

A HERMENEUTIC OF VULNERABILITY. EDOM IN MALACHI 1:2–5¹

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ABSTRACT

The current interpretation of Edom in Mal 1: 2-5 does not allow for any redemption of Edom. This article looks into the possibility of reading these verses differently so as to allow for the rehabilitation of Edom. At issue here is to whom the deity is referring to in Mal 1:4: the Edomites or the audience of Malachi's prophecy, the priests? In nearly all the translations and commentaries it seems to be the Edomites, but Gerda Hoekveld-Meijer (1996) made the bold claim that the text refers to the priests, or the Levites, turning Edom into a blessing. Something similar happened with the figure of Cain in Genesis 4. In order to answer the question of the validity of this interpretation of Edom, this essay will look at what happened to Cain in Gen 4 and Edom in Obadiah (in which the anti-Edomite sentiments are the clearest) before it takes up the case of Edom in Malachi.

WHAT IS A HERMENEUTIC OF VULNERABILITY?

A hermeneutic of vulnerability circumscribes that process which comes into being when two persons meet, face to face, in their metaphorical nakedness, destituteness, without any kinship or blood relatives.² They meet each other as if they are orphans,

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² A hermeneutics of vulnerability has been developed as a possible response to the decolonial turn which reveals the underbelly of modernity and implicates Western hermeneutics in an epistemicide caused by its preference for provinciality as a universal (cf. G. F. Snyman 2014; 2015a). The programme is based on an ethics of interpretation whereby readers not only become aware of what the effect of their reading or interpretation is on others, but also realise the need to take responsibility for that effect. One of the elements in this programme is the recognition of the reader's own vulnerability in the unmasking of his or her privileged

widows, the marginalised in the world, those the world looks down upon – people with no rights, except the right to life. It is that ethical moment in any dialogical encounter when each partner raises the spectre of the sixth commandment in Exod 20:13 and Deut 5:17, challenging one another to not kill the other. In this encounter both are stripped of everything, uncovered, unable to hide, not immune, at the mercy of the other, defenceless, unarmed, unshielded, shelterless, guideless, unattended, unguarded, unescorted, unsheltered, unflanked, in short: vulnerable or fragile.

In this encounter that has the possibility to turn into a battle of life and death the plea to not kill the other places a radical responsibility on both parties. It is a responsibility shared by most major religions under the rubrics of agape or charity, neighbourly love, solidarity, *visheshdharma*, *ren*, *karunā* or compassion, and mercy or *hesed* (cf. Tham 2014:215–224). This invisible plea to respect each other is revealed in the ethical moment of realising that the face of the other – the eyes looking at you – imposes a radical obligation not to annihilate or violate the other. Both become the hostage of each other in recognising the vulnerability of the other as well as, ultimately, the vulnerability of the self. The recognition of one's own vulnerability enables one to engage with the vulnerability of the other.

This ethical moment is very real in my own context where I am obliged to deal with my own complicity in apartheid and participation in systemic structures that privileged me over others because of my whiteness.³ It is a process of a lifetime with no quick fixes, a continuous reminder by looking into the eyes of those who bear the marks of apartheid and not deny the reflection. It is a difficult encounter in two ways: First, one's task is to hear and internalise the critique and to be confronted with the embarrassment of being found out by one's most frightening other. Secondly, one has the responsibility to understand one's own location and point of view in such a way that it is rendered absolutely problematical and extremely vulnerable by the other. It is no easy matter to achieve such vulnerability or fragility.

position of reading (cf. G. F. Snyman 2011).

³ For example, Western vulnerability surfaced recently at the burning of paintings of certain political and cultural figures at a student demonstration at the University of Cape Town (Furlong 2016; see also Msimang 2016).

In South African terms, for the moment, it means that whiteness gets immersed in the role of the perpetrator. It is not something one embraces willingly, but a part one has to play for the sake of reconciliation and a common post-apartheid future. As a biblical scholar I turned to the biblical text to see what was done to perpetrators and whether they were redeemed in any significant way. It just may turn out that the perpetrator discourse in the Hebrew Bible illuminates in some way such roles. I am not looking for a paradigm or a programme, but simply what the role of being a perpetrator entails and whether there is a possibility in these biblical stories for redemption.

THE PROBLEM

At first glance it seems as if the interpretive tradition of these perpetrator stories deals with the perpetrator much harsher than the stories themselves! For example, the story of Cain shows much more empathy towards Cain than what the interpretive tradition is prepared to concede. The Esau stories too give Esau a reprieve. He is portrayed in a rather positive way in Gen 33 and Deut 2, very much like the portrayal Cain receives in his genealogy in Gen 4. But once the link is made to Edom, Esau/Edom gets a very bad press in the prophets, especially among the Minor Prophets such as Obadiah.

The question this essay asks is whether there is any redemption for Edom, particularly in the book of Malachi. Malachi 1:2–3 refers to Esau and Jacob in a parallelism that creates a contrast:⁴

I have loved you, says the Lord.

But you say: ‘How have you loved us?’

Is Esau not Jacob’s brother?

Yet I have loved Jacob,

but I have hated Esau: I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage

⁴ Most translations see the *waw*-consecutive as a contrast in which the deity’s love for Jacob is contrasted with Esau, his brother, and for whom divine love seems to be missing. It seems only the ZUR (*Und Jakob habe ich geliebt*) and the ZUL (*Ngamthanda uJakobe*) are neutral in that a contrast is not suggested with the *waw* translated as “and”.

a desert for the jackals. (NRSV)

In v. 2 the deity proclaims his love for Jacob with a *waw* consecutive and *qal* perfect. Verse 3 continues with the deity's proclamation, starting with the accusative, Esau, as the object of the deity's hatred: "Esau, I hated". Here the *waw* copulative acts as a contrast, and it is translated as "but": "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I hated". The contrast is between love and hate, and not between Esau as brother and Jacob who is loved. The action that follows after the statement of hate with the subsequent *waw* consecutive is traditionally interpreted as the contents of the deity's hatred for Esau: he has put his mountain to waste and his inheritance (the land given to him) to the jackals of the desert or wilderness (Gemser 1975:§77): Thus, I put his mountain to waste and gave his inheritance to the jackals of the desert.

The question is whether there is any impediment to connect the latter to Jacob and not to Esau? Edom is only mentioned in Mal 1:4 but the assumption is that it links up with Esau:

If Edom says, "We are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins," the LORD of hosts says: They may build, but I will tear down, until they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the LORD is angry forever. (NRSV)

In most readings and translations the destruction and devastation are linked to Esau and Edom. In v. 2 the desolation of the hill country and its rendering into a waste land are associated with Esau. In v. 4 most readings tie Edom in 4a to the "they" in 4b with the effect that the text, as in the case of the book of Obadiah, leaves no door open for any redemption for Edom. Edom remains incapacitated forever.

The sentence starts with ׀ introducing what can be a conditional sentence, a causal sentence or a consecutive sentence (Gemser 1975:§310, 311 and 312). The question is whether it is linked to the previous sentence or whether it introduces a new condition.

But I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness so that Edom saith, 'We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places.' [KJV]

The אָמַר יְהוָה could then introduce a new argument and does not embroider on what Edom will be doing.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever. [KJV]

At issue here is to whom the deity is referring: the Edomites or the audience of Malachi's prophecy, the priests? In nearly all the translations and commentaries it seems to be the Edomites. They (the Edomites) will build up, but I (Yahweh) will demolish them (the Edomites); they will be called "the wicked territory" and "the people with whom God is angry in perpetuity".

But can this verse refer to Israel, or Jacob? Gerda Hoekveld-Meijer (1996:76) reads it differently by deliberately bring into play the intended audience of the dispute, the priests in the House of Levi:

Yahweh: I have loved you [Jacob].

Priests: How have you shown love to us?

Yahweh: Is not Esau a brother for Jacob?

I loved Jacob.

Esau I hated.

I will reduce his (Jacob's) hill country to a waste,

And his (Jacob's) inheritance for jackals of the desert.

But Edom will say:

We were beaten down, we turned back and we have built the ruins.

Malachi: Thus says the Lord:

Yahweh: They (Edomites), they will rebuild; I, I will pull down (the House of Levi),

They will call them (the priests of Israel) "region of wickedness", "the people whom Yahweh will curse for ever."

Your (Jacob's) own eyes will see it (the rebuilding of the House of Levi by Esau).

And you (the priests) will say:

Yahweh is great above (and beyond) the region of Israel.”

Hoekveld-Meijer (1996:77) argues that the “saviour aspect” of Esau is honoured and that the blessed should not be a curse for others, in line with the Torah in Gen 12:3:

This unusual interpretation is the only logical foundation for the rest of the prophecy which is directed against the wicked House of Levi, whose blessing will be turned into a curse. “Yes, into a curse.” (Mal 2:2). By referring to YHWH's hate of Edom, Malachi demonstrates two things. In the first place, he interprets Edom's temporary demise (between 520–480 BCE) as a form of divine punishment. As such, he is in accord with the other Esau prophecies. But at the same time he says that if a hated son can be blessed again and can again become a blessing, how much more will the beloved son be blessed again.

Is this unusual reading valid? This reading allows Edom from a position of vulnerability to become a blessing for others and not stay cursed. This is what happened with Cain. In order to answer the question of validity, this essay will look at what happened to Cain and Edom in Obadiah (in which the anti-Edomite sentiments are the clearest) before it takes up the case of Edom in Malachi.

CAIN⁵

Cain was a bad brother (Bremmer 2003:83). His murder of Abel, his brother, broke a code that would have allowed a community like his to survive (Noort 2003:105). People depended on each other for survival and brotherhood, so that solidarity amongst brothers was deemed imperative for their continued existence. Fratricide signalled a breakdown of this solidarity, endangering the community's existence. One

⁵ For a discussion on Cain's vulnerability, see G. F. Snyman (2015b).

can understand why Cain gets portrayed in absolute terms: the ultimate sinner, an example par excellence of depraved humanity, a superb scapegoat. In fact, the link between fratricide and Cain makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to rehabilitate him. It is such an enormous crime that it surpasses all borders of decency. It even dwarfs the sins of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 (cf. LaCocque 2003:98).

The Early Church regarded Cain as the prime example of sinful behaviour. In fact, Genesis 4 became so overburdened that it is sometimes difficult to match the interpretations with the biblical text! Cain was not a mere murderer, he was also turned into an oppressor of the poor and a teacher of evil practices (cf. Byron 2011:211). Philo (Philo, *Det.* 78; cf. also Najman 2003:113) regarded Cain's character as seriously flawed. He turned Cain into an atheist and referred to his fratricide several times. Josephus saw Cain as greedy, scheming and gross. He portrayed Cain's fratricide as extremely wicked; his punishment enabled him to become malicious and depraved (Hayward 2009:121). The Church Fathers regarded Cain's soul as having the wrong disposition, enabling them to regard him as a teacher of error. Some Church fathers even considered Cain a prototype of hatred and the devil's heir. In his book *Contra Faustum* Augustine drew a parallel between Cain and the Jews. Both were associated with tilling the soil, unsatisfied with their lot, and became murderers, Cain killing Abel and the Jews killing Christ.

In the end, both are evil. The link drawn between Cain and the Jews on the basis of a mark had a huge influence in European affairs and European expansion since 1492. Katharina von Kellenbach (2013:14) formulates it as follows:

Beginning with Ambrose and Augustine, the story of Cain was used to delegitimize Jews as the older brother who had killed Christ and was forced to become a 'wandering people' marked by the sign of circumcision. This interpretation climaxed in Pope Innocent III's mandate, promulgated at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, that Jews wear badges on their clothing to become distinguishable in Christian lands. The mark of Cain played not only an ignominious role in the history of Christian anti-Judaism but was also used to justify racism and colonialism. Black skin became the mark of

shame that legitimated the capture, trade, and enslavement of African peoples and the colonization of non-white populations by European Christians. As a divine stigma, the mark of Cain invited and justified the mistreatment of vulnerable minorities (or majorities in the case of colonization), who were considered guilty of some past violation and deserved to be subjugated.

Through such interpretive traditions, Cain has been given a stigma that somehow allows communities to label, marginalise, discriminate against and humiliate others thought to be unfit to be part of society for various reasons. The notion of the mark of Cain has been used throughout history as a divinely sanctioned invitation to dehumanise and criminalise other human beings and communities.

In the story itself, Abel is the vulnerable one (cf. van Wolde 1991:35–36). His name (breath, nothingness), his relation (the reader encounters him as the brother of Cain) and Cain's birth (proclaimed as a divine creation by his mother) are pointers to Abel's vulnerability and ultimate negation. In the latter instance of ultimate negation, the conversation the story says takes place between Cain and Abel, is empty to the reader. The narrative provides no content.

With the murder Cain severs his ties with his brother. His ensuing punishment takes that severance much further: Cain is severed from his immediate community (his tribe and family), the larger society, and, finally, God and earth. First, the fields have sucked up Abel's blood, and can now provide nothing in return. They have been poisoned (Sicker 2002:57). The blood of Abel crying from the soil has rendered the earth infertile and unusable to Cain. He is now forced to earn a living by other means (Westermann 1984:306). He can no longer practice his trade of farming. The fratricide also had an impact on the community. Cain has rendered them unstable and unsafe. They can no longer tolerate his presence in their midst. He has become unclean and anyone dealing with him will share in the uncleanness. The only option is to ban him from the community (Noort 2003:105).

Subsequently, Cain becomes a wanderer and a fugitive. He is displaced on three levels: socially, culturally and physically. His removal from his clan and tribe, his

lands and his deity, constitutes a death sentence (LaCocque 2008:116). He has now become extremely vulnerable, like his brother Abel, with his life in jeopardy. He has become an outlaw and a prey. He is a fugitive and hides from God and man. It has become unbearable (Gen 4:13–14):

Cain said to the Lord: ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear. Today you have driven me from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.’

Cain’s lament here is parallel to Abel’s blood crying from the soil. Far from being insensible and an affront he proclaims here his own vulnerability (van Wolde 1991:36). He realises that everyone he encounters, will have it in their power to kill him. His life can be exchanged for his brother’s. He does not whine over his sentence and subsequent predicament, but rather comes to terms with the gravity of his act as fratricide and the insufferability of its consequences. The full burden of his crime – his non-recognition of Abel’s vulnerability in that crucial ethical moment when they were out in the field (Gen 4:8) – is laid upon him (Westermann 1984:109).

For Cain to survive the *ius talionis* needs to be limited. Yahweh has removed his protection and it is clear the deity will not intervene should someone lay his hands on Cain. Cain can lose his life, with the only intervention that of the deity’s sevenfold revenge visited upon Cain’s killer and his family (Gen 4:15).

Cain is also given a mark. But there is no other scriptural information about the mark than the statement that Cain was given a mark. It was a mark of protection but it did not stop the process of justice. Cain does not receive a clean slate. He remains under the burden of his injustice, susceptible to the anger of the deity and banned from his clan and community.

But it is rather significant that just after Cain was given a mark as protection, one reads that Cain settled (Gen 4:16), that he procreated (v. 17) and that to his procreation is attributed the basic components of humanity: life, arts and science (vv. 20–22). Cain is removed from his place of origin, but he does not disappear from the face of the earth. He settles in a land called Nob, meaning “nowhere”. He finds a wife whose

name is never mentioned, and has children. These two acts ensure for Cain a future. His banishment removed Cain so to speak from humanity, but his son, Enoch, in building a city, a place of safety, retrieves for Cain his humanity (von Kellenbach 2013:15). The allusion to Cain's son and his offspring, as well as the mention of the city that this son is said to have built, illustrates that Cain was able to proceed with a life of his own. He became part of history and memory as his descendants got linked to the establishing of civilisation in various ways.

It is as if the city is the mark of Cain (Lohr 2009). The city with its protective walls and gates is a place of protection and refuge, an idea quite common in the Old Testament. After being given the mark, Cain no longer wanders, but settles. The city prevented Cain from being vulnerable to potential killers. It prohibited the execution of the sevenfold vengeance against would-be killers. The mark given to Cain enabled life: Cain settled, married, and begat children who, in turn, built cities and established art, music and culture. It is as if Cain regained his moral integrity, argues von Kellenbach (2013:15):

I read the Genesis text as a benevolent sign that protects Cain from retributive violence. It is neither a substitute for, nor an addition to, punishment. Cain is stripped of home, professional identity, and proximity to God. He had felt secure and certain in his home, his status, and his relation with God, all of which has contributed to his false sense of entitlement, invulnerability, and indifference to his brother. God's mark, rather than a badge of shame, is intended to provide an opportunity for renewal of his moral integrity and the restoration of his human dignity.

ESAU/EDOM

Cain's redemption seems to be in the fact that he was able to lead a life after the murder of Abel, although separate from his own original clan. Esau in Genesis 36 seems to have done similarly after Jacob stole his birthright. He went to live in the land of Seir, a mountainous area "away from the fatness of the earth and the dew of

heaven on high” (Gen 27:39). He responded rather well to the hand Yahweh dealt him. In Gen 33 he embraces Jacob, his fury dissipated. Here he act as a true brother, something Cain never was (Gen 33:4):

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. (NRSV)

Esau’s joy in meeting his brother is in sharp contrast with his feelings just after he found out that Jacob, yet again, deceived him (Gen 27:41):

Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father has blessed him, and Esau said to himself: ‘The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’ (NRSV)

This verse received a peculiar interpretation in the Midrash (cf. Leibowitz 1972:283). Esau is said (according to Rabbi Levi) to be arguing that Cain was a fool for killing Abel while Adam was still alive, because Adam procreated and Seth was born. The implication is that Esau thought that he would wait until the death of his father Isaac. It would then be impossible for someone else to take Jacob’s place, but in the meantime, Jacob procreated and begat many more children. Pharaoh thought Esau was foolish to ignore Jacob’s procreative abilities, hence his decree to kill the young boys at birth. Haman castigated Pharaoh in turn for ignoring the procreative abilities of the girls to bear children and he decreed to slay all the Jews. Here it seems that Esau, together with Cain, Pharaoh, and Haman is a prototype of Jewish hatred (Leibowitz 1972:372): “Just as Jacob was taken as a symbolic name for the Jewish people, so Esau was said to represent Rome, the power that destroyed the Temple and scattered the remnants of Israel”.

But the Midrash also sees a human side in Esau, since he intended to wait before he intended to kill Jacob: he waited for his father to die. Leibowitz (1972:284) reports this as the good side of Esau as he respected his parents. Support for this respect is seen in the way Esau dressed in his best clothes when he visited his father (according to Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel). These were the very fine clothes that Jacob put on to deceive Isaac in order to receive the blessing.

However, the ideological blindness towards Esau also results in two different readings of his encounter with Jacob later on. Despite Esau's embrace of Jacob and a sense that he is no longer angry, Jacob does not travel with Esau. His recalcitrance here is used as the reason to read deception into Esau's embrace. In Gen 33:4 Esau is described running towards Jacob, falling on his neck and kissing him, both of them weeping. In the Midrash, the vowels become an issue. Rabbi Shimon ben Eliezer's argument that "Esau's compassion was aroused at that moment and he kissed him with all his heart" (Leibowitz 1972:374), is based on the balance between vocal points and consonants. He saw Esau being motivated by love, but Rabbi Yannai saw an Esau motivated by hate. The latter based his interpretation on an extra vowel he detected, which changes the word used for kissing into biting. Thus he stated that Esau did not come to kiss Jacob, but to bite him. The weeping was because of pain – Jacob's pain was due to Esau biting him, and Esau's was because Jacob's neck turned into marble causing his (Esau's) teeth to break.

Esau as a symbol of hate becomes quite visible in the way Edom is portrayed in the Minor Prophets. Whereas Esau responded with grace to Jacob, Edom is thought to have behaved in an unbrotherly fashion. Genesis 36:8–9 connects Edom with Esau. He is called the ancestor of the Edomites. In Genesis it is Jacob that seems to be the bad brother, but in Edom's depiction by the prophets he becomes the bad brother of Israel. Moreover, it seems as if Edom is disallowed any voice. In contrast, Cain and Esau retained their voices; Cain was able to express his concerns regarding the punishment he received, and Esau's anger evidently subsided when he met Jacob much later in life. But Edom is voiceless in the prophets (Isa 34:1–17; 63:1–6; Jer 49:7–22; Ezek 25:12–14; 35:1–15; Amos 9:11–12; Joel 4:19–21; Mal 1:2–5; Ps 137; Lam 4). Moreover, it is in the book of Obadiah that Edom features as the perpetrator par excellence (Bartlett 1977:21).

The tradition that is closely associated with Esau portrays a positive picture of him, but the tradition associated with Edom is scathing about them.⁶ Whether real or

⁶ Ehud Ben Zvi (1996:231) says that although there is apparently a deep-seated feeling of hatred towards Edom, the latter remains just one of the neighbouring nations labelled as evildoers. However, its identification with Edom gives a significant spin to its portrayal.

not, the negative attitude towards Edom is borne by the destruction of Jerusalem and the role Edom played or refused to play (cf. Assis 2006). The fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. constituted a major psychological and cultural blow. The destruction was interpreted as divine judgment over Israel and Yahweh's abandonment of them in favour of Edom which seemed to have reached its pinnacle of power around that time. Although the Babylonians were regarded as the divine instrument, the Edomites became the scapegoat. They were literally close enough to be held responsible for the fall of Jerusalem in assuming their facilitation of Judah's demise as a state.

Thus, Edom's assumed participation or complicity in the destruction of Jerusalem is thought to result in similar actions against Edom. This is the main tenet of the prophecy in Obadiah (10–14 and 15b). Edom is accused of standing idly by during the Babylonian siege and destruction. Edom did not prohibit the Babylonians from looting the city; in fact, they rejoiced in the demise of Jerusalem and participated in the looting and destruction by entering the city itself. Worse, those who fled were captured and handed over to the Babylonians. Obadiah accuses Edom of extreme bloodguilt, that is, murder and violence towards their brother (cf. Tebes 2009:250).⁷

Verse 10 alludes to fratricide, the brutal and physical violence with which Edom murdered his brother. As with Cain the prophecy deals with the wrath and bitterness of the first-born (Krause 2008:479), but different from Cain the anger is aimed towards a deceiving brother who took what did not belong to him. What makes this bloodguilt so sweeping and intense is that it was the result of fratricide, a brother killing a brother, not someone strange but a next of kin (Tebes 2009:22). Fratricide shatters the basis on which a tribal community operates. Kinship implies solidarity between groups who are tied to each other by related ancestors. It was a distinguishing marker that organised ancient Israel, Edom, Ammon, and Moab (Tebes 2009:22).

This kinship solidarity created certain expectations. Judah expected Edomite solidarity in case of a calamity (Renkema 2003:161). Instead of showing solidarity Edom exploited Judah's helplessness and powerlessness by plundering it and invading its territory. Those who fled were captured and either handed over, killed, or sold as

⁷ The special place Edom receives in the book of Obadiah is connected to the notion of brotherhood which is central in the message of the book (cf. Zvi 1996:239).

slaves. Edom failed to fulfil the conditions of brotherhood by their grand-standing over against a distressed and defenceless group of people, the pinnacle of abandonment (Renkema 2003:164).

Obadiah's lament on the lack of such solidarity is not far-fetched. Edom's refusal (v. 11) intensifies its transgression to such an extent that Judah's blood, like Cain's, was thought to cry out to God for vengeance. Edom's failure to aid Judah is reminiscent of the story in Numbers 20 when Edom refused Israel safe passage through their territory. Edom is now shamed and disgraced, reduced to nothingness, like Cain. Shame and disgrace entail loss of respect and non-recognition of its existence as a state. Edom's punishment for failing to come to Judah's rescue during the Babylonian invasion is that it will lose any stature it may have had among the peoples of the rest of the world.

Obadiah accuses Edom of lacking fraternal solidarity (Renkema 2003:181) by preying on the utter vulnerability of Judah during the Babylonian invasion. Judah lost its autonomy, their physical well-being exploited by looting and devious behaviour by Edom, and the brotherhood in tatters, leaving Judah defenceless against exploitation. This vulnerability is then wished upon Edom, measure for measure (Obad 15). Verses 2–9 illustrate to the reader how Edom will be rendered vulnerable: everything in Edom will be reversed, their pride will come to a fall, their wisdom will be turned into foolishness, their strength will weaken, and their fortifications will be rendered useless (Assis 2014:216). Edom will no longer be looked up to as an older brother. Instead, it will become despised and the least amongst the nations (v. 2). Their dominance over Judah will be broken.

Obadiah proclaims Edom's ultimate vulnerability: They will be left destitute once Yahweh is finished with them. Verses 3–4 allude to Edom's natural protected cities against the steep slopes of the southeast Jordan which rendered them impenetrable. The terrain was just too difficult for armies to negotiate (Jeremias 2007:65–66). The unassailability of these fortifications provided Edom with a sense of security which the prophet now falsifies in suggesting that robbers will ransack them, taking more

than what they need or want. Edom will be pillaged; their vineyards will be picked clean.

Edom will experience the same duplicitous behaviour from their neighbours with whom they have entered into treaties as they employed to deceive Judah. Just as Judah was at a loss that Edom dared desert them, so would Edom find it incomprehensible that those with whom they once entered into treaties would stop their flight. Edom will have a hard time understanding the changed attitudes of its alliance partners. Moreover, Yahweh would remove the wise and wisdom from Edom (v. 8), rendering it meaningless before Yahweh. Edom will be rendered culturally corrupt and hollow (Wolff 1986:51).

There does not seem to be any redemption for Edom in the prophecy of Obadiah. The hope of redemption is reserved for Judah, who will seek refuge on Mount Zion. In vv. 15a and 16–21 Obadiah brings into play the day of Yahweh when the reversal of roles with Edom will be complete (Wolff 1986:64). The house of Jacob will be restored to its former glory, repossessing the property lost when Edom invaded Judah (v. 17). Edom will cease to exist, burnt to a stubble (v. 18) whilst a remnant of the house of Joseph (the former northern kingdom) and the house of Jacob (the former southern kingdom) will flourish (cf. Renkema 2003:201).

Obadiah concludes his prophecy with Mount Zion ruling Mount Esau. The question is why is it necessary to rule Mount Esau if Edom's destruction is absolute. No rule seems necessary if Edom no longer exists. Or is it a case of Judah needing Edom in order to continue to show the dominance of the former? It seems to be the case that there is a remnant of Edom visible so that Jacob can continue to humiliate them and render them insignificant. Is it a case of "in perpetuity" as it occurs in Malachi 1:4?

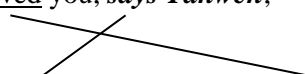
EDOM IN MALACHI

Love and hate in Malachi 1:2–5

Chiastic structures

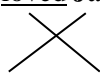
Edom only features in Malachi 1:2–5. Verse 2 and 3 concerns Jacob and Esau, verse 4 brings Edom into the picture and verse 5 addresses Malachi's intended audience, Israel in Jerusalem. Verses 2–3 contrast Jacob and Esau in terms of their presence inside or outside of the covenant. Jacob is inside the covenant but Esau is excluded. Yahweh loved Jacob, but hated Esau. Malachi 1:2–5 is then usually explained in terms of an antithesis or an antithetical chiasm where the corresponding legs of the chiasm stand in contrast with one another: love versus hate and two people with different names, Jacob and Esau.

S. D. (Fanie) Snyman (2014:30) reads particular sets of chiastic structures in vv. 2–5. The first chiastic structure is in v. 2a:

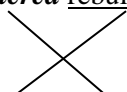
I have loved you, *says Yahweh*,

 and *you say*: in what way have You loved us?

The connecting sides are *say* and *love*.

The second chiasm is in vv. 2b–3:

And yet I loved *Jacob*

 But *Esau* I have hated.

Snyman calls this an antithetic parallelism with the two proper names and the two verbs denoting contrasting emotions. A third chiasm appears in v.4:

Shattered rebuild

Rebuild *torn down*

Edom argues that they are shattered but that they will rebuild. What they rebuild, however, Yahweh will tear down.

S. D. Snyman (2014:31) sees in the macro structure of vv. 2–5 also a series of chiasmic structures:

(A) Yahweh	(B) Jacob/Israel
(B) Jacob	(C) Esau
(C) Esau	(A) Yahweh
(A) Yahweh	(BB) Jacob/Israel
(CC) Esau	(A) Yahweh

He says:

In the first chiasm the love of Yahweh (A) has for Israel (B) is stated. In the second chiasm Yahweh's love for Jacob (B) is contrasted with his hate for Esau (C). In the last chiasm what Edom's (C) intentions are set against what Yahweh (A) intends to do. The first chiasmus deals with the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The second chiasmus has to do with Yahweh's love for Jacob/Israel, in contrast with Esau/Edom. The third chiasmus deals with Edom's intended actions and Yahweh's response.

Love and hate

Verses 2–3 contrast Jacob and Esau in terms of their presence inside or outside the covenant. Jacob is inside the covenant but Esau is excluded. Yahweh loved Jacob, but hated Esau. Fanie Snyman's interpretation in terms of chiasmic structures (see also S. D. Snyman 1985:64–65) notes the two opposing corresponding legs of the chiasm: love versus hate and two people with different names, Jacob and Esau. The hate for Esau parallels the hatred for Edom after the exile. But Snyman is very cautious with regard to the meaning of this hatred. He does not read it as resentment, but rather in terms of more and lesser loved. The focus is on the selection and the correlation is not rejection. S. D. Snyman (1985:77) is of the opinion that the focus here is the love of Yahweh with the hatred for Edom not the point of the book. Hatred serves to highlight Yahweh's love.

For this kind of understanding one needs to recognise “hate” here not in terms of the emotional baggage the word today has. It simply means not being chosen. And regardless of not being chosen, people have obligations towards Yahweh (Anderson 2011:235). However, the effect of the antithesis is that a particular identity is shamed. In the process of defining an other, a particular group of people gets portrayed in such a way that they are turned into collateral damage in the conflict between Yahweh and his chosen people. What concerns me is the ethics of characterising Edom in this way. Love for someone is illustrated with what is being done to another. And if this behaviour is linked to a deity, the negative attitude receives divine sanction: because God hates, I can hate too.

Explaining the contrast and lessening its semantic value do not alleviate the effect of exclusion the chiasm constructs. Malachi 1:2–5 connects covenantal acceptance with divine hatred and desolation for the other, creating in its aftermath various levels of inequality. This covenantal language of Malachi, feeding into Christianity’s ideas of predestination and election as was the case with Calvin, had a knock-on effect from the fifteenth century onwards in the labelling in Christian theological terms of non-Christian (strange) people, that is, people not from European origin in the Americas and Africa. The monotheistic Christian religion was unable to conceive of an other, be it an other human or an other deity. Christianity at the time rather facilitated an understanding of the strange people as enemies to the Christian religion, thus pagan-idolaters (Wynter 2003:292). Subsequently, the non-Europeans would be regarded as abnormal, and “the only available slot of Otherness to their Norm, into which they would classify these non-European populations, was one that defined the latter in terms of their ostensible subhuman status” (Wynter 2003:292). The subhuman status was based on the inhabitants’ rejection of the Christian gospel. Rejection meant that they could “justifiably” be categorised as enemies-of-Christ and lose their land (Wynter 2003:295). Refusal of the gospel entailed that they were now free game to the missionaries who attacked, captured, and enslaved them and expropriating their lands in the process. Ultimately, blackness itself became characterised as the mark of Cain (cf. von Kellenbach 2013:13–14). The differentiation between Jacob and Esau in Mal

1:3, and the concomitant descriptors of love and hate with it, play into this scheme of thought.

Verse 4 moves the preference for Jacob as love and rejection of Esau as hatred to a total condemnation of Edom: “This hatred shows in the fate of the land of Edom in past and present, and even into an unlimited future: a land and people under the wrath of God – forever” (Scoralick 2012:35). In focussing on the covenant, scholars try to bypass the argument here that hatred for someone proves love for another. Scoralick (2012:44) says the point is not Edom being judged and wasted, because that happened to Israel too (cf. Kessler 2012:229). The point is that this judgment on Edom is forever. Anderson (2011:224) thinks vv. 2–4 are illustrations of the way Yahweh loved Jacob: the first illustration is his rejection of Esau, the second example is the desolation of Edom as his punishment for their disregard of Jacob, and the third example is Edom as a territory of wickedness that will in perpetuity be under the wrath of Yahweh (Anderson 2011:227):

All of these are to be reminders of YHWH’s love for Israel: he chose Jacob, their ancestor. He has punished those who mistreated them. And he will continue to protect them into the future.

The idea of covenant and Edom’s land as inheritance suggests a particular religious commonality. The biblical text is silent on Edom’s religion whilst it is rather vociferous in comparison with the idolatry of Moab and Ammon. Bartlett (1977:196) argues that Edom most probably had enough in common with the Yahweh cult to the extent that “an Edomite abroad would have found little difficulty in adjusting to religious practice and belief in Israel, Ammon or Moab”. 1 Samuel 21:7 also refers to Doeg the Edomite in the sanctuary at Nob, implying an Edomite worshipping Yahweh.

With the covenant Israel is the sole object of Yahweh, yet in Deut 2:5 Yahweh gives land not only to Israel, but to Edom too. The notion of brotherhood originates here, but later the common bond was not explained in terms of religion but the patriarchs and the fall of Jerusalem (Rose 1977:32). The fall of Jerusalem was interpreted as rejection by Yahweh and a choice in favour of Edom: “Edom could

have been considered the chosen people instead of Israel because Edom was perceived as Jacob's twin brother, the alternative 'son', and in fact the first born" (Assis 2006:297). Assis regards the election of Edom and the rejection of Israel the background to Mal 1:2–5. The latter thought they were rejected with the fall of Jerusalem and Edom is the logical next choice. Thus the people argued Yahweh did not love them any longer, a claim to which Malachi replies with proof of Yahweh's love (Assis 2006:298).⁸ The assurance is that Edom remains inferior to Israel, forever.

Interpretations of the conflict between Edom and Israel: an anti-Edomite trend

André Lemaire (2010) sketches the history of the Edomites. Of considerable importance for our understanding of the anti-Edomite sentiments, one should take into consideration the following: Edom was not an independent kingdom during the tenth century B.C.E. (Lemaire 2010:229). Edom's control in first half of eighth century did not extend to the east of the Arabah (Lemaire 2010:232), but their prominence is more readily felt (Lemaire 2010:233). With Assyria controlling the Southern Levant, Edom became a vassal under the Pax Assyriaca for about 100 years as a vassal to the neo-Assyrians in 701 they became a threat to the Kingdom of Judah (Lemaire 2010:236). It is only in 597 that Edom became dominant in the Negev (Lemaire 2010:237). Jerusalem set up a coalition against Babylon with inter alia Edom, but the latter turned against them in support of Babylon. After the fall of Jerusalem Edom reaches its peak in 582–552, controlling the Edomite mountains east of the Arabah, the entire Negev as well as the southern Shephalah and Judean mountains. Edom enjoyed economic prosperity as possessed the fertile lands of Judah, controlled the incense road, the Gaza as well as Red Sea trade (Lemaire 2010:240). Edom lost their independence with Nabonidus's campaign. Its cities lost their importance and they gradually faded (Crowell 2007:84).

⁸ According to Assis, it is for this reason that the Chronicler names Esau first and Jacob second in the genealogy of 1 Chr 1. The impression is that Esau is the elected one, only to be negated at the end of the list with Edom's rejection. Assis makes 1 Chr 1 part of the anti-Edomite polemic. In this genealogy it is not so much about the superiority of David as monarch as it is about the inferiority of Edom in relation to Israel (Assis 2006:302).

The conflict between Israel and Edom has been interpreted in various ways. Nelson Glueck (1936:144) alludes to an economic rivalry between Israel and Edom because of the rich mineral deposits in the rift of the Araba valley. The rift forms a natural line of division between eastern and western Palestine with the two groups fighting bitterly over this rich and quite strategic piece of land. He says (1936:146–47):

Ownership of the waste spaces of the long Araba rift, with its minerals and trade possibilities, was hotly contested by Judah and Edom for several centuries, with Judah holding the upper hand most of the time. In this struggle lay the roots of the mutual animosity which lasted long after either group was in a position to control the Arabah.

Bartlett (1989:173) argues that Judah was fairly consistent in its lack of sympathy towards Edom, either Edom being a fierce enemy or later a treacherous enemy. It seems as if Edom and Judah were incapable of a friendly relationship with one another. Strangely enough, Edom is deemed a brother, a relation denied to Moab and Ammon, yet the relationship between Judah and Edom was worse than with the rest of the Transjordanian people.

Cresson (1964:151) refers to a damn-Edom-theology, a religious concept with eschatological and apocalyptic overtones, turning Edom into the symbolic designation of the enemy of the Jews. It was initially a “natural historical reaction – the hatred of a people for a cruel and ruthless enemy – and became a concept of eschatological significance expressing hope for and confidence in the destruction of the enemies of the Chosen people”. In similar vein Bartlett (1977:186) regards Edom as a symbol for all the foreign nations, an example of the enemy of God’s people:

The destruction of Edom was a parable of the destruction of the nations as a whole; indeed, the destruction of the peoples might be pictured as taking place in Edom self. Edom could be named to symbolise a world empire, seen in opposition to God. It is remarkable that such a small,

remote and unsuccessful nation should have had such a deep psychological effect upon its former masters.

Glazier McDonald (1995:24) says that Edom was not an enemy like the other nations; they “became the enemy par excellence, the epitome of wildness and lust for power, the symbol of Yahweh’s foes throughout the world who oppose the deity in the eschaton”. Initially it was a mere neighbourly squabble and the anti-Edomite diatribe did not differ much from the diatribe against Ammon and Moab. However, the grievances against the nations got subsumed under the main grievance of Edom’s territorial expansion. This grievance became the common denominator for all the nations’ sins that “Yahweh, the cosmic warrior” had to avenge (Glazier McDonald 1995:32): “Edom’s transformation is complete when it is depicted as the eschatological foe whose bloody destruction is the precondition for cosmic restoration and for Israel’s triumphant return to Zion.”

In verse 4 the focus in the previous verses on the brothers Jacob and Esau shifts to what most interpreters believe is a total condemnation of Edom without any reprieve (Verhoef 1972:95). It is as if the hatred intensifies by showing the fate of Edom in the past, present and future (Scoralick 2012:35): a people and their land under the wrath of Yahweh.

Malachi’s reference to Edom (from the perspective of an anti-Edomite trend) indicates that the concept of Edom has started to develop into a religious concept with eschatological and apocalyptic overtones, turning Edom into the symbolic designation of the enemy of the Jews. Edom became the enemy par excellence, a symbol of the foes of Yahweh.⁹ Initially it was a mere neighbourly squabble with the anti-Edomite diatribe not differing much from the diatribe against Ammon and Moab. But what was initially a “natural historical reaction” (Cresson 1964:151), a deep dislike for a cruel and ruthless enemy, became subsumed under a symbol for Yahweh’s foes as those who oppose Yahweh in the eschaton. Edom as the common denominator for the

⁹ Woudstra (1968:21, 26) argues that Esau became in Jewish writings the epitome of wildness and lust for power. Identified with Edom, such wildness and lust became the epitome of power in the Roman Empire, an image that lived on beyond the Middle Ages. Edom plays a representative role in interpretative history, “the quintessence of heathenism”.

enemies of Yahweh became a concept of eschatological significance in which Israel would survive and her enemies destroyed (Bartlett 1977:186):

The destruction of Edom was a parable of the destruction of the nations as a whole; indeed, the destruction of the peoples might be pictured as taking place in Edom self. Edom could be named to symbolise a world empire, seen in opposition to God. It is remarkable that such a small, remote and unsuccessful nation should have had such a deep psychological effect upon its former masters.

In Obadiah, this process is completed when Edom becomes the eschatological foe whose violent overthrow is necessary for restoring Israel on Mount Zion. In Malachi there is already the seed for this line of thinking, as Edom will experience in perpetuity the wrath of God. There is thus no hope for Edom's restoration, as it is needed as a counterfoil to Israel in the restoration process. The destruction of Edom is vital, and forever. She can never again rear its head. Edom cannot be redeemed or rehabilitated. The reader does not hear Edom's side of the story. Edom is not allowed to defend herself.

In contrast to the prophets, Deut 2:1–8 and Deut 23:7–8 portray a positive picture of Edom. In the first instance no reference is made to Edom, but only to Seir and the descendants of Esau. The mentioning of Seir alludes to the territory given to Esau by Yahweh. Although nothing negative is said, the reader gets an impression of strained relationships: Israel should not dare to take land, and they should buy food and water. The reader also learns that the descendants of Esau are their kindred and that the latter are afraid. Deuteronomy 23:7–8 commands Israel not to abhor an Edomite or an Egyptian; in fact, the third generation may enter the assembly of Yahweh. Bartlett (1995:20) evaluates the texts' stance as follows:

It was the record of the hostility of the monarchic period that led later writers to attribute hostile behavior to Edom in 587/6 BC. The attitude of the account in Deut 2:1–8 and 23:8, however, belongs to the postmonarchic situation or to a totally different theological appreciation

of the relationship between Edom and Judah, or to both. Nevertheless, it reveals a conscious attempt to undo the hostile attitude and underlines how deep that went.

Bartlett (1989:182) says that it is as if the Deuteronomist is “consciously and deliberately opposing the usual abhorrence of Edom”. He ascribes it to the common religious background between Judah and Edom (Bartlett 1989:184). This common background, affirmed in Judges 5:4, becomes the fundamental reason for the idea of brotherhood between the two groups. And it is perhaps exactly because of the common ground that Judah became so incensed by Edom: the hostile behaviour of Ammon and Moab could be explained by their religious affiliations in worshipping abominations. With Edom, that route was closed because of the brotherhood concept. They had the same religious roots (Bartlett 1989:184).

In this reading so far, there is no redemption or rehabilitation for Edom. These readings seem to be based on a particular view on the Edomites, namely one that links up with that of Obadiah. Subsequently, the negative role of the Edomites in other prophecies turns the Malachi reference too into a condemnation of Edom, so that the destruction wished upon Edom is final and “forever”. Can one read it otherwise? The prophets might be quite disapproving of Edom, but the Deuteronomist is much more forgiving of Esau.¹⁰

If one takes Hoekveld-Meijer’s (1996:75–76) reading, then certainly, the text can be read otherwise. Hoekveld-Meijer indeed provides a different and polemical reading (Tebes 2009:8) of the text by moving away from the chiasmic parallelism which turns the text into a condemnation of Esau and Edom towards a reading that takes the audience setting of the words of Malachi seriously.

Gerda Hoekveld-Meijer’s reading of Mal 1:2–5

Hoekveld-Meijer justifies her argument on the basis of the subjective discernment of conditional clauses. GKC (§159.1) acknowledges the subjective element in the understanding of conditional sentences, but Hoekveld-Meijer uses two other

¹⁰ Numbers 20–21 is also negative towards Edom.

references in this regard, one found in Verhoef's commentary on Malachi (1972:88) and another by Kruse (1954). Verhoef (1972:88) states the following:

Ten gunste van deze comparatieve opvatting, meer of minder geliefd, pleit ook de omstandigheid dat het Hebreeuws de comparatief slechts onvolkomen kan uitdrukken. Veelal word het positieve en het negatieve zonder meer naast elkaar gesteld en word het aan de hoorder of lezer overgelaten het 'dialektische' karakter ([with reference to Kruse]) van de negatie uit toon en samehang op te maken.

According to Verhoef it is up to the reader to interpret the dialectic character in parallelisms. He too refers to Kruse, who explains the problem in the Hebrew language for the reader, since not everything can be given via the text in terms of words, intonation and vowels. He says (Verhoef 1953:381):

Sonst kann es zu Misverständnissen kommen, besonders wenn der negierte, naheliegende Sachverhalt einem der Hörer oder Leser nicht in dem Masse selbstverständlich ist, wie es der Sprecher annimmt. Das Hebraische, das die Relativität gar nicht andeutet, ist hier wie so oft in Gefahr, zweideutig zu werden, besonders für den modernen Leser. Denn da wir aber die Intonation des Bibelhebraischen trotz aller masoretischen Akzente nur sehr wenig wissen, kann es leicht sein, dass der Hebraer durch eine besondere Betonung des positiven oder negativen Terminus beim Sprechen auf die stillschweigend zu machende „Korrektur“ der uneigentlichen Sprechweise hinwies. Das Hebraische überlasst ja auch sonst viel dem Gefühl (man denke etwa an den Gebrauch der „Tempora“ beim Verb), und wir sind leicht geneigt, ihm daraus den Vorwurf der Ausdrucksarmut und mangelnden Logik zu machen. Aber vielleicht liegt es nicht so sehr am fehlenden Verstand, als am übermächtigen Affekt, und es ist bezeichnend, dass die in Frage stehende stilistische Eigentümlichkeit besonders in der direkten Rede, im Gespräch und in der

Dichtung verwendet wird, wo durch die paradoxe Redeweise die Lebhaftigkeit des gesprochenen Wortes eine Verstärkung erfährt.

These two remarks are interpreted as an acknowledgement of the subjectivity involved in interpretation, especially here with reference to conditional clauses. Based on these remarks, Hoekveld-Meijer (1996:76–77) then argues that Mal 1:2–5 is a prophecy against Jacob and not Esau. The dialectic that is presupposed to be between Jacob and Esau is maintained, but its content is constructed differently, because of the lack of clear referencing between the signifiers (the curses) and the signified (Jacob or Esau). The two utterances about Jacob are juxtaposed: “Although I love Jacob, I will destroy him; although I hated Esau, he returned and rebuilt”. The hate for Edom illustrates Edom’s temporary demise in 520–480 B.C.E. as a form of divine punishment (Hoekveld-Meijer 1996:77). But it also implies that if the hated son can become a blessing, the once beloved son can regain his position and become a blessing yet again.

Edom’s strong position is, according to Hoekveld-Meijer (1996:77), a historical reality, a similar point that Bartlett (1977) and Lemaire (2010) make: Edom became stronger in the post-exilic period.

The structure reveals the theological and historical relevance of Edom in post-exilic Israel in the eyes of Malachi. Jacob is on the verge of being destroyed by wicked priests (the prophecy is aimed at them). Hence, YHWH warns the priests. He will pull down the House of Levi: Esau, of all people, will rebuild the ruins (like Esau rebuilt his own ruins). Malachi deviates from the other prophets in the sense that he associates the recovery of Esau (who returned to Israel!) with the apostasy of the House of Levi. Esau did not come as revenger but as restorer. The religious restoration of Israel (Levi) depends on Esau.

The crux of the interpretation is whether Edom in Malachi is part of the Edomite hatred that one finds in the (minor) prophets after the fall of Jerusalem. This hatred has been carried into the New Testament; for example, in Hebrew 12, people are warned

against the example of Esau, “an immoral and godless person” (v. 16) who failed to repent when he sold his birth right (v. 17). But what if one takes Verhoef and Kruse seriously? When a comparative relationship is stated, it is sometimes merely the joining of opposites, leaving it to the reader to construct the dialectical character of the negative statements. Currently, however, the reader is up against the tradition, starting with early Christianity as well as the Midrash!

To problematise the traditional reception of Malachi 1:2–5, one comes up against an established textual structure (such as Fanie Snyman’s [1985, 2014] chiasmic structure) that reinforces the anti-Edomite theology of the minor prophets, but one needs to ask whether an anti-Edomite proclamation is not read into the text because of a *Vorverständnis* of the anti-Edomite prophecies and theologies? The chiasmic structure is realised within the understanding of the text as a condemnation of Edom. In other words, the structure, so it seems to me, is *post-ex factum*, i.e., after the reading. It is extremely difficult to read the text as if for the first time. A reader reads a text with the tradition behind him or her, but perhaps now is the time to look at Hoekveld-Meijer’s suggestion anew.

Evaluation of Hoekveld-Meijer’s reading of Malachi 1:2–5

It seems to me, given the lack of a clear signifier-signified relation in this prophecy, that what makes Hoekveld-Meijer’s reading possible is a deliberate recognition of the intended audience of the prophecy: the House of Levi in Jerusalem with whom the deity has entered into a covenant (Mal 2:1, 4, 8). The dialogue with them, however, does not start in Chapter 2 but already in Mal 1:2 with a thesis statement, a defence and an argumentation.¹¹

Sweeney (2000:720) formulates the main tenet of the book as a “parenthetic address to the priesthood and the people of Israel that calls upon them to maintain the sanctity

¹¹ Most scholars follow Pfeiffer’s (1959) format for disputation speeches: (A) die Behauptung (basic thesis put forward by the prophet); (B) Die Einreden des Partners (counter theses proclaimed by the prophet’s opponents) and (C) Begründung und Schlüssfolgerung (argument in support of the prophet, the consequences of the argument for the audience and conclusion).

of the temple and the people so that YHWH might be properly revered”.¹² Of importance here is the audience that is assumed: the priesthood and the people of Israel being addressed in the diatribe. They are to be persuaded that they are loved by the deity who acts on their behalf. The fact that the deity fails to act is because of their failure to worship the deity properly (2000:722). Malachi 1:2–5 demonstrates that Yahweh indeed loves them and that Edom serves as an example of what happens when Yahweh no longer demonstrates his love towards a people.

The reference to Jacob and Esau is seen as the introduction of the Torah, as if it is a “priesterliche Lehrgespräch zur Tora-Erteilung” (cf. Lescow 1993:16). To Sweeney the Jacob/Esau reference reminds the audience where Edom comes from and who Jacob was, i.e., the chosen one: it (2000:724) “reiterate[s] the role reversal and emotions of the Genesis narrative as preface to the contemporary experience of both nations”, i.e., Edom coming under pressure from the Nabataeans and the Arabic presence in the region and Israel’s presence back in Yehud with the temple and its services not being what it should be. In line with the anti-Edomite trend, Sweeney concludes that the contrasting fates of the two peoples serve the prophet’s argument that Edom will be destroyed and Jacob will retain its land.

But is there any reason to link the destruction Yahweh refers to, to Esau? Verhoef (1972:88) mentions a few problems with regard to the reading of verse 3 and its understanding as a punishment over Edom. The terminology is used by prophets to indicate punishment. If the reference to the punishment is something of the past, the verb is an *imperfectum consecutivum*. But if the punishment is something of the past, the punishment of Edom is problematical as it is still awaited. If the punishment is of the recent past, the problem is to which event it can be related.¹³ Hill (1998:153) refers

¹² Sweeney (2000:716) sees paranesis as “a rhetorical speech form that is designed to convince its audience to adopt a set of beliefs or to take action in relation to a specific goal. It employs both positive and negative elements, i.e., exhortation and threat, in order to facilitate its aims”.

¹³ According to Hill (1998:151) the exact date and circumstances of Edom’s disintegration are undecided. Despite various onslaughts from the side of Nabonidus from 522 B.C.E., Edom retained its independence until a group of Arab tribes overpowered them some time in the fifth century. By 312 B.C.E., according to inscriptional evidence, the Nabataeans were entrenched in the region with Edom’s territory largely incorporated with the Edomites

to “incomplete” historical processes that will obliterate Edom. It is difficult to pinpoint Edom’s destruction here in the text. Within an anti-Edomite reading tradition Verhoef accepts that Edom and not Israel is the object of the deity’s destruction with their land (the hill country) turned into a wasteland.

The verb נִשְׁפָּץ does not sit well here and not as comfortable to the prophecy when understood to involve Edom. When understood in covenantal terms Yahweh is free to elect and reject whom he wishes, yet not arbitrarily. Thus, he rejected Edom for good reasons: they were guilty of false worship and hatred towards Israel. But postexilic Yehud runs the same danger of drawing the same judgement because of the same evil Edom was supposedly perpetrating (Hill 1998:152). It is this logic that Hoekveld-Meijer explored in her interpretation. Moreover, the notion of turning a territory into a wasteland is not unique to Edom, but a curse that will be inflicted on Israel for not keeping their covenant obligations. Just because Joel 4:19 pronounces a similar judgement on Edom, does it mean Malachi follows suit?

Similarly, the situation described in v. 4 with Edom claiming that they may have been down trodden, but they will return and rebuild that what was destroyed and Yahweh counter-claiming that he will destroy what they rebuild, can be applied to the situation of Yehud as well, according to Hill (1998:156): Israel might have returned to Israel but they will continue to lead a miserable existence in Yehud unless they “return” to Yahweh.

Verhoef (1972:90) sees Edom’s response as an arrogant answer to the intended punishment in line with Isa 9:9. To him, the *waw consecutive perfectum* of קרא indicates the consequences of their arrogance: they will be called certain names. But who is calling who? The subject of the calling would be the surrounding people and the object of their derision is only indicated by the particle preposition suffix 3rd person masculine plural of ל. Verhoef makes it refer to the previous section, and sees it as a consequential sentence. But is the object of derision still Edom, which earlier on is depicted by a singular feminine suffix?

Here Hoekveld-Meijer sees a different addressee, and looks into the context of the prophecy to determine the audience at whom it was aimed: the priests from the house of Levi who did not comply with their religious duties. Yahweh says that Edom will rebuild and that he will tear down the house of Levi. She thus makes them the object of derision.

I detect two problems here with Hoekveld-Meijer's construction: there is no object reference to the owners or the inhabitants of the houses torn down. Hoekveld Meijer deliberately reads the addressees of the prophecy: the house of Levi. The second problem is whether one would not expect the plural second person masculine suffix here, in line with the discourse earlier on in v. 2, where the priests are addressed with "you"? Nonetheless, the implication of Hoekveld-Meijer's translation is that Edom will rebuild the house of Levi and Yahweh will demolish the House of Levi. This is then further worked into the translation of v. 5: Jacob's eyes will see the punishment of the house of Levi and the priests will praise the deity again.

With regard to v. 4, Hill (1998:158) argues that the independent pronouns and the finite verbs "involve logical structure" as well as setting up an explicit antithesis between Edom and Yahweh. But does this logical structure mean that the subject in the first part ("Edom says") becomes the object in the second part as is the case in the current translations and interpretations? Hill (1998:158) says, "The emphatic position of the personal pronouns in this antithetical structure permits rendering *hēmmâ* and *'anî* as object pronouns 'as for then ... but as for me ...'" But it does not have to mean that the antithesis is on who is rebuilding and who will undergo destruction. The antithesis is that Edom will rebuild and that Yahweh will demolish, regardless of who will be demolished. And indeed the text does not say whose houses will be demolished. It only states that Yahweh will destroy.

Weyde (2000:92) also opts for a reading that highlights the contrast between the plans of Yahweh and the plans of Edom: "Although Edom says, 'We are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins,' the LORD of hosts says: 'They may build, but I will tear down.'" If the focus is on the contrast of the plans of Yahweh and Edom, does it mean that the focus of the plans is in both instances on Edom? Can the contrast not be

supported by an implied reference to the audience, the priests and Israel as the representatives of Jacob? Weyde (2000:92) recognises here a problem in the role of the ׀ particle:

It is to be admitted that that it is not always easy to choose between various possible interpretations of ׀ in cases where a ׀-clause is followed by a main clause; in particular, it is difficult to make a distinction between a conditional and a concessive understanding, of which the latter perhaps can be seen as a special case or category of the former.

He (2000:93) also acknowledges that if one reads the ׀ particle as a concessive conjunction, the announcement of the disaster that follows “occurs *without any discernible reason*” (my emphasis). Could the disaster not be more appropriately linked to the audience, i.e., the priests and the Levites? Moreover, when one looks at the names attributed to Edom the content of Edom’s wickedness is not mentioned either (Weyde 2000:102), thus removing any barrier that may make a link to the priests and the Levites more difficult.

CONCLUSION

Once portrayed as a perpetrator it seems to be rather difficult if not impossible to be redeemed. And if the perpetrator is not going to read or hear what is being said, it becomes a counterfoil for the wrath of someone else. Edom is a very good example of the force behind perpetrator discourse that turns someone into a caricature. To move away from such a process is not easy. Hoekveld-Meijer’s portrayal of Edom is like a voice calling in the wilderness. However, an interpreter should not be blind to the consequences of perpetration. One of the consequences is that the label tends to stick and a perpetrator has to live with it, proving daily that the label is no longer valid. This is the task incumbent on current South African society and the label of racism.

But with Edom it is a bit different. It is not clear if any Edomite would remotely have taken note of Malachi’s prophecy if taken to be the target of the deity’s wrath.

What one then has is an imagined ethical moment where an Edomite plea not to be destroyed is failing for whatever reason. If Hoekveld-Meijer's interpretation is valid, then Edom's vulnerability is recognised and it receives redemption. The figure of Cain may serve as an example for a perpetrator that succeeds in life despite of the evil that has been committed. But his redemption is part of the story. The question is whether there is sufficient evidence for this kind of interpretation in the case of Edom. Hoekveld-Meijer's reading does not rest upon any grammatical evidence. She calls forth the positive attitude towards Edom in other sections of the biblical text to suggest the possibility that Edom does not stay outside. However, Esau as a symbol of hate is very evident in the treatment Edom receives in the biblical text. Edom is accused of treason against his brother, a fratricide similar to Cain.

It is then unproblematic to read into Malachi this anti-Edomite trend. A chiasmic structure in Mal 1:2–5 backs this perspective, although in this case one may ask whether the chiasmic structure is constructed from the anti-Edomite perspective and whether it proves the latter. The interpretative history is soaked with an anti-Edomite perspective in this regard so that it is difficult to determine which came first. The anti-Edomite tradition is a huge stumbling block for Hoekveld-Meijer's interpretation, an obstacle I am not sure how to eliminate despite my affinity towards the latter interpretation and its usefulness for the development of a hermeneutics of vulnerability.

With regard to the utilisation of Edom in Malachi's introductory prophecy perhaps the only sensible entrance into the text would be the remarks about the subjective component in the linking of the dialectical elements with each other. A few scholars have expressed their reservation about the referents in these dialectical structures because of the subjective nature of the interpretation in this case. In v. 4 the reader has a choice between who is directly addressed: the intended audience (priests or Levites) or the Edomites. If it is the former, then Malachi's words is less an oracle against a foreign nation but an oracle against the people which forms the subject of the rest of the book.

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