



Report of the Joint Meeting 2018

Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception

Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België
The Society for Old Testament Study (United Kingdom)
Die Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap van Suid Afrika

22–24 August 2018
Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Groningen, Oude Boteringestraat 38, Court Room

The Joint Meeting 2018 of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap (OTW), the Society for Old Testament Study (SOTS), and the Old Testament Society of South Africa (OTWSA/OTSSA) focused on texts of violence in the Hebrew Bible, as well as their often problematic reception history. Point of departure was the observation that authoritative texts and traditions can be rewritten and adapted to new circumstances and insights. Texts are subject to a process of change. The study of the way in which these (authoritative) Biblical texts are produced and/or received in varying socio-historical circumstances discloses a range of theological and ideological perspectives. In reflecting on these issues, the central question was how to allow for the plurality of possible and realized meanings of a given text, while retaining the ability to form critical judgments regarding Biblical exegesis.

The papers at the conference studied this question by concentrating on general issues and on the meaning and reception history of important texts from all parts in the Hebrew Bible, that is, the Torah, the Former Prophets, the Later Prophets, and the Writings, and by using a variety of methodological approaches: semantic analysis, synchronic and diachronic literary analysis, ancient Near Eastern comparative research, reception history, reader-response criticism, post-colonial criticism, and intercultural contextual qualitative research.

The Joint Meeting 2018 was the 230th meeting of the OTW, the 17th Joint Meeting of OTW and SOTS, the 3rd Joint Meeting of OTW and OTWSA/OTSSA, and the 1st of OTW, SOTS, and OTWSA/OTSSA. Because the Joint Meeting 2018 was a great success, the president of the OTW proposed to explore the possibility to integrate the OTSSA within the system of Joint Meetings between the OTW and OTSSA. Both the president of the OTSSA and the secretary

of the SOTS were in principle positive with regard to this suggestion. As a first step, both the board of OTW and of the OTSSA will submit a proposal to their members. If they agree, a formal request will be sent to the board of the SOTS.

Funds and sponsors

The conference was made possible by generous grants of the Royal Academy of Sciences in the Netherlands (KNAW); Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Groningen; Theological University of Apeldoorn; and the Theological University of Kampen.



KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE
AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN



Participation

58 scholars from 3 continents and 12 countries participated in the Joint Meeting 2018: 27 OTW-members, 12 SOTS-members, 15 OTWSA/OTSSA-members, and 4 junior researchers.

In alphabetical order (including institutional affiliation):

James K. Aitken (Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge), Miracle Ajah (Stellenbosch University / National Open University of Nigeria), Hans Ausloos (Louvain la Neuve), Bob Becking (University of Utrecht) Koert van Bekkum (Evangelical Theological Faculty Leuven / Theological University Kampen), Willem Boshoff (University of South Africa), Wim de Bruin (Protestant Church, Stolwijk), Ntozakhe Cezula (University of Stellenbosch), David J.A. Clines (University of Sheffield), Alice Deken (University of Free State), Jaap Dekker (Theological University Kampen), June F. Dicki (University of KwaZulu-Natal), Meindert Dijkstra (Utrecht University), Jaap van Dorp (Dutch Bible Society), Katie Edwards (University of Sheffield), Elelwani Farisani (University of South Africa), Stefan Fischer (Bloemfontein / University of Vienna), Hallgard Hagelia (Ansgar Teologiske Høgskole), Raymond de Hoop (Protestant Church, Oudewater), Izaak de Hulster (University of Helsinki), Jack David Kawira (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Hans Kocken (Catholic University Leuven), Arie van der Kooi (Leiden University), Marjo Korpel (Protestant Theological University), Gert Kwakkel (Theological University Kampen / Faculté Jean Calvin Aix-en-Provence), Bénédicte Lemmeliijn (Catholic University Leuven), Magdel le Roux (University of South Africa), Catherine Lewis-Smith (University of Cambridge), Christo Lombaard (University of South Africa), Pieter van der Lugt (Independent scholar), Matthew J. Lynch (Westminster Theological College), Tsauryi K. Mapfeka (King's College London), Heather A. McKay (Edge Hill University), Michaël van der Meer (Protestant Theological University),

Johannes de Moor (Protestant Theological University), Eric Peels (Theological University Apeldoorn), Ivan A. Raharjo (Theological University Apeldoorn), Arjo Riemer (Theological University Kampen), Wolter Rose (Theological University Kampen / University of Groningen), Jacques van Ruiten (University of Groningen), Paul Sanders (Protestant Theological University), Eben Scheffler (University of South Africa), Anne-Mareike Schol-Wetter (Dutch Bible Society), David Shepherd (Trinity College Dublin), Stephanus Daniel Snyman (University of Free State), Klaas Spronk (Protestant Theological University), Johanna Stiebert (University of Leeds), Lodewyk Sutton (University of Free State), Angela Thomas (Retired), Arie Versluis (Theological University Apeldoorn), Christiane de Vos (EKD, Theological Education), Cor de Vos (University of Münster), Karel Vriezen (Utrecht University), Henk de Waard (Theological University Apeldoorn), Wilhelm J. Wessels (University of South Africa), Hugh Williamson (University of Oxford), Hans-Georg Wünnch (Theologisches Seminar Rheinland / University of South Africa), Pieter van der Zwan (University of South Africa).



Papers Read

I VIOLENCE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: GENERAL REFLECTIONS

Jacques van Ruiten (University of Groningen), *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception*

David J.A. Clines (University of Sheffield), *The Ubiquitous Language of Violence in the Hebrew Bible*

Heather A. McKay (Edge Hill University), *Violence with Humour: Is this Possible in the Hebrew Bible?*

II VIOLENCE IN THE TORAH: TEXT AND RECEPTION

Christo Lombaard (University of South Africa), *The Murderous God of the Akedah in Three Recent Public Discourses: a British Popular Anti-Religious Book, a US TV Series and a South African Poem (Or: Criteria for Godhood and Faith in Secular Media)*

Miracle Ajah (National Open University of Nigeria), *Narratives of Violence in Numbers 25: Between Text and Reception*

III VIOLENCE IN THE FORMER PROPHETS: TEXT AND RECEPTION

J. Cornelis de Vos (University of Münster), *Violence in the Book of Joshua*

Ntozakhe Cezula (University of Stellenbosch), *Two Poles of the Exodus: Conquest the Oppressive Pole as Depicted in Joshua 6:21*

June F. Dickie (University of KwaZulu-Natal), *Jael: Mighty Hero, Exemplary Egalitarian, or Slippery Man-Slayer? Perspectives of Interpretation Then and Now of Judges 4–5*

Catherine Lewis-Smith (University of Cambridge), *Was Samson's Mother Raped? How Sexual Violence is Handled in Critical Responses to Judges 13*

David Shepherd (Trinity College, Dublin), *'Put Him to Death for the Life of his Brother': the Problem of Bloodguilt and the Peculiar Death of Absalom*

Paul Sanders (Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam), *Sevenfold Assassination Appeasing God and Humans: 2 Samuel 21*

Izaak de Hulster (University of Helsinki), *YHWH's War with Whom? Foreign Deities and the Biblical Portrayal of Kings*

III VIOLENCE IN THE LATER PROPHETS: TEXT AND RECEPTION

Eric Peels (Theological University Apeldoorn), *Divine Tears because of Divine Violence? God's Lament in the Oracle against Moab in Jeremiah 48*

Willem S. Boshoff (University of South Africa), *Between Violence and Pornography in Revenge: Hosea 2:4–15 (Heb) and the Shift from one Perpetrator to Another*

Wim de Bruin (Stolwijk), *Reading the Book of Micah as Mediation between two Perspectives on the Enemy*

Wilhelm J. Wessels (University of South Africa), *A Critical Reflection on the Presentation and Reception of YHWH as a Violent Deity in the Book of Nahum*

III VIOLENCE IN THE WRITINGS: TEXT AND RECEPTION

Matthew J. Lynch (Westminster Theological Centre), *Scheming Violence in the Psalms*

Arie Versluis (Theological University Apeldoorn), *Happy is the One Who Dashes Your Infants Against the Rocks': Reception History and Theological Interpretation of Psalm 137:9*
Tsauryi K. Mapfeka (King's College London), *The Massacres in Susa and Beyond: The Bloodbath of Esther 9 as Reflective of Life in Diaspora*

Publication

The papers of the Joint Meeting 2018 will be submitted for publication in a volume of the series *Oudtestamentische Studiën* (Brill), which will be peer-reviewed. Revised papers of max. 8000 words to be sent by December 1st, 2018 to Jacques van Ruiten (j.t.a.g.m.van.ruiten@rug.nl). Style-guide: *Chicago Manual of Style* and [Brill's Author Guide](#).

Meals and Cultural Trip

Wednesday's buffet dinner was in the choir of the Der Aa-Kerk in Groningen. Other lunches and dinners were at Central Hall of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Groningen. During a cultural break on Thursday afternoon, the participants of the conference visited the Romanesque churches of Bierum, Oosterwiltwerd and Garmerwolde in the Groningen countryside, guided by a tour guide of the Stichting Oude Groninger Kerken.

Organization

OTW-Board: Jacques van Ruiten (University of Groningen) and Koert van Bekkum (Evangelical Faculty Leuven / Theological University Kampen), with the support of the staff of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen.

Abstracts contributions and short CV's contributors

Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception (Jacques van Ruiten)

The president of the OTW and chair of the Joint Meeting 2018 introduces the theme of the conference, its methodological complexities, and its relevance for Twenty-First century CE worldwide academia and society.

The Ubiquitous Language of Violence in the Hebrew Bible (David J.A. Clines)

This paper aims to identify and categorize terms for violence in Hebrew, as a foundation for further study of the use of violence. I am understanding violence as the deliberate use of physical force against another, and especially against the body of another. I will survey terms for actions such as to: 1. Destroy, oppress, show violence, 2. Kill, slaughter, 3. Strike, 4. Break, break bones, break the neck 5. Crush, 6. Pierce, thrust through, wound, 7. Cut, cut off, cut into pieces, and 8. Seize, bind. I will not include war, warrior, fight, burn, capture, circumcise; and other terms for hostility that do not necessarily include violence: e.g. reject, despise, mock, curse, hate, abhor, loathe. My preliminary list of terms for violence has 235 items (1.8% of the total vocabulary of Classical Hebrew), occurring in the Hebrew Bible a total of 5,400 times (1.8% of the Hebrew Bible). I will analyse how many of these terms and occurrences relate to violence against persons. And I will prepare, as a control, a corresponding list of terms (with their occurrences) for groups of non-violent actions such as desire, love, hope, comfort.

Violence with Humour: Is this Possible in the Hebrew Bible? (Heather A. McKay)

Is violence humorous in the Hebrew Bible? Admittedly, not often, and even then the humour is rather black, or very black indeed. At other times it is merely, wry. Sometimes, the humour is inherent in the story itself, sometimes only evident, or more evident, when compared with an intertext, and sometimes when the discerning reader recognises what a subtle author or editor is doing with the story as it unfolds. Of course, it is also possible that such humour lies in the eyes of the beholder, but there are various places where humorous violence may be visible; taken together they are a heady mixture of human and divine violence: Abraham's argument over the destruction of Sodom, Jacob's fight at the Jabbok, Dinah's brothers' deceitful plan, the fate of the Golden Calf, the fate of Jezebel, the self-harming of Ezra, the other-harming of Nehemiah, and the fate of the castor oil plant.

The Murderous God of the Akedah in Three Recent Public Discourses: a British Popular Anti-Religious Book, a US TV Series and a South African Poem (Or: Criteria for Godhood and Faith in Secular Media) (Christo Lombaard)

Genesis 22 relates the psychologically disturbing account of how God instructs Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a token of devotion. Apart from roughly two and a half millennia

of interpretative wrangling with this text and two centuries of academic scholarship on it, this account keeps recurring in various ways in modern media too. Three such 'publications' are here taken into review: a section of the popular 2006 book *The God Delusion* by British biologist Richard Dawkins; an interchange between two of the main characters in the US TV crime series *Bones* (series 2, episode 2); and a 2016-published poem called 'Sacrificium' by South African poet Lina Spies in her most recent poetry volume, *Sulamiet*.

In these three public fora, which may be placed variously on a continuum between religion-positive and religion-negative views, the problem of the murderous God of the Genesis 22 account is in each instance treated differently, and creatively so. Interestingly, and unintentionally, in these treatments (as in many others) implicit criteria on the part of the authors are revealed of what would in public discourse be acceptable for acknowledgeable Godhood and/or by further implication for legitimate faith. Identifying these and other implicit criteria are of importance in placing on a clearer footing the often binary religion-positive / religion-negative discourse within publicly secular societies. In turn, such greater clarity tends to indicate that the rhetoric employed in this debate frequently stem not from the oppositioning of 'religious' and 'non-religious' points of view, but from two equally religious orientations, though of opposing perspectives regarding the phenomenon of faith.

Narratives of Violence in Numbers 25: Between Text and Reception (Miracle Ajah)

The injunction in Numbers 25:7 'Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them' (NIV), appears to give impetus for imperialism, holy war, nepotism and genocide. The narratives of violence in Numbers 25 and other places in the Hebrew Bible, apparently conflict with the gospel of grace, love, peace, and forgiveness found in the New Testament. While some will quickly move to justify the texts, not dealing with the understandably troubling nature of the narratives, others will simply write them off as obsolete. This paper understands the complex literary and canonical context in which such passages appear and because of the incongruity between ancient Israelite culture and the cultures of readers today. How can a modern reader interpret the narratives of violence today without giving credence to arms conflict? This paper adopts a socio-historical approach and content analysis of relevant literature in studying our given text. It argues that the complexity of the material with regard to violence in Numbers 25 can affirm that it opposes violence, but views peace as ultimate goal.

Violence in the Book of Joshua (Cor de Vos, University of Münster)

The authors of the book of Joshua do not seem to have any problems with violence neither of humans against humans nor of God against humans.

However, there are a few texts, especially the rather ironical chapters 2 and 9, that appear to betray a different view. It looks as if the protagonists do not want to exterminate all inhabitants of the land or even deliberately want to be deceived in order to avoid extermination. Did the authors of the book of Joshua have some problems with violence after all?

Two Poles of the Exodus: Conquest the Oppressive Pole as Depicted in Joshua 6:21 (Ntozakhe Cezula)

The Exodus movement ranges between the poles of liberation and oppression. The departure from Egypt was the liberation of the Israelites from the Egyptians. The arrival in Canaan was the oppression of the Canaanites by the Israelites. Scholars have not shown willingness to engage the Exodus comprehensively. The South American and African theologies of liberation have focused on the departure from Egypt to embrace the Exodus as a liberation movement. The Palestinian and the Native American theologies of liberation have focused on the conquest to reject the Exodus as an oppressive, violent movement. This paper suggests that a comprehensive engagement with the Exodus can turn out to be fruitful for both liberation movements and newly liberated nations.

Because this paper originates from South Africa, it is definitely acquainted with the liberation dimension of the Exodus. As already indicated, the African liberation theology has mostly tended to turn a blind eye to the oppressive and violent conquest. It is, therefore, the intention of this paper to engage with the conquest part of the Exodus. The hope is that such an engagement can inspire new insights concerning the Conquest as a process that can contribute positively to the phenomenon of liberation. Specifically, Joshua 6:21, as a violent verse, will be the focus of the paper.

Jael: Mighty Hero, Exemplary Egalitarian, or Slippery Man-Slayer? Perspectives of Interpretation Then and Now of Judges 4–5 (June Dickie)

Jael (from the account of her actions in Judges 4–5) has been viewed in many ways, including a courageous hero, a woman who challenged the gender-stereotypes, and as a cruel murderer. However, a literary-rhetorical study of the song in Judg 5 indicates another purpose of the accounts, one that is not related to her character. Rather a more compelling interpretation (Wong, 2007) is that the two texts, particularly the song, were composed to stir the non-participating tribes to unite with the rest of Israel in battle against the enemy. The song is not a typical victory song as seen in the Ancient Near East (Hurlbert, 2016). Rather the literary context builds to a climax with the dramatic description of Jael's actions. For Israel at that time, Jael was a hero. But how do women today view Jael's 'violent act'? For this paper, two groups in South Africa study Judg 4–5 and perform it in their own languages, with particular focus on the texts relating to Jael (4:17–22, 5:24–27). The first group is Coloured women growing up in the violence of the Cape Flats, some of whom deal

with 'violent men' in their lives through manslaughter. The second group is (educated) refugee women from Francophone Africa, who have traditional African values of submission to men. The study looks at their interpretations of Jael's actions, and evaluates them in the light of the Hebrew text.

Was Samson's Mother raped? How Sexual Violence is Handled in Critical Responses to Judges 13 (Catherine Lewis-Smith)

Contemporary critical reception of Judges 13 (including Adele Reinhartz, Mark Zvi Brettler, Philippe Guillaume and George Savran) supposes a sexual encounter between the unnamed woman of Judg 13 and *mal'ak YHWH*, turning on the pregnant possibility of the woman's report 'a man of God came to me' (13:6). The critics imagine a consensual sexual encounter, or even the happy cuckoldry of a Shakespearian plot, and yet reach to the rape legislation of Deut 22:25–27 to ground these readings. Can we be satisfied with a critical manoeuvre that conjures consensuality from a statutory acceptance of a rural woman's vulnerability to rape? If the rape statutes are our intertext, should we also re-read the nuance of her testimony that the man had a fearful appearance, and find threat in her urgent running for her husband upon the stranger's return? This paper will focus on the reception of sexual ethics and legal frameworks in contemporary scholarship and the responsibility of the critic in minimizing sexual violence in defending a comedic plot.

'Put Him to Death for the Life of his Brother': the Problem of Bloodguilt and the Peculiar Death of Absalom (David Shepherd)

Any reader acquainted with character of Joab in 2 Samuel can hardly be surprised when he supervises the execution of David's rebellious son, Absalom. However, given David's instructions to 'deal gently with the young man for my sake' (2 Sam 18:5), what is perhaps more surprising is just how ungenerally Absalom is killed, even by Joab's cold-blooded standards. If this much is obvious from the text, various peculiarities and questions remain: why does the narrative make mention of Absalom's head being caught in a tree? What is the significance of Joab's intervention in thrusting Absalom through whilst he's hanging and still alive? Indeed, why is the *coup de grâce* (if that is what it is) delivered by no-less than ten of Joab's armour-bearers? As part of a wider project, this brief paper seeks to offer some new answers to these and other questions by considering the ways in which Absalom's ill-fated career and ultimately his death are animated by the problem of bloodguilt explored in the books of Samuel.

Sevenfold Assassination Appeasing God and Humans: 2 Samuel 21 (Paul Sanders)

2 Sam 21 justifies David's decision to allow seven descendants of Saul to be killed by the Gibeonites. Saul's previous slaying of some Gibeonites had aroused God's anger, which manifested itself in a famine that lasted for three consecutive years. After the killing of

Saul's innocent sons and grandsons, not only the fury of the Gibeonites but also the anger of God was appeased. The narrative calls attention to the suffering of Rizpah, a concubine of Saul, whose two sons were among the victims. However, the story is also quite uncritical of God's and David's approval of the assassination of Saul's descendants. How can this be explained? A new comparison with other Biblical passages as well as the plague prayers of the Hittite king Muršili II makes it much easier to answer this question.

YHWH's War with Whom? Foreign Deities and the Biblical Portrayal of Kings (Izaak de Hulster)

Even when the books of Kings mention foreign deities (e.g., 2 Kgs 5:18; 2 Kgs 17:30–31) and refer to foreign kings with theophoric names (such as Ben-Hadad), in several stories of military confrontation the foreign deities seem absent (such as 1 Kgs 20MT). Did biblical authors intentionally leave out foreign deities of the enemy (cf. 2 Kgs 18:32b–35)? How does their absence influence the narrative? Taking 1 Kgs 20MT and 2 Kgs 18–19 as examples, this paper examines the question of whether two foreign kings are represented as direct enemies of YHWH by the biblical authors. Without mentioning their deities, this narrative portrayal would rank these kings in the same divine tier as YHWH. Is this to underline the foreign kings' arrogance? What might other (intended) effects on the perception of foreign deities and foreign kings be? Or possibly even on Israelite kings who 'did evil in the sight of the Lord'?

Divine Tears because of Divine Violence? God's Lament in the Oracle against Moab in Jeremiah 48 (Eric Peels)

Among the 'texts of terror', the oracles against the nations stand out as documents which vehemently attest human and divine violence. In the collection of these oracles in the book of Jeremiah, the prophecy concerning Moab (Jer 48) with its extraordinary length and its remarkable accumulation of reused prophetic material (from, e.g., Isa 15–16) proclaims a merciless divine judgment. Central to this peculiar composition is the curse 'on him who keeps his sword from bloodshed' (vs 10). There is no future left for Moab, a total annihilation is envisaged (vs 42). According to Bernard Duhm, the *Judentum* had a low esteem of the prophet Jeremiah in attributing to him this badly composed, pseudo-prophetic text full of hatred.

An intriguing feature in this chapter, however, is that this oracle, much more than the others in the section Jer 46–49, has a theological interest. The prophetic announcement of Moab's destruction shows an idiosyncratic alternation of judgment and lament. Both divine fierce anger and his regret, divine judgment and his wailing over Moab, are part of the oracle. How is this language of divine grief to be interpreted? As an 'ironic inversion of the lamentation' (Jones) or as a sign of divine compassion (Fretheim)? Does it create a new theology (Fischer: 'der weinende König der Nationen'), or is it the result of editorial activity

by postexilic Jewish scribes expressing their solidarity with the suffering of the nations? (Kegler: 'menschliches Betroffensein').

The analysis of this particular phenomenon is expected to shed new light on the theological evaluation of the divine violence in the oracles against the nations.

Between Violence and Pornography in Revenge: Hosea 2:4–15 (Heb) and the Shift from One Perpetrator to Another (Willem S. Boshoff)

The brief narrative of revenge against an unfaithful wife in Hos 2:4–15 (Heb) commences as a court procedure (cf. *rib*-terminology). The accusation becomes a threat against the woman who is accused of being adulterous and the imagery is pornographic. Gradually the role of perpetrator shifts from the husband Hosea to the god YHWH, and the accused changes from the wife Gomer to people of Israel. In the interpretation history of this text, a variety of approaches have been presented, but neither the violence nor the pornography – depending on how the events are perceived, sits comfortable on the pages of commentaries or monographs on the prophet or the theme.

The book of Hosea is an authoritative prophetic text, also known to be a witness to the love of God (Hos 11). In this paper, I will approach the text from different historical situations, utilising iconographical material, to establish how the text may have originated. A further question is whether the text can be salvaged, to maintain authority in a situation where gender-based violence is the order of the day and where the text seems to convey the wrong message.

Reading the Book of Micah as Mediation between two Perspectives on the Enemy (Wim de Bruin)

As commonly known, different sequences of books of the so-called Minor Prophets have been transmitted in canonical traditions as the Greek Septuagint and the Hebrew Masoretic text. In several studies it has been demonstrated that these sequences are not arbitrary. Both specific formal and thematic connections show that they are the fruits of well-considered and thought-out labour, which was part of a process of purposeful combining, collecting and putting in order. In this paper I will focus on the remarkable position of the book of Micah in the Masoretic canon. Whereas in the Septuagint the books of Jonah and Nahum – both explicitly dealing with the fate of Israel's arch-enemy Nineveh – directly follow one another, in the Masoretic tradition the book of Micah was placed in-between. Apart from their own rich contents, in this way the prophecies of Micah seem to function as a bridge or even mediation between two apparently excluding views unfolded in the prophetic books surrounding them. Especially, I will pay attention to the perspectives on 'the enemy' as expressed or presumed in the books of Jonah and Nahum, and to the ways in which reading the book of Micah in its mediating position between two counterparts may contribute to find a useful balance. Though we are not able to

reconstruct the deepest intentions of collectors, I am convinced of the plausibility of the assumption that the need of creating such a balance in the communities in which these books were read may have been just as actual as it is in modern times.

A Critical Reflection on the Presentation and Reception of YHWH as a Violent Deity in the Book of Nahum (Wilhelm J. Wessels)

The inclusion of the book of Nahum in the Hebrew Bible has caused many an interpreter uneasiness because of the violent nature of scenes depicted and the abusive nature of the language used. On opposite extremes, there are some who outright reject the book as a display of nationalism, whilst others have attempted to justify its content as reflecting YHWH unwavering care for his people and his just response to the enemy of his people and therefore his enemy. This entails the justification of YHWH's matching response of violence to the violent enemy's abuse of his people. This leads to the core question: what to make of a god who meets violence with violence? In this paper, three YHWH-speeches will be addressed in an attempt to grapple with the question raised. These passages are Nahum 1:12-14; 2:13 and 3:5-7. In all of these passages negative verbs are employed to describe YHWH's responses against the enemy and distasteful scenes display YHWH's revolting dealings with Nineveh. The aim is to analyse these passages in the contexts in which they appear in the book of Nahum and then to look at suggested interpretations offered in literature. This will entail critical engagement on how these passages were received and reinterpreted in the light of the issue of the presentation of YHWH as a violent god. Of particular interest is Julia O'Brien's extensive and informative engagement with the issue of YHWH's violence. Besides interacting with her views, a possible reading will be suggested that will not only address the South African context, but a reading that is relevant in contexts where people read these texts whilst confronted with violence in their societies.

Scheming Violence in the Psalms (Matthew J. Lynch)

One of the psalmist's recurrent anxieties is that his enemies would gather in secret to plot his harm. He fears not only the damage that would result, but the very act of scheming itself. He draws attention to the fact that the enemy schemes violence out loud but in secret. Given the evocative potential of the psalmist's prayers, one might expect just a few more prayers that dramatize the act of violence—the whirling sling or swinging sword, rather than violence that has not yet occurred. But there are comparatively few prayers that plead for protection from violence occurring 'right now', as it were. Most describe the possibility of violence, but not the act of violence itself. More than the hand, sword, spear, sling or javelin, the psalmist petitions God for protection from the scheming voice of the enemy. So Ps 52:4: 'Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, working deceit.' Another cries out for God to 'confuse ... divide [the enemy's] tongues' because of violence (Ps 55:9). One petitioner prays for God to 'rescue me from violent men ... who

devise evil in private (בלב) and incite war every day.’ They ‘sharpen their tongue like a serpent’s, the venom of vipers lies behind their lips’ (Ps 140:1–3; cf. Mic 6:12). In each instance, the hidden schemes of the enemy play a lead role, and as a consequence, so do their words, lips, tongues, and mouths. The psalmist’s preoccupation with enemy speech may register for modern readers as indicators of paranoia or an obsessive compulsion. However, the pervasiveness of this theme throughout the Old Testament suggests instead a distinct cultural conception of the relationship between speech and violence that is perhaps at variance with modern Western formulations of speech.

My purpose in this paper is to examine this conception, and begin to outline some of its basic contours and supporting assumptions. But to focus more specifically (given the broad range of texts addressing enemy speech), I will examine texts where the psalmist reflects explicitly on the phenomenon of an enemy scheming violence. As I hope to demonstrate, scheming serves as something of a focal lens for understanding how the psalmist conceptualized the problem of violence. From my analysis will emerge a picture wherein verbal scheming was not simplistically prior to ‘real’ physical violence. Rather, it described a form of violence that afflicted the godly, and was a kind of affliction from which the petitioner sought protection.

Happy is the One Who Dashes Your Infants Against the Rocks’: Reception History and Theological Interpretation of Psalm 137:9 (Arie Versluis)

Psalm 137:9 is one of the most horrible texts of violence in the Old Testament. In present-day Western societies, a literal reading evokes feelings of aversion and rejection. At the same time, the psalm is part of Jewish and Christian Scriptures and has been read and interpreted for centuries.

This paper first investigates the psalm’s reception history asking what proposals have been made for a more peaceful interpretation of this text: which non-literal interpretations have been proposed and how valid are they? Next, it will explore whether a responsible theological interpretation of this violent text is possible.

The Massacres in Susa and Beyond: The Bloodbath of Esther 9 as Reflective of Life in Diaspora (Tsauryi K. Mapfeka)

This paper seeks to explore how an awareness of the diaspora provenance of Esther can aid in reading the violence in Esther 9, which is so different from the rest of the book, whose narrative seems to have been adequately resolved by the end of Esther 8. It is perhaps not surprising that suggestions have been made to disregard Esther 9 as a late addition (Clines, 1984). Until recently, the fact that the story of Esther is set in the eastern diaspora has not featured with any significance in the book’s interpretation, which has tended to focus very much on the link with Purim. Interest in the concept of diaspora in both popular and academic discourses has risen sharply in recent years, providing to Esther studies a

valuable new interpretive lens. The thesis of this paper is that, in the light of comparative modern studies, situations of diaspora are generally characterised by extreme forms of violence. By applying such a perspective, this paper aims to investigate how the incidence of violence in diaspora situations or its imagination at the very least, can shed light on the extreme violence recounted in Esther 9.