

## **Editorial: Dedicated to Wilhelm (Willie) J. Wessels<sup>1</sup>**

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This issue is dedicated to Wilhelm (Willie) Joseph Wessels, whose career at UNISA spanned the period from January 1979 to December 2018. Willie's primary focus throughout his career was on prophetic literature. In his valedictory lecture presented at UNISA on 23 October 2018, he reflected on Jeremiah with particular reference to 21:1-23:8 and 23:9-22. The latter text was also the focus of his second PhD, which he completed in January 2018 at the Radboud University Nijmegen (the Netherlands), while the former was the focus of his early career. In his own words he stated: "I have ended with the beginning in mind." For Willie, despite the glaring failures of the political leaders and religious leaders, a message of hope is embedded in these texts: "new righteous political leaders will rise and in spite of religious frauds, people will return to the core of what is right and regain favour – so hope remains!" Such a message of hope is exactly what is needed in our current political-economic-religious climate.

Willie Wessels was an inextricable part of what was needed to see the flag of (South) African Old Testament scholarship flying high throughout difficult times. We appreciate Willie for his contribution and the editorial team decided to show this by inviting scholars who have all in one way or another walked with Willie during parts of his journey to pay tribute to their esteemed colleague. Hence the present edition featuring a collection of articles related to Willie's interests here is summarized as "Poetry, Prophets and Ethics." A word of thanks goes to everyone one of them<sup>2</sup> for their contributions and can be summed up as follows:

Eric Peels, Professor Old Testament Studies at the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn in the Netherlands presents a Dutch piece under the memorable title "Wee over Moab... Een exegese van Jeremia 48:1-10." As noted by the author, "the oracle against Moab in Jeremiah 48 still contains many unanswered questions." Following an overview of introductory issues regarding text and structure, geography and topography, and theological accents in this chapter, a detailed exegesis of each verse is offered to reveal a devastating verdict by YHWH himself who is presented as judging the hubris of this foreign nation.

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In an essay entitled "De-Centering Lamentations: A Crisis of Hope, of Memory, and of Continued Presence", Scott Ellington, who is a Professor of Christian Ministries at Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia, USA seeks to challenge the popular reading of chapter three of the book Lamentations as the chiasmic middle. Instead he argues for a developing story line running through the book as a whole with chapter three better seen as a climax in the plot at which point Israel considers the ways in the relationship with Yahweh has fundamentally changed.

Lee Roy Martin is Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland in the USA and also affiliated with Unisa. His topic of choice is "The Chiasmic Structure of Psalm 106" with reference to which he notes that within the narrative structure of the particular Psalm's "historical recital of Israel's story" is a chiasm that emphasizes key parallel elements, e.g. "Israel's past failures and Yahweh's generous grace, highlighting the need for repentance and forgiveness in any historical context."

Liza Esterhuizen, research associate at the University of Pretoria, focusses on "Decolonising biblical trauma studies: The metaphorical name Shear-jashud in Isaiah 7:3ff read through a postcolonial South African perspective." Her concern is the common ground between ancient and modern audiences related to struggles, trauma, and hardship suffered. With specific reference to the book of Isaiah, she sees the reader as confronted with a difficult text/prophet who in Isaiah 7:3ff not only addressed the King as an individual but also the people of Judah as a collective when naming his son.

Becky Hill, Adjunct Professor in the Biblical Studies Department at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland (Ohio), USA introduces us to what she aptly calls "Sights and Sounds of Death Valley: A Close Reading of Ezekiel 37.1-14". Both visual and auditory elements found in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones are shown to offer a fitting biblical approach to understanding the literary structure of the imagery as it invites the reader into the prophet's encounter of the presence of YHWH.

Leonard Maré is an Extra-ordinary Professor of Old Testament studies affiliated with the North-West University and he too presents a study on aspects of the Book of Ezekiel. The starting point for this paper is the observation that many passages in the former and later prophets mention the activities of the spirit of God in relation to the prophetic office. Here the question asked concerns the pneumatology implicit in selected passages in the book of Ezekiel.

Hendrik Bosman, Professor of Old and New Testament at Stellenbosch University, contributes a study on "Loving the neighbour and the resident alien in Leviticus 19 as ethical critique of holiness". Given that "Loving the neighbour" is generally accepted as fundamental to Judeo-Christian theological ethics, it seems strange that few reflect on the implications of extending "loving

the neighbour" (Lev 19:18) to "loving the resident alien/foreigner" (Lev 19:33-34) within the context of the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26). The author therefore fills the gap showing various ways in which "holiness" was redefined in Leviticus 19 during the post-exilic period.

Jacqui Grey is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Alphacrucis College in Parramatta, Australia. Her piece deals with Isaiah's Vision of Yahweh and Ethical Replication read in conversation with Elaine Scarry's related idea on responses to the presence of beauty. Adapted to consider the role of holiness as a driving factor in Isaiah's message of social justice in sections 1-39 and 40-66, the prophet and his circles are shown as de-centred in the stories of their experience of Yahweh's beauty and terror.

Juliana Claassens, Professor of Old Testament, and Chair in the Department Old and New Testament and Head of the Gender Unit at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, exposes "The Hidden Wounds of Structural Violence: Exploring an Intersectional Understanding of Violence in Jeremiah 4-6". Her paper shows how taking seriously manifestations of this particular form of violence with a special emphasis on gender, race and class allows for a more multi-faceted approach very relevant to related present day challenges.

Blessing Boloje, an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the University of Bochum (Germany), affiliated with the University of Pretoria (Research Associate) and originally from Nigeria investigates the consequences of "Trading Yahweh's Word for a Price: Ethical Implications of the Collusion of Prophets and Priests in Micah 3:5-7, 11." Commenting on the "mercenary attitude of prophets and priests in discharging their duties as religious functionaries," the article examines Micah's indictment of charismatic and cultic Judean's self-centred leadership for commercialising Yahweh's word and failing to live up to YHWH's ethical standards.

Knut Holter is Professor of Old Testament in Diaconia and Leadership Studies at the Faculty of Theology at the Specialised University of Misjonsmarka in Stavanger, Norway. His article on "The Question of an Ethics of Bible Translation" offers "Some Reflections in Relation to Septuagint Isaiah 6:1 and 19:25." The two texts are read in dialogic style with some concerns of recent discourses of Bible translation ethics, especially the question of a translation's "loyalty" vis-à-vis source text, target language and culture, and other actors involved in the translation process.

The article of Gert Prinsloo, Professor in the Department of Ancient Languages and Cultures at the University of Pretoria identifies an example of "Inner-biblical Allusion in Habakkuk's מַשָּׁח (Hab 1:1-2:20)" that also involves "Utterances Concerning Babylon in Isaiah 13-23 (Isa 13:1-14:23; 21:1-10)". His

meticulous close reading suggests a high probability that a shared tradition lies behind this particular way of condemning Babylonian arrogance.

Ellen van Wolde, Professor of Exegesis and Source texts at Radboud University in Nijmegen in the Netherlands offers a new perspective on the famous verse in the prologue of the book of Job, commonly translated with "Job took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes." A cumulative argument combining observations on syntax and semantics shows a surprising alternative in which the satan seems to be bringing Job a pot to squeeze out his inflamed boils that cover him from head to toe.

Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele), Professor of Old Testament at the University of South Africa, enables "Hearing Jeremiah's confessions in the context of 'silent sheep'" through the ears of African lore. With the perspective gained from her knowledge of selected Sotho proverbs, she shows the popular construction of masculinity as demanding the repression of men's capacity to cry would be better balanced by taking seriously the book of Jeremiah (cf. his confessions in particular) offering the reader a better (religious) alternative.

Funlola Olojede is a Post-Doctoral Fellow and Researcher at the Gender Unit at Stellenbosch University. With the provocative question, "What of the Night?" she looks at "Conceptions and Theology of Night in Isaiah and the Book of the Twelve". Though a number of studies have probed the concepts of time (and night) in the Hebrew Bible, there remains a gap in the research when it comes to exploring the strong existential correspondence between day and night throughout Isaiah and in comparison with related data in the Minor Prophets.

Eben Scheffler, Professor of Old Testament at Unisa, entices us with a piece he calls "Allegorizing Song of Songs' most erotic parts: Judaism, Calvinism, Lutheranism." If allegorical reading promotes uncontrollable subjective interpretation, this will surely be evident when different religious traditions get their hands on the more explicitly sexual contents of the book. The study confirms this with reference to reception in the Targum, the Calvinistic Dutch Statenbijbel and in Luther's lectures on Canticles.

Daniel Smith-Christopher, Professor of Theological Studies at the Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles, introduces us to the idea of "The Outlaw David ben Jesse: Reading David as Geronimo in exile?" The article considers a reading of the stories of David in which the idea of him as the proverbial wanted man is able to account for the exilic interest in so depicting his character in the first parts of the so-called "Succession Narrative" (2 Sam 7 – 1 Kings 1-2).

Richard Moore is Associate Dean at the Lee University School of Religion and reflects on "Finding the Spirit of Elijah in the Story of Elisha and the Lost Axe Head: 2 Kings 6:1-7 in the Light of 2 Kings 2". In response to

putting the question “Where is the spirit of Elijah, specifically, in the story of Elisha and the lost axe head?”, the author considers the possibility that a more complex teleology underlies the short narrative than has regularly been assumed.

Alphonso Groenewald is Professor of Old Testament Studies in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. His article is called: “A Trauma Perspective of the Redaction of the Poor at the end of Book I (Pss 3-41) and Book II (Pss 42-72) of the Psalter”. In response to a recent study of Willie Wessels suggesting that the Hebrew Bible has a clear position regarding the question of the poor and the needy, Groenewald offers the insights of a trauma perspective on the variety of terms used for the poor at the end of Book I (Pss 3-41) and Book II (Pss 42-72).

With this collection of research outputs inspired by Willie’s interests, it is with deep appreciation that we dedicate this issue of *Old Testament Essays* to our esteemed colleague and friend.

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