

Review of Mari Joerstad, *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics: Humans, Nonhumans, and the Living Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

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In *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics*, Mari Joerstad aims to elaborate the activity of nonanimal nature throughout the Hebrew Bible. She explores “personalistic nature texts,” which occur when “nonanimal nature performs actions, displays affect, or is addressed in a manner similar to how one addresses a person” (3). Joerstad undertakes her research on the Hebrew Bible with the question: “What do these texts suggest about how ancient Israelites viewed and interacted with the world?” (2). This approach represents both exegetical and ecological research aims. By employing classical tools of biblical studies (e.g., close reading, historical comparison, and linguistic study), she investigates a more holistically grounded understanding of the texts. Then, she draws the reader to “think about how we, in the contemporary world, interact with the world around us and to consider how engaging with the Bible’s active understanding of nonhuman nature might influence our ethics and the scope and nature of contemporary environmental action” (3). So, this study does not set out to discuss current ecological issues or to suggest practical solutions through the lens of the Hebrew Bible but rather to refresh the perspective of how we could understand the texts in the Hebrew Bible to engage in conversation concerning our current ecological issues.

Chapter 2 assigns a theoretical and methodological foundation for understanding texts ecologically. With the work of Cora Diamond, Joerstad argues that the ideas of metaphor and relationality in *new animism* could open a new perspective for understanding personalistic nature texts in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, for biblical scholars who are familiar with the concepts of metaphor and relationality, the question “why *new animism*?” is not answered convincingly.

Chapter 3 delineates the activity of the ground and earth by examining personalistic nature texts in the Torah. Some of the actions attributed to the ground are: participating in the creation of



vegetation; crying out to Cain's murder; swallowing the Egyptians through the Reed Sea; devouring Korah and his company; and watching the behaviour of the Israelites. Significantly, these dynamic actions of the land represent "the relationship between the Israelites and the land into which they are about to enter. The character of the land, its obligations to YHWH, its relation to humans—these themes come to the fore in personalistic nature texts in the Torah" (48).

In Chapter 4, Joerstad examines personalistic nature texts among the Prophetic books in five thematic categories, which she classifies by recurrent images and vocabulary: war, theophany, address, grief, and joy. Nonanimal nature 1) acts like a warrior or helper in war, 2) reacts to YHWH's presence with feelings of fear or reverence, 3) is addressed by YHWH and YHWH's prophets by the literary device of "apostrophe," 4) grieves and mourns desolation and destruction caused by human action, and 5) rejoices through moisture, growth, and fertility in YHWH's deliverance. The emotional life of other-than-human persons shows how nonanimal nature diversely and dynamically relates with YHWH and humans.

Focusing on the Writings (the third part of the Hebrew Bible), Chapter 5 explores the unique features of nonanimal nature that are not discussed in the previous chapters. These include 1) the joyous shouting of nonanimal nature in Psalms, 2) the non-responsive attitude of nonanimal nature towards humans or human behaviour in Job, and 3) the prominent blending of humans, animals, plants, and land in the Song of Songs. These diverse descriptions imply that the action and feelings of nonanimal nature are never patterned and predictable but are vital and dynamic. So:

What Job, the Song, and the Psalter show is that the biblical writers are continually thinking and rethinking the relationship between humans and all that is not human. Their attitudes towards and interactions with nature are not static; it is an ongoing process of getting to know each other (194).

In her concluding chapter, Joerstad delineates the implications of her study by: 1) laying out three fields—theological anthropology, architecture and artefacts as presented in biblical texts, and iconographic exegesis of the archaeological record of ancient Israel—where her study can be applied, 2) putting the work of two modern artists (Patricia Johanson and Jules Renard) into conversation with biblical texts, and 3) discussing how religious communities can address climate change.

By thorough investigation of personalistic nature texts, Joerstad answers the initial task of her monograph. In summary, the ancient Israelites in the Hebrew Bible viewed nonanimal nature as God's creation, with its own purpose and function in life and in relationship with God and humans. Her application of the concept of new animism, which is a relatively new topic in religious studies, is worthy of further engagement. Although a clearer definition of *new animism* is needed, her argument that the idea of relationality in new animism is useful for understanding the relational nature of God, humans, and nonanimal nature in the Hebrew Bible is appreciated.

The most problematic and controversial question appears in her opinion on the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and animism. She states that “the ontologies of animists and the writers of the Hebrew Bible share a family resemblance” (22). Throughout her argument, the vague term “family” does not seem appropriate to describe the relationship she outlines between the Hebrew Bible and the concept of *new animism*. It should be noted that the phenomenological similarities between the concepts as expressed in the Hebrew Bible and in various forms of animism do not guarantee that those similarities are of the same root. In addition, it would be helpful for her readers to be told more explicitly that the structure and the contents of this book follow the tripartite scriptural corpus of the Hebrew Bible. Explaining this choice may reduce confusion for those (less familiar with the shape of the Hebrew corpus) who question why some books (e.g., Joshua) are treated alongside the Prophetic books.

These minor critiques notwithstanding, this book is valuable and recommended to those—academic *and* lay audiences—who want to know how nonanimal nature relates with God and humans in the Hebrew Bible and to bring Hebrew Bible perspectives to bear on dialogue about current ecological issues.