Partnership Remembered: Erets Canaan as Co-Provider and Co-Enforcer in H

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Abstract

The article contrasts two views of "land" in two texts which both originated in priestly circles. The first text is the Priestly creation narrative, and here the article leans heavily on the work of Norman Habel and the Earth Bible Project. For Habel, Genesis 1 is the story of the loss of partnership between God and Earth. The article then describes the portrayal of the "land of Canaan" or "Erets Canaan" in the Holiness Legislation and shows how the old partnership is remembered and rekindled. In the second part of the article the earlier work of Esias Meyer is used. The objective of this article is to contrast these two views of relationship to land and to make clear that the Holiness Legislation is much less anthropocentric than its Priestly predecessor in Genesis 1.

Keywords: anthropocentrism; Earth Bible Project; Genesis 1; Holiness Legislation; partnership

Introduction

This article is interested in the presentation of the relationship between God, humans, and the earth or, to be more specific, the Hebrew word אֶרֶץ. The article sets out to contrast the presentation of this three-way relationship in the first creation narrative with the Holiness Legislation. I will first engage with the commentary of Norman Habel (2011) on Genesis 1–11. Habel initiated the Earth Bible Project which is one of the best examples of biblical scholars taking the present ecological crisis seriously.[1] After engaging with Habel's interpretation of Genesis 1, I first spell out my understanding of the diachronic relationship between the Holiness Legislation and the Priestly text and then revisit my (Meyer, 2015) previous understanding of the portrayal of land in Leviticus 17–26. This article was first presented at a conference in the Kruger National Park in 2014, organised by Willie van Heerden. Willie inspired many South African scholars of a younger generation to participate in eco-theological debates.

Habel (2011) has presented a commentary on Genesis 1–11 in which the principles and values of the Earth Bible Project are used to interpret the text. I will briefly explain Habel's interpretation of the first creation narrative, usually described as the Priestly creation narrative. I will not discuss the general approach of the Earth Bible Project in detail.[2] These include a set of ecojustice principles such as "intrinsic worth," "interconnectedness," "voice," "purpose," "mutual custodianship," and "resistance" (Habel 2011, 1–2). In the light of these principles, the Earth Bible Project has also created a "revised ecological hermeneutic" which has the following elements (Habel 2011, 3–16):
1. Context—The environmental crisis
2. Context—An ecological worldview
3. Suspicion—Anthropocentric bias
4. Identification—Empathy with Earth
5. Retrieval—The voice of Earth
6. Context—Literary and cultural
7. Application

In the overview below, it should become clear how Habel applies these in his interpretation of the text. But the most essential three principles are probably suspicion, identification, and retrieval. It should be evident that these elements could also be

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1   Apart from the Earth Bible Project, another school of thought is associated with the University of Exeter. The different contributions in Horrell, Hunt, Southgate, and Stavrakopoulou (2010) could be considered representative of this approach. One of the works that I engage with later is by Morgan (2010a), a PhD dissertation presented at Exeter. Morgan (2010b) also contributed to the aforementioned volume. See discussion in Kavusa (2012, 42–46), where this school features under "Revisionist ecological hermeneutics," also Kavusa (2019, 244–45). Van Heerden (2014a, 114n1) also offers a brief description of this school.

2   This has been done by many others. See Kavusa (2012, 36–40), Horrell (2010, 6–9), and Tucker (2009, 349–67).

described as "ideological-critical" and share much with feminist interpretations.[3] Van Heerden (2014a, 115) argues that a "central concern of this threefold ecological hermeneutic is to overcome the anthropocentric bias that we are likely to find both in ourselves as readers and in the text we are reading" (also Van Heerden 2017, 471). He refers to an earlier definition of anthropocentrism by Habel (2008, 4) in which he identifies two faces of anthropocentrism:

> The first is the assumption or condition we have inherited as human beings—especially in the Western world—that we are beings of a totally different order than all other creatures in nature. In other words, the hierarchy of things is god, human beings, and the rest.

The second face that Habel (2008, 4) refers to has to do with the tendency amongst humans to view nature as an "object," sometimes the "object" of our investigations. This approach cultivates a sense of superiority in humans "but has also contributed to a sense of distance, separation, and otherness."

In the light of the comment by Van Heerden above, this article is more interested in "anthropocentric bias" in the text itself, and the article contrasts two different portrayals of the relationship between God, the Earth/land, and humans. We will see from Habel's interpretation of Genesis 1 that eventually the text settles for a hierarchy of "god, human beings, and the rest," but the article will also focus on the relationship between YHWH, Erets, and the addressees in the Holiness Legislation. We will try to show that in the Holiness Legislation, the hierarchy changes and that anthropocentric bias is not as salient as in Genesis 1. First, we need to clarify how we understand the relationship between the Holiness Legislation and Priestly literature.

About P and H, or Historical-Critical Presuppositions

Leviticus 17–26 has traditionally been called the Holiness Code (German: *Heiligkeitsgesetz*). This term goes back to 1877.[4] This study will further build on the emerging consensus that the Holiness Code is later than Leviticus 1–16* and was added to the latter through a process of inner-biblical exegesis. This is the position of scholars such as Otto (1999), Grünwaldt (1999), Nihan (2007), Hieke (2014a and 2014b) and more recently Rhyder (2018, 43) who all argue for a date more-or-less in the second half of the Persian period.[5] They are building on an earlier generation of scholars such

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3   I am thinking of what some feminists would call "recovery" of female voices ignored by male interpreters. See Fewell (1999, 27), Bowen (2007, 449), and the discussion in Kavusa (2019, 241).

4   The name was coined by Klostermann (1877). It is clear why he chose this name, since the exhortation to be holy appears several times in the first chapters: Leviticus 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:6, 7 and 8.

5   See Otto (2007, 199–200) for the early fourth century, Nihan (2007, 574) for late fifth century with Grünwaldt (1999, 379–81) and Hieke (2014a, 70) aiming more for the middle of the fifth century. Rhyder (2018) tends to refer to "Persian Period Yehud" and does not want to become too specific.

as Elliger (1966) and Cholewiński (1976) who changed earlier views (like that of Wellhausen) that the Holiness Code preceded the rest of P[G] and P[S] (Nihan 2007, 3).[6] In this understanding of the development of the Holiness Code, it reinterpreted older legal collections such as the Decalogue(s), the Covenant Code, the Deuteronomic Code and the Priestly text (see Otto 1999, 138–82, Nihan 2007, 395–545). There are dissidents to this view in the European context[7] and elsewhere,[8] but this position seems to be the ascending one. This position is supported by the most recent study on the Holiness Code by Rhyder (2018), who prefers to talk of the "Holiness Legislation."[9] In this article, we will tend to simply talk about H in reference to Leviticus 17–26, although scholars who refer to H often presume that other texts in the Pentateuch are included, but these texts are not relevant for this article.[10]

From a historical-critical perspective, I read Genesis 1 as part of P and accept that the text from Leviticus 17–26 was written by a later generation of priests.[11] It should also be noted that although it has been proposed that Genesis 1 was actually written by the authors of H, I do not agree with that view and the vastly different ways of describing

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6 For a brief discussion of the difference between the Priestly *Grundschrift* (P[G]) and the secondary additions (P[S]), see the discussion in Nihan (2007, 3–13). P[G] was usually understood as the basic Priestly narrative and P[S] often entailed the legal texts that were supposedly added later. See also the discussion in Zenger and Frevel (2012, 189–214), especially pages 193–94 and 209–10. For them P[G] is characterised by a utopian character which is diminished by the cultic character of P[S] (Zenger and Frevel 2012, 210): "Je deutlicher die Kultgesetzgebung in den Vordergrund rückt, desto mehr tritt der utopische Charakter van P[G] in den Hintergrund." Nihan (2007, 379–82), as the most recent serious diachronic engagement with Leviticus, abandons this distinction and argues for the ending of P in Leviticus 16.

7 For example, Blum (2009), Crüsemann (1997), and Ruwe (1999), who would all argue that Leviticus 17–26 is too integrated into the rest of Leviticus to be regarded as something different.

8 There are also some Jewish scholars in the Kaufmann School who would agree with the fact that Leviticus 17–26 postdates P, but who would like to date both much earlier. A good example of this line of thought is Knohl (1995) who dates Leviticus 17–26 to ca. 743–701 BCE. Another important example is Milgrom (1991, 2000, and 2001). Both would deny that the Holiness Code used D as a source. Few European scholars have taken these arguments seriously. Exceptions include Joosten (1996, 9–15), Krapf (1992), Zehnder (2005, 323), and now also Kilchör (2015). I do not find the arguments of the Kaufmann School convincing (see Meyer 2010). See also Nihan (2007, 563), Watts (2013, 41), or more recently Rhyder (2018, 39–43), or Schmid (2019).

9 It is not clear why, or at least I could not find any explanation, but both "Code" and "Legislation" could be used to translate the German "Gesetz". The main difference is that Code seems to imply a collection of laws which is closed and the point is that most scholars do not consider Leviticus 17–26 as a closed collection, but argue that a few other texts could be found scattered throughout the Pentateuch written by the same hands. Rhyder tends to shy away from referring to "the same hands." See the next footnote.

10 For a discussion of possible texts see Nihan (2007, 564–70). Rhyder (2018, 29–33) provides a brief overview of this debate and also offers a critique of Knohl's important contribution to the debate. Rhyder prefers to talk of "h-related" texts. Boorer (2018, 42–47) also offers an extensive discussion.

11 See discussion in Nihan (2007, 379–94) on the extent of P in Genesis 1–Leviticus 16, as well as arguments for dating P to "the first decades of the fifth century BCE, shortly after the disappearance of the last Davidides" (p. 394).

the relationship between God, land/Erets, and humans between Genesis 1 and H adds to this disagreement.[12]

Although this study approaches the relationship between H and P from a diachronic perspective, my engagement with H itself is synchronic. There is no doubt that H also expanded over time, but "from the days of Elliger and Cholewiński attempts by scholars to identify layers in the text of Leviticus have become far more modest" (Meyer 2014, 268).[13] I think that the following quote from Rhyder (2019, 723) best motivates my approach:

> Although chapters 17–26 include late additions and supplements, in addition to traces of earlier source materials, they generally evince structural integrity and a distinctive linguistic and thematic profile, as well as an overarching focus on matters of holiness. … These structural, linguistic, and thematic consistencies justify treating Lev 17–26 as a discrete subsection of the Priestly traditions, with the descriptor "Holiness legislation," or H.

With regard to Habel, one should also add that Habel's approach to the first creation narrative is not a historical-critical approach. His approach is a synchronic approach, akin to narrative criticism with elements of ideological criticism added to it. He does engage with the ancient Near Eastern context of the text, but that is probably the most "historical" element to his approach.

Erets as Forgotten Partner in P

Habel (2011, 20–21) constructs two major myths in Genesis 1–11 namely the Erets myth and the Adamah myth. The first creation story consists mostly of the Erets myth and the Adamah myth is not present, but at some stage the Erets myth is interrupted by another myth, namely the Tselem myth. This interruption stands at the centre of Habel's interpretation of this text. The Tselem myth is found in verses 26–28 of Genesis 1 which has been identified as a "rupture" by an earlier generation of scholars such as Westermann (Habel 2011, 24).[14] This interruption is a crucial part of Habel's larger argument about the relationship between Earth, Elohim, and eventually humanity who

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12 I am referring to the work of Firmage (1999) here. Firmage thinks that Genesis 1 actually belongs to H, which would mean that we do not know where P starts anymore. See the response by Nihan (2007, 303).

13 See Meyer (2014, 267–68) for a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon.

14 Habel is referring to Westermann's 1964 book *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, but in Westermann's (1984, 143) actual commentary the issue is discussed in more detail. As is typical of historical critics, Westermann (1984, 143) thinks that the "creation of humans was once an independent narrative and became part of the story of the creation of the world only at a late stage." See also Westermann (1984, 156–59).

come into the narrative as part of the Tselem myth.[15] Habel (2011, 25) divides the chapter into nine scenes and in terms of this structure the creation of humanity in verses 26 to 28 become scene eight. For the sake of consistency, I will usually refer to earth or Earth as Erets. Habel seems to use the two terms interchangeably. In line with Habel's reading I will refer to Erets as "her" and "she." The word in Hebrew is grammatically female and Habel shows that she is a character in her own right.

In Habel's (2011, 26) interpretation of the first seven scenes (vv. 3–25) he underlines that "Earth is, moreover, a partner with God in the creation of vegetation and other life forms." This partnership is destroyed when humanity enters the narrative in verses 26–28 and Habel takes issue with earlier interpreters who argued that the creation of humanity should be viewed "from the perspective of human beings." For Habel this denies the fact that Erets/Earth is actually the main character in the narrative until this point. I will briefly sum up Habel's reasoning in understanding Erets as the main character in the first seven scenes by pointing to the most salient features of Erets's characterisation.

In Scene One (vv. 3–5), Habel (2011, 30) argues that the main purpose of the creation of light is to enable Erets to appear, or for Erets to be seen eventually. It is clear that Habel interprets every aspect of the story from the perspective of Erets which illustrates what is meant by points 3, 4, and 5 of the hermeneutic mentioned above. The same goes for Scene Two (vv. 6–8) in which the *raqia* is created. For Habel (2011, 31) "the formation of the solid realm prepares the way for the appearance of *Erets*, a solid realm below." Thus, a space is created into which Erets could move, or into which Erets could be born. The latter takes place in Scene Three (vv. 9–10). Habel (2011, 31–32) points out that as with a natural birth there is a parting of waters in this scene from which Erets then emerges. Just as a human parent would name her child so God then names the new-born "Erets" or "Earth." It is clear that God/Elohim is delighted with his child and "sees Earth is good." The first three scenes thus first focus on the preparation before the birth of Erets and then the birth itself. In the next three scenes the unique partnership and cooperation between Erets and Elohim comes to the fore.

In Scene Four (vv. 11–13), Erets produces plants. Habel (2011, 33) highlights the fact that the "revealed *Erets* is the dormant source of all living creatures, except humans" and the production of plants is the result of Erets being "a partner with Elohim in the creation process." In Scene Five (vv. 14–19) the lights are fixed to the *raqia* by Elohim and the lights are commanded to rule over the day and the night. Yet for Habel (2011,

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15 Although Habel takes his cue from a historical critic such as Westermann, Habel does not seem to be interested in any diachronic arguments. Habel (2011, 26) presents no arguments on why or when verses 26–28 were added, if indeed they were added. His interest lies solely in the fact that these verses are a "rupture" and that they violate the role of the central character of the story. This rupture also has a negative effect on interpreters who "argue that the creation and the creation event are to be viewed from the perspective of human beings."

33) this ruling is not about domination but simply to "'regulate' light for *Erets*." The lights are there to give light to the benefit of Erets. Scene Six (vv. 20–23) tells of the creation of water and sky creatures. Habel (2011, 34) argues that the waters also become partners in the creation process by bringing forth all the living creature in them. The birds in the sky do not seem to be linked to a particular source, but their function is to fly "above *Erets*." In this scene we also find divine blessing for the first time. For Habel, Erets "is the domain where this blessing/power is exercised". Erets is both "source of life" and the "habitat of all living creatures." One could say that the highpoint of the partnership between Erets and Elohim is found in Scene Seven (vv. 24–25). As Habel (2011, 34) shows, Elohim commands and Erets produces all kinds of animals, both domestic and wild. For Habel, Erets is "the source, home and habitat of 'living creatures'" and both "body" and "breath" are produced by Erets.

What should be clear from this portrayal is that the first three scenes describe the preparation for and eventually the actual birth of Erets and in the next four scenes Erets increasingly grows as a character in partnering more and more with Elohim in creating all the animals. Scene Seven clearly presents a highpoint in this partnership, but from the next scene onwards this partnership is forgotten, and Elohim gets new partners.

Habel (2011, 35) points out that one would expect this pattern of partnership to continue into the next scene (vv. 26–28) and that Erets would once again partner with Elohim to create human beings. Instead, Elohim addresses "unidentified divine forces apparently from another realm." Scene Eight is the previously mentioned "Tselem myth." It is called this for obvious reasons since humanity is supposed to be a "tselem" of Elohim. Habel (2011, 36) understands *tselem* as something like a statue, something physical, but wonders which images of Elohim, presented in the narration of the first seven scenes, would be used to create humans. Options include "a nurturing life-force," "a verbal impulse," or "an empowering partner." The latter underlines the partnership with Erets, but the actual image of God that seems to be copied to human beings is that of "hierarchical power" and here Habel (2011, 37) provides a brief overview of interpreters through the years who understood these verses as implying human superiority and that the text "authorises humans to rule an anthropocentric universe." This is a case of Habel exposing the anthropological bias of these interpreters.

In the rest of the discussion of Scene Eight, Habel (2011, 37–40) provides a detailed discussion of the command given to human beings and the two verbs aften associated with the rule of Near Eastern kings. The end-result is that ruling in the *tselem* of Elohim "implies a form of royal domination that devalues *Erets* and the living community of *Erets*" (Habel 2011, 38). But it should be clear that in Habel's interpretation Erets changes from a partner to Elohim in the first seven scenes to something which humans will rule over in Scene Eight. The intrusion of the Tselem myth in verses 26–28 has catastrophic consequences for Erets and her relationship with Elohim. To add insult to injury, in Scene Nine (vv. 29–31) Erets is to provide vegetation for humans to eat, but now Elohim seems reluctant to admit that Erets actually is the source of the vegetation

as she was portrayed in Scene Three (Habel 2011, 40–41). Habel (2011, 43–45) concludes his interpretation of the Priestly creation narrative with "retrieval" and here he eventually allows Erets to tell her own story. Her story is a story of two parts. The first part of the story focuses on the partnership with Elohim and the second part is a dark story of intruders who are to oppress Erets and replace her by forming their own partnership with Elohim. It is a beautiful story of delight initially, but then great loss at the end. At the end of Genesis 1, it is clear that the text settles for the hierarchy of Elohim, humans, and only then Erets.

Habel (2011, 41) describes the blessing of the Sabbath as a "narrative coda" which "appears to be located outside the sequence of creation." Habel points out that previously blessing had been used to "activate life," but now time is blessed "with the inherent capacity to initiate, sustain, restore life." It is fascinating that Habel (2011, 42) shows that the focus of these verses "is not anthropocentric, but cosmic, embracing the completed separation of *shamayim* and *Erets* together with the celebration of divine rest!"

Habel (2011, 42–43) then explores three "Sabbath connections" in the rest of the Pentateuch. These are the two Decalogues in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, but also Leviticus 25–26 which is, of course, very relevant for the next part of this article. The Sabbath year in Leviticus 25:1–7 makes it possible for the land "to be made free to rejuvenate and restore its fertility." Habel mentions the importance of Leviticus 26, and we will return to his interpretation in the next section when we get to the relevant texts.

One could argue that there are some weaknesses in Habel's presentation of the Priestly creation narrative.[16] Mostly, he follows the story's final form and Habel's interpretation is strongly reminiscent of a narrative approach. Willie van Heerden (2014b, 563), after referring to the work of Habel (2011), argues that "few ecological interpretations of the Bible have grappled with the problem(s) to which the text may have been a response." I agree with Van Heerden that "considering the problem(s) to which the first creation account may have been a response also deserves our attention" and I will return to the historical issues at the end of this article, but Habel is more interested in the problems that the text causes now in our context, and not where it comes from. Habel's hermeneutic allows him to read from the perspective of Erets, irrespective of what ancient problems verses 26–28 wanted to solve,[17] and these verses do bring about a lot

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16   One weakness in Habel's argument is that he draws a lot from the work of Van Wolde (2009) who has argued that ברא has the same meaning as בדל. Van Wolde's interpretation has been questioned by some scholars. See, for instance, Becking and Korpel (2010). Habel (2011, 28) uses Van Wolde's interpretation to downplay God's creation role in Genesis 1:1. God's role is thus more about providing space into which Erets can be born later.

17   Van Heerden (2014b, 465), like many other scholars, uses the term "democratised" to refer to the arguments that these verses had the hegemonic power of ancient kings in their sights and suggested a world where power should be more evenly distributed amongst human beings. See the discussion in Schüle (2009, 43–45) and Meyer (2021, 263–64).

of change in the narrative. Habel was not the first scholar to identify an interruption in the text and Erets is clearly pushed aside by the human intruders.

The next part of this article focuses on the portrayal of Erets in the Holiness Legislation which, as we argued above, is usually regarded as having been produced by a later generation of Priestly authors. But before we investigate that text, one should first note that there are several clear differences between the Priestly creation narrative and the Holiness Legislation.

Erets Canaan as Remembered Partner in H

The first difference is that of genre. The Holiness Legislation stretches from Leviticus 17 to 26, and most of is a combination of casuistic and apodictic laws, with one short narrative in Leviticus 24. We will see that the most interesting texts are actually from the parenetic frame of the Holiness Legislation.[18] In short, if we talk of characters, we are stretching the meaning of the term a bit, since characters are usually associated with narrative texts.

Second, the "characters" do not have the same names. Elohim is now called YHWH.[19] Erets actually becomes Erets *kənaʿan*, or simply Canaan. We will call her Erets Canaan. She is not the earth anymore, but a smaller stretch of land which goes by other names as well, such as Palestine or Israel. In this regard I divert from Habel's (2011, 43) argument that "'Land' in this Leviticus passage [i.e., Lev 26, author] is the same word as *Erets* in Genesis 1." This is technically true, since the text mostly talks only of *ʾereṣ*, but in the context of the larger Holiness Legislation *ʾereṣ* clearly refers to Canaan. Habel does add that Erets in H is a "microcosm" of Erets in Genesis 1, which is a more accurate way of putting it. Erets Canaan is a subdivision of Erets, a smaller piece of her. The human "characters" are also different. They are not humanity anymore, but the "sons of Israel." They feature mostly as the addressees of these chapters and do not really have their own voice. The main change from Genesis 1 to Leviticus 17–26 is thus that the former is much more universal and the latter much more local.

Third, the Holiness Legislation is also part of the larger Sinai pericope. Israel, in the larger narrative of the Pentateuch, is still at Sinai where they are addressed. There are

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18 Otto (1999, 172–76) regards the following texts as parenetic: Leviticus 18:1–5, 24–30; 19:1–4; 20:7–8, 22–27; 22:8, 31–33; 15:18–19, 38, 42a, 55; 26:1–2. See also Rhyder (2018, 310n19) who adds Leviticus 19:19aα and 19:36b–37.

19 This change takes place in Exodus 6:2 which is where P starts to refer to God as YHWH. Before this he was Elohim (Gen 1) and El Shaddai (Gen 9 and 17). See the discussion of P in Ska (2006, 155) where he puts it as follows: "The God of the universe is Elohim; the God of Israel's ancestors is El Shaddai; YHWH is the God of the people of Israel."

also other important characters such as Moses and Aaron who often facilitate communication between YHWH and the "sons of Israel."

Below I will show that even though most of the text is not a narrative, the relationships between the three most important players are quite interesting compared to Habel's reading of Genesis 1. Quite a few scholars have shown that Erets Canaan is not a passive onlooker in the Holiness Legislation, although these scholars refer to it as "land." Thus Davis (2009, 100) describes the "land as a semi-autonomous moral agent." Morgan (2010, 78) agrees with Davis and argues that "Leviticus reflects a genuine, strange and yet profound recognition that land is not an inanimate object." Clayville (2013, 16), also in response to Davis, refers "to the land as simply a semiautonomous agent because 'moral' as a descriptor of the land itself implies that the land has consciousness, takes initiative in acting, and possibly that it reasons self-reflectively about its actions." Strawn (2012, 448) says that "the Land/Ground/Earth (הארץ) is the personified subject of the verb קיא." Of course, the question is why these scholars would portray the land as such and which texts their arguments are based on. The answer to the second half of the question is easy since all four of these scholars usually cite Leviticus 18:24–28 (or parts thereof) which we will take a closer look at below (Davis 2009, 100; Morgan 2010, 78; Clayville 2013, 17). In the next part I will offer support for their arguments by drawing on an earlier work of mine (Meyer 2015).

Meyer (2015, 436–38) first makes the point that land can refer to three kinds of places or "countries" in the Holiness Legislation. These are Egypt (אֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם),[20] Canaan (אֶרֶץ־כְּנַעַן),[21] and "the land of your enemies" (אֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיכֶם).[22] Basically, as part of the larger Sinai pericope, the addressees are on their way from Egypt, which was a bad place of slavery, to Canaan, which is the good land that YHWH is about to give to them. As mentioned before, we will refer to land as "her" and as Erets Canaan, but one should note that references to Canaan specifically are only found in the three cited texts. Yet, because Canaan is introduced in 18:3, it is clear from the rest of the text that references to "Erets" or "land" in the rest of the Holiness Legislation and especially in the parenetic frame all refer to Canaan. "The land of your enemies" lurks in the future if the addressees failed to abide by all the prescriptions. The latter only features in Leviticus 26. YHWH makes this journey between an oppressive land and a promised land possible as Leviticus 25:38, for instance, spells out (NRSV). This is the third reference to "Land of Canaan":

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20 Leviticus 11:45; 18:3; 19:34, 36; 22:33; 23:43; 25:38, 42, 55; 26:13, 45.
21 Leviticus 14:34; 18:3 and 25:38.
22 Leviticus 26: 36, 38, 39, 41 and 44.

Leviticus 25:38 (NRSV)

> **38** I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (אֶרֶץ־מִצְרָיִם), to give you the land of Canaan (אֶרֶץ־כְּנַעַן), to be your God.

In the third section of Meyer's (2015, 438–442) article he focuses on cases where land is grammatically the subject of a verb. He does this to argue that at times there is an element of "personification" to the portrayal of the land, especially when Erets Canaan is the subject of a verb of which humans are usually the subject. Erets Canaan is the subject of seven different verbs and some of these examples support the idea of personification stronger than others. These seven are "becoming unclean" (*qal* of טמא),[23] "spitting out" (*hiphil* of קיא),[24] "prostitutes herself" (*qal* of זנה),[25] "rests" (*qal* of שבת),[26] "gives" (*qal* of נתן),[27] "takes pleasure" (*qal* of רצה),[28] and "eats" (*qal* of אכל).

Meyer (2015, 439) acknowledges that the verb "to become unclean" (*qal* of טמא) does not add much weight to the argument for personification. Although humans are often the subject of the verb, inanimate objects or animals can also do the same. For instance, Leviticus 11:32–36 mentions different kinds of material that "become unclean" when they come into contact with the carcasses of certain animals. Other examples include Leviticus 14:36 where "all that is in the house" (NRSV) will become unclean. In Chapter 15 quite a few examples of inanimate objects becoming unclean are given, including "every bed" (v. 4), "any saddle" (v. 9), "everything made of cloth or of skin" (v. 17), and "everything upon which" a woman with blood flow lies (v. 20). Thus, different kinds of material and things such as a saddle can become unclean, and in that sense Meyer does have a point to warn against putting too much weight on these examples. Yet he does not mention here that scholars generally refer to two kinds of impurity, namely ritual or physical impurity on the one hand and moral impurity on the other.[29] All the examples just mentioned are cases of physical impurity, whereas what takes place in Chapter 18 is a clear example of sexual sins, which is an example of moral impurity, along with idolatry and murder (Klawans 2000, 26). Moral impurity is usually something regarded as typical of H and altogether absent in P (Klawans 2000, 26–28). Leviticus 18 is clearly a long list of apodictic sexual taboos. Verses 6 to 18 are about incest taboos and verses 19 to 23 add broader sexual regulations. In verse 20, we read of the male addressee becoming unclean (*qal* of טמא) by sleeping with his neighbour's wife. In verse 23, we read that sexual relations with an animal will also make the addressee unclean (*qal* of טמא). The point is that becoming unclean because of illicit

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23 Leviticus 18:25 and 27.

24 Leviticus 18:25, 28(x2) and 20:22.

25 Leviticus 19:29.

26 Leviticus 25:2, 26:34, 35(x2).

27 Leviticus 25:19, 26:4 and 20.

28 Leviticus 26:34(x2) and 43.

29 The essay by Nihan (2013, 311–67) provides one of the best overviews of this debate. Nihan (2013, 321) prefers to talk of "physical" impurity rather than "ritual" impurity.

sexual relations is a typically *human* thing, and this is also what happens to Erets Canaan, which means an argument for personification can be made after all. Previous inhabitants committed all of these (בְּכָל־אֵלֶּה) sexual practices, became defiled themselves (v. 24) and Erets Canaan was defiled as a result. The two examples of the land becoming unclean are found in 18:25 and 27, and these texts are intertwined with other instances which add further support to the argument. The last seven verses from Chapter 18, which are usually regarded as part of the parenetic frame, are worth citing. All the parts where the land is the subject of the verb are underlined:

Leviticus 18:24–30 (NRSV)

> **24** Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. **25** Thus the land became defiled (טמא); and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out (קיא) its inhabitants. **26** But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you **27** (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled (טמא)); **28** otherwise the land will vomit you out (קיא) for defiling it, as it vomited out (קיא) the nation that was before you. **29** For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from their people. **30** So keep my charge not to commit any of these abominations that were done before you, and not to defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.

This text includes those cases where the land "spits out" or "vomits out" its inhabitants and this verb strengthens the argument for personification further since of the eight examples of this verb in the Hebrew Bible, only humans and the land are the subject with one exception being the book of Jonah's rather large fish (Meyer 2015, 439). We already saw that Davis, Morgan, Clayville, and Strawn were referring to some of these verses when they made their arguments for personification. Strawn (2012) actually engages specifically with these examples from Jonah and Leviticus 18, but also Leviticus 20. Strawn (2012, 449) says that the "term is visceral, physical, and related to serious illness."

The third verb, to "prostitute oneself," makes the case even stronger since "human beings are always the subject of the verb," except for the one time (Lev 19:29) that the land prostitutes itself (Meyer 2015, 439). Meyer (2015, 440–42) then provides four further verbs (אכל, רצה, נתן, שבת) where land functions as the subject of the verb. Of these אכל is probably not the strongest case, since fire can also be the subject of this verb when it consumes sacrifices or erring priests (Lev 6:3, 9:24 and 10:2). In Leviticus it is the land of the enemies that potentially consumes the addressees and this text clearly refers to exile (26:38). The verb שבת occurs five times in Leviticus in *qal*. In four of

these texts Erets is the subject,[30] and the addressees are the subject only once.[31] The verb רצה is a much more complicated case since it could potentially have two meanings.[32] In Chapter 26 the subject of the verb is either the addressees or Erets. When the addressees are the subject of the verb it has the negative meaning of "pay" or "make amends," but when the land is the subject of the verb it has the positive meaning of "enjoy." On three occasions land is also the subject of the verb נתן (25:19; 26:4, 20), but also the trees can be the subject of this verb (26:4, 20). I would like to explore these examples further since they seem to be the most reminiscent of Habel's portrayal of the partnership between God and Erets in Genesis 1. Leviticus 25:19 reads as follows:

Leviticus 25:19 (NRSV)

The land will yield (נתן) its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely.

Erets is portrayed as the provider of food and the addressees will be able to eat from what the land will "give." This verse is reminiscent of Genesis 1:29 which is part of Habel's Scene Nine, where Erets also has to provide for the intruding human beings. Yet there Elohim is the subject of the verb נתן and here it is Erets Canaan. The use of the verb נתן in itself seems like a very common-sense way in which people whose lives depend on eating from the land would portray their relationship with the land. This verse is probably not the strongest argument for personalisation, unless one argues that, compared to Genesis 1:29 where Elohim provides, that responsibility lies now with Erets Canaan in Leviticus 25. The next example also strengthens the case:

Leviticus 26:4 (NRSV)

I will give (נתן) you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield (נתן) its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield (נתן) their fruit.

This verse is from the second pericope of Leviticus 26, which most scholars argue includes verses 3–13.[33] These verses spell out how good life will be on the land if the addressees were to keep all the statutes and commandments that YHWH expects of them. The verb נתן is used three times to describe a chain reaction in which YHWH provides rain, the land provides its produce, and the trees provide their fruit. It seems that the partnership with YHWH has been renewed since YHWH and Erets Canaan seem to be working in tandem to take care of the addressees. When Habel (2011, 33) discusses Scene Four (vv. 11–13) of Genesis 1 he describes it as follows:

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30 Leviticus 25:2; 26:34, 35(x2).
31 Leviticus 23:32. In this case the verb is second person plural.
32 Meyer (2015, 441) provides a more detailed discussion of this issue in which he draws extensively from Hieke (2014b, 1052). See also Milgrom (2001, 2273–74).
33 See, for instance, Milgrom (2001, 2290), Nihan (2007, 542–43), or Hieke (2014b, 1055).

Elohim now speaks to the 'newborn' *Erets* and summons her to come alive, replete with all the vegetation typical of land; Erets comes to life by generating a range of plants complete with seeds that will enable regeneration. The immediate source of this plant life is not strictly the command of Elohim, but Erets—Erets is a *partner* with Elohim in the creation process, a cocreator [my italics].

What Habel does not mention is that grammatically in verses 11 and 12 Erets is also the subject of certain verbs as is clear from verse 12:

Genesis 1:12 (NRSV)

12 The earth <u>brought forth</u> (*hiphil* of יצא) vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.

Erets is not often the subject of a verb in Genesis 1, only in verses 2, 11, 12 and 24. Verse 24 is part of Habel's (2011, 34) Scene Seven in which land creatures emanate from Erets, once again in response to a word from YHWH. But one could argue that just as Erets is "co-creator" in scenes four and seven of Genesis 1, she is "co-provider" in Leviticus 26:3–13. This means that where Erets is portrayed as a forgotten partner at the end of Genesis 1, at the end of Leviticus, especially in Chapter 26, she has made a comeback and seems to be partnering with YHWH again. However, the task at hand is not creating but providing.

Leviticus 26 takes a negative turn from verse 14 onwards: the text spells out what will happen if the addressees are disobedient. The rest of the chapter spells out what punishment the addressees can expect to receive, and the chapter only takes a positive turn from verse 42 again. But Erets Canaan also plays a role in the punishment as verse 20 shows (NRSV):

Your strength shall be spent to no purpose: your land shall not yield (נתן) its produce, and the trees of the land shall not yield (נתן) their fruit.

Partnering with YHWH is not clear from this verse, but what is clear is that Erets Canaan plays a role in punishing the addressees. This verse becomes a mirror image of verse 4, but here is no mention of the rain which YHWH provided in that verse. It is also slightly ironic that Erets is described as "your land," implying a close relationship between Erets Canaan and the addressees, but in a context of Erets Canaan withholding her life-giving produce from the addressees it seems more like proverbial salt in the wounds. We have already mentioned an earlier example of the land playing a role in the punishment of the addressees, namely Leviticus 18:25; when the land became defiled, YHWH punished it and as a result Erets Canaan spat out the inhabitants. Once again the term "chain reaction" comes to mind, but the end result is that Erets Canaan acts as a kind of enforcer for YHWH.

I would like to make one last point about the implication of Leviticus 26 for Erets Canaan. As Meyer (2015, 441) hints, Erets Canaan is also the main beneficiary of the addressees being in exile and the following verse shows that best:

Leviticus 26:34 (NRSV)

> Then the land <u>shall enjoy</u> (*qal* of רצה) its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land <u>shall rest</u> (*qal* of שבת), and <u>enjoy</u> (*qal* of רצה) its sabbath years.

This verse combines two of Meyer's (2015) seven verbs. The NRSV also translates רצה with a very positive meaning of רצה. In the previous pericope, verses 27–33 spell out the devastating consequences of the addressees not obeying the stipulations. A dismal picture of the addressees' destruction and exile is painted, but Erets Canaan is the main beneficiary of this total destruction. The removal of the human addressees leaves Erets Canaan in a very favourable situation.

Leviticus 26 takes a more positive turn in verse 40, positive, that is, for the human addressees. It states that if they were to confess (*hithpael* of ידה) their iniquities, and make amends for their iniquities (vv. 40–41), then the following will happen:

Leviticus 26:42 (NRSV)

> then will I remember my covenant with Jacob; I will remember also my covenant with Isaac and also my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

It is fascinating that apart from the covenant with the ancestors, YHWH also remembers the land, or then Erets Canaan. Verse 43 again refers to Erets Canaan enjoying "her sabbaths." So, although verses 42–45 are good news for the human addressees because their covenantal partnership with YHWH will be renewed, the land or Erets Canaan will not be forgotten again, but remembered. It seems that in future a partnership will consist of three partners and this kind of partnership seems to be vastly different from the lost partnership of Genesis 1 in Habel's interpretation of that text. Whereas the Priestly creation narrative concludes with a forgotten partnership between Elohim and Erets, the post-Priestly Holiness Legislation concludes with a partnership remembered. Erets Canaan is portrayed as a co-provider and co-enforcer in partnership with YHWH.

If one were to refer to Habel's definition of anthropocentrism as having two components of "hierarchy" and turning earth into an "object," it should be clear that the Holiness Legislation is much less anthropocentric. If one were to postulate a hierarchy from H, one could make a good case that Erets Canaan ranks above the addressees. Erets Canaan is after all also co-provider and co-enforcer. It should also be clear that Erets Canaan is much more than a mere object to be studied, or exploited, but a subject in her own right that should be feared and respected, a subject which enjoys the demise of the addressees. We have made this argument by starting with a simple syntactical question of where

Erets Canaan is the subject of a verb and whether these cases could bolster an argument for her "personification." We have not actually looked at the most obvious and often used text, Leviticus 25:23, which portrays the addressees as strangers in Erets Canaan and Erets Canaan as belonging to YHWH and not to humans.[34] One could also have drawn from debates on the meaning of the term *ʾaḥuzzāh*, which is always used in H to describe landownership, a term usually translated with "right to use" the land and not ownership as we would understand it today.

The question is: Why is Erets Canaan in a much better position at the end of H than Erets was at the end of the creation narrative in P?

Conclusion: Why Now Remembered?

My first inclination is to attempt a historical-critical argument, an inclination I am sure Willie van Heerden (2014b) would approve of. If H is dated to the second half of the Persian period, it means that it was written about two centuries after the land was lost in 586 BCE. Thus, one could argue that the authors of H had learned from their past and that losing the land had sensitised them to how vulnerable their position actually was on the land. This "reality check" on the ancient authors of H helped them reimagine their view of land. Therefore, Erets Canaan in H is a much more important and powerful character than Erets is in Genesis 1.

This argument's weakness is that the same scholars who usually date H to the second half of the Persian period date P to the first half of that same period. This means that P is much closer to the actual "reality check," namely the loss of the land. Or should we rather take our cue from Van Heerden (2014b, 564) who describes this experience as "being traumatised by a foreign ruler who subdued and dominated the people in exile." Is Genesis 1 thus more focused on the trauma caused by the neo-Babylonian king in general, than specifically the loss of the land? One would expect this insight of dependence on and vulnerability regarding the land to become more acute the closer one is to the event of losing the land, but here one presumably has a case of the insight of vulnerability becoming more acute the further one moves away from the catastrophe. This is not so simple either and the problem is the second difference that I identified above between H and P's creation narrative. Erets Canaan is not Erets. The former is a local subdivision of the latter. Genesis 1 presents a universal perspective of Erets or what we would call Earth, whereas H is concerned with Canaan. Furthermore, Genesis 1 is concerned with humanity and H is concerned with Israel.

Another fruitful comparison would have been between Erets Canaan in H and Erets Canaan in the Priestly sections of the patriarchal stories. But there are many differences.

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34   An excellent example would be Habel's (1995) earlier book which takes its title from Leviticus 25:23. Habel (1995, 97–114) offers a detailed discussion of the view of landownership in H.

A quick scan of mentions of Erets or Erets Canaan in the P parts of the Abraham story shows that Erets is never the subject of a verb and Erets is never portrayed as if in partnership with Elohim. Erets Canaan is usually something given (Gen 17:8), or a place where Abraham arrives (Gen 12:5) and stays (Gen 13:12), thus an object.[35] Yet there are some similarities.

In an essay by Jakob Wöhrle (2010) and an article by Blenkinsopp (2009), both paint a picture of Abraham the immigrant who does not claim the land of Canaan, but who goes about negotiating and buying land. Both of them argue that Abraham functions as an example or paradigm (Blenkinsopp's term) for Judah's returned exiles in the early Persian period. The relationship between the returnees and the land is precarious. The returnees believe that they are the rightful owners, but other people are living there. These people are the Judeans who were not taken into exile. With regard to Canaan, Wöhrle (2010, 193n15) points out that Canaan is only mentioned in the P parts of the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob narratives and not in the non-P parts. He also follows Frevel (2000, 363–64) in arguing that "land of Canaan" here has a connotation of "land in foreign hands." Wöhrle (2010, 199) also thinks that there is uncertainty among the returnees about the land promise and whether it is still applicable. He argues that the promise gets renewed for every one of the patriarchs and the message for the returnees is that although they lost the land, the promise will be renewed for them, too. But the point is that the P parts of the patriarchal narratives (especially of Abraham) paint a picture of an uncertain relationship with the land and that access to the land of Canaan cannot be taken for granted. This uncertainty sounds a lot like the picture painted above in our reading of Erets Canaan in H. Yet the differences are much more glaring. The anxiety about land reflects a deeply anthropocentric perspective in which Erets Canaan is nothing more than an object.

It should thus be clear that the most important texts in the Pentateuch produced by priests (even of different generations) that have the potential to break through stifling anthropocentrism are the first creation narrative and H. In the former, the partnership with Elohim is eventually broken, but it returns stronger than ever in H.

It is still difficult to imagine why the authors of H gave so much power to Erets Canaan, but this is the same text often lauded for its ethical content and its openness towards strangers. From our modern-day ecological crisis, it should be clear that how H views Erets Canaan is much less anthropocentric than Genesis 1.

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35   References to Canaan in the Abraham narrative can be found in Genesis 11:1, 31; 12:5 (x2); 13:12; 16:3; 17:8; 23:2, 19.

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