RHETORICAL LANGUAGE AS A DEVICE FOR JEREMIAH'S AUTHENTICITY CLAIMS: HIS RIVALRY WITH ADVERSARIES IN 23:9–15

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the rhetorical language used by the prophet Jeremiah (compilers of the text) in Jeremiah 23:9–15 to profile the prophets who opposed him and his claim to be the spokesperson of Yahweh. He does not only use language and imagery to discredit his opponents in the eyes of his audience and readers, but also to describe their fate. The poem in Jeremiah 23:9–15, therefore, concerns the authenticity claim as to who the true prophet of Yahweh is.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is displayed on many levels in society. The idea of leadership in modern societies converts to occupying positions of authority and power. Expectations of leaders are to show the ability to take up positions of responsibility, exercise good judgement, and influence people to pursue a common goal, which will be to their benefit. We find such people in politics, business, education, and religion, to mention a few. Although the term "leadership" might be a modern one, the actual practice of exercising authority and guiding people is an ancient practice. This is true for the many societies reflected in the Hebrew Bible as well. We learn from these Hebrew texts of people who were in positions of authority and power, such as kings in the political domain, priests leading cultic practices, and prophetic figures attempting to influence people's relationships with Yahweh.

The focus of this article is the conflict that raged between the prophet Jeremiah and other prophetic groups for authenticity and recognition as true prophets speaking

on behalf of Yahweh. To weigh in on this battle, we are dependent on the literary versions of the conflict, that is, the interpreted and biased versions of the scribes of the text. For the purpose of this article Jeremiah 23:9–15 will be used as a window on the prophetic conflict. The question to be asked is what role rhetoric in Jeremiah 23:9–15 plays in shedding light on the presumed prophetic conflict. The Jeremiah passage will be analysed in terms of the rhetoric employed by Jeremiah to establish his relationship to Yahweh, to profile the opposition prophets, and to convince the audience of the falseness and fate of these prophets. The broader purpose of this passage is to confirm the authority of Jeremiah as a true prophet in the prophetic tradition of Israel and Judah.

THE COGENCY OF RHETORICAL LANGUAGE

A brief discussion of language as phenomenon and its function seems necessary before focusing on the text of Jeremiah 23:9–15.

Power of expression

In doing research for this article, I came to the realisation that the study of language is a particularly specialised field and that there are many schools of thought on language. It is beyond the scope of this article to get involved in the philosophical debates about language. Wareing (2004:10) regards language as "a system, or rather a set of systems (the system of sounds, the system of grammar, the system of meaning); variations in usage are often systematic as well. Within these systems there is scope for creativity and invention." Another way to describe language is to describe it as a code. In this regard Dessalles (2007:11) says "one of the most striking characteristics of human language is its referential power: words stand for entities". He continues by saying "so language can be seen as a code: we translate the situation into words for an interlocutor, who decodes the message and reconstructs the situation which motivated the act of communication". Language is therefore a system through which we communicate and attempt to make meaning when people interact with each other.

Hanks (2013:409) mentions the following four points of relevance to our discussion: 1. "The most basic function of language is seen as interpersonal communication". 2. "Communications are built up out of words; syntax is secondary". 3. "Words are sophisticated multipurpose tools for a great variety of purposes. It is important to select the right tools for the job whatever the job may be." 4. "Meanings are constructions, but ephemeral; they are to be seen as events, involving interaction between two or more participants". Hanks further observes that written texts are more permanent in nature, but meanings are fluent and never fixed. He says that "a reader's attribution of a meaning to a fragment of text is a displaced participatory event" (Hanks 2013:409).

We form ideas in our minds and these ideas result in constructions of reality. To construct these realities and make meaning possible, ideas are linked to words. Through the careful combination of ideas that are linked to words, pictures of reality are constructed (cf. Taylor 2006:17). Language is a vehicle for making meaning and facilitating processes of communication and understanding. Words, however, can be used in a variety of ways, not only to communicate but to serve certain purposes of communication. A few words on rhetoric in this regard seem necessary.

I understand rhetoric to mean the art of using language effectively to achieve a certain purpose. This is done by presenting the communication in a particular style, a structuring of words and sentences and employing various devices to engage the listener or reader. Jones and Peccei (2004:45) define rhetoric as "the skill of elegant and persuasive speaking". Davies (2013:108) regards rhetoric as the art of persuasion used by writers. He continues by saying that it concerns "the techniques that they use to manipulate their readers, to argue their case, and to persuade their audience of the validity of their argument". Sawyer (2009:225) refers to the following aspects of importance when rhetoric is in focus: the structuring of a literary unit, the stylistic techniques applied, the purpose of the literary unit, and who the addressees are. For the purpose of this article, I am interested in three aspects which formed the basis of Aristotle's view on rhetoric. These aspects are the following: how the argument is presented, the style in which it is presented, and the composition of the demarcated

section (cf. Ricoeur 1977:8–9). Some of the stylistic techniques that are employed as part of the rhetoric are metaphors, parallelisms, repetition, binary patterning, circular structures, and imagery, to name but a few (cf. Jones and Peccei 2004:45–52; Ryken et al. 1998:720–727).

Besides the fact that language is essential in the process of communication, the functionality of language is also important for the purpose of this article. Language serves the important function of sharing information between speaker/writer and audience/reader (cf. Dessalles 2007:294). I have already mentioned the functional use of language and rhetoric to persuade or influence people (Jones and Peccei 2004:45). As mentioned above by Hanks (2013:409), language is a tool and if used correctly, it is a powerful tool. People in positions of authority very often use this tool effectively to convince others of an idea or to motivate someone to participate in a project or follow a vision (cf. Gill 2011:276).

Dessalles (2007:348) makes the important observation that language "is closely associated with the granting of status, in that relevant speakers are granted it by hearers". In the process people associate with certain speakers and form coalitions, which in the end elevate such speakers to positions of influence and leadership. Coalitions can grow in the process and that will have a direct influence on decision making (Dessalles 2007:349). In this way language becomes associated with power and the exercise of power. People in positions of authority often use the power of language to persuade people to do their bidding, convincing them that it is actually what they want. This can very easily be exploited and result in the abuse of power. This is also the way that ideologies can be formed and maintained. Jones and Peccei (2004:38) define ideology as a "set of beliefs which, to the people who hold them, appear to be logical and 'natural'". As mentioned before, ideas are formed in our minds and words are linked to these ideas and serve as vehicles to convey these ideas. When a number of people associate with these ideas and rally around them they can become powerful and mind controlling. These dominating ideas can develop into ideologies that can exercise power over people and their beliefs. They can become controlling ideas that dominate people and cause certain behaviours. Clines (2009:24)

says in this regard that "ideologies are not just sets of mental ideas, but ideas that influence people's actions, and so the relations among people, in the world. Since there is almost always a dissymmetry of power relations between people and groups of people, and ideology tends to support and enhance the power of its adherents." What is required in this regard is an ideological-critical approach to expose dominating ideologies for what they are. Written texts should also be submitted to ideological-critical scrutiny. The implication of this is that the Jeremiah text in chapter 23:9–15 should also be approached in this way.

STRUCTURING OF JEREMIAH 23:9–15[1]

לַנְּבִאִ֖ים	9a
נִשְׁבַּ֤ר לִבִּי֙ בְּקִרְבִּ֔י	9b
רָֽחֲפוּ֙ כָּל־עַצְמוֹתַ֔י	9c
הָיִ֙יתִי֙ כְּאִ֣ישׁ שִׁכּ֔וֹר	9d
וּכְגֶ֖בֶר עֲבָ֣רוֹ יָ֑יִן	9e
מִפְּנֵ֣י יְהוָ֔ה	9f
וּמִפְּנֵ֖י דִּבְרֵ֥י קָדְשֽׁוֹ׃	9g
כִּ֤י מְנָֽאֲפִים֙ מָלְאָ֣ה הָאָ֔רֶץ	10a
כִּֽי־מִפְּנֵ֤י אָלָה֙ אָבְלָ֣ה הָאָ֔רֶץ	10b
יָבְשׁ֖וּ נְא֣וֹת מִדְבָּ֑ר	10c
וַתְּהִ֤י מְרֽוּצָתָם֙ רָעָ֔ה	10d
וּגְבֽוּרָתָ֖ם לֹא־כֵֽן׃	10e
כִּֽי־גַם־נָבִ֥יא	11a
גַם־כֹּהֵ֖ן חָנֵ֑פוּ	
גַּם־בְּבֵיתִ֛י מָצָ֥אתִי רָעָתָ֖ם	11b
	11c
נְאֻם־יְהוָֽה׃	11c

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[1]   The cascading of the text is done following the approach of John Lübbe on the basis of work he has done on narrative texts (cf. Lübbe 2009:605–617; 2011:353–384). I appreciate his input in this regard.

לָכֵן יִהְיֶה דַרְכָּם לָהֶם כַּחֲלַקְלַקּוֹת בָּאֲפֵלָה 12a

יִדַּחוּ 12b

וְנָפְלוּ בָהּ 12c

כִּי־אָבִיא עֲלֵיהֶם רָעָה שְׁנַת פְּקֻדָּתָם 12d

נְאֻם־יְהוָה: 12e

וּבִנְבִיאֵי שֹׁמְרוֹן רָאִיתִי תִפְלָה 13a

הִנַּבְּאוּ בַבַּעַל 13b

וַיַּתְעוּ אֶת־עַמִּי 13c

אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל: ס

וּבִנְבִאֵי יְרוּשָׁלִַם רָאִיתִי שַׁעֲרוּרָה 14a

נָאוֹף 14b

וְהָלֹךְ בַּשֶּׁקֶר 14c

וְחִזְּקוּ יְדֵי מְרֵעִים 14d

לְבִלְתִּי־שָׁבוּ אִישׁ מֵרָעָתוֹ 14e

הָיוּ־לִי כֻלָּם כִּסְדֹם 14f

וְיֹשְׁבֶיהָ כַּעֲמֹרָה: 14g

לָכֵן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת עַל־הַנְּבִאִים 15a

הִנְנִי מַאֲכִיל אוֹתָם לַעֲנָה 15b

וְהִשְׁקִתִים מֵי־רֹאשׁ 15c

כִּי מֵאֵת נְבִיאֵי יְרוּשָׁלַ͏ִם יָצְאָה חֲנֻפָּה לְכָל־הָאָרֶץ: 15d[2]

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[2] Textual critical information: verse 9 begins with a superscription "concerning the prophets". The Septuagint (LXX) reads "in/among the prophets". Text critical note b indicates that for the Masoretic Text (MT) word "drunken" the LXX has "broken, destroyed". There is no need to change the MT, since the next part of the sentence refers to wine. In the c-c note where the MT has "his holy words", the LXX reads "the excellence of his glory". The MT as it is makes good sense and need not change. The text-critical note 10a-a indicates that the words "for the land is full of adulterers" is lacking in the LXX. 10b suggests the words "of evildoers and", then reading: "the land is full of evildoers and adulterers." 10c-c regards the whole sentence "כִּי מִפְּנֵי אָלָה אָבְלָה הָאָרֶץ יָבְשׁוּ נְאוֹת מִדְבָּר" as an addition. Footnote 10d indicates that a few manuscripts such as LXX and Syriac suggest a change of vowels for אָלָה to have the meaning "these". This would then refer to the adulterers who cause the land to mourn. This is a complicated verse and Holladay regards the verse as being in disarray (Holladay 1986:626). The matter of the repetition of כִּי is not the only problem; verse 10 has many more issues that exegetes have to deal with. McKane

DEMARCATION OF JEREMIAH 23:9–15

Jeremiah 23:9–40 consists of a collection of oracles which scholars in general divide into six poetic and prose sections, namely 23:9b–12, 13–15, 16–17, 18–22, 23–32, and 33–40 (cf. Stulman 2005:215; Rudolph 1968:150–155). The first passage of concern to follow the announcement of the rubric "concerning the prophets" is 23:9b–12. I will argue that 23:9–15 should be treated as the first main section.

Jeremiah 23:9–40 is preceded by two sections consisting of 23:5–6 and 23:7–8. In the Septuagint (LXX), 23:7–8 follows on 23:40 and therefore 23:6 stands immediately before verse 9, which means the superscription can link to either verse 6 or verse 9. It is most probably a secondary addition to the text and has the same function as 22:11 in the cycle against the kings (cf. Carroll 1986:451; Holladay 1986:624). Besides the uncertainty as to whether verse 9 should follow on verses 7–8 or 5–6, the Masoretic Text has a *setuma* at the end of verse 8. Furthermore, 7–8 is prose in style, whereas verses 9 and further are poetic in nature. Stylistically therefore it seems that a new section is introduced in verse 9.

(1986:569–570) provides a detailed discussion of how scholars such as Duhm (1903), Rudolph (1968), and Janzen (1973) suggest changes that should be made to the text. These scholars regard 10b as secondary and suggest that it should be scrapped (the reference to "oath" or "curse"). However, as McKane indicates, not much is gained by following their suggestions. It seems better to accept the MT as it is and attempt to understand it in its current form. McKane suggests that the MT should be followed, but with one exception, that is, to read *miphne elê* (the Septuagint and the Peshitta) rather than מִפְּנֵי אָלָה.' If this suggestion is accepted, then the reference is to Yahweh and his holy words at the end of verse 9 and not to the adulterers, because 10a is omitted in the Septuagint. These problems in the MT were discussed by a panel of academics responsible for a Dutch Bible translation project (cf. de Waard 2003:100–101); the panel concluded that both the MT version (because of a curse) and the LXX suggestion of a demonstrative pronoun plural (because of these [things]) are text possibilities. However, it seems better to keep to the MT, because the changes are not essential for making sense of the verse as it currently stands. My view is that the terminology used in the section under discussion alludes to the covenant and that the reference to the oath supports this idea. As Lundbom (2004:183) also indicates, "*alla* should be retained, because there is assonance with the verb *'abelah*". Note 12a in *BHS* indicates that a few manuscripts have the root דחה instead of דחח. However, the two verbs have very similar meanings "to be thrust down" and "to be pushed" (cf. Koehler and Baumgartner 2001:218) and do not necessitate any change. The suggestion in critical note 14a is that the imperfect form of the word should be read following *biltī,* not the perfect (Carroll 1986:454). However, although the incorrect form is used in the MT, the meaning is still clear (McKane 1986:576).

As far as content is concerned, the focus from verse 9 onwards is on the prophets, whereas in the previous two passages the concern was about a righteous king (verses 5–6) and the return of Israel from exile (verses 7–8). The syntax has shown that verses 9–12 belong together if markers such as מִפְּנֵי (verses 9 and 10) and כִּי (verses 10, 11 and 12) are taken into consideration. Verse 12, introduced by לָכֵן֙, also indicates that a conclusion is drawn on what preceded. It should also be noted that both verses 11 and 12 end with the affirmation clause נְאֻם־יְהוָה. Verses 9–11 served as an indictment, followed in verse 12 with a verdict.

It is not difficult to see that verses 13–15 structurally belong together. Verses 13 and 14 are similarly structured and the parallelism purposefully sets up a relation between the two verses. Verse 15, similarly to verse 12, serves as a concluding verse introduced with לָכֵן. The content of this passage also makes it clear that these verses belong together since it places the prophets of Jerusalem on the spot. As was the case in the previous passage, an indictment in verses 13–14 is followed by a verdict announced in verse 15.

CONTEXTUALISING JEREMIAH 23:9–15

It is clear by now that the poem in Jeremiah 23:9–15 forms part of the cycle of oracles collected under the rubric "with regards to the prophets". There is very little in this poem that can assist in placing it against a specific historical background. What is known is that priests and prophets are addressed as if they are still functioning and there is mention of the temple in Jerusalem as if it is still in existence. The social context of the book of Jeremiah reflects the time before the Babylonian exile of the Judean people. What is further revealed in this short poem is that the land is caught in a period of drought, which is also mention in Jeremiah 3, 12, and 14.

My research suggests that this passage should be understood against the backdrop of the cult. In order to express the underlying belief system in the society of ancient Israel and Judah, language is used to communicate this underlying system. This conclusion is drawn from observations that emanated from engaging the text. In

Jeremiah 23:9, by means of parallel structure, mention is made of Yahweh's holy words and per implication his holiness. From research done by scholars on what basic conceptual structures define the functioning of Israelite society, the classification system of HOLY/COMMON and PURE/IMPURE seems to be applicable to the discussion of Jeremiah 23:9–15. Van Wolde (2009:208–211) elaborates on this classification system of how the Israelite society experienced their world, which seems relevant for the understanding of this passage. A brief overview of her discussion is necessary to assist in the further discussion of this passage.

Van Wolde names various cognitive domains and shows how these domains tie in with the categories HOLINESS, PURITY, IMPURITY and IDOLATRY. Yahweh is related with the category HOLINESS, the sanctuary (temple) with HOLINESS, land with PURITY, people with IMPURITY and idolatry with HOLINESS/PURITY versus IDOLATRY/IMPURITY (van Wolde 2009:210–211). These selected categories are all relevant for the interpretation of Jeremiah 23:9–15 which concern Yahweh, his word, land, idolatry, priests and prophets, temple and people. An important distinction should be made between ritual impurity and moral impurity. Ritual impurity concerns matters such as disease, corpses, and childbirth. Moral impurity has to do with matters such as idolatry, sexual transgressions, and bloodshed. Hrobon (2010:18–19) says in this regard: "These acts defile not only the sinner (Lev. 18:24), but also the land of Israel (Lev. 18:25; Ezek 36:17), and the sanctuary of God (Lev. 20:3; Ezek 5:11), and this defilement can eventually result in the expulsion of the people from the land of Israel (Lev. 18:28; Ezek 36:19)". He continues by saying that moral impurity is sin and causes separation from Yahweh and even exile and death (Hrobon 2010:19).

With the preceding insights in mind, the first relevant point is the observation that Yahweh is closely related to the concept of holiness. Because of his holiness Israel is expected to adhere to his stipulations (van Wolde 2009:209). Goldingay (2009:609) says in this regard: "Yhwh makes the Israelites holy by giving them laws to obey, and the Israelites make themselves holy and become holy by obeying these laws". Yahweh called the people of Israel into a relationship and formalised the relationship by making a covenant agreement. Some stipulations were formulated with which the

people of Israel had to abide to safeguard the covenant relationship. Yahweh required fidelity from his people and worship of him alone. From the research done for this article, it became clear that the covenant between Yahweh and Judah formed the backdrop against which Jer 23:9–15 should be understood. The prophets of Israel and Judah strongly condemned the worship of foreign gods and regarded idol worship as a severe form of infidelity. The disconnection between Yahweh as the holy one and the prophets (and the people) is the key issue in Jer 23:9–15. Van Wolde (2009:210) quotes Joosten (1996:199) who says the following:

> The holy presence of Yahweh in the midst of the Israelites will not tolerate impurity or unholy behavior of any kind. The transgressions of the commandments must be punished swiftly, because the impurity generated by the transgressions of the Israelites will be projected on to the sanctuary, which in this way will be defiled. The final effect will be the withdrawal of the divinity from his earthly dwelling, for his holiness cannot coexist with impurity.

The prophet in 23:9 is emotionally disturbed by the very fact that holiness cannot coexist with impurity (verses 10–15).

RHETORICAL STRATEGY EMPLOYED IN JEREMIAH 23:9–15
Style: progressive revealing of opponents in the poem

As indicated above, I suggest that these two defined sections should be interpreted together (cf. Schmidt 2013:40–43). There seems to be a progression in content with the second passage making more explicit who the people that are of concern to the prophet are. In verse 10 some people are referred to as "adulterers" (מְנָאֲפִים) without specifying who they are. It is said of these people that "their course has been evil, and their might is not right" (NRSV). In verse 11 a general statement is made that both prophet and priest are ungodly (חָנֵף). It is not specified in particular who they are except to mention that there "wickedness" (רָעָה) was found in the Yahweh's house, implying the temple in Jerusalem. The transgressions mentioned in vv. 10–11 are

presented in rather vague and generic vocabulary. The verdict in verse 12 announces disaster as a result of Yahweh's judgement. When verses 13 and 14 are brought into play, it is more explicitly stated that the prophets of Jerusalem are the ones who were implied in the previous passage. By comparing the prophets of Jerusalem to the prophets of Samaria, it further becomes clear that the accusation of deceit against these prophets concerns false prophecy. If the vocabulary of these two passages is taken into consideration, some key words occur in both of them. These consist of words such as אֶרֶץ (verses 10 [twice] and 12), רָעָה (verses 10, 11, 12, and 14), the root נאף (verses 10 and 14) and also the root חנף (verses 11 and 15). There is some progression to be detected from verse 10 to 15, and some aspects that were vague became more explicit in the second section (12–15). If both the structure and the content are taken into consideration, then a case can be made to read these two sections together. Whether this was the case originally is difficult to say, but in the current context it makes sense to read them together.

Profiling of key characters in Jeremiah 23:9–15

Several characters are mentioned in 23:9–15. These characters are profiled in a particular way that is important for the purpose of this article. Note should be taken of the language of blame and judgment when it comes to the profiling of Jeremiah's opponents.

The prophet Jeremiah

The first character is the speaker of verse 9, which the book of Jeremiah wants readers to identify as the prophet Jeremiah. He reveals his emotions when confronted with the holiness of Yahweh and his word, but also because of the terrible state of the land described in verse 10. The condition of the prophet is compared to that of a person under the influence of alcohol – he acts like a drunkard. The reference to the words of Yahweh that are holy is very important, because proclamation is the essence of a prophet's mission. But the prophet is also upset, because infidelity has caused impurity in the land.

Yahweh

The second main character is Yahweh, who speaks and acts in judgement, according to verses 10–15. Yahweh the holy one and his holy word belong to the category HOLY. Furthermore, it seemed that temple and land should also be classified as part of the category HOLY. The land given to the people of Israel belongs to Yahweh the holy one and the temple serves as his earthly abode (Ottosson 1974:402). The temple is regarded as holy because of Yahweh's holy presence (Marlow 2012:491–492). Both the land and the temple were defiled because of the infidelity and wickedness of the prophets and the priests (Hrobon 2010:57–58). The land became impure, as did the holiness of the temple (cf. 23:10 and 11). In verse 12, Yahweh announces that a time will come when he will act in judgement by causing disaster for them. Yahweh is also the one who has observed what the prophets of Samaria and Jerusalem have done. In both these instances he observed what these prophets had done in the past and their conduct fall within the domain of infidelity. In verse 15, Yahweh again announces his verdict that he will give them bitter wood (wormwood) to eat and poisoned water to drink. Yahweh is not only the holy one, but he also acts in judgement, because leaders have broken the covenant agreement, betrayed Yahweh, and defiled the land.

The opponents

Jeremiah 23:10 also mentions a category of people labelled as adulterers (מְנָאֲפִים). This undefined group of people is identified in verse 11 as the prophets and priests. In verse 14 they are revealed to be the prophets of Jerusalem. I have argued that there is a gradual unveiling of whom the real people are that Jeremiah has in aim. The following is said about these prophets: these adulterers fill the land (כִּי מְנָאֲפִים מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ); their course is evil (מְרוּצָתָם רָעָה); their might is not right (וּגְבוּרָתָם לֹא־כֵן – verse 10); they are ungodly (חָנֵפוּ); their wickedness (רָעָתָם) is found in the temple (verse 11); what they do is shocking (שַׁעֲרוּרָה – something horrible); they commit adultery (נָאוֹף); they walk in lies (וְהָלֹךְ בַּשֶּׁקֶר); they strengthen the hands of the evildoers (וְחִזְּקוּ יְדֵי מְרֵעִים – verse 14); the prophets of Jerusalem are like Sodom (כִּסְדֹם) to Yahweh. To call the prophets adulterers is to blame them for infidelity in their relationship with Yahweh,

similar to acts of infidelity in a marriage relationship. This infidelity implies the worship of other gods besides Yahweh, but it can also be a metaphor for political alliances (cf. Sharp 2003:113–114, 117). The context here seems to lean more to the worship of other gods. By so doing they have defiled the land. The reference in verse 14 to adultery also ties in with the blame of idol worship and therefore apostasy. In clause 10d it is said that the prophets' lifestyles are morally contaminated as is specified by the noun רָעָה (cf. Maiberger 2004:421–422). This ties in with what is said in clause 14c: "they walk in deceit". In parallel relation with verse 13a, where mention is made of the prophets of Samaria who claimed to have received their prophecies from Baal, the deceitful conduct of the prophets of Jerusalem might insinuate that in similar fashion their prophecies are false. By implication, therefore, their whole existence is nothing less than a lie. They not only commit adultery by worshiping other gods like Baal, their general conduct is branded a lie. All of these descriptions signify that their behaviour is morally and ethically corrupt.

The expression "their course is evil" (10d) forms part of a synonymous parallelism with "their might is not right" (10e). Schmidt (2013:40) translates this clause with "und ihre Stärke Unrecht". Linked to רָעָה, it means that there is something unethical about their might or power, their power is corrupt. Their position as prophets in society rendered them some form of power in the religious sphere. Because of their claims to be servants of Yahweh, these prophets had the power to influence people's outlook on life and their decisions. In clause 11a, Yahweh states that both the prophet and the priest are ungodly. In light of the various ways the conduct of these prophets was described in the preceding discussion, this seems to be a defining statement, a judgement on the character of these prophets. They are morally perverted; they do not even have respect for the sanctity of Yahweh's temple, but acted in arrogance. They have violated the sacred space by their infidelity towards Yahweh and their deceit of the people by misleading them with false prophecies. Their evil practices in the temple have defiled the sanctity of this cultic space.

Verse 14d blames these prophets for "strengthening the hand of the evildoers". The people of Judah are often reprimanded for their worship of other gods and their

participation in the worship of idols. They have been unfaithful to Yahweh in this regard and have broken the conditions of the covenant. The prophets also played their part by setting a bad example and even deceived the people with false prophecies. Instead of being champions of the covenant and cautioned the people to turn back to Yahweh, they have rendered support to their evil practices and infidelity.

The prophets of Jerusalem are also characterised by comparing them to Sodom. They are associated by this symbol to sinful behaviour that resulted in destruction and abandonment. The picture painted of the prophets of Jerusalem is one of infidelity, moral corruption, deception, abuse of their positions to influence people to do what is wrong instead of what is right, and false prophesy. Diamond (2003:575) puts it eloquently when he says:

> How seriously we are to take the vocabulary of impurity is hard to say. It often masks the revulsion of the speaker in face of generalized cultic impurity and apostasy (cf. Jeremiah 2–3; Hosea 1–3) as much as it refers to a specific literal moral depravity. And the falsification of Yahwistic cult purity is explicitly highlighted. Moral rhetoric gives way to the accusation of corrupt misappropriation of oracular power (v. 13, 'prophecy by Baal,' 'lead astray'; v. 16, 'they delude you,' 'vision of their mind'; v. 27, 'to make my people forget my name,' 'forgot my name for Baal').

The poem in Jeremiah 23:9–15 names both prophets and priests in verse 11, but the main focus is on the prophets of Jerusalem. It is clear from the various descriptions used in the passage that the conduct of the prophets is ethically and morally disgraceful. They were unfaithful to Yahweh and transgressed the covenant conditions. They acted immorally and deceitfully. The prophets of Jerusalem are condemned for dishonouring the word of Yahweh by speaking falsely like the prophets of Samaria did. Their everyday conduct was nothing less than a lie; they are false prophets. Their conduct created what was regarded as holy, unholy, and what was regarded as pure, impure.

Images of judgement, rejection and punishment

The poem in Jeremiah does not only mention the transgressions of the prophets, but also presents the negative consequences of these moral indiscretions on the land, the prophets of Jerusalem, and the people of Judah. As Fretheim (2002:33) says: "Moral order adversely affects cosmic order; human sin has had a deeply negative effect upon the environment". The infidelity of the prophets caused a curse on the land and that caused the land and the surrounding pastures to wither and dry up (cf. Hayes 2002:121–122). The land that is an extension of Yahweh's holiness was defiled by the prophets' idol worship, resulting in a drought. Their moral transgressions were seen as violation of the covenant and that evoked the curse on the land (cf. Deut 29:9–28). The land as a result was defiled and became impure. In this regard, McComiskey's (1980:787) remarks that the cult is the place of concern about purity, and rituals are the instruments to safeguard purity and help people to dispose of impurity, seems relevant. To make matters worse, the temple that served as sacred space for Yahweh and therefore fits the category of holy, was desecrated by the evil things these functionaries did in the "house of Yahweh". They violated the cultic space where restitution was supposed to take place.

But the land alone was not affected by the moral transgressions of the prophets; they themselves would bear the consequences of their infidelity and moral indiscretions. The poem repeatedly makes it clear that these prophets were utterly corrupt. In Jeremiah 23:10 it is said "their *course* has been evil" – מְרוּצָתָם רָעָה; 23:12 reads "their *way* shall be like a slippery slope" – דַרְכָּם לָהֶם כַּחֲלַקְלַקּוֹת and 23:14 says "they *walk* in lies" – וְהָלֹךְ בַּשֶּׁקֶר. Their way of life speaks of deception. These prophets are accused of making, in terms of the categories mentioned, what is holy, sacred, and pure, into something unholy, desecrated, and impure. As a result, they will land up in a dark place of despair, rejected and experiencing disaster – Yahweh will punish them (23:12). Jeremiah 23:15 announces that Yahweh is about to give the prophets of Jerusalem bitter wood (wormwood, לַעֲנָה) to eat and poisoned water (מֵי־רֹאשׁ) to drink. Death lies in their future.

What is striking when looking at the Judean society from the perspective of the above-mentioned categories is the interconnectedness and interdependence of people, their environment, and their religious belief system. The Judean people are in a covenant relationship with Yahweh and the prophets are supposed to be the caretakers of this relationship and its requirements. When this relationship is harmed by the infidelity of the prophets, it affects the land which is the base of the people's existence and of their survival in terms of safety and produce. There is interdependence between the sacred and the profane and if the equilibrium is distorted, it has a ripple effect. The infidelity of the prophets in Jeremiah 23:9–15 not only impacts on the land and the people's dependence on the land, but also on the ordinary people of Judah. The infidelity towards Yahweh is regarded as deceit, but this deceit became the concept by which their whole existence was defined. The effect of this is that they corrupt the people of Judah who are dependent on the prophetic words they believe come from Yahweh. The impurity of the prophets made the people of Judah impure, because as 23:15 states, their perversion spread throughout the land. Their apostasy has made the entire land godless (Sharp 2003:117–118).

The poem in Jeremiah 23:9–15 serves as an oracle of judgement and condemnation of the prophets of Jerusalem. Their infidelity, deceit, abuse, and bad example made them deserving candidates of Yahweh's wrath and punishment. The perspective of them presented in this poem frames them as false prophets.

THE IDEOLOGY BEHIND JEREMIAH'S PROFILING (RHETORICAL LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY) OF HIS OPPOSITION

The matter of concern in the conflict between Jeremiah and the opposing prophetic groups is who the "real messengers" of Yahweh are. The cycle in Jeremiah 23:9–40 is not the only section reflecting on this issue; chapters 27–29 and some other places in the book of Jeremiah also reveal this conflict. One of the key phrases used to deny other prophets the right to act as prophets is the phrase mentioned by Jeremiah quoting Yahweh: "I did not send them, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied" (Jer 23:21). We should, however, realise that what we have in this cycle

on the prophets is a collection of oracles, presumably from Jeremiah, which the tradition of Jeremiah collected and composed in this particular cycle on the prophets. What we have in Jeremiah 23:9–15 is therefore only one side of the story, the side presented by the compilers of the cycle of oracles. In his own mind Jeremiah regarded himself as "the" true messenger of Yahweh. The compilers who knew the outcome of the history of Judah promoted and confirmed the notion that Jeremiah was the true prophet of Yahweh. The poem in Jeremiah 23:9–15 concerns the matter of the authenticity of Jeremiah as true prophet and history has vindicated him in his role as true spokesperson on behalf of Yahweh.

CONCLUSION

The question asked in this article is what role rhetoric in Jeremiah 23:9–15 plays in shedding light on the presumed prophetic conflict. Jeremiah characterises his opponents in extremely negative ways. He uses language, syntax, and style to do so, as well as rhetorical devices such as parallelisms, metaphors, and imagery. Many of the words he has chosen to label his opponents are vague and general in meaning, but serve the purpose of presenting them in a bad light. He tarnishes them by his choice of words, blames them for causing the drought in Judah by their deceit of Yahweh, for defiling the cultic space and abusing their power and influence on the ordinary people. He blames them for causing the people to disobey the covenant and for being disloyal to Yahweh. By the effective use of language and imagery, Jeremiah contrasts himself with the prophets who oppose him. Clearly Jeremiah is to be regarded as the true prophet authorised by Yahweh.

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