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In the Post-Exilic Minor Prophets

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AN EVALUATION OF THE USE OF RHETORICAL QUESTIONS IN THE POST-EXILIC MINOR PROPHETS

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Introduction

The statement of problem of this research is: How are rhetorical questions used in the post-exilic Minor Prophets? The post-exilic prophets employed numerous rhetorical questions as they proclaimed the word of God to the Jewish people. These rhetorical questions occur in several grammatical constructions with a variety of implied responses and with many uses. Haggai employs rhetorical questions eight times in three prophetic words. Zechariah employs rhetorical questions thirteen times in six prophetic words. Malachi employs rhetorical questions twenty-three times in six prophetic words.

The Interrogative Particle ׀, h^a

The post-exilic Minor Prophets most often introduce rhetorical questions with the interrogative particle ׀, h^a. The post-exilic Minor Prophets employ the interrogative particle on twenty-one occasions to introduce rhetorical questions. Haggai uses the interrogative particle five times to introduce rhetorical questions. Zechariah uses it eight times to introduce rhetorical questions. Malachi also uses it eight times to introduce rhetorical questions. These rhetorical questions occur in two constructions.

With the Adverb of Negation

The post-exilic Minor Prophets use the interrogative particle ׀, h^a with the adverb of negation ׀, lo in rhetorical questions that imply an emphatic positive response on ten occasions. Haggai uses the interrogative particle and adverb of negation in one rhetorical question. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to anticipate and identify a pos-

sible source of discouragement in Haggai 2:3, “Is it not like nothing in your eyes?”

Zechariah uses the interrogative particle and adverb of negation in six rhetorical questions. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to assert the immortality of God’s word in 1:6: “But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers?” This question is part of a series of rhetorical questions that forces God’s people to consider the transience of human life and the immortality of God’s word. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to rebuke Satan and conversely to encourage God’s people and introduce the assurances that follow in 3:2: “Is this not a brand plucked from fire?” He uses this construction in rhetorical questions to mildly rebuke in 4:5 and 13: “Do you not know what these are?” He employs this construction in a rhetorical question to rebuke God’s people for their selfishness and introduce a warning of judgment in 7:6: “And when you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?” He uses this construction to affirm that these were the same words that God spoke at an earlier time in 7:7: “Were these not the words that Yahweh proclaimed by the earlier prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity with its cities round her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?” This question is part of a series of rhetorical questions that leads to a warning of judgment.

Malachi employs the interrogative particle and adverb of negation in three rhetorical questions. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to establish the close relationship of Esau to Jacob in 1:2: “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” This question accentuates the assurance of God’s love to Jacob and his descendants that follows. He uses this construction in two rhetorical questions to establish that all of God’s people have one father and creator in 2:10: “Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?” These questions establish a truth that provides the basis for a final rhetorical question that rebukes them for dealing treacherously with one another.

Without the Adverb of Negation

The post-exilic Minor Prophets also employ the interrogative particle $\bar{\imath}$, h^a without the adverb of negation in rhetorical questions on eleven occasions. These rhetorical questions normally have an implied emphatic negative response. Haggai uses the interrogative particle in four

rhetorical questions. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to rebuke God's people for being preoccupied with their own houses while neglecting the temple in 1:4: "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house is desolate?" He uses this construction in a rhetorical question in 2:12 to establish a truth by analogy that serves as the basis for his appeal, "Will it be holy?" He uses this construction in a rhetorical question in 2:19 to accentuate the concluding assurance: "Is the seed still in the storehouse?" However, he also uses this construction with an implied emphatic positive reply in 2:13: "Will it be unclean?" The reason that this question has an implied emphatic positive reply is that it has the negative word "unclean." Therefore, this construction is equivalent to the interrogative particle with the adverb of negation (see above). This question establishes a truth by analogy that serves as the basis for his appeal.

Zechariah uses the interrogative particle without the adverb of negation in rhetorical questions on two occasions. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to warn of the transience of human life in 1:5: "And the prophets, do they live forever?" This question is part of a series of rhetorical questions that forces God's people to consider the transience of human life and the immortality of God's word. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to rebuke God's people for their insincere fasting in 7:5: "Say to all the people of the land and the priests, saying, 'when you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?'" This question is part of a series of rhetorical questions that leads to a warning of judgment.

Malachi employs the interrogative particle without the adverb of negation in five rhetorical questions. The first question with this construction is found in Malachi 1:8, "Please bring it to your governor, will he be pleased with you?" This question establishes a truth by analogy that serves along with other questions in a series as a warning. The second rhetorical question with this construction is located in 1:8: "Will he lift up your face?" This question also establishes a truth by analogy that serves along with other questions in a series as a warning. The third question with this construction is found in 1:9: "will he (God) lift up your faces?" This question serves as a warning based on an analogy established by preceding questions in a series. The fourth question with this construction is located in 1:13: "Shall I accept it from your hand?" This question also serves as a warning based on an analogy established by preceding questions in a series. The fifth question with this construc-

tion is found in 3:8: “Will a man rob God?” This question serves to rebuke God’s people for their failure to give the tithe.

The Interrogative Pronoun מַה, mah

Haggai and Malachi employ the interrogative pronoun מַה, mah on six occasions to introduce rhetorical questions. Haggai uses the interrogative pronoun two times to introduce rhetorical questions. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to introduce an explanation of the bad experiences of God’s people to encourage them to rebuild the temple in 1:9: “‘Why?’ An utterance of Yahweh of hosts, ‘because my house is desolate while you run each man to his own house.’” He also employs this construction in a rhetorical question in 2:3: “How do you see it now?” This question is part of a series of rhetorical questions that anticipates and emphasizes a possible source of discouragement.

Malachi uses the interrogative pronoun in a rhetorical questions four times. He uses this construction in 2:14 to anticipate the confusion of God’s people by putting a question in their mouths, “Why?” This question is followed immediately by a warning explanation. He employs this construction in a rhetorical question in 2:15 to introduce the reason for God making them one in 2:15, “And why one?” The answer to this question provides one of the key arguments for remaining faithful to their wives. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question in 3:13 to anticipate an objection of God’s people by putting a question in their mouths and to introduce the rebuking explanation that follows: “What have we spoken against you?” Finally, he employs the interrogative pronoun in a rhetorical question in 3:14 to express the doubts and discouragement of God’s people by putting a question in their mouths and to introduce the assurances and warnings that follow: “And what profit is it when we have kept his injunctions and have walked as mourners before the face of Yahweh?”

The Interrogative Pronoun and Preposition מַה־, bammah

Closely related to the preceding construction is the use of rhetorical questions introduced by the interrogative pronoun with the preposition, מַה־, bammah. This construction is the most distinctive construction that Malachi employs for rhetorical questions. Haggai and Zechariah do not employ this construction. Malachi characteristically employs this construction with an implied negative response to anticipate an objection

of God's people and introduce further explanations, assurances, and warnings in 1:2, 6, 7, and 2:10. He uses this construction in a rhetorical question to anticipate an objection by putting a question in their mouths and to introduce further assurances of God's love in 1:2: "How have you loved us?" He employs this construction in two rhetorical questions to anticipate an objection by putting a question in their mouths and to introduce a rebuking explanation in 1:6: "In what way have we spoiled your name?"; and 1:7 "In what way have we defiled you?" He uses the interrogative pronoun and preposition in a rhetorical question in 2:17 to anticipate an objection by putting a question in their mouths and to introduce the warning explanation that follows: "How have we wearied him?"

The Interrogative Pronoun ׀, mi

The post-exilic Minor Prophets also employ a construction in rhetorical questions that is introduced with the interrogative pronoun ׀, mi. Haggai uses this construction only one time, while Zechariah and Malachi employ this construction two times each. Haggai uses this construction in a rhetorical question in 2:3a: "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory?" This question is part of a series of rhetorical questions that anticipates and emphasizes a possible source of discouragement. Zechariah employs this construction in a rhetorical question in 4:7: "What are you, O great mountain?" This question implies an emphatic negative response, assures God's people of the insignificance of any obstacle, and introduces the assurances that follow. Zechariah also uses the interrogative pronoun in a rhetorical question in 4:10: "For who despises the day of small thing?" This question rebukes God's people for their lack of faith and emphasizes the assurances that follow. Malachi uses this construction in two rhetorical questions in 3:2: "But who can endure the day of his coming?"; and "Who can stand when he appears?" These questions have an implied emphatic negative response and warn of the severity of God's judgment.

The Interrogative Pronoun ׀, 'ayyeh

Zechariah and Malachi employ a construction in rhetorical questions with the interrogative pronoun ׀, 'ayyeh. These questions have an implied emphatic negative response. Zechariah employs this construction for one of his rhetorical questions, whereas Malachi uses this construction three times for his rhetorical questions. Zechariah uses this

construction in a rhetorical question in 1:5: “Where are your fathers?” This question warns of transience of human life as part of a series of rhetorical questions that forces God’s people to consider the transience of human life and the immortality of God’s word. Malachi employs this construction in two rhetorical questions to rebuke God’s people for their failure to honor and reverence God in 1:6: “And if I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am the Lord, where is the reverence due me?” Finally, he employs this construction in a question in 2:17: “Where is the God of justice?” This question expresses the doubts and discouragement of God’s people and introduces the assurances that follow.

Other Constructions

Zechariah and Malachi also use four other constructions in rhetorical questions. Haggai does not use any other constructions. Zechariah employs two other constructions in rhetorical questions. The first is introduced by the interrogative pronoun **מַיְמַי**, mati with the preposition **עַד**, ad in 1:2, “Yahweh of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been indignant these seventy years?” This rhetorical question echoes the discouragement of God’s people and introduces the assurances that follow. In the second construction, Zechariah shapes the contexts to indicate a rhetorical question in 8:6: “If it is marvelous in the sight of remnant of this people in these days, should it be marvelous in my sight?” This question implies an emphatic negative response. Thus it affirms God’s ability to accomplish his purposes and rebuke his people for their lack of faith in him.

Malachi also employs two other constructions in rhetorical questions. First, he uses the interrogative pronoun **מַדְדָּוָא**, maddua to introduce a rhetorical question in 2:10: “Why do we act treacherously so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?” This rhetorical question has no satisfactory reply. Thus it rebukes God’s people for treachery based on preceding questions in a series of rhetorical questions. Second, Malachi employs the adverb of negation and conjunction **וְלֹא**, w^elo to ask a rhetorical question in 2:15, “Has he not made one?” This question expects an emphatic positive reply. Thus it establishes the unity of husband and wife as the basis for his appeal for husbands to remain committed to their wives.

Conclusion

Each of the rhetorical questions in the post-exilic Minor Prophets has been examined and categorized into groups that are similar in form and use. The table below categorizes these rhetorical questions by their grammatical constructions, rhetorical effects, and function within the passage. This thesis may serve as a helpful guide for students of the Bible as they consider the significance of rhetorical questions they encounter in the Bible. This thesis should especially be relevant for those studying the post-exilic Minor Prophets.

TABLE OF RHETORICAL QUESTIONS USED IN THE
POST-EXILIC MINOR PROPHETS

Location	Translation	Grammatical Construction	Rhetorical Effect	Function
Haggai 1:4	Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house is desolate?	Interrogative particle הֲ	Expects emphatic negative reply	Rebukes God's people for being preoccupied with their own houses while neglecting the temple
Haggai 1:9	"Why?" An utterance of Yahweh of hosts, "because my house is desolate while you run each man to his own house."	Interrogative pronoun הֲמָ	Reemphasizes their bad experience	Introduces an explanation of the bad experiences of God's people to encourage them to rebuild the temple
Haggai 2:3	Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory?	Interrogative pronoun מִי	Identifies a particular group of people	Part of a series of rhetorical questions that anticipate and emphasize a possible source of discouragement
Haggai 2:3	How do you see it now?	Interrogative pronoun הֲמָ	Identifies a particular concern	Part of a series of rhetorical questions that anticipates and emphasizes a possible source of discouragement

Haggai 2:3c	Is it not like nothing in your eyes?	Interrogative particle ׀ with the adverb of negation ׀	Expects an emphatic positive reply	Part of a series of rhetorical questions that anticipates and emphasizes a possible source of discouragement
Haggai 2:12	Will it be holy?	Interrogative particle ׀	Expects emphatic negative response	Establishes a truth by analogy that serves as the basis for the appeal
Haggai 2:13	Will it be unclean?	Interrogative particle ׀	Expects emphatic positive response (because the verb used has a negative sense)	Establishes a truth by analogy that serves as the basis for the appeal
Haggai 2:19	Is the seed still in the storehouse?	Interrogative particle ׀	Expects emphatic negative response	Accentuates the concluding assurance
Zechariah 1:5a	Where are your fathers?	Interrogative pronoun ׀	Expects emphatic negative response	Warns of the transience of human life as part of a series of rhetorical questions that forces God's people to consider the transience of human life and the immortality of God's word

Zechariah 1:5b	And the prophets, do they live forever?	Interrogative particle ׀	Expects emphatic negative response	Warns of the transience of human life as part of a series of rhetorical questions that forces God's people to consider the transience of human life and immortality of God's word
Zechariah 1:6	But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers?	Interrogative particle ׀ with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects emphatic positive response	Asserts the immortality of God's word as part of a series of rhetorical questions that forces God's people to consider the transience of human life and the immortality of God's word
Zechariah 1:12	Yahweh of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been indignant these seventy years?	Interrogative pronoun מַה־ with the preposition עַד־		Echoes the discouragement of God's people and introduces the assurances that follow
Zechariah 3:2	Is this not a brand plucked from fire?	Interrogative particle ׀ with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects an emphatic positive response	Rebukes Satan and conversely encourages God's people and introduces the assurances that follow

Zechariah 4:5	Do you not know what these are?	Interrogative particle אִי with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects an emphatic positive response	Serves as a mild rebuke
Zechariah 4:7	What are you, O great mountain?	Interrogative pronoun מַה	Expects an emphatic negative response	Assures God's people of the insignificance of any obstacle and introduces the assurances that follow
Zechariah 4:10	For who despises the day of small things?	Interrogative pronoun מַה	Expects an emphatic negative response	Rebukes God's people for their lack of faith and emphasizes the assurances that follow
Zechariah 4:13	Do you not know what these are?	Interrogative particle אִי with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects an emphatic positive response	Serves as a mild rebuke
Zechariah 7:5	Say to all the people of the land and the priests, saying, "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for these seventy years, was it for <u>me</u> that you fasted?"	Interrogative particle אִי	Expects an emphatic negative response	Rebukes God's people for their insincere fasting and is part of a series of rhetorical questions that leads to a warning of judgment

Zechariah 7:6	And when you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?	Interrogative particle אִם with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects an emphatic positive response	Rebukes God's people for their selfishness and is part of a series of rhetorical questions that leads to a warning of judgment
Zechariah 7:7	Were these not the words that Yahweh proclaimed by the earlier prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity with its cities round her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?	Interrogative particle אִם with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects an emphatic positive response	Affirms that these were God's words and is part of a series of rhetorical questions that leads to a warning of judgment
Zechariah 8:6	If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in these days, should it be marvelous in my sight?	Implied within the context	Expects an emphatic negative response	Affirms God's ability and rebukes his people for their lack of faith in him
Malachi 1:2	How have you loved us?	Interrogative pronoun with the preposition בְּמַה	Expects emphatic negative response;	Anticipate an objection of God's people by putting a question in their mouths and introduces further assurances of God's love
Malachi 1:2	Was not Esau Jacob's brother?	Interrogative particle אִם with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects emphatic positive response;	Establishes the close relationship of Esau to Jacob to accentuate God's love for Jacob and his descendants

Malachi 1:6	And if I am a father, where is the honor due me?	Interrogative pronoun ה' אִי	Expects emphatic negative response	Rebukes God's people for their failure to honor God
Malachi 1:6	And if I am the Lord, where is the reverence due me?	Interrogative pronoun ה' אִי	Expects emphatic negative response	Rebukes God's people for their failure to reverence God
Malachi 1:6	In what way have we spoiled your name?	Interrogative pronoun with the preposition ה' מַה	Expects emphatic negative response	Anticipates an objection of God's people by putting a question in their mouths and introduces a rebuking explanation
Malachi 1:7	In what way have we defiled you?	Interrogative pronoun combined with preposition ה' מַה	Expects emphatic negative response	Anticipates an objection of God's people by putting a question in their mouths and introduces a rebuking explanation
Malachi 1:8	Please bring it to your governor, will he be pleased with you?	Interrogative particle ה'	Expects emphatic negative response	Establishes an analogy that serves along with other questions in a series as a warning
Malachi 1:8	Will he lift up your face?	Interrogative particle ה'	Expects emphatic negative response	Establishes an analogy that serves along with other questions in a series as a warning
Malachi 1:9	will he (God) lift up your faces?	Interrogative particle ה'	Expects emphatic negative response	Serves as a warning based on an analogy established by preceding questions in a series

Malachi 1:13	Shall I accept it from your hand?	Interrogative particle הֲ	Expects emphatic negative response	Serves as an warning based on an analogy established by preceding questions in a series
Malachi 2:10	Have we not all one father?	Interrogative particle הֲ with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects emphatic positive response	Establishes the basis for a rebuke in the final question in a series of rhetorical questions
Malachi 2:10	Has not one God created us?	Interrogative particle הֲ with the adverb of negation לֹא	Expects emphatic positive response	Establishes the basis for a rebuke in the final question in a series of rhetorical questions
Malachi 2:10	Why do we act treacherously so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?	Interrogative pronoun מַדּוּעַ	Has no satisfactory reply	Rebukes God's people for treachery based on preceding questions in a series of rhetorical questions
Malachi 2:14	Why?	Interrogative pronoun מַדּוּעַ		Anticipates the confusion of God's people by putting a question in their mouths and introduces the warning explanation that follows
Malachi 2:15	Has he not made one?	Negative and conjunction וְלֹא	Expects emphatic positive reply	Establishes the unity of husband and wife as the basis for the appeal to remain committed to their wives

Malachi 2:15	And why one?	Interrogative pronoun מַה		Creates interest and introduces the reason for God making them one as the basis for the appeal to remain committed to their wives
Malachi 2:17	How have we wearied him?	Interrogative pronoun with the preposition בַּמָּה	Expects an em- phatic negative response	Anticipates an objection of God's people by putting a question in their mouths and introduces the warning explanation that follows
Malachi 2:17	Where is the God of justice?	Interrogative pronoun אַי	Expects a negative response	Expresses the doubts and discouragement of God's people by putting a question in their mouths and introduces the assurances that follow
Malachi 3:2	But who can endure the day of his coming?	Interrogative pronoun מַי	Expects emphatic negative response	Serves as a warning of the severity of God's judgment along with the subsequent question
Malachi 3:2	Who can stand when he appears?	Interrogative pronoun מַי	Expects emphatic negative response	Serves as a warning of the severity of God's judgment along with the preceding question
Malachi 3:8	Will a man rob God?	Interrogative particle הֲ	Expects emphatic negative response	Rebukes God's people for their failure to give the tithe

Malachi 3:13	What have we spoken against you?	Interrogative pronoun מִי	Expects emphatic negative response	Anticipates an objection of God's people by putting a question in their mouths and introduces the rebuking explanation that follows
Malachi 3:14	And what profit is it when we have kept his injunctions and have walked as mourners before the face of Yahweh?	Interrogative pronoun מִי	Expects emphatic negative response	Expresses the doubts and discouragement of God's people by putting a question in their mouths and introduces the assurances and warnings that follow