the social, religious, and ethical issues surrounding divorce during the time of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi.

Further, a comparative approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the biblical teachings on divorce, as it considers multiple perspectives and voices within the text. This method avoids the risk of interpreting verses in isolation and allows for a more nuanced exposition that considers the complexities of the biblical narrative. To sum up, it can be said that, emphasizing the need for a comparative approach in studying the issues of divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi is crucial for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of these texts.

By comparing the contradictory messages and exploring historical and theological contexts, scholars can contribute to a profound comprehension of the difficulties surrounding divorce within these biblical texts.

Conclusion

Through the methodological approach of the historical-cultural analysis, literary analysis, the social science approach, and the theological perspective, a comprehensive exploration of the seemingly contradictory messages on divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi has been achieved. The literature review revealed that the deemed contradictory messages can be understood by considering the historical context, societal factors, literary characteristics, and theological motivations present in these texts. Various scholars have contributed valuable insights to this topic, shedding light on the complexities surrounding divorce after the Babylonian exile. The portrayal of divorce in these texts is multifaceted, reflecting the historical, cultural, and religious dynamics of the time. The divergent messages on divorce serve as a reminder of the challenges faced by the Yehud society in maintaining fidelity to the covenant of God while navigating the realities of the social context. Further research through other approaches and dialogue is necessary to deepen our understanding of these seemingly contradictory messages and their implications for contemporary discussions on divorce.

CHAPTER 3

COMPARATIVE STUDY

This chapter will extensively examine the context of the texts in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi that discuss divorce. An investigation of the socio-historical, cultural, and socioeconomic scenes of both books to gain a deeper understanding of the contradictory messages on divorce found within them, will be considered. This exercise aims to shed light on how these messages were received by their respective audiences and explore the possible implications for contemporary readers.

Not only will this chapter consider the seemingly contradictory issues of divorce in the texts, but will analyze the isagogical study, formation of the text, and the historical-cultural backdrop to the issue of divorce. Moreover, the study aims to investigate whether there is a contradiction among the passages of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi on the issue of divorce, or if the seemingly contradictory messages are merely two sides of the same coin.

Isagogical Study

Isagogical study refers to the introductory analysis or investigation of a biblical text or passage. It involves examining the background, context, historical setting, authorship, literary structure, and other relevant aspects to gain a foundational understanding of the text before engaging in detailed interpretation and analysis. Thus, the background information and context (Isagogy) surrounding the texts of

Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, which address the issue of divorce, will be thoroughly explored.

Author

Scholars associate the authorship of the book of Ezra in some way with that of 1 and 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are combined in many ancient Hebrew manuscripts.¹ John MacArthur notes that,

Ezra was most likely the author of both Ezra and Nehemiah, which might have originally been one book. After he arrived in Jerusalem in 458 BC, he changed from writing in the third person (Ezra 1-6) to writing in the first person (Ezra 7-10). As a scribe, Ezra had access to the myriad of administrative documents, that are found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.²

Further, Edwin M. Yamauchi notes that “while there exist countless complicated connections between Ezra-Nehemiah and chronicles, Nehemiah is regarded as the scribe of the Nehemiah memoirs, Ezra is believed to have been the one who authored the Ezra memoirs.”³ Thus, scholars in the same vein argue that Nehemiah wrote certain sections and put together the rest (1:1-7:5; 12:27-43; and 13:4-31). However, others think that Ezra wrote 7:6-12:36 and 12:44-13:3 and that Ezra arranged the remaining content with the aid of Nehemiah’s journal. It can be summed up, that the text of Ezra-Nehemiah is traditionally attributed to the scribe Ezra, who was a prominent figure during the time after the exile, as reflected in Israelite history.

Malachi, on the other hand, is attributed to an anonymous prophet. However, there is no ground for the argument that the text was written by anyone else besides

¹ Douglas J. Moo and Richard Hess, *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 3902.

² J. F. Macarthur, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 9.

³ Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Ezra and Nehemiah,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (TEBC)*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 4:124.

the prophet whose name it carries. The absence of a patronymic in Malachi's name is inconsequential since this is also accurate for many other prophets, including Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Haggai.⁴

Date

Knute Larson, Kathy Dahlen, and Max E. Anders have highlighted that Ezra was "written between 440 and 400 BC, possibly some years from the Babylonian exile under Ezra and the restoration of the Israelites. It remains unresolved whether the text of Ezra or the text of Nehemiah was authored first."⁵ Jacob Meyers adds that all indications point to a completion date around 400 BC for the primary work of the Chronicler, with no evidence supporting a future date.⁶ Hence, it can generally be suggested that Ezra-Nehemiah was likely composed during the 5th century BCE, after the Israelites' return from Babylonian exile.

Even though there are no explicit indications of Malachi's date, either within the text or heritage, we can infer an estimated date of the prophecy based on accompanying proof.⁷ Thus, the problem of intermarriage and divorce, then, is the point in common that may help determine, if not the date of Malachi, at least the prophet's position vis-à-vis Ezra and Nehemiah.⁸ Hence, it can be generally deduced

⁴ Merrill, *Daniel-Malachi*, 220.

⁵ K. Larson, K. Dahlen, and M. E. Anders, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (HOTC) 9 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 18.

⁶ J. M. Myers and J. M. Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, The Anchor Bible (TAB) 14 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010), LXX.

⁷ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 361.

⁸ Merrill, *Daniel-Malachi*, 222. "There are three possibilities: (1) Malachi is last in the series, written therefore sometime after the last date in Nehemiah, ca. 432 BC (Neh 13:6); (2) Malachi is contemporary with Ezra and Nehemiah or both (458-432); or (3) Malachi precede the two." The whole hinges largely on the books' respective attitudes and responses to the question of divorce.

that Malachi was presumably written in the 5th or 4th century BC, towards the end of the post-exilic spell.

Audience

Both Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi were likely written for the Israelite community that had returned from exile and were seeking to reestablish their religious and societal structures.⁹ Larson, Dahlen, and Anders argue that “in regards to Malachi’s word selection, we can presume that the people of Israel had come back from the Babylonian captivity by the time of this book’s writing.”¹⁰ Ezra and Nehemiah’s texts recount the events of the people in Yehud during the 6th and 5th centuries BC. Part of the occupants had stayed there from birth; others had come from Babylon, where they, their parents, and grandparents had stayed since the besieging of Jerusalem in 586 BC.¹¹

Theme and Purpose

The overarching theme of both Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi is the restoration of proper worship, religious purity, and the re-establishment of Israelite identity.¹² One of the crucial objectives of Ezra-Nehemiah was to reveal to the Jewish people that they were part of the continuation of the pre-exilic Jewish community, that Yahweh had elected.¹³ In this context, the discussion on divorce serves as a means to

⁹ S. R. Cook, “Introduction to Malachi,” accessed 20 January 2024, <https://windowwalker.podbean.com/e/introduction-to-malachi/>.

¹⁰ M. Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, *Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2015), 281.

¹¹ Tiemeyer, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 1.

¹² Robbert Cope Alan, “The Moral World(s) of Malachi,” (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2017), 250–256, accessed 1 March 2024, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu>.

¹³ Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 41.

address issues related to faithfulness to God and the preservation of the covenant community.

Setting

Ezra-Nehemiah primarily deals with the events surrounding the restoration of the sanctuary and the walls of the city. The focus is on the rebuilding of the community and the re-establishment of religious practices.¹⁴ Malachi's text was likely authored in the time of the Persian rule when the sanctuary was completed and the restoration of worship in Jerusalem.¹⁵ Malachi specifically addresses issues of religious and social injustice, related to the priesthood, tithing, divorce, and religious practices.¹⁶

Literary Analysis

Ezra-Nehemiah

The text of Ezra and Nehemiah belongs to the genre of historical narrative. It provides an account of the events and challenges faced by the Israelites as they built Jerusalem and restored their religious practices. The narrative includes details of genealogical records, temple worship, and community rebuilding efforts.¹⁷ Thus, Ezra and Nehemiah are part of the second grand historical corpus in the Jewish Scriptures.

¹⁴ Tiemeyer, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 68–84.

¹⁵ P. Adam, *The Message of Malachi: I Have Loved You, says the Lord* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013), 15.

¹⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe and Ken Baugh, *Be Amazed: Restoring an Attitude of Wonder and Worship: OT Commentary, Minor Prophets*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C. Cook, 2010), 164.

¹⁷ J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 36–37.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are kept in one scroll, according to the Jewish tradition, hence one would see it useful to read the books as one literary unit. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer notes that “both books share similar themes, particularly about Ezra and Nehemiah objecting to certain marriages within their community. However, there are noticeable differences in style, suggesting that these are separate books.”¹⁸ The text of Ezra-Nehemiah in its structure can be categorized into three major divisions: (Ezra 1-6; Ezra 7-10; and Neh 1-13). Tamara Cohn Eskenazi proposes a thematic structure divided into three parts. The first part encompasses Ezra 1:1-4, which discusses the decree for the community to construct the temple. The second part, spanning from Ezra 1:5 to Nehemiah 7:72, focuses on the community’s efforts to build the temple. The final part, (Neh 8:1-13:31), portrays the community’s celebration of the completed temple following the Torah.¹⁹ However, scholars like Brevard S. Childs argue for a four-part structure: the rebuilding of the sanctuary (Ezra 1-6); Ezra’s marital rectification (Ezra 7-10); Nehemiah’s reconstruction of Jerusalem’s perimeter wall (Neh.1-6); and the restoration of the people in Yehud (Neh 7-13).²⁰

1. Ezra 10: 1-17: This passage describes the response of the community to the issue of intermarriage. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining the purity of the Israelite community and denounces intermarriage as a cause of potential religious syncretism.

¹⁸ Tiemeyer, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 4.

¹⁹ Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 175–176.

²⁰ B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 632–33.

2. Nehemiah 13:23-31: This text discusses Nehemiah's efforts to expel foreign wives from the Israelite community. It underscores the importance of maintaining religious and ethnic boundaries within the community.

Malachi

The book of Malachi is categorized as a prophetic book. It contains oracles and messages from the prophet Malachi, addressing the people with God's words of rebuke, encouragement, and exhortation. The text is characterized by its use of rhetorical questions and dialogue between the prophet and the people.²¹ The text contains a superscription and six oracles in the form of disputations with the post-exilic Jewish community, and "what is said later implies that the socioeconomic and political elite are in view."²² The book contains "substantiations." These, according to Norman Gottwald, "are loose in structure and variously expanded, with asides (Mal 1:11; 2:4-9) and resumptions of argument (Mal 2:1; 2:13) that suggest protracted and involved disputes."²³ Moreover, Gunkel in O'Brien notes that the text of Malachi presents the form of "statement and counter-statement."²⁴ Thus, each of these oracles is structured in a most likely similar fashion. Each starts with a statement, followed by an objection that demands clarification, and ends with an exposition that settles the issue and leads to a conclusion.²⁵

²¹ Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*, 304–306.

²² N. K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), 509.

²³ *Ibid.*, 510.

²⁴ Julia M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, Dissertation series / Society of Biblical Literature 121 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990), 57.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

In his work, Malachi employed a prose style rather than a poetic format.²⁶ However, scholars seem to disagree on the format employed by the prophet. Glazier-McDonald, using the broad view of the definition of poetry, notes that, the literary style of Malachi is poetic,²⁷ whilst Hill is inclined to the oracular prose style.²⁸ Nevertheless, Terry W. Eddinger identifies it as a hybrid, which he calls a poetic prose. Thus, he further argues that “the book reads as a conversation in a prosaic discourse with little regard for line length as usually found in poetry.”²⁹ Overall, in this prophetic post-exilic work, the dominant literary tool is the prophetic disputation, which is a form of lawsuit, Yahweh and his people are at odds.³⁰ Eugen March in John, H. Hayes concludes by saying, “In prophetic writings, this structure is employed to address and respond to accusations or challenges posed against God.”³¹

The immediate literary context, which contains the smallest unit of thoughts, is Malachi 2:1-17, while the surrounding text is found in chapters 1-4 of the book. The bigger setting to which the text under study belongs has a seven-part structural analysis as highlighted below:

A. The Superscription, (Mal 1:1)

B. Oracle # 1: God’s love declared, (Mal 1:2-5)

²⁶ W. C. Kaiser, *Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 18.

²⁷ Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, the Divine Messenger*, Dissertation Series 98 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), 3–6.

²⁸ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 23–26.

²⁹ Terry Eddinger, *Malachi: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, Baylor handbook on the Hebrew Bible (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012), 3.

³⁰ Marvin E. Tate, “Questions for Priests and People in Malachi 1:2–2:16,” *Review & Expositor* 84 (August 1987): 391, accessed 11 February 2024, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/003463738708400304>.

³¹ John H. Hayes, *Old Testament Form Criticism*, Trinity University Monograph Series in Religion 2 (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974), 168.

- C. Oracle # 2: Disputation against defiled offerings, (Mal 1:62:9)
- D. Oracle #3: Defiling the covenant through intermarriage and divorce, (Mal 2:10-16)
- E. Oracle #4: The approaching judgement, (Mal 2:17-3:5)
- F. Oracle #5: Tithes and the blessing of God, (Mal 3:6-12)
- G. Oracle #6: The righteous triumph, (Mal 3:13-4:6)

Malachi's message is for the Yehud society during the time after the exile and it is presented in the form of oracles or prophetic disputations. The disputations can be put into categories, exposing a clear literary structure of the text. Thus, the immediate literary context can be presented in a chiasm or concentric pattern:

“Dispute Three (Mal 2.10-16) A-B-C = C'-B'-A'

(A) Ideal situation = unity: “one God” + “one Father”
General sin = “infidelity” (10)

(B) Indictment/specific sin = intermarriage: “daughter of a foreign god” + “infidelity” (11)

(C) Verdict: exclusion, rejection of “food offering” (12)

(C) Verdict: rejection of “food offering” (13)

(B') Indictment/specific sin =divorce: “wife of covenant” + “infidelity” (14)

(A') Ideal situation = unity: “one ... one” General sin = “infidelity” (15)”³²

Malachi 2: 10-16: This section confronts the concept of sending away directly. It criticizes the practice of divorcing one's wife, emphasizing the unfaithfulness and violation of the covenant that divorce represents. The passage asserts that God hates divorce and urges the Israelites to act in faithfulness towards one another. It can be summed up that, this literary form and literary tools employed in this text by the

³² Ernst Wendland, “Linear and Concentric Patterns in Malachi,” *The Bible Translator* 36 (January 1985): 116, accessed 20 February 2024, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/026009358503600102>.

author are indispensable keys to a reliable interpretation and a nuanced understanding of the passage.

Historical Background

Malachi's text and Ezra-Nehemiah's text were all written during the Persian period following the Babylonian exile. Thus, understanding the historical context of this period is essential to grasping why the authors addressed issues related to divorce.

Ezra-Nehemiah

Ezra-Nehemiah serves as a biblical source of information regarding the Persian domination during the period when Cyrus II conquered Babylonia in 539 BC to the time when they were defeated by Alexander in 333 BC. This era marked the emergence of Judaism in a distinct manner from the pre-exilic Israelite religion.³³ After Babylon's conquest, Cyrus, the king of Persia, encouraged the people conquered by Babylon to return to their lands through an edict.³⁴ Charles F. Fensham adds that "the international political backdrop during this period holds great significance. King Cyrus, known for his enlightened and tolerant rule, issued a decree after his conquest of Babylon, promising displaced peoples the right to go back to Jerusalem and reconstruct the sacred places of worship."³⁵ Thus, this presented an excellent opportunity for the exiled Israelites to go back to Judah and reconstruct the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Although financially supported by wealthier Jewish individuals, the returning Jews were poor and ill-prepared to take responsibility in Judah.³⁶

³³ Gordon F. Davies, David W. Cotter, Jerome T. Walsh and Chris A. Franke, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Berit olam (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical press, 1999), ix.

³⁴ Levering, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, 39.

³⁵ Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

The Persian empire assumed supremacy in the ancient Near East, and all the circumstances mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah happened in this period. The community emphasized continuity with the covenant people of God, leading to a strong focus on separation from contamination and syncretism with neighboring cultures. Moreover, being a small community amidst diverse peoples and religious traditions, the covenant community needed to maintain purity in its beliefs, practices, and ethical standards. Although Ezra-Nehemiah's measures might appear merciless, the text of Ezra and Nehemiah highlights the significance of the covenant community's continuation in the Lord's proposition. Babylonian deportation had occurred because Israel, the covenant nation had abandoned exclusivity, making it evident why Ezra-Nehemiah emphasizes purity in the post-exile remnants.³⁷

The book of Ezra and Nehemiah recounts the people's experiences in Yehud during the 6th and 5th centuries BC, a period marked by political and economic hardships. The occupants of Yehud and its perimeters were struggling to survive in a land ruined by conflict. Part of the population dwelt there since birth, while some were descendants of those who had been living in Babylon since Jerusalem's fall of 586 BC.³⁸ In addition to poverty, the community faced internal divisions regarding the restoration efforts. One faction believed that rebuilding Jerusalem's city wall stimulated economic growth through taxation, while others feared such a project would be seen as a hostile act of fortification by Persian rulers.

Furthermore, Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer notes that "debates arose regarding the trading practices, with considerations of whether markets should be open on the

³⁷ M. Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary (TNAC)10 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 52.

³⁸ Tiemeyer, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 1.

sabbath or closed to uphold religious commandments.”³⁹ This period also involved soul-searching and a quest for identity, as the loss of political autonomy compelled the people of Yehud to redefine themselves distinctively from their neighboring peoples. The question of what defined a person as Jew, whether it was ethnicity, religious practices, or something vaguer, became of utmost importance. In attempting to explain further the situation of this post-exilic nation during Ezra-Nehemiah’s time, Jon L. Berquist asserts that “Yehud, a community, in a state of disarray, formed artificially by its past but deliberately distancing itself from its traditions and historical continuity, this is largely influenced by the necessity of surviving under foreign rule and the political context of the time.”⁴⁰

Against this background, both Ezra and Nehemiah had to confront the Yehud community and address the mixed marriages challenge. They had to take strong measures, (Neh 13:23-31), (Ezra 10:3), that is to let all men send away or divorce their strange wives and children, so that they curb the effects of these marriages. They had to act swiftly to put a stop to this act and renew their commitment to God and his covenant.

Malachi

The post-exilic period, particularly the 2nd part of the fifth century BC, was a difficult time for Jewish people.⁴¹ They were under the dominance of Persian rulership, which greatly impacted their political history.⁴² In Jerusalem, conditions

³⁹ Tiemeyer, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 1.

⁴⁰ J. L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia’s Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 5.

⁴¹ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 160.

⁴² John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed., Westminster Aids to the Study of the Scriptures (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster J. Knox Press, 2000), 356.

were tough as economic situations worsened. Jewish families were so desperate to the extent of trading their sons and daughters into bondage to their wealthy neighbors. They also had to pay tribute to the Persian governors and provide for the occupying soldiers. The diminishing revenues of the temple led to the Levites leaving Jerusalem and becoming farmers in the surrounding areas (Neh 13:10).

Moreover, Page H. Kelly states that “this era of poverty and oppression caused doubt and skepticism among the people, who questioned God’s love (Mal1:2), and justice (Mal 2:17).”⁴³ Many even questioned the benefits of being religious (Mal 3:13-15). Consequently, there was a growing indifference among the people towards maintaining their distinct identity as the people of God. Intermarriage between Jewish men and heathen women became widespread, often leading to divorces of Jewish wives.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Malachi discusses a decline in the importance placed on temple offerings, which may be connected to political changes during the 1st part of the fifth century BC under the Persian empire.⁴⁵ Darius, the ruler during that period, oversaw the building of the 2nd sanctuary in Jerusalem. However, when Xerxes came into power in 486 BC, he redirected funding away from provincial temples. Moreover, Nehemiah, upon his return, discovered a noticeable decline in spirituality and made efforts to address it. T. V. Moore notes that “this decline of faith affected both the priests and the people, resulting in careless worship, offering cheap sacrifices, marrying foreigners while abandoning their Jewish partners, and neglecting their

⁴³ P. H. Kelley, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1984), 148.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁵ W. E. Mills and R. F. Wilson, *The Prophets*, Mercer Commentary on the Bible (MCB) 4 (Macon, Georgia: Mercer, 1996), 353.

spiritual duties.”⁴⁶ However, it was during this general period, possibly between Nehemiah’s two terms as governor, that God raised the prophet Malachi to invite the nation to turn once more to wholehearted commitment to God.⁴⁷

In as much as the passages of Malachi 2:10-16, Ezra 10:1-17 and Nehemiah 13:23-31 are not drawn from the same literary and historical contexts, it is still possible to identify similarities and differences that shed light on the seemingly contradictory approaches to divorce. To fulfill the requirements of a comparative study, the discussion on the literary and historical context will be expanded further to explicitly highlight the contrasting and connecting elements within these passages in the next section.

Comparative Assessment

Ezra-Nehemiah addresses the issue of intermarriage and divorce among the returnees to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, while Malachi confronts the issue of divorce within the community. By comparing Ezra 10:1-17; Nehemiah 13:13-26, and Malachi 2:10-16, one can gain insights into how these texts address the issue of divorce and whether their messages are contradictory or complementary.

Similarities

- i. Prohibition of intermarriage: both Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi advocate for the separation of Jewish people from foreign marriages. Ezra 10:2-3 and Malachi 2:11 both emphasize the importance of maintaining the

⁴⁶ T. V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 334.

⁴⁷ “Malachi” [Mal 2:10-16], *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald, 1955-1976), 4:1121.

purity of the Jewish community by avoiding intermarriage with foreign women, “who were committed to the worship of foreign gods.”⁴⁸

- ii. Emphasis on covenant faithfulness: both Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi stress the essence of upholding the covenant with God. Nehemiah 13:29 and Malachi 2:10 together speak to the faithfulness of the people in violating the covenant through intermarriage and divorce.

Differences

- i. Response to divorce: in Ezra 10:1-17, the people are commanded to divorce their strange women and offspring, resulting in a mass divorce. Nehemiah 13:23-27 also addresses the issue of intermarriage but focuses on the punishment of those who violated the law. In Contrast, Malachi 2:10-16 rebukes the men who have been unfaithful to their Jewish wives, highlighting that divorce was a detestable thing before God.
- ii. Focus on repentance and reconciliation: Malachi stresses the significance of repentance and reconciliation within the setting of divorce. Malachi exhorted the nation to remain faithful to their partners and reminded them of the covenant commitment they have made (Mal 2:15-16). Whilst, Ezra and Nehemiah focus on enforcing the law and separating from foreign spouses.

Furthermore, the socio-historical context of Ezra-Nehemiah reflects a period of religious and social reform as the Jewish community sought to reestablish themselves in Jerusalem. The issues of intermarriage and divorce were seen as threats to the purity of the community and the covenant relationship with

⁴⁸ Kelley, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 154.

God. Malachi, written slightly later, addresses similar concerns but focuses more on the interpersonal and emotional impact of divorce within the community, thus he condemned divorce. Charles F. Fensham argues strange women were taken to be wives against God's principles. Their marital unions were regarded as unlawful right from the start.⁴⁹ Hence, sending away such women can be perceived as necessary and imperative since this action would protect the community from further pollution into the next generations. Therefore, from the argument above, one can deduce that the seemingly contradictory approach to divorce in both Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi can be deemed to be non-existent because the marriages in Ezra-Nehemiah seem to be legally non-existent.

It can be summed up as, while there are differences in the approach of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi on the issue of divorce, these texts can be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. Ezra-Nehemiah emphasizes the importance of maintaining the ethnic and religious identity of the Jewish people through separation from foreign marriages, while Malachi condemns divorce absolutely and highlights the emotional and relational consequences of divorce and calls for repentance and reconciliation. Together, these texts provide a nuanced understanding of the complex socio-religious issues faced by Israelites during the Persian period.

Grammatical-Syntactical Analysis

Malachi 2:10-16

The passage begins with an address to the people of Israel, establishing a sense of communal identity. The language used indicates a rebuke and a call for reflection.

⁴⁹ Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 135.

The first-person plural **אנחנו** and **אנכי** are used to include both the prophet and the audience in the conversation, emphasizing the shared responsibility for maintaining the covenant.⁵⁰ Moreover, the passage can be put into two categories, vv. 10-12 and vv. 13-16. Each category reflects a complaint Yahweh has with the priests.⁵¹

The verb **אָפְּרָה** emerges regularly in this pericope and is central to the complaints found in each section. **אָפְּרָה** is Qal yiqtol first person common plural from **אָפַר**, the verb means to “act faithlessly, treacherously, perfidiously, commit faithlessness.”⁵² Glazier McDonald notes that the verb **אָפְּרָה** also denotes in this passage faithlessness in marriage and covenant relationships. Hence, the object of this treacherous act or betrayal can be the wife or Yahweh.⁵³ Hence, an act of disloyalty towards a fellow member of the covenant family was seen as a violation of faithfulness towards God, who was considered their common father and creator and the source of unity for the Israelites. However, this pericope, suggests that any act of unfaithfulness toward a member of the covenant society puts one’s covenant relationship with God in danger.⁵⁴

A. J. Grieve in Peake states that, the verb **אָפְּרָה** points to double treachery of divorce to native wives (vv. 10, 13-16) and marrying foreign women (v. 11), who lead their husbands to worship idols, this act not only ruptures the marital union, but

⁵⁰ McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 443.

⁵¹ Eddinger, *Malachi*, 54.

⁵² Robin Wakely, “**אָפַר**,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 582.

⁵³ Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, the Divine Messenger*, 85.

⁵⁴ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 262–81.

profanes the intimate connection betwixt God and Israel.⁵⁵ Consequently, it can be inferred that God’s strong disapproval of divorce and His insistence on marital fidelity are intertwined with the theme of the people’s turning away from the covenant and God’s demand for truthfulness and loyalty to it.

Throughout the passage, there is a notable use of covenantal language. The terms *לְשֵׁרָאֵל* and *יַעֲקֹב* are interchangeably used as a reminder of the nation’s identity, the people’s connection to Yahweh. Therefore, this section proceeds with a focus on the covenant from the preceding sections, specifically highlighting the importance of faithfulness demonstrated through the marital covenant.⁵⁶ As the oracle continues it can be noted that the phrases, “*וְהָיָה חֲבֻרְתֶּיךָ*” and “*וְנֹאֲשֵׁת בְּרִיתֶיךָ*,” in v. 14 are used to highlight the intimate and binding nature of these relationships. “*וְהָיָה חֲבֻרְתֶּיךָ*” is a verbless clause, embracing a waw conjunction with independent personal pronoun 3rd person feminine singular plus a feminine construct noun. Here, *הָיָה* functions as a subject and *חֲבֻרְתֶּיךָ* as predicate.⁵⁷ The noun is a hapax legomena and is found only in this passage. Andrew Hill notes that this word is one indicating “permanent bonding”, and he further states that the expression suggests that a wife should not be seen as mere property to be easily discarded, but as an equal partner in the covenant.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Arthur S. Peake, Matthew Black, and H. H. Rowley, “Malachi,” *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible (PCB)* (London: Routledge, 2004), 586.

⁵⁶ Baker, *Joel, Obadiah, Malachi*, 326.

⁵⁷ E. A. Coffin, *A Reference Grammar of Modern Hebrew* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 314–37.

⁵⁸ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 242.

This phrase “וְאִשָּׁת בְּרִיתָהּ” has a waw copulative with noun feminine singular construct plus noun feminine singular construct with second masculine singular pronominal suffix. This genitival phrase is unique to this phrase in the Hebrew Bible. The construct בְּרִיתָהּ is parallel to בְּרִית in 2:10 and is likely considered to equate God’s covenant with the covenant of marital union.⁵⁹ Overall, this threefold description of the wife, “אִשָּׁת נְעוּרָיָהּ”, “וְהִיא חֲבֵרָתָהּ” and “וְאִשָּׁת בְּרִיתָהּ”, is used to stress the intimacy and closeness between the two partners in a marriage, making the treacherous behavior of the spouse even more abhorrent.⁶⁰

This passage also contains a variety of rhetorical questions, such as “הֲלוֹא אִבְרָהָם אֶתְּחַלְּקֶנּוּ” in v. 10, and “Are we not all created by the same God?” These questions serve to engage the audience and to challenge their understanding of their relationship with God and one another.⁶¹ Moreover, this phrase, “הֲלוֹא אִבְרָהָם אֶתְּחַלְּקֶנּוּ” is an interrogative verbless clause. Walke and O’Connor call it a question of fact.⁶² Thus, these clauses have parallel grammatical construction except for the last word. The parallel construction ties these two clauses together and emphasizes their unity of thought. Their purpose is to set up the third question, which requires a longer answer and is Yahweh’s real concern.⁶³ The verb “בְּרָאנוּ” is Qal, qatal 3rd person masculine singular, from “בָּרָא” with 1st common plural suffix. It is translated into past tense and

⁵⁹ Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 124–167.

⁶⁰ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 380.

⁶¹ J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity, 1972), 237.

⁶² Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 131–135.

⁶³ Eddinger, *Malachi*, 55.

of completed action. The verb is used in connection with God only, thus only God creates. Ringgren alludes, “בָּרָא” is more than the act of creating but also includes election. Thus, he notes that Israel’s election is included in the meaning here.⁶⁴

Additionally, there is a shift in tone from addressing the community as a whole to specifically addressing the priests. The priestly role is depicted as one of great responsibility, as they have to teach and model faithful adherence to the covenant.⁶⁵ The use of “you” in v. 13 highlights this shift and emphasizes the heightened expectations for the priests.⁶⁶ The phrase “וְזָאת שְׁנֵית הַעֲשׂוֹ” in v. 13 begins with waw conjunction, which is conjunctive joining two similar situations, rather than disjunctive as indicated by the ‘*petuha*’ between v12 and 13.⁶⁷ Glazier-McDonald and others associate this verse with a previous verse on mixed marriages.⁶⁸ However, Terry Eddinger notes that this verse seems to be the beginning of the pericope on divorce, with the consequence of priests’ actions stated first and followed by the statement of the problem. “This is a reversal of verses 10-12, thus forming a chiasm -A, B, B’, A’ -accusation, consequence, consequence, accusation.”⁶⁹ Thus, the presence of this structure adds credibility to the waw conjunction at the beginning of the verse being conjunctive and not disjunctive. Moreover, the placement of the

⁶⁴ Benhardt, Bergam, Helmer Ringgren and Johannes G. Botterweck, “בָּרָא,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 2:245–7.

⁶⁵ Elie Assis, “Mutual Recriminations: God and Israel in the Book of Malachi,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 28 (January 2014): 38–39, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09018328.2014.926692>.

⁶⁶ Richard J. Bautch and Gary N. Knoppers, ed., *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 283–85.

⁶⁷ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 236.

⁶⁸ Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, the Divine Messenger*, 99–100.

⁶⁹ Eddinger, *Malachi*, 62.

illustrative pronoun and the attribute before the verb perhaps is for emphasis, stressing “second thing.”⁷⁰

The passage also addresses divorce directly. The phrase “כִּי־שֶׁנָּא שְׁלַח” expresses a strong sentiment against divorce, portraying it as detestable in God’s eyes.⁷¹ The verbal clause has כִּי particle conditional, שֶׁנָּא verb qal perfective third singular masculine, and שְׁלַח verb piel infinitive construct. The verb שְׁלַח means “to send away”, “dismiss”, “give over”, “let go”, nevertheless, it is usually translated as “divorce”. Terry Eddinger suggests that the word as pointed can be a piel imperative since the piel infinitive construct and imperative have the same form. However, a command to divorce seems out of place unless it is stated sarcastically.⁷² Niccacci A. alludes that, concerning 2:16a, שֶׁנָּא is a participle functioning as the predicate and שְׁלַח is an infinitive functioning as a direct object. The subject in the text is not explicitly mentioned, but it most likely refers to God, and the implied subject is “I” due to the accompanying phrase, “Thus said the Lord God of Israel.”⁷³

Overall, linguistic choices in this passage serve to reestablish the graveness of the covenant interrelation and challenge the nation to maintain faithfulness, and integrity within their relationships with both God and one another.⁷⁴ Moreover, one can agree with Hinckley Mitchell and Powis Smith who noted that “Vv 10-16 present

⁷⁰ A. Niccacci, “Poetic Syntax and Interpretation of Malachi,” *Liber Annuus* 51 (January 2001): 85–86, accessed 16 January 2024, <https://www.brepolonline.net/doi/10.1484/J.LA.2.303527>.

⁷¹ Ross, *Malachi Then and Now*, 157,174.

⁷² Eddinger, *Malachi*, 70.

⁷³ Niccacci, “Poetic Syntax and Interpretation of Malachi,” 88.

⁷⁴ Cope, “The Moral World(s) of Malachi,” 153.

the strongest and most outspoken condemnation of the divorce evil that the Old Testament offers.”⁷⁵

Ezra 10:1-17

The linguistic analysis of the passage reveals a sense of urgency and crisis. The opening verse sets the tone, using words such as **וּמִתְנַפֵּל** and **בִּכְהָ** to convey the emotional state of the community.⁷⁶ The word **וּמִתְנַפֵּל** is a verb hithpael participle singular masculine from **נָפַל**, meaning to fall, be cast down, to fall prostrate. **בִּכְהָ** is a verb qal participle singular masculine from **בָּכָה**, meaning to weep, bewail, to weep bitterly.⁷⁷ Bob Becking notes that “Ezra carries out these actions while weeping (*bokeh*) and prostrating himself (*mitnappel*) in front of the dwelling place of YHWH. The Hitp. form of the verb is utilized in Scriptures to signify a prayerful attitude of repentance.”⁷⁸

The repetition of the word **וַיִּקָּם** in v. 5, about Ezra’s response, signals his action-oriented approach. **וַיִּקָּם** -verb qal waw consecutive imperfect third person masculine, from **קָם** meaning: to arise, stand, rise, stand up. Moreover, the passage includes a series of direct quotations from Ezra and other community members, using reported speech to convey the conversations and interactions taking place vv. 1-6. This helps to bring a sense of immediacy and authenticity to the narrative. There is

⁷⁵ H. G. Mitchell and J. M. Powis Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament (TICCHSONT) (Edinburgh: Clark, 1980), 56.

⁷⁶ Yamauchi, “Ezra, Nehemiah,” 4:325–326.

⁷⁷ Hamp, “בָּכָה,” *TDOT*, 2:117.

⁷⁸ Becking, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 154.

also the use of specific names and groups, emphasizing the collective nature of the decision-making process. The term *שָׁרִי* in v. 5 and the specific mention of individuals, such as Shecaniah and Jehiel, highlight their influence and authority in the situation.⁷⁹ The inclusion of their names adds credibility and supports the narrative's historical context.

The text employs also repetition to underscore the seriousness of the situation. Certain phrases in v. 11, such as “תִּנְנוּ תוֹדָה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי” and “וְהִבָּדְלוּ מֵעַמִּי,” and the phrase in v. 3 as well “לְהוֹצִיא כָּל-נָשִׁים” are employed to reinforce the actions that need to be taken. The word *לְהוֹצִיא* is a verb Hiphil infinitive construct, from *יָצָא* meaning: to come out, send, and in the Hiphil, to cause to go, come out, to lead out. Thus, the Israelites were to cause their foreign wives to go away, to come out of the marriages. H. G. M. Williamson notes that “the word used *לְהוֹצִיא* is again not the usual one for divorce, and may reflect the same pejorative attitude to these unions noted in v. 2.”⁸⁰ The verb *וְהִבָּדְלוּ* is niphil imperative second person masculine plural, from *בָּדַל* meaning: to divide, separate, in the niphil it means to separate oneself from, to withdraw from, to be separated. Thus, the Israelites were called upon to cut off all associations with the aliens.⁸¹ Therefore, this use of the imperative emphasizes the urgency and the need for a collective response.

⁷⁹ L. W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (TICCHSONT) (1913; repr., Edinburgh: Clark, 1980), 340–341.

⁸⁰ H. G. M. Williamson, D. A. Hubbard, G. W. Barker, J. D. W. Watts and R. P. Martin, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 16 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2018), 424.

⁸¹ Batten, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 344.

Additionally, the passage contains a list of names in vv. 6, 15, that further emphasizes the communal nature of the decision-making process. The language throughout the passage conveys a sense of resolution and determination. The actions taken, such as the gathering of the entire assembly and the signing of a covenant, demonstrate the commitment to rectify the situation.⁸²

Nehemiah 13:23-31

The passage begins with a reference to the foreign women and their children, emphasizing their outsider status. The text employs specific verbs and actions to describe Nehemiah's response. In verse 25, there is a contrast between the actions of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra pulled out his hair, which symbolized distress and grief. On the other hand, Nehemiah plucked the hair from someone else's beard, which was done out of anger and to insult and ridicule them.⁸³ Moreover, Nehemiah's reaction seems to have not fully resolved the issue at hand. Notably, the divorce proceedings of Ezra 10 are not mentioned here. Nehemiah was more focused on preventing such marriages in the future and did not make his ruling apply retrospectively.⁸⁴

Words such as **בִּיָּאָרְרָה**, **הִאֲרָה**, and **מָאָרְרָה** depict Nehemiah's strong reaction to the intermarriages. The use of these vivid verbs adds a sense of drama and urgency to the narrative. The verb **בִּיָּאָרְרָה** is qal waw consc imperfect 1st person common singular from **בָּאָרַר**, meaning to strive, contend, to conduct (decide) a legal case. In this passage, Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry note that

⁸² Myers and Myers, *Ezra. Nehemiah*, 86–87.

⁸³ Yamauchi, "Ezra, Nehemiah," 4:766.

⁸⁴ L. C. Allen and T. S. Laniak, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther: Based on the New International Version*, New International Biblical Commentary (NIBC) 9 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Paternoster Press, 2003), 164.

“the verb is employed for verbal combat, that is to quarrel, to chide one another.”⁸⁵

Another verb employed in the text is וְאַקְלָלֶם which is: piel waw consecutive imperfect 1st person common singular, suffix 3rd person masculine from קָלַל, meaning to curse. In the context of this statement, the idea being emphasized is the use of a curse formula by Nehemiah. Nehemiah asserted a curse on those who had married foreign women, and he saw the curse take effect by publicly disgracing them. Donald E. Gowan, “A curse, in this context, is a speech or formula intended to bring harm or ill will to its recipients when uttered or invoked.”⁸⁶

The passage also utilizes rhetorical questions to engage the audience and highlight the potential consequences of intermarriage. “וְלָכֶם הַנְּשֻׁמֵּעַ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל־” וְהָרַעָה הַגְּדוּלָה הַזֹּאת”, this question serves to challenge the people and to prompt self-reflection. Furthermore, the text includes several commands and imperatives, such as “זָכְרָה לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי” translated as “remember me, my God.” These commands emphasize the importance of remembrance and the desire for God’s intervention and approval.⁸⁷

The passage brings out the idea that “Judah has been unfaithful,” which signifies the violation of the covenant and the severity of the situation. This emphasizes the gravity of the issue and serves as a reminder of the Israelites’ responsibility to remain faithful to God. The passage concludes in vv. 29-31, with a plea for God’s mercy and a reference to the Levitical priesthood. The mention of the

⁸⁵ Helmer Ringgren, “גִּי,” *TDOT*, 13: 474-478.

⁸⁶ Donald E. Gowan, ed., *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 97.

⁸⁷ Levering, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, 208.

priesthood underscores the theme of religious purity and highlights the importance of maintaining the integrity of the community's religious practices.⁸⁸ Overall, the linguistic choices in this passage convey a message of the need for separation and the importance of preserving the distinctiveness of the Israelite community. The use of specific verbs, rhetorical questions, and imperatives serves to engage the audience and reinforce the message of separation and repentance.

Comparative Discussions on Passages

In conducting a grammatical-syntactical analysis of Mal 2:10-16, Ezra 10:1-17, and Neh 13: 23-31, an exploration of the passages reveals key insights into the issue of divorce. In this study, I have shown that Malachi's third oracle is directed towards the priests, leaders, and people of the restoration community of Yehud. This community is considered the chosen people of Yahweh. The main purpose of this oracle is to provide instruction on the topic of divorce and to also emphasize God's view on divorce. Malachi consistently emphasizes the importance of a shared community based on a common father and creator (Mal 2:10) when discussing the institution of marriage.

The ethical aspect of the oracle exposes various wrongdoings such as mixed marriages and unfaithfulness to God (Mal 2:10-12), as well as heartless divorce of Judean wives by Judean men (Mal 2:13-16). These actions are deemed disrespectful and unacceptable in the eyes of Yahweh, as they undermine the covenant relationship both socially and religiously. For Malachi, marrying foreign women, being unfaithful, and engaging in divorce were seen as direct violations of the fundamental covenant relationship within the Judean community.

⁸⁸ Williamson, Hubbard, Barker, Watts and Martin, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 401.

Turning to Ezra 10:1-17, the passage tackles the issue of intermarriage with foreign women. Here, the analysis focuses on the specific context of divorce within the narrative. While divorce itself is not directly addressed in this text, it is inferred that divorcing foreign wives was one of the actions taken by the men of Israel to rectify their improper marriages. This highlights the particularity of divorce as a means to address the issue of intermarriage, serving as a means of upholding religious and cultural purity.

In Nehemiah 13:23-31, the concern centers around the people of Judah marrying foreign women, violating God's commands. The passage illustrates Nehemiah's response and actions in tackling this issue. The analysis highlights Nehemiah's strong rebuke and punishment, including the public shaming and cursing of those who married foreign women. Divorce is not directly mentioned, but allusions to this effect can be drawn out, and it can be inferred that divorce was the consequence for those who did not comply with Nehemiah's orders to end their improper marriages. This brings forth the particularity of divorce as a corrective measure to rectify marriages that go against religious and cultural obligations.

Synthesizing the arguments and analysis from these passages, the issue of divorce emerges as a response to various transgressions, such as unfaithfulness, intermarriage with foreign women, and violation of religious laws. Divorce is presented as a means to restore purity, fidelity, and unity within the context of marriage, both religiously and culturally. It is also presented as something detestable and hated by God. The passages highlight the consequences and severity of divorce, emphasizing its impact on individuals, families, and future generations. Overall, the passages stress the sacredness of marriage and the need to uphold its sanctity, while showing the particularities of divorce in addressing specific transgressions.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is the examination of the significant connections that exist between individual clauses in the generation of textual units, ranging from individual paragraphs to larger discourse units and even entire books. Discourse analysis aims to identify and comprehend the methods by which texts are organized and linked to convey meaning and logical progression. The discourse analysis outline for Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah's text is presented in the next pages.

Discourse Outline: Malachi 2:10-16

10a.	הֲלוֹא אֶב אֶחָד לְכָלֵנוּ	Do we not all have one father?	Question (Yes)
b.	הֲלוֹא אֵל אֶחָד בְּרָאנוּ	Did not one God create us?	Question (Yes)
c.	מִדּוּעַ נִבְגַּד אִישׁ בְּאָחִיו	Why do we deal treacherously? each man against his brother	Question
d.	לְחַלֵּל בְּרִית אֲבוֹתֵינוּ:	to profane the covenant of our fathers?	Elaboration
11a.	בְּגָדָה יְהוּדָה	Judah has dealt treacherously	Action
b(c).	וְתוֹעֵבָה	and an abomination	Emphasis
c.	נַעֲשֶׂתָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וּבִירוּשָׁלַם	has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem.	Event
d.	כִּי	For	Reason
e.	חָלַל יְהוּדָה קֹדֶשׁ יְהוָה	Judah has profaned the holy things of the Lord,	Action
f.	אֲשֶׁר אָהֵב	which He loves,	Elaboration
g.	וּבָעַל בַּת־אֵל נָכָר:	and has married the daughter of a foreign god.	Action
12a	יִכְרֹת יְהוָה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂהָ	The Lord will utterly destroy the man, who does this,	Wish
b.	עַד וְעַנָּה מֵאֹהֶל יַעֲקֹב	until he is even cast down from out of the tabernacles of Jacob,	Characterization
c.	וּמִגֹּשׁ מִנְחָה לַיהוָה צְבָאוֹת:	and from among them that offer sacrifice to the Lord Almighty.	Characterization
13a.	זֹאת	And this	Pronouncement
b(a).	שְׁנֵית תַּעֲשׂוּ	is the second thing you do	Topic
c.	כַּסּוֹת דְּמַעַתָּה אֶת־מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה	you cover the altar of the LORD with tears,	Action
d.	בְּכִי וְאִנְקָה	with weeping, and with groaning,	Elaboration
e.	מֵאִין עוֹד פְּנוֹת אֶל־הַמִּנְחָה	because he no longer pays any attention to the offering	Reason
f.	וְלִקְחַת רָצוֹן מִיְדָעֵם:	or accepts it with favor from your hand.	Elaboration
14a.	וְאָמַרְתֶּם	Yet you say,	Speech
b.	עַל־מָה	For what reason?	Question
c.	עַל כִּי־יְהוָה הָעֵיד בֵּינוֹךְ וּבֵין אִשְׁתְּ מַעוֹרֶיךָ	Because the LORD has been a witness between you and between the wife of your youth,	Answer

d.	אָשֶׁר אַתָּה בְּגִדְתָהּ בָּהּ	to whom you have dealt treacherously,	Elaboration
e.	וְהִיא חֲבֵרְתָךְ וְאִשְׁתְּ בְרִיתְךָ	and yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.	Elaboration
15a.	וְלֹא־אָחַד עָשָׂה	And did not he make one?	Question (Yes)
b.	וְשִׁאֵר רוּחַ לֹו	Yet had he the residue of the spirit	Elaboration
c.	וּמַה הָאָחַד מִבְּקִשׁ זָרַע אֱלֹהִים	And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed.	Question
d.	וְנִשְׁמְרֹתֶם בְּרוּחֵיכֶם	Take heed then, to your spirit,	Command
e(f).	וּבְאִשְׁתְּ מַעֲוֵרֶיךָ	and with the wife of your youth	Topic
f.	אֶל־יִבְגְּדוּ:	let no one deal treacherously	Mandate (neg.)
16a.	כִּי־	For	Reason
b.	שִׁנְיָא שְׁלַח	I hate sending away (divorce)	Pronouncement
c.	אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	says the Lord, the God of Israel,	Parenthetical
d.	וְכֹסֶה חִמְסוֹ עַל־לְבוּשׁוֹ	and him who covers his garment with violence,	Action
e.	אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת	says the LORD of hosts.	Parenthetical
f.	וְנִשְׁמְרֹתֶם בְּרוּחֵיכֶם	So take heed to your spirit,	Command
g.	וְלֹא תִבְגְּדוּ:	that you do not deal treacherously.	command (neg.)

v.10a: interrogative verbless clause. The interrogative particle with a negative adverb creates an emphatic rhetorical question intended to give information passionately. Christo H. J. Van Der Merve, Jackie A. Naude, and Jan H. Kroeze point out that “*וְלֹא*” marks a rhetorical question that cannot be easily contested, as is the case here.”⁸⁹ v.10b: the first verb is a qal qatal 3ms with 1cp pronominal suffix, indicating a past completed action. v.10c: the clause is a question referring to faithless or treacherous behavior, specifically towards Yahweh, and the phrase “a man with his

⁸⁹ Christo H. J. VanDerMerwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 322.

brother” is an idiom meaning “with one another.” v.10d: the final verb in the clause is piel infinitive construct which brings an elaboration to 10c, indicating behavior that violates Yahweh’s covenant meriting divine punishment.⁹⁰ v.11a: is an independent clause showing action. Note that “Judah” is a feminine noun here but is masculine in its next usage in this verse. Douglas Stuart calls this a “merism by which the entire population, male and female, is indicated.”⁹¹ The clause in 11b brings an emphasis on the discourse. The term תועבה is found in the Pentateuch with covenant as its background, as well as in historical and prophetic texts. This “detestable” act is displeasing to Yahweh and poses a threat to the survival of Israel.⁹² The two parallel phrases in between the occurrences of “Judah” emphasize the covenant people, with a focus on Jerusalem, where the temple is located. v.11d-e: in these clauses, a conjunction is used followed by a piel qatal 3rd person singular masculine verb and a proper noun. וְ is a subordinate conjunction, opening a clause that functions epexegetically, giving the reason for the event in 11c. The verb in the clause aligns in meaning with the verb in v.10c. The genitive phrase “the holiness of Yahweh” may refer to ceremonially clean things or individuals.⁹³ v.11f: this part of the verse contains a relative pronoun followed by a qal qatal 3rd person singular masculine verb. The relative pronoun acts as a connector and introduces a dependent causal

⁹⁰ A. E. Hill, ed., *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 25 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 227.

⁹¹ D. Stuart, “Malachi,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary 3*, ed. T. Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1331.

⁹² Wakely, Robin, “תועבה,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 1:315.

⁹³ Eddinger, *Malachi*, 59.

clause. If יהוה is the subject of אָהַב and קָדַשׁ יְהוָה in v.11e is the object of Yahweh's love, it would be the most likely interpretation. In verse 11g, a copulative waw connects a qal qatal 3rd person singular masculine verb to two construct nouns in masculine form. The waw functions as a conjunction since this clause is in parallel with the preceding וְיָיִן clause. This clause elaborates (the action) on how Judah has defiled the holiness of Yahweh. v.12a: is an independent clause denoting the wish of the narrator. The verb in the clause is Hiphil yiqtol 3ms jussive + proper noun + preposition with a definite article and noun ms. This is a jussive form of the verb כָּרַת and should be translated as "may he cut off". The function of the jussive is used here as malediction (a curse or imprecation).⁹⁴ v.12b: the clause presents characterization and contains a relative pronoun + qal yiqtol 3ms with 3fs pronominal suffix. This verb is a non-perfective denoting habitual action without a specific tense or time value association.⁹⁵ v.12c: the clause also presents characterization in the discourse and consists of a noun ms + waw copulative with qal active participle ms + preposition with noun mp construct + proper noun. This word pair is enigmatic (difficult to interpret). Although no precise solution presents itself, the best translation seems to be that of an idiom, a merismus, suggesting the totality meaning "everyone."⁹⁶ The וְ preposition has a sense of separation. The waw conjunction can be interpreted as a coordinating conjunction that joins v.12b and 12c. However, Andrew E. Hill suggests translating it as an emphatic waw as "even."⁹⁷ This makes sense in that this phrase

⁹⁴ Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 34.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁶ Stuart, "Malachi," 1334

⁹⁷ Hill, *Malachi*, 236.

further distinguishes persons from “the tents of Jacob.” v.13a: the clause presents the pronouncement in the verse and has a waw copulative with demonstrative pronoun fs + adjective is + qal yiqtol 2mp. The place of the demonstrative pronoun and the adjective before the verb perhaps is for emphasis, stressing “second thing.”⁹⁸ The yiqtol is a progressive non perfective, meaning that particular thing you are continuously doing. v.13b: the clause contains the topic of the verse. This subordinate clause describes the result of the action in the following clause 13c. The infinitive has a verbal characteristic, similar to a participial gerund. The infinitive construct here emphasizes the continuous action initiated by the ongoing action. 13d is an elaboration of the action in 13c, while 13e gives the reason to the action in 13c-d, and 13f is an elaboration to 13e. The waw conjunction following a negative has an alternative force, connecting phrases that list alternatives.⁹⁹

v.14a-b: the clauses introduce a speech and question respectively. The clause reflects discourse with an interrogative clause reporting the priest’s questioning of the accusation in verse 13. Terry Eddinger notes in clause 14c “discourse introducing the response of the priests. The waw is functioning in an adversative sense and is translated “but”.¹⁰⁰ v.14b: preposition + interrogative pronoun. This conflation means “upon what” or “concerning what” but has the sense of “on what basis”, “for what reason” or “why.”¹⁰¹ v.14c: this clause introduces a prophetic litany against divorce. The verb in this clause is Hiphil qatal 3ms. Andrew E. Hill calls this form a “persistent perfective,” something that began in the past and continues into the

⁹⁸ Niccacci, “Poetic Syntax and Interpretation of Malachi,” 85.

⁹⁹ Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ Eddinger, *Malachi*, 63.

¹⁰¹ Waltke and O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, 18.

present.¹⁰² The term has legal connotations, especially in the prophetic dispute genre. This is also covenant language, which has legal connections. This is a dependent relative clause directly accusing the priests of their faithlessness.

v.14e: this is an epexegetical dependent clause giving additional information concerning אֲשֶׁת נְעוּרָיָה in v.14d. The double, paralleled expressions emphasize the closeness of the marriage relationship. In this noun clause, אִיָּהּ is functioning as the subject and as אֲשֶׁת נְעוּרָיָה predicate.v.15a: the clause begins with a question and has a waw conjunction with noun ms construct + noun fs + preposition with 3ms pronominal suffix. The waw is a coordinating conjunction with the negative. לֹא functions as an item negation rather than a clausal negation, which is rare in Biblical Hebrew. v.15b: this clause is an elaboration of 15a, and has a waw conjunction with noun ms construct + noun fs + preposition with 3ms pronominal suffix. The waw is conjunctive, and has an epexegetical sense, conjoining this phrase with the previous one and clarifying it. This genitival phrase שְׂאֵר רֵיחַ is unique in the Masoretic text. רֵיחַ refers to the “life force” given by Yahweh. Here it includes the ability to procreate, as this phrase is in parallel with וְרַע אֱלֹהִים in the next clause.¹⁰³v.15c: the clause contains a question. The primary numeral is specific in this instance and refers back to the earlier use of אָחַד. The piel participle suggests continuous or ongoing activity. This expression serves as the response to the inquiry posed in the preceding clause. The term אֱלֹהִים is utilized in an exalted manner, indicating that the “descendants” have their origin in and belong to Yahweh. v.15d: in this clause, we

¹⁰² Hill, *Malachi*, 241.

¹⁰³ Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi, the Divine Messenger*, Dissertation series 98 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), 108.

have a command, followed by a topic in the verse in 15e, which is connected to the negative mandate in 15f. A consecutive clause following a logical course of action. It is important to note that the prophet switches back to using second-person plural pronouns, indicating that he is once again addressing a broader audience, as seen in verse 14a.v.16a: the clause consists of a particle conjunction + qal qatal 3ms. The adverbial clause marker **כִּי** introduces an intention clause, which can be translated as “for” or “because” that is a reason. v.16b: piel infinitive construct which carries the pronouncement in the discourse. The term signifies “to send off” but is commonly interpreted as divorce. v.16c: the clause presents a formula designating a prophetic messenger, as previously seen in Malachi, with the additional descriptor **אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**. The verb **כָּסָה** when paired with the preposition **עַל** conveys the idea of “covering over.” The noun **מְזַמֵּן** functioning as the indirect recipient and is more fitting in this context as it places the married man as the initiator of the action.¹⁰⁴ v.16d: the clause is a prophetic messenger formula. v.16e: waw + niphal w^e qatal 2mp + preposition with noun fs construct and 2mp pronominal suffix. A sequential clause following a logical progression. This clause closely resembles the one found at the conclusion of verse 15. This portion effectively concludes the third prophetic message. v.16f: waw copulative with negative + qal yiqtol 2mp. The negative term **לֹא** in conjunction with the second-person plural yiqtol verb formulates a negative command.

In summary, Malachi 2:10-16: A discourse analysis of this passage focused on the use of rhetorical questions and commands to engage the audience, the repetition of key terms and phrases to emphasize the central theme of covenant unfaithfulness, the

¹⁰⁴ Stuart, “*Malachi*,” 1339.

contrast between the ideal of marriage and the reality of divorce, the use of metaphors and imagery to convey deeper theological truths and the overall structure and flow of the passage.

Discourse Outline: Ezra 10:1-3

1a(c).	וְכַתְּפִלַּל עֶזְרָא וְכִהְיָה תוֹדֹתָ	Now while Ezra was praying and confessing,	Background-Action
b(a).	בִּכְהָ וּמִתְנַפֵּל לִפְנֵי בַּיִת הָאֱלֹהִים	weeping and throwing himself to the ground before the house of God,	Manner
c.	נִקְבְּצוּ אֵלָיו מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל קָהָל רַב־מְאֹד	a very large assembly gathered to him from Israel	Action
d.	אֲנָשִׁים	men,	List-Item
e.	וְנָשִׁים	women,	List-Item
f.	וְיָלְדִים	and children	List-Item
g.	כִּי־בָכוּ הָעָם הַרְבִּיעַ־בְּכָה:	for the people wept bitterly.	Reason
2a.	וַיַּעַן שְׁכַנְיָה בֶן־יְחִיאֵל מִבְּנֵי עוֹלָם	And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam answered	Response
b.	וַיֹּאמֶר לְעֶזְרָא	and said to Ezra,	Speech
c(d).	אֲנָחְנוּ	We	Topic
d.	מְעַלְנוּ בְּאֱלֹהֵינוּ	have been unfaithful to our God,	Confession
e.	וְנָשָׂב נָשִׁים נְכָרִיּוֹת מֵעַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ	and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land;	Confession
f(g).	וְעַתָּה	but now	Background-Temporal
g.	יֵשׁ־מִקְוָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־זֹאת:	there is still hope for Israel in this regard.	Pronouncement
3a(b).	וְעַתָּה	So now	Background-Temporal
b.	נִכְרַת־בְּרִית לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ	let us make a covenant with our God	Exhortation
c.	לְהוֹצִיא	to send away	Expansion
d.	כָּל־נָשִׁים וְהַנּוֹלָד מֵהֶם	all these women and the children born of them	Expansion
e.	בְּעֲצַת אֲדֹנָי	in keeping to the counsel of my lord	Manner
f.	וְהַחֲרָדִים בְּמִצְוַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ	and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God;	Expansion
g(h).	וְכַתּוּבָה	and according to the law.	Manner
h.	יַעֲשֶׂה:	to be done	Wish

The first verse of the passage v1, contains three independent clauses and four dependent clauses. The discourse analysis identifies the background action in 1a, which connects the narrative to the action in 1c, which is the gathering of a large crowd around Ezra. Clauses 1d-f list the people who gathered. The particle conjunction ׀ in the last clause brings support to the preceding clauses by giving the reason for the gathering. Clause 1b presents the manner in which the character in 1a: Ezra carried out himself as he was praying and confessing.

The verbs used in these clauses indicate that the actions of ‘praying’ and ‘confessing’ were done continuously as reflected in the hitpael form. Ezra performs these acts while weeping and throwing himself to the ground before the house of God, which indicates a posture of penitence. A very large crowd, described as a ‘community’ forms around Ezra. This community is the one that Ezra wants to reestablish, and the detailed enumeration of men, women, and children emphasizes the size and severity of the situation.¹⁰⁵ The text here mentions that the people wept, which creates a sense of social connection through collective mourning.

In v2, the independent clause 2a brings a response through Shecaniah and the conjunction ׀ connects the response to the activities of 1a-g. 2b presents the beginning of the speech delivered to Ezra. The clause 2c is an independent clause introducing the topic of the verse, and it is connected to the subordinate clause in 2d. The word אֲנִי in 2c is the subject of 2d, and מְעַלְלֵנוּ is the predicate with בְּאֵלֵהֵינוּ as the complement. Clauses 2d-e presents the confession done by Shecaniah on behalf of the community that had gathered to Ezra. Clause 2f presents the background temporal to the pronouncement in clause 2g.

¹⁰⁵ Williamson, Hubbard, Barker, Watts and Martin, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 149.

The construction of v2a introduces a new character, Shecaniah, who takes the initiative to address the crisis. The name Shecaniah means “he who dwells with Yahweh.”¹⁰⁶ This name bears some allusions to the restoration agenda, as Israel was being restored to faithfully stay with Yahweh. In clauses 2d-e, Shecaniah uses the qal form to confess the sin of the Israelite men marrying foreign women. The Hiphil form in 2d indicates that the Israelite men caused the foreign women to become their wives. The construction in 2f-g begins with an adverb expressing the hope that Israel had at that particular time.

The third verse of the narrative is built of three independent clauses and five subordinate clauses. Clause 3a gives a background temporal to the exhortation that follows in 3b, where a covenant is to be made between the offenders and their God as part of the restoration process. Clauses 3c-d are presented as an expansion of the idea in 3b, thus the covenant was about divorcing all the foreign women and their children. Clause 3e brings the manner in which 3c-d was going to be carried out, and 3f is presented in the narration as an expansion to 3e. Finally, clauses g-h are connected, giving the wish and manner in which the activities of the covenant were going to be carried out.

The construction in 3b-c portrays the action of the proposal, using the qal form to convey the idea of “making a covenant” which derives from the practice of cutting a sacrificial animal.¹⁰⁷ The Hiphil form in 3c-d suggests that the Jewish men were to cause these wives and children to go, and be sent away. The construction of the clauses from 3e-f indicates that this proposal was to be done in consultation. The

¹⁰⁶ Becking, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 155.

¹⁰⁷ Yamauchi, “Ezra and Nehemiah,” 4:455.

word “lord” may refer to Ezra, but the general context suggests that the “counsel” is not solely Ezra’s but also that of the Lord.¹⁰⁸

Discourse Outline Nehemiah 13:23-27

23a.	גַּם בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם	Also in those days	Background-Temporal
b.	רָאִיתִי אֶת־הַיְהוּדִים	I saw the Jews	Experience
c.	הַשִּׁבּוּ נָשִׁים	who had married women (from)	Action
d.	אֲשְׁדּוּדִיּוֹת	Ashdod	List-item
e.	עַמּוֹנִיּוֹת	Ammon	List-item
f.	מוֹאָבִיּוֹת:	Moab.	List-item
24a.	וּבְנֵיהֶם	And their children	Emphasis
b.	חֲצִי	half	Topic
c.	מְדַבֵּר אֲשֶׁר־לֹאִיתִי	spoke Ashdod	Status
d.	וְאִיֶּם מִכִּיָּרִים לְדַבֵּר יְהוּדִית	and none was able to speak Jewish (language)	Denial
e.	וְכָל־שׂוֹן עִם וְעִם:	but the language of (his own) people.	Comparison
25a.	וְאָרִיב עִמָּם	So I contended with them	Action
b.	וְאָקֹלְלֵם	and cursed them	Co-occurrence
c.	וְאָכָה מֵהֶם אַנְשִׁים	and struck some of the men	Co-occurrence
d.	וְאָמָרְטָם	and pulled out their hair	Co-occurrence
e.	וְאֲשָׁבִיעֵם בְּאֱלֹהִים	and made them swear by God	Co-occurrence
f.	אִם־תִּתְּנֶנּוּ בְּנֹתֵיכֶם לְבָנֵיהֶם	You shall not give your daughters to their sons	Oath
g.	וְאִם־תִּשָּׂאוּ מִבְּנֹתֵיהֶם לְבָנֵיכֶם וְלָכֶם:	and you will not take any of their daughters as wives for your sons or for yourselves!	Oath
26a.	הֲלוֹא עַל־אֵלֶּה חָטָא־שְׁלֹמֹה מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל	Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things?	Question (Yes)
b(c).	וּבְגוֹיִם הַרְבֵּים	and the many nations	Background-location
c.	לֹא־הָיָה מֶלֶךְ כָּמֹהוּ	there was no king just like him	Comparison
d(e).	וְאֶהָב לְאֱלֹהֵיוֹ	and he was loved by his God	Emphasis
e.	הָיָה	to be	Status
f.	וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים מֶלֶךְ עַל־ כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	and God made him king over all Israel	Divine-Action

¹⁰⁸ Yamauchi, “Ezra and Nehemiah,” 4:455.

g(h).	גַּם־אוֹתָנוּ	yet also	Emphasis
	הַחֲטִיאוּ הַנָּשִׁים הַנִּכְרִיּוֹת: .ח	the foreign women caused him to sin.	Action
a(b).	וְלָכֶם	And then	Emphasis
27b.	הַנְּשָׂמַע	should we hear	Question (No)
c.	לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל־הַרָעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת	that you do all this great evil	Elaboration
d.	לְמַעַל בְּאֱלֹהֵינוּ לְהִשָּׁב נָשִׁים נִכְרִיּוֹת:	to act faithlessly to our God by causing yourselves to dwell with foreign women.	Elaboration
a(c).	וּמִבְנֵי יוֹיָדָע	Now one of the sons of Joiada	Topic
28b.	בֶּן־אֱלִישִׁיב הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל	son of Eliashib the high priest	Characterization
c.	חֵתָן לְסַנְבַּלַּט הַחֹרֶץ	was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite.	Status
d.	וְאֶבְרִיחָהוּ מֵעָלַי:	So I caused him to flee from me.	Action
29a.	זְכֹרָה לָהֶם	Remember them,	Prayer
b.	אֱלֹהֵי	O my God,	Address
c.	עַל גְּאֻלֵּי הַכֹּהֵן וּבְרִית הַכֹּהֵן וְהַלְוִיִּם:	because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and the Levites.	Reason
30a.	וְטַהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל־נֹכֶר	So I purified them of everything foreign,	Action
b.	וְאֶעֱמִידָה מִשְׁמֹחוֹת לַכֹּהֲנִים וְלַלְוִיִּם	and I assigned specific duties to the priests and the Levites,	Action
c.	אִישׁ בְּמַלְאכְתּוֹ:	each man upon his work.	Elaboration
31a.	וְלִקְרָךְ הַעֲצִים בְּעֵתִים מְזֻמָּנוֹת	and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times	Elaboration
b.	וְלִבְכוּרִים	and for the first fruits	Elaboration
c.	זְכֹרָה־לִּי	Remember me,	Prayer
d.	אֱלֹהֵי	O my God,	Address
e.	לְטוֹבָה:	for good.	Purpose

The narrator in v23 begins by giving a background temporal before introducing the foreground of his issue. In clauses 23b-c the narrator presents the

experience of those days in v23a, when he saw Jews in action, marrying women from foreign nations as listed in v23d-f. Nehemiah realized that some Judeans had ventured into cohabitation with foreign women. The הַשִּׁיבוּ Hiphil + נָשִׁים noun in v23b means to have sex with women, however, it must be understood as the indication of a long-term intimate cohabitation.¹⁰⁹ In v24 the narration continues by emphasizing the relation to the activities of v23, thus v24b gives a topic, followed by status in v24c, denial, and comparison in v24d-e respectively. Thus, the inability to speak the Judean language was considered as alienation from the correct Yahwist identity. v25a-e: the narrator presents a man in action, highlighted by a sequence of five *waw* consecutive verbs. The action-packed scene brings the story to the oath v25f-g which was taken as a commitment to the restoration process. These verbs could indicate simultaneous actions, co-occurrence, or things that happened in succession, where the contending, cursing, striking, pulling of hair, and swearing happened at the same time or in succession following each other. Thus, the use of these strong verbs brings the idea of drama and urgency to the discourse.

v26: the narration begins with a question in the affirmative, followed by a background location in v26b. In v26c the narrator continues by comparing King Solomon with kings from other nations that none was like him. The comparison is followed by an emphasis in v26d, which connects to v26e, which shows status, followed by the divine action in v26f. the verse ends with an emphasis connecting to v26h, showing the action of foreign women in causing the king to sin and follow other gods. So Nehemiah's actions and reference to Solomon, indicate that he knew the

¹⁰⁹ Becking, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity*, 327.

danger of these women in leading Israel to false worship and lose their identity in Yahweh. Hence, Ezra called for the dissolution of these marriages.

v27-29: verse 27 presents one independent clause and three dependent clauses. v27a presents an emphasis on what was said before, and v27b is a resumption of v27a, and it brings a question in the negative. v27c-d presents an elaboration of v27a-b. The narrator brings up a topic in v28a, which is linked to v28c presenting status. v28b presents characterization to bring clarity to the topic, and v28d shows the action taken by Nehemiah to expel the offender. In v29, the narration continues by presenting the narrator's prayer, addressed to God, and the verse concludes in v29c by giving reason to the plea in v29a. Bob Becking asserts that "the text concludes by a summarizing note on the measures taken by Nehemiah to restore the promises made and to revive the community and establish true worship."¹¹⁰

In v30 of the discourse, there are two independent clauses in v30a-b and one dependent clause in v30c. The first and second clauses present action, taken by Nehemiah in purifying the community and restoring the priesthood, followed by an elaboration in v30c. Verse 31a-b continues as an elaboration on the purification process in v30, and it concludes with a prayer v31c, an address v31b, and the purpose in v31e.

In conclusion, Nehemiah 13:23-31: Discourse analysis examined the use of direct speech and dialogue to convey the intensity of Nehemiah's response, the repetition of the waw consecutive verbs in v25 to emphasize his confrontational approach. The discourse also exposed a detailed list of the people's transgressions, the use of vivid language to convey Nehemiah's forceful leadership, and the overall

¹¹⁰ Becking, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 330.

structure that moves from a description of the problem to Nehemiah's decisive actions.

Summary

In chapter 3 of the comparative study between Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi on divorce, various aspects were explored, including the Isagogical study, literary analysis, historical background, comparative analysis, grammatical-syntactical analysis, and discourse analysis. The chapter delved into the contradictory messages present in the two biblical texts regarding divorce, considering the historical and theological contexts in which they were written.

This chapter highlighted that the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi were written by Ezra and the prophet Malachi respectively. The books were written in the period between the 5th and 4th century BC, after the Babylonian exile, during the post-exilic period. These texts were likely written for the Yehud community that had returned from exile. The overarching idea of both texts is the restoration of proper worship, religious purity, and identity. In this context, the discussion on divorce serves as a means to address issues related to faithfulness to God and the preservation of the covenant community.

Based on the passages under study, it is evident that while Ezra-Nehemiah takes a strong stance against intermarriages, Malachi emphasizes the harm and unfaithfulness associated with divorce itself. Ezra-Nehemiah underscores the importance of maintaining the purity of the Israelites and denounces intermarriage as a cause of potential apostasy. On the other hand, Malachi criticizes the practice of divorcing one's wife, emphasizing the unfaithfulness and violation of the covenant that divorce presents. The choice of language in the passages conveys a message of the need for separation and the importance of preserving the distinctiveness of the

Israelite community. The use of specific verbs, rhetorical questions, and imperatives serves to engage the audience and reinforce the message of separation and repentance.

In conclusion, chapter 3 of the study provided a comprehensive exploration of the seemingly contradictory messages in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi regarding divorce, considering the Isagogical, literary, historical, comparative, and grammatical-syntactical aspects. The chapter uncovered the complex and nuanced perspectives surrounding the aspect of divorce, and God's intentions for relationships within the Yehud community.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter of the study, the theological implications of the contradictory messages on divorce found in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi are examined. The theological analysis focuses on the underlying beliefs, principles, and values presented in the Old Testament and each book concerning marriage, divorce, covenant, and God's intentions for human relationships. A practical analysis will also explore the practical applications and ethical considerations that arise from these teachings and how they impact the lived experiences of individuals and communities. By intertwining both the theological and practical analyses, this study seeks to shed light on the complex interplay between theological beliefs, practical implications, and historical context within ancient Israel's understanding of divorce.

Old Testament Theological Perspectives on Divorce

According to William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, the Old Testament assumes that divorce is acceptable, although little is mentioned about how it functions except for one law that regulates it (Deut 24:1-4).¹ However, their main argument is that divorce is an accepted institution in the Old Testament. Wayne H. House and J. Carl Laney supports this view by emphasizing that "Moses did not introduce divorce but acknowledged its existence and attempted to control what went against God's

¹ William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus* (Nashville, Tennessee: T. Nelson, 1985), 106.

original intention for marriage. While divorce was ‘permitted’ because it was not explicitly prohibited by law, it was not viewed favorably.”²

Moreover, the laws in the Old Testament not only promote the idea of a lifelong partnership but they are also based on the belief that a permanent relationship is established between spouses.³ In the Edenic model for marriage, it is stated that a husband and wife should remain in a permanent relationship, sticking closely to one another (Gen 2:24). This ideal is emphasized throughout the Old Testament, where marriage is seen as a lifelong covenant between spouses and witnessed by God himself.⁴ Both husbands and wives are called to be faithful to this covenant. It is important to note that the biblical record does not permit either spouse to break the marriage vows by being unfaithful.⁵

However, due to the distortion of the original divine mandate for lifelong marriage, divorce became a common practice. Although there are many references to divorce in the Old Testament, there is no legislation prescribing it. Richard M. Davidson in Mueller and de Souza states that “Divorce is tolerated, conceded, permitted, but is never commanded or approved by divine law.”⁶ Even the passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which is often discussed concerning divorce, does not prescribe it.

² House and Laney, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 24.

³ G. J. Wenham, *Jesus, Divorce, and Remarriage: In Their Historical Setting* (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2020), 9.

⁴ Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias B. de Souza, ed., *Marriage Biblical and Theological Aspects*, Biblical Research Institute Studies in Biblical Ethics 1 (Silver Springs, Maryland: Review and Herald, 2015), 179.

⁵ Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 313–338.

⁶ Mueller and de Souza, *Marriage Biblical and Theological Aspects*, 180.

Thus, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 does not change God's original plan for marriage; instead, it offers a solution and guidance when the ideal of marital permanence is not followed. Alex R. G. Deasley raises a question in response to this, asking how an institution (divorce) that contradicts the divine ideal can remain uncondemned and be even used by God?⁷ However, the answer to this question requires further clarification as we delve into the Old Testament teachings on Divorce. In the meantime, it can tentatively be suggested that the Old Testament views divorce from the perspective of redeeming a fallen society. Redemption will only occur when God involves himself in this society, entering and making use of its flawed institutions, not to approve them, but to transform them beyond their limitations.

Divorce in the Torah

The Hebrew's increasing leniency towards divorce and remarriage led to the need for legislation to address this issue.⁸ Laws in the Torah assume the existence of divorce as an institution. For example, in Deuteronomy 22:13-29, if a husband wants to get rid of his wife (v13) he can falsely claim that she was not a virgin at the time of their marriage (v14). the wife's parents are responsible for defending her virginity and providing proof (v15-17).⁹ However, if the husband is found to be lying, he would be punished and fined, and he would not be allowed to divorce her.

Moreover, the most explicit law about divorce in the Old Testament is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. It is important to understand its meaning correctly. This law

⁷ A. R. G. Deasley, *Marriage & Divorce in the Bible and the Church* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 2000), 50.

⁸ House and Laney, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 21.

⁹ J. A. Thompson and D. J. Wiseman, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (TTOTC) 5 (Leicester Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-varsity press, 1974), 236-7.

does not create a divorce or endorse it but merely looks at it as a custom already in practice.¹⁰ It simply acknowledges divorce as an existing institution and seeks to regulate its application in the case of a woman returning to her first husband after divorcing or being widowed by her second husband.¹¹ Thus, the first three verses describe the situation of a woman who has been divorced by different men or divorced once and then widowed. It is worth noting that the text neither encourages nor commands divorce. It only describes the circumstances leading to divorce. However, it implies that a woman's remarriage after divorce is akin to adultery, as she now cohabits with another man. This aligns with Jesus' teaching that divorce and remarriage, whether by husband or wife, constitute adultery (Mark 10:11-12).¹²

Summing up the evidence from the Torah, divorce is accepted as a reality. Richard M. Davidson alludes that "the implication is clear: God does not promote or endorse divorce in this passage. There seems to be an underlying disapproval, although divorce is allowed and not punished."¹³ This has a dual implication: first, divorce is not a divine institution or part of God's plan for marriage. It is a consequence of the prevailing sinful state, and if God accepts it, it is to bring about something better. Second, divorce is recognized as achieving its intended purpose. It dissolves an existing marriage and allows the divorced individuals to remarry. Therefore, William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham argue that "Deuteronomy 24:1-4

¹⁰ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 3., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (TNICOT) 05 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1981), 305.

¹¹ S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament (TICCHSONT) (Edinburgh: Clark, 1996), 269–271.

¹² House and Laney, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 23.

¹³ Richard M. Davidson, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament," *Perspective Digest* 16 (2011): 4, accessed 24 March 2024, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>.

loses its meaning if this interpretation is not upheld. This point does not rely on claims that the law aims to discourage hasty divorce or similar arguments.”¹⁴

Divorce in Prophetic Books

The use of the metaphor of marriage to describe God’s relationship with Israel is a way of emphasizing the personal aspect of their covenant. This concept is highlighted through the personal experiences of prophets like Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, who use their tragic relationships as a backdrop to convey the collapse of the marriage between God and his people.¹⁵ Hosea is the first Old Testament writer to interpret God’s covenant with Israel as a marriage, drawing from his pain and betrayal by his wife to understand the significance of the covenant. This suggests that there is a direct analogy between the laws of marriage and divorce and how God deals with His unfaithful people.

Furthermore, it is suggested that Hosea divorced his wife Gomer due to her moral unfaithfulness, just as God “divorced” Israel for their spiritual unfaithfulness. This is evident in the phrase “for you are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hos 1:9), which is seen as the dissolution of the covenant between God and Israel, similar to a legal divorce formula.¹⁶ Although Jeremiah does not explicitly mention a literal message, the imagery of divorce is metaphorically used, particularly about the law of divorce. This law emphasizes that there is no possibility of God reconciling with Judah and returning to their previous relationship. However, as William McKane

¹⁴ Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*, 107–8.

¹⁵ Walther Eichrodt and J. A. Baker, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 45–69; 251–55.

¹⁶ H. W. Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, Hermeneia--A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (HACHCB) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 21–22; 27.

asserts, it is important to note that despite the legal aspect of Israel's divorce, there is still a possibility of reconciliation, "divorce is, nevertheless not final."¹⁷ This is implied through the repeated calls for repentance, as repentance is a religious rather than a legal category. God, who uses the law of divorce to convict and punish Israel, is not restricted by it and can forgive and restore them when they genuinely repent.

Divorce in the Writings

Divorce is a topic that has been addressed throughout various religious texts, specifically in the context of the Bible. The Writings provide insights into the views on divorce, its implications, and considerations that should be made when dealing with such a complex issue. In the last chapters of Ezra and the last chapter of Nehemiah, it is mentioned that upon returning from exile in 457 BC, Ezra-Nehemiah dealt with a group of leading Jews who had married non-believing wives. These Jews had disregarded the instructions found in the Torah (Deut 7:1-5).

The situation showed how divorce was used as a means to restore purity, identity, and faithfulness to the covenant.¹⁸ However, Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias Brasil de Souza suggest that the motivation behind this was not just ethnic purity, but also the preservation of true worship of Yahweh, protecting it from being influenced by pagan religions.¹⁹ Marriages with pagan women were seen as rebellious and invalid, leading to the use of divorce as a way to maintain the religious integrity of the community.²⁰ It is important to note that the specific terminology for "divorce" used

¹⁷ W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (TICCHSONT) (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1986), 65.

¹⁸ Olyan, "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah," 3–5.

¹⁹ Mueller and de Souza, *Marriage Biblical and Theological Aspects*, 194.

²⁰ Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*, 163.

in these passages is different from any other Old Testament passage. This indicates that once these marriages were recognized as direct violations of the Torah's command, they were not considered legitimate or valid marriages. Ezra, knowledgeable in the law of God, intentionally used unusual terminology for both the marriage and the divorce of these wives.²¹

However, this should not be seen as an endorsement of divorce as a preferred method to address marital issues, but rather as a solution for specific circumstances to uphold religious values. Edwin Yamauchi argues that the actions of Ezra-Nehemiah were not solely on racial or cultural measures, but were necessary to preserve Israel's spiritual heritage.²² Since the Torah did not provide specific instructions on how to handle such situations, it would be premature to generalize and insist that the extreme measures taken by Ezra-Nehemiah should be applied to all future cases where a believer marries a non-believer.²³ Edward G. Dobson rightly emphasizes that these were unique circumstances, as the Messianic line, "the holy seed" was at risk of extinction, and God commanded severe action. If some points in this text as justification for divorce, it would be prudent to remind them that Christ has already come, and thus these circumstances cannot be repeated.²⁴ However, the passage does underscore the dangers involved in intermarriage or cohabitation with unbelievers.

²¹ Mueller and de Souza, *Marriage Biblical and Theological Aspects*, 195.

²² Yamauchi and Phillips, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 345.

²³ Mueller and Souza, *Marriage Biblical and Theological Aspects*, 195.

²⁴ E. G. Dobson, *What the Bible Really Says about Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1986), 47.

New Testament Theological Perspectives on Divorce

Divorce, remarriage, and the breakdown of families have become significant challenges in societies and churches. The New Testament upholds the view of marriage presented in the Old Testament and emphasizes the importance of marriage based on the order of creation. Marriage is even compared to the relationship between Jesus and His church (Eph 5:22-23). However, the New Testament acknowledges the existence of divorce, and both Jesus and Paul address this topic.²⁵

During the time of Jesus, divorce was treated casually by many in Judaism. The two schools of thought, Shammai and Hillel, had differing opinions on the grounds for divorce. The Hillel school allowed husbands to divorce their wives for almost any reason, including minor issues like burning a meal.²⁶ Meanwhile, the Shammai school permitted divorce only in cases of sexual offense committed by the wife. Instead of adhering to God's plan of the permanence of marriage, divorce was seen as a privilege.²⁷ Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees on this issue in that context.

The New Testament upholds the sacredness of marriage, emphasizing its divine institution and intended permanence. Jesus, in responding to the Pharisees' question regarding divorce, points to the creation account found in Genesis, stating, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matt 19:6, NIV).²⁸

²⁵ Mueller and de Souza, *Marriage Biblical and Theological Aspects*, 207.

²⁶ Robbert W. Wall, "Divorce," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary (TABD)*, ed. David Noel Freedman and Gary A. Herion (New York: Doubleday, 19), 218.

²⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 228–235.

²⁸ D. L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 461.

David L. Turner further notes that “Jesus referring to the creation story in Genesis 1-2 prioritizes God’s original intention for marriage over the ad hoc legislation of Deuteronomy 24, and the Mosaic concession for human sin.”²⁹ Therefore, this verse highlights God’s design for marriage as a lifelong commitment and implies that divorce is a departure from this ideal.

Jesus further addresses divorce in the Sermon on the Mount, presenting a higher ethical standard for his disciples. He states, “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery” (Matt 5:31-32, NIV).³⁰ Further, Jesus teaches that if a man divorces his wife for reasons other than sexual infidelity, it leads to adultery for both the ex-wife and her potential future spouse. He clarifies that divorce without sexual infidelity is not a valid divorce.³¹

Moreover, Jesus goes against the prevailing belief of the time in the area of divorce. R. T. France asserts that “this radical refusal to recognize the validity of divorce will be grounded in Matthew 19:3-9 on God’s original purpose in creation: marriage is to be a lifelong commitment.”³² However, Jesus does not insist on divorcing an unfaithful spouse; rather, he allows it as an option for the offended party. Like his father’s view in Malachi 2, Jesus dislikes divorce in every situation, nevertheless, *porneia* -understood within its biblical range of meaning, is the only

²⁹ Turner, *Matthew*, 461.

³⁰ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 146–148.

³¹ Turner, *Matthew*, 171–172.

³² R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (TTNTC) (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 123.

grounds for divorce, although it is preferred to seek forgiveness and strive for a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, as desired by Jesus and the Bible.³³ His desire is always reconciliation unless there is ongoing, unrepentant, adulterous destruction of the marital covenant.³⁴ Thus, one can suggest that, here, Jesus indicates that divorce should not occur. Moreover, Jesus' teachings as mentioned in Matthew 19:4-6, acknowledge scripture's ability to address doubts and lead to a decision on divorce. In this context, there are no justifiable reasons for divorce as the order of creation (Gen 2:24) mandates the inseparable union of one man and one woman in marriage.³⁵

The apostle Paul also offers insights into divorce within the context of Christian theology. Richard B. Hays commenting on 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 alludes, that this passage highlights a rare instance where Paul explicitly references a teaching of Jesus to support his instructions to the churches. Although his wording differs from that of the Gospels, Paul is referring to Jesus' teaching on divorce, which was more stringent than both Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural norms.³⁶ Thus, in light of this command from the Lord, Paul permits divorce only when an unbelieving spouse forces it upon the Christian. Paul emphasizes that the prohibition of divorce is not his ruling, but rather comes from the Lord.³⁷ Therefore, in his letter to the Corinthians, he

³³ Mueller and de Souza, *Marriage Biblical and Theological Aspects*, 214.

³⁴ S. K. Weber and M. Anders, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary: NIV Based (HNTC) 1 (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2007), 68.

³⁵ Mueller and de Souza, *Marriage Biblical and Theological Aspects*, 220.

³⁶ R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary For Teaching and Preaching (IBCTP) (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 119–120.

³⁷ D. E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 278.

advises believers who are married to unbelievers to seek unity and reconciliation rather than divorce (1 Cor 7:12-16).³⁸

Additionally, Paul teaches that while divorce is not ideal, separation can be necessary in cases where one spouse is consistently unfaithful or unwilling to uphold marital responsibilities (1 Cor 7:12-15).³⁹ Moreover, Paul views holiness, mentioned in verse 14 as the reason for believers to maintain their marriages, not as a mystical or transferable quality, but rather as a matter of social relations and ethical behavior by God's will.⁴⁰ Presumably, Paul has two main reasons for advising couples to stay together: first, divorcing goes against God's will in principle, and second, the Christian's lifestyle, love, and testimony may potentially influence the unbelieving spouse to come to faith (vv. 14, 16).⁴¹ However, Paul does not recommend pressuring the unbeliever into staying together if they insist on their newfound incompatibility.

In a nutshell, the New Testament offers multiple theological perspectives on divorce, highlighting marriage's sacredness and intended permanence while recognizing human brokenness and the need for compassion. Jesus' teachings emphasize God's design for marriage and the seriousness of divorce, while Paul's guidance focuses on unity, reconciliation, and the responsibility to preserve marriages. Through these perspectives, the New Testament encourages believers to approach divorce thoughtfully, seeking restoration and applying God's grace in all

³⁸ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (TNIGTC) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2013), 525–530.

³⁹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 121.

⁴⁰ R. A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (ANTC) (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1998), 99.

⁴¹ A. C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (TNIGTC) (Grand Rapids: W B Eerdmans, 2011), 108.

situations of marital struggle. Thus, divorce in the New Testament perspective is not ideal, however, separation can be necessary in cases where one spouse is consistently unfaithful to the marriage covenant

Theological Discourse in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi

The books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi address the issue of divorce within the context of the post-exilic community, where the restoration and reform of the Jewish people were central concerns. In Ezra-Nehemiah, the theological theme of maintaining purity and fidelity to the covenant with God is evident in the strict measures taken to separate from foreign wives and children. The emphasis on upholding the covenant and preserving the religious and ethnic identity of the Jewish community led to the mass divorce of intermarried couples as a means of reaffirming the exclusivity of the covenant relationship with God.

Ezra was aware that the Mosaic law strictly forbade Jews from intermarrying with foreigners. Such marriages would inevitably lead to the worship of foreign gods (Deut 7:1-4).⁴² In the text of Ezra-Nehemiah, the purpose is not to establish a biblical pattern for divorce and remarriage. Instead, as a leader and priest in the restoration community, Ezra sought to teach the returned exiles about the danger of apostasy, the need to maintain religious purity, and the tragic consequences of violating God's laws. Thus, Ezra acknowledged that marrying women from foreign lands went against the covenant and advocated for a communal commitment to expel the wives and children from these unlawful unions.⁴³ Nehemiah also viewed these post-exilic

⁴² Williamson, Hubbard, Barker, Watts and Martin, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 154–156.

⁴³ Allen and Laniak, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 79.

marriages to pagan women as rebellious and invalid, recognizing Israel's history of apostasy through similar intermarriages.⁴⁴

In Malachi, the theological theme of fidelity to the covenant is highlighted in the context of marital relationships. The prophet condemns the practice of divorce and marrying foreign women, emphasizing the emotional and relational consequences of such actions. Thus, Malachi calls for divine judgement on those who defile the marriage relationship in v. 12. He emphasizes that their excessive emotional displays in prayer will have no effect due to their broken marriage vows. He further condemns those who have violated their marital commitments as being treacherous towards their spouses.⁴⁵ According to the prophet, divorce not only goes against God's original plan for marriage but also undermines the marriage covenant witnessed by the Lord. It is a grave sin that God despises. Therefore, Malachi calls for repentance, reconciliation, and the restoration of fidelity within marriage, emphasizing the theological importance of upholding the sacred covenant relationship between spouse and God.

The term "unfaithfulness" is emphasized throughout the verses and is the main focus of this condemnation. The passage suggests that Judah's unfaithfulness to God is reflected in their behavior towards each other.⁴⁶ Thus, the prophet Malachi preaches a high standard for marriage, emphasizing companionship with one's spouse and shared responsibility in parenting. He emphasizes the sacred nature of the husband-wife relationship by relating it to the covenant between God and Israel. This is why he disapproves of divorce and encourages people to remain loyal to their marriage vows. In a way, Malachi's teachings foreshadow the stricter instructions on divorce given by

⁴⁴ Wenham, *Jesus, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 30.

⁴⁵ House and Laney, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 29.

⁴⁶ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 57.

Jesus (Matt 19:9-11) and Paul (1 Cor 7:1-16).⁴⁷ In this context, the prophet's stance against divorce may be a response to the exclusive tendencies of post-exilic Judaism, as they sought to restore ethnic purity by discouraging intermarriage.

Moreover, these unlawful marriages imply that marital issues always impact a person's spiritual life. If there is constant conflict and tension between a husband and wife, it becomes impossible for them to maintain a good relationship with the Lord.⁴⁸ The Jews who married pagan women failed to understand why their sacrifices were no longer accepted by God. The wife being divorced is referred to as "your wife by covenant" in this context, indicating God's serious regard for the marriage vows, even though the husband did not take them seriously. When marriage vows are exchanged, a solemn covenant is established, and those who break them will be held accountable by God.⁴⁹ To sum it up, since divorce brings harm to a marriage partner, God despises it and the damage it causes to marital relationships. The implication here is that the prophet recognizes that remaining faithful to the marriage covenant both fulfills God's intent for the man-woman relationship and contributes to a stable society.⁵⁰

Theological Evaluation

In examining the divorce messages in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, some apparent contradictions and conflicts arise. Ezra-Nehemiah, which addresses the post-exilic period, emphasizes the importance of maintaining ethnic and religious purity.⁵¹ In Ezra 10, the Israelites are commanded to divorce their foreign wives and send them

⁴⁷ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 333–334.

⁴⁸ Kelley, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 154.

⁴⁹ Kelly, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 154.

⁵⁰ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 334.

⁵¹ Williamson, Hubbard, Barker, Watts and Martin, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 159–162.

away, as their marriages were seen as a violation of God's law.⁵² The theological implication here is that maintaining the purity of the Israelite community was paramount. This emphasis on purity was rooted in the understanding that intermarriage with foreign nations would lead to the worship of foreign gods and compromise Israel's exclusive devotion to Yahweh. Matthew Levering poses a question "How can they remain pure and live in God's presence in the land if they do not solely worship Yahweh."⁵³ Therefore, divorce was seen as a necessary action to uphold the theological integrity of the nation and preserve its relationship with God.

On the other hand, Malachi, written almost during the same period, criticizes the practice of divorcing Jewish wives and marrying foreign women. Malachi 2:16 highlights God's hatred for divorce and encourages faithfulness to one's Jewish spouse.⁵⁴ Gary V. Smith and Timothy D. Sprankle allude that,

Malachi continued to present God's case against Israel in a third dispute. He focused on the people's unfaithfulness towards God and the sorry state of marriage in the land of Judah. At that time, both Ezra and Nehemiah had encouraged men to divorce their pagan wives to preserve the nation's spiritual purity. Unfortunately, many took advantage of this exception for divorcing a foreign bride into a general rule that permitted them to divorce any wife. This led to a distorted understanding where some believed it was acceptable to divorce even Jewish wives and marry foreign women. As a consequence, the temple became polluted, worship was rejected, marriages were unhappy, and future generations were at risk due to these unholy mixed marriages. This situation deviated greatly from God's original plan and contradicted the divorce policy established by Ezra and Nehemiah. Therefore, Malachi pleaded with his audience to revive God's intended design for marriage.⁵⁵

Further, the prophet emphasizes that divorcing one's spouse in such circumstances is an offense to God. The implication in Malachi is that God values the

⁵² Levering, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, 132.

⁵³ Levering, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, 202.

⁵⁴ Smith and Sprankle, *Zephaniah - Malachi*, 323–327.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 322.

marriage covenant and love between spouses. Divorce is portrayed as incompatible with the ideal God has for the marriage relationship.⁵⁶ This understanding aligns with the Genesis creation account, where God establishes the institution of marriage as a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman.⁵⁷ These conflicting messages present a theological challenge, as both books are considered authoritative in biblical canon and seemingly uphold opposite perspectives on divorce.

To reconcile these contradictory messages, it is crucial to consider the historical and cultural contexts. In Ezra-Nehemiah, intermarriage was primarily addressed to maintain the uniqueness and fidelity of Israel's worship of Yahweh. Divorce, in this case, was considered a necessary measure to restore the purity of the community.⁵⁸ Whilst, in Malachi divorce is condemned, emphasizing God's desire for a loving and faithful marriage.⁵⁹ Thus, from a theological perspective, these passages highlight tension between purity and love, faithfulness in the context of marriage. They invite us to consider the complex interplay between fidelity to God's commands and the compassionate treatment of individuals within the community. While Ezra-Nehemiah prioritizes purity,⁶⁰ Malachi shifts the focus to the importance of love and faithfulness.

Moreover, a potential theological harmony lies in recognizing the emphasis on covenant faithfulness in both texts. While Ezra-Nehemiah emphasizes the imperative

⁵⁶ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 320.

⁵⁷ Kaiser, *Malachi*, 84.

⁵⁸ Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 148–159.

⁵⁹ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve*, 1034–42.

⁶⁰ Olyan, "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah," 1–2.

to dissolve marriages that violated the covenant with God,⁶¹ Malachi highlights the importance of remaining faithful within existing Jewish marriages.⁶² Both messages, in their contexts, strive to honor the covenant relationship between God and the people of Israel by different means. Reconciling the messages can involve considering the varying purposes and intentions behind the directives on divorce in the books. Thus, each text must be understood within its proper setting.⁶³

The contradictions between the divorce message in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi have broader implications for the understanding of biblical theology on divorce. It demonstrates that the Bible does not present a monolithic or straightforward perspective on this issue. Jay E. Adams asserts that “it is crucial to have a biblically balanced perspective on divorce, acknowledging the aspects that God despises while also understanding that in some circumstances in which (as God himself demonstrated) divorce may be necessary in this fallen world.”⁶⁴ Rather, it reflects the complexities and nuances of human relationships and the ever-evolving theological understanding within ancient Israel. While both texts point towards the significance of covenant faithfulness, they differ in the particular expressions of this faithfulness concerning divorce. This divergence highlights the dynamic nature of biblical theology and the potential for ethical and moral development within the scriptural narrative.

⁶¹ J. H. Walton, ed., *1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (ZIBBC) 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 420.

⁶² Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 278–281.

⁶³ R. Woodrow, *Divorce and Remarriage: What Does the Bible Really Say?* (Riverside, California: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 2002), 8.

⁶⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co, 1986), 24.

Ultimately, these seemingly contrasting messages provide an opportunity for theological reflection on the broader themes of covenant faithfulness, grace, forgiveness, and redemption. They challenge believers to navigate this tension with discernment, recognizing the need for both fidelity to God’s commands and compassionate engagement with others.⁶⁵ As believers, we should seek to understand and apply the timeless principles of God’s word, while also responding to the unique circumstances and complexities of individual lives in our contemporary context.⁶⁶ Therefore, by exploring the contradictory facts between these texts, it becomes evident that searching for a comprehensive, unified perspective on divorce within the Bible necessitates careful scriptural analysis against the backdrop of historical and theological contexts.

Practical Application

The theological and practical analysis of divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi provides valuable insights into contemporary contexts. These texts highlight the tension between preserving religious and cultural purity and upholding the covenantal commitments within marriage. Thus, Allen P. Ross notes “every marriage has its imperfections. In any marriage, there will be numerous instances where expectations are not met, causing strain and disagreements, or even actions that go against moral principles and values which tarnish the significance of the union.”⁶⁷ However, we are continuously reminded to strive for the ideal and to adhere to the divine principles of marriage. While the specific circumstances surrounding divorce

⁶⁵ Dobson, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 2.

⁶⁶ Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 165.

⁶⁷ Ross, *Malachi Then and Now*, 177.

have changed over time, the underlying principles can still inform our understanding of divorce today.

In contemporary society, divorce is a complex and sensitive issue, often surrounded by emotional turmoil and societal stigmatization. The theological analysis of these biblical texts reminds us of the significance of covenant faithfulness, emphasizing the commitment and responsibility inherent in marital unions. Thus, the texts point to the fact that, in the restoration community of Ezra-Nehemiah, the divorce of gentile wives from their Jewish husbands was neither approved nor condemned. However, it seemed necessary due to the severe consequences that arose from mixed marriages.⁶⁸ Therefore, context is key when handling divorce issues in these passages. Moreover, these texts encourage reflection on the long-term consequences and implications of divorce. They invite individuals and communities to consider the importance of seeking reconciliation, investing in the well-being of one's spouse, and striving to maintain the integrity of the marital covenant.

Practically, these texts prompt us to approach divorce with compassion and grace, as J. Carl Laney notes “It is important to note that God does not express hatred towards those who have gone through a divorce. Believers should not be hostile towards those who have experienced a marital disaster, but should instead emulate Christ’s loving concern.”⁶⁹ Thus, the passages of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi invite us to prioritize the emotional and spiritual welfare of all parties involved, recognizing the pain and brokenness that divorce can cause. Hence, Joyce G. Baldwin asserts that “it is in the best interests of the individual as well as of the community that families

⁶⁸ Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 37–38.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

should not be broken by divorce.”⁷⁰ These ancient texts remind us that divorce is not a matter to be taken lightly, but rather a serious and weighty decision that demands careful consideration.

Ethical Discussions on Divorce

The study of these texts can significantly shape and inform contemporary theological and ethical discussions on divorce. By examining the divergent messages within Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, we are reminded of the complexity surrounding divorce and the need for nuanced perspectives. In agreement with this notion, Michael Pearl notes that “in this contemporary society, moral values are declining due to the influence of promiscuous ideologies. Those of us who strive to uphold biblical standards are finding it challenging to maintain a moral environment around us.”⁷¹

These texts caution against simplistic or rigid views on divorce, encouraging us to avoid legalistic approaches that fail to consider the complexity of human relationships. Instead, they remind us of the importance of maintaining a holistic understanding of marriage and the needs of individuals within marital unions. Thus, Christians are called to have a Christ-like attitude of acceptance and compassion when dealing with people who have sinned against God. Whilst there should be no compromise on calling sin what it is, believers must demonstrate unconditional love and acceptance.⁷² Informed by these texts, modern theological and ethical discussions can provide space for acknowledging the realities and challenges faced by individuals in difficult marriages, while also upholding the significance of covenant faithfulness.

⁷⁰ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 241.

⁷¹ M. Pearl, *The Bible on Divorce and Remarriage* (Pleasantville, Tennessee: No Greater Joy Ministries, 2016), 74.

⁷² Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 45.

Therefore, it is crucial to create awareness in young people that, marriage is a lifelong commitment, emphasizing that it should not be cast aside when one feels unfulfilled.⁷³

Moreover, these texts can remind us of the imperative to examine the historical and cultural contexts in which biblical commandments on divorce were given. As Walter C. Kaiser, Jr notes “it is important to consider all aspects of God’s teachings and not rely solely on one statement or context when discussing any topic.”⁷⁴ Thus, the passages under study call for contextual interpretation that takes into account the unique circumstances in which these texts were written. In the same vein Doug Batchelor states, “each situation should be considered on a case-by-case basis, while still upholding biblical principles with compassion for those who have strayed.”⁷⁵ This approach enables modern theological discussions on divorce to steer away from a one-size-fits-all perspective and instead encourages a nuanced understanding that is sensitive to the diverse experiences of individuals and communities.

Practical Suggestions and Considerations

The importance of minimizing divorce and promoting reconciliation should be emphasized, with the understanding that sometimes divorce is a necessary option in this imperfect world. Efforts should be made to encourage couples to explore alternatives before proceeding with divorce and to support reconciliation between divorced individuals whenever possible before they move on to relationships.⁷⁶

⁷³ Pearl, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 74.

⁷⁴ Kaiser, *Malachi*, 83.

⁷⁵ D. Batchelor, *The Bible on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Roseville, California: Amazing Facts, 2011), 85.

⁷⁶ Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 31.

Hence, in light of the messages explored in Era-Nehemiah and Malachi, there are practical suggestions that can be offered for individuals and communities grappling with the issue of divorce:

- a. Encourage Counseling and Support: individuals experiencing marital difficulties should be encouraged to seek professional counseling or therapy. This can provide a safe space for exploring the challenges and potential paths toward reconciliation. Nevertheless, as J Carl Laney asserts, “When counseling individuals, they must know that we love and accept them with their problems and that we are personally invested in their well-being. This loving support is essential for those going through a marital breakup.”⁷⁷
- b. Foster a Culture of Communication and Empathy: promote healthy and open communication within relationships and communities. Encourage individuals to practice active listening, empathy, and understanding to create an environment where issues can be addressed constructively.
- c. Prioritize Reconciliation: in situations where divorce is being considered, practical attempts at reconciliation should be made first. This may involve mediation, seeking advice from trusted mentors or counselors, and exploring opportunities for healing and restoration within the relationship. In light of this, the divorcing parties should point to the fact that confession and forgiveness have the power to strengthen personal relationships and pave the way for further communication in marriage.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 133.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 134–135.

- d. Provide Pastoral Care and Support: communities and religious leaders should provide non-judgmental pastoral care and support for individuals going through a divorce. This involves creating safe spaces for them to share their experiences, seek guidance, and find comfort and healing. Thus, J. Carl Laney adds that, as Christian counselors, we have an important, yet often overlooked, responsibility to pray for the restoration of the marriage relationship.⁷⁹
- e. Advocate for just and Compassionate Divorce Laws: work towards advocating for fair and just divorce laws that protect the rights and well-being of all parties involved, particularly those who may be vulnerable or marginalized.

By considering these practical suggestions and considerations, individuals and communities can navigate the complexities of divorce in a way that upholds the biblical principles of covenant faithfulness while also considering the specific circumstances and needs of the individuals involved. Moreover, it is crucial to consider the well-being and emotional needs of individuals affected by divorce, particularly in cases where divorce might be a last resort to address significant relational or personal issues.

Summary

In this chapter, the focus is on the theological and practical analysis of divorce in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi. The chapter explores various perspectives on divorce in the Old Testament, starting with the Torah and extending into the prophetic books. The theological outlook in the Old Testament provides a

⁷⁹ Laney, *Divorce Myth*, 136.

foundation for understanding the perspectives on divorce in these two books. This chapter also looked at the New Testament perspectives, which may offer alternative views compared to the Old Testament, providing additional insights into divorce and its implications within the context of Christian faith. Finally, it looked at the practical application, analyzing how these teachings can be contextualized and applied in contemporary settings.

The Old Testament presents divorce as an acknowledged phenomenon, and not as something that traces its origin from God's plan for humanity. Thus, the law in the book of Deuteronomy does not create a divorce or endorse it but merely looks at it as a custom already in practice. It simply acknowledges its existence and seeks to regulate its application to emerging circumstances. Divorce is viewed not as a divine institution or part of God's plan for marriage, but if God accepts it, it is to bring about something better. From the prophetic literature, it is evident that divorce is not final, God can forgive and restore Israel into the covenant relationship.

Ezra-Nehemiah viewed the post-exilic marriages to pagan women as rebellious and invalid, recognizing Israel's history of apostasy through similar intermarriages. Here, divorce was used as an instrument to restore purity, identity, and covenant faithfulness. However, this does not imply, that divorce was sanctioned as God's plan for families, or to imply that God was migrating from His original plan of permanence in marriage. Thus, Malachi brings the perspective that, since divorce brings harm to a marriage partner, God despises it. Hence, remaining faithful to the marriage covenant both fulfills God's intent for couples and contributes to a stable community.

The New Testament highlights that marriage is sacred and is intended to be permanent, however, human sinfulness and brokenness are recognized, thus

compassion is needed. Jesus' teachings emphasize God's design for marriage and the seriousness of divorce, while Paul's guidance focuses on unity, reconciliation, and the responsibility to preserve marriages. Thus, divorce in the New Testament perspective is not ideal, however, separation can be necessary in cases where one spouse is consistently unfaithful to the marriage covenant.

It is worth noting that divorce is a sensitive institution. When dealing with divorce, as portrayed in the theological and practical analysis section of these passages, we should seek to understand and apply the timeless principles of God's word, while also responding to the unique circumstances and complexities of individual lives in our contemporary contexts. Divorce is not a matter to be taken lightly, thus it should be in the best interests of everyone that families should not be broken by divorce.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the conflicting messages about divorce found in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi in the Old Testament. The researcher took a comparative approach, considering the historical, cultural, and theological contexts of these books to better understand the different perspectives on divorce and why God's displeasure with the practice is expressed differently.

Summary

To summarize the study, chapter two examined the various approaches used by scholars to address the research problem. These included the historical-cultural analysis, literary analysis, theological approach, and social science approach. The evidence from this study indicates that scholars using a historical-cultural approach analyze the social and cultural background of the period when these texts were written and how these factors may have influenced the author's attitudes towards divorce. The focus of the texts on rebuilding the temple and restoring the Jewish community in Jerusalem likely shaped their views on divorce, viewing it as a threat to the community's stability.

The study also revealed that discouragement and spiritual apathy had affected the nation, including the priests. The issue of divorce reflects the challenges faced by the Israelites in maintaining their religious and cultural heritage, as they were prone to

religious cynicism and political skepticism. This was likely influenced by the wider cultural context of the Persian Empire, where divorce was allowed and practiced.

Another important discovery of this research is that Israel's special status is not based solely on itself, but rather on YHWH's holiness, making it inseparable from Israel's relationship with God. According to Jan Clauss, this realization has implications for interpreting mixed marriages.¹ It recontextualizes the concept of Israel's holiness, suggesting that separation of mixed marriages is not an ultimate goal but rather a means to demonstrate the sacred status of the people and their close connection to YHWH in their way of life. Additionally, a literary analysis approach focuses on the structure and content of the texts, such as the dialogue between God and His people in Malachi 2:10-16. From this perspective, it can be inferred that Malachi views divorce as a violation of the covenantal relationship between God and His people.

Furthermore, the social scientific approach sheds light on the social reality constructed by the Jewish community in Persian Yehud. David Janzen, employing this approach, suggests that the community's decision to enforce divorce and expulsion of foreign wives was a ritual purification act, akin to a witch-hunt.² Donald P. Moffat explains that the language used by Ezra labels these marriages as socially unacceptable and the women as pollutants in the community.³

A theological examination of divorce in the book of Malachi reveals the significance of marriage as a covenant established by God. The condemnation of

¹ Jan, "Understanding the Mixed Marriages," 131.

² Janzen, *Witch-Hunts, Purity and Social Boundaries*, 19.

³ Moffat, *Ezra's Social Drama: Identity Formation, Marriage and Social Conflict in Ezra 9 and 10*, 126.

divorce in Malachi stems from the understanding of God's intentions for a lifelong commitment, love, and faithfulness within the union. It is also evident that a comparative approach is crucial in studying divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi to gain a comprehensive understanding of the texts.

Chapter 3 of the comparative study between Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi focuses on the topic of divorce. The chapter examines the Isagogical study, literary analysis, historical background, comparative analysis, and grammatical-syntactical analysis to explore the conflicting messages presented in these biblical texts regarding divorce. It considers the historical and theological contexts in which they were written. Further, the chapter establishes that Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi were written by Ezra and the prophet Malachi, respectively, during the post-exilic period between the 5th and 4th century BC. Both books aim to restore proper worship, religious purity, and identity. The discussion on divorce within this context addresses issues related to faithfulness to God and the preservation of the covenant community.

From the passages examined, it is clear that Ezra-Nehemiah strongly opposes intermarriages, while Malachi emphasizes the harm and unfaithfulness associated with divorce itself. Ezra-Nehemiah stresses the importance of purity among the Israelites and condemns intermarriage as a potential cause of apostasy. On the other hand, Malachi criticizes divorcing one's spouse, highlighting the unfaithfulness and violation of the covenant that divorce represents.

Additionally, the chapter demonstrated that Malachi's third oracle is directed towards the leaders, priests, and the people of the greater restoration community of Yehud. It serves as a didactic instruction on the subjects of marriage and divorce. Malachi consistently places the narrative of marriage within the framework of a community that shares a common relationship and fellowship based on their creator.

The ethical dimension of Malachi's oracle reveals wrongdoings related to mixed marriages and unfaithfulness to God. It also highlights the heartless divorce of Judean wives by Judean men. These actions are seen as disrespectful and reprehensible offenses against Yahweh, undermining the fundamental covenant relationship of the Judean community.

It is suggested that despite their different approaches, Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi can be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. While Ezra-Nehemiah does not endorse divorce, it presents God's ideal perspective. The linguistic choices in the passages convey the need for separation and the importance of preserving the distinctiveness of the Israelite community. The use of specific verbs, rhetorical questions, and imperatives effectively engages the audience and reinforces the message of separation and repentance.

Chapter four continually exhibits that, in the Old Testament, divorce is recognized as a common practice rather than being ordained by God. The law in Deuteronomy does not endorse divorce but instead regulates its application to specific situations. Divorce is not portrayed as a divine institution but rather as a means to bring about a better outcome if God permits it. The prophetic literature emphasizes that divorce is not irreversible, and God can forgive and restore Israel to a covenant relationship.

In Ezra-Nehemiah, marriages to pagan women were considered rebellious and invalid, reflecting Israel's history of straying from God through such intermarriages. Divorce was used to restore purity, identity, and covenant faithfulness, but it did not imply that divorce was part of God's original plan for families. Malachi emphasizes that divorce harms a marriage partner, and God despises it. Remaining faithful to the

marriage covenant fulfills God's intentions for couples and promotes a stable community.

Other issues that have been revealed in the theological and practical analysis are that the New Testament teaches that marriage is sacred and intended to be permanent, although human sinfulness and brokenness are acknowledged. Jesus stresses God's design for marriage and the gravity of divorce, while Paul emphasizes unity, reconciliation, and the duty to preserve marriages. Divorce is not ideal in the New Testament perspective, but separation may be necessary in cases of consistent unfaithfulness. Divorce is a complex matter that should be approached with compassion, adhering to biblical principles while considering the individual circumstances in contemporary society. It is important to handle divorce with care, prioritizing the well-being of families and aiming to prevent unnecessary dissolution of marriages.

Conclusion

The comparative study of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi on divorce reveals a complex and multifaceted understanding of this issue within post-exilic society. The contradictory messages reflect the various historical, cultural, and theological influences that shaped the authors' perspectives. It cautions against oversimplifying biblical teachings on divorce and emphasizes the need for contextual interpretation. Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of historical and theological lenses as essential tools for understanding and applying biblical teachings on divorce in our modern context, encouraging a nuanced and informed approach to conversations surrounding the topic.

The study attempted to answer the research questions: What are the historical and theological contexts of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi, and how do they shed light

on attitudes towards divorce in post-exilic Judaism? How do the seemingly contradictory messages on divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi reflect the social and cultural changes that occurred during the post-exilic period? In answering these questions, the study revealed that, in Ezra-Nehemiah, divorce is depicted as a tool for restoring purity, identity, and covenant faithfulness within the Jewish community following the exile. The emphasis is on maintaining religious integrity and upholding the laws of God as a means of preserving the community's identity. On the other hand, Malachi emphasizes the sanctity of marriage and condemns divorce as a violation of the sacred covenant between spouses. The prophet highlights the negative impact of divorce on the marriage partner and underscores the importance of faithfulness and commitment in marital relationships.

The seemingly contradictory messages on divorce in Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi can be attributed to the social and cultural changes that occurred during the post-exilic period. The return from exile brought a renewed emphasis on religious purity and identity as the Jewish community sought to rebuild Jerusalem and reestablish themselves as a chosen people of God. Divorce was used as a means to address intermarriage with non-Jewish women and prevent assimilation into foreign cultures, reflecting the community's concerns about maintaining their distinctiveness and fidelity to the covenant.

However, as time passed and societal norms evolved, attitudes towards divorce also began to shift. Malachi's emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and the harm caused by divorce can be seen as a response to changing social values and the need to reaffirm the importance of marital fidelity in a shifting cultural landscape. The prophet's condemnation of divorce may reflect a growing awareness of the emotional

and relational consequences of marital dissolution and a call to uphold the sacredness of the marriage bond.

The following observations aim to reconcile the opposing viewpoints presented in the passages under consideration: Firstly, it should be confidently asserted that divorce is not aligned with God's plan and is not approved as part of His design. Instead, God's intention for marriage is a lifelong commitment expressed through a covenantal promise made in His presence. The idea that divorce has become acceptable is a result of the destructive influence of sin.

Secondly, while divorce is not part of God's design, it is an unfortunate reality in human experience that cannot be ignored. Consequently, it must be taken into account as a context in which God continues to pursue His redemptive purposes. God is depicted in various ways about divorce. At times, He restricts it to mitigate harmful effects, as demonstrated in the law described in (Deut 24:1-4). Alternatively, He employs divorce as an existing reality to further His purposes, such as symbolizing His rejection of Israel in Jeremiah 3:8 or utilizing the institution of divorce itself to safeguard His ongoing salvific work in history, as seen in Ezra-Nehemiah. Therefore, any attempt to apply these specific instances (in Ezra-Nehemiah) to modern marriages, suggesting that a Christian should divorce an unbelieving spouse, contradicts Paul's clear teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:12-13. Paul explicitly discourages believers from dissolving their marriages with unbelieving partners. Furthermore, amidst the decline of love and loyalty, the covenantal aspect of marriage is revived and emphasized as God's original and enduring purpose, as highlighted by the prophet Malachi.

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VITA

Personal Information

Date of Birth	June 09, 1984
Place of Birth	Harare, Zimbabwe
Marital Status	Married
Citizenship	Zimbabwean
Denomination	Seventh-day Adventist Church
Spouse Name	Siphephisiwe Rwizi

Educational Background

2022-2024	MABTS (Biblical Languages) Adventist University of Africa
2008-2011	BA Theology Solusi University
2006-2007	Advanced Level Glen Norah High 1
2002-2003	Certificate in Sales and Front Office Management B.E.R.N Institute
1997-2000	Secondary Education Domboramavara Secondary School
1990-1996	Primary Education Domboramavara Primary School

Work Experience

Current	District Pastor (Effective January 1, 2013)
2008	Sales Rep. Ratran Trading Pvt Ltd
2001-2005	Storesman Valhalla Chickens Pvt Ltd