

AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER? JUSTICE AND
TRANSFORMATION IN A MALAGASY-NORWEGIAN
DIALOGUE (GENESIS 4)

Knut Holter

The plot of the Cain and Abel narrative in Gen 4 seems quite problematic. Each of the two brothers brings gifts to the Lord, who—to my mind, rather disturbingly, even quite unjustly—“looked with favor” on Abel and his offering of the firstborn of the flock but “did not look with favor” on Cain and his offering of the fruits of the soil (vv. 4–5). I would have preferred a narrative where God looks with favor on both the shepherd and the gardener, a narrative in which my ideas of divine and human justice would be more easily discerned, a narrative that would have a more obvious potential as a transformative facilitator among contemporary readers.

So to my male, middle-class, white, northern European, and Protestant mind, the narrative is quite problematic. I realize that these sets of interpretive qualifiers could mean that the problem is not necessarily in the narrative but precisely in “my mind,” reflecting my own political, social, ethnic, cultural, and religious situation. What is more, in spite of my disappointment about a God who does not fit my theological and ethical frameworks, it could be that the narrative still has potential as a transformative facilitator among contemporary readers. To explore this, I have challenged two Bible study groups—one in my own congregation in Stavanger, Norway, and one in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar, a city I occasionally visit—to read and reflect upon the Cain and Abel narrative, and to dialogue with each other about its meaning.

Reading Contexts

For this project, groups were sought for that shared some basic characteristics in spite of coming from different parts of the globe. A crucial point in this selection was the aim of reducing the number of variables, so as better to be able to recognize differences. First, both Bible study groups, which each existed prior to this project, recruit their members from urban contexts (industry, business, universities) and from typically middle-class and tertiary educated layers of their respective societies. This means that the members of both groups were used to communicate with people from other cultures and countries and that they were able to relate to theoretical questions arising from written texts. Second, both Bible study groups were of mixed gender with members in their forties to sixties. Thus the group members shared some of the challenges facing the in-between generation, such as caring for elderly parents as well as children and even grandchildren. The latter factor is important when reading a text like Gen 4, with its plot of complex family relations. Third, both Bible study groups are affiliated with a Lutheran church. This too is of some importance, as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Madagascar and the Lutheran Church of Norway have a history of interaction dating back to the 1860s, when Norwegian missionaries began work in Madagascar.

The historical interaction between Malagasy and Norwegian Lutherans deserves some further attention. One aspect is the role of the Old Testament in their respective Sunday services. The Norwegian missionaries who started their work in Madagascar in the nineteenth century simply transferred the Church of Norway lectionary to Madagascar. At that time the Norwegian lectionary for Sunday sermons included only texts from the Gospels. The Malagasy Lutherans have kept this lectionary until today, whereas the Norwegian Lutherans have introduced a lectionary for Sunday sermons that includes Old Testament texts. As a result, Lutherans attending Sunday services in Norway occasionally hear a sermon on the Cain and Abel narrative in Gen 4, whereas Lutherans in Madagascar never do, in spite of being part of a church that, generally speaking, shows more interest in the Old Testament than is the case in Norway.

Another aspect of the interaction between Lutherans in Fianarantsoa and in Stavanger is an academic collaboration between the Fianarantsoa-based Lutheran Seminary, now a graduate school of theology, and the Stavanger-based Mission School, now a specialized university. This collaboration dates back to the 1880s when the first Malagasy student came

to study theology in Stavanger. In spite of more than a hundred years of collaboration between Fianarantsoa and Stavanger and between Malagasies and Norwegians reading the Bible and being involved in theological training, no dialogue on a particular biblical text or motif has been undertaken prior to this point. There have been a few instances of Norwegians investigating the role of the Bible in Madagascar (Munthe 1969) or providing textbooks in biblical studies for a Malagasy audience (the most recent example is Holter 2012), but there has been no previous attempt to facilitate and study an actual Malagasy-Norwegian dialogue on a particular biblical text or motif.

The two Bible study groups accepted the invitation to participate in the project and agreed to dedicate two group meetings to the project. In the end each devoted three group meetings to the project, from late 2011 to early 2013. The two project coordinators, Olivier Randrianjaka in Fianarantsoa and Knut Holter in Stavanger, did not participate in the group discussions. The correspondence between the groups was done in the form of letters written in Malagasy and Norwegian, translated into English by the project coordinators and sent by e-mail. Before the first meeting, the groups were given a brief written presentation of the project, including: (1) some general textual perspectives, locating the text within the primeval history, and noticing some societal and religious patterns reflected in the text; and (2) some applicative perspectives, asking whether it is possible to make connections between the text and contemporary family relations.

Analytical Contexts

Although there had been no previous example of a Malagasy-Norwegian dialogue on a particular biblical text or motif, the present dialogue on Gen 4 forms part of a broad spectrum of interpretive webs. Two nodes of these webs should be briefly addressed here—the dialogue and the text.

The first node concerns the dialogue. The Malagasy-Norwegian dialogue is but one of many examples of dialogues between African and European readers of the Bible, “ordinary readers,” without formalized training in biblical interpretation, as well as “professional readers,” theologians and exegetes with formalized training in biblical interpretation. Such dialogues are, however, a rather recent phenomenon. For centuries, any interaction between Africa and Europe with regard to the Bible was characterized by the colonial context, with the Europeans seeing themselves as the interpretive subject of a monologue vis-à-vis Africa rather

than having a dialogue with Africa, thus viewing the Africans as a receiving object rather than as an interpretive subject (Holter 2008). This conceptualizing of the dialogue/monologue was fundamentally wrong: from the very moment the Bible became available, African readers developed their own interpretive strategies in relation to the book and/or text (West 2000). Nevertheless, due to the colonial past with its shadow stretching far into postcolonial times, it is probably only in the last generation that African and European readers of the Bible have been able to meet as equal interpretive subjects. A couple of research projects might illustrate this new situation. One is the mid-1990s "Bible in Africa Project" (Ukpong 2000), which also included surveys of popular biblical interpretation in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and Glasgow, Scotland (Riches 1996). Some differences with regard to how the Bible is used in the two contexts are highlighted without any value-based assessments of these differences. Another project is the 2006 conference on "African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue" in Stellenbosch, South Africa, searching for ethically accountable ways of relating the biblical texts to what is increasingly acknowledged as our—African and European—common context (De Wit and West 2008).

More directly, however, the present Malagasy-Norwegian dialogue on Gen 4 is part of yet another research project initiated in Amsterdam, "Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible" (De Wit et al. 2004). The aim of the project is to develop an empirically based understanding and interpretation of what happens when small groups of readers of biblical texts, sometimes coming from radically different contexts, read the same text and get involved in a dialogue about its meaning. The project initiator and director, Hans de Wit (2004, 488; 2012, 17–32), points out three distinct elements of intercultural Bible hermeneutics: (1) an analysis of the interaction between culture and the process of interpreting biblical texts; (2) an exploration of the conditions that make possible the communication about the meaning of biblical texts across cultural boundaries; and (3) an emphasis on questions of liberation and of truth across cultural boundaries.

In the intercultural Bible hermeneutics that develops from such elements, the concept of the "other reader" plays a key role (De Wit 2012, 47–58). The communication of the meaning of biblical texts across cultural borders and the implicit potential of revealing culturally biased and oppressive readings requires people or groups who can serve each other as the "other reader," that is, as a reader who reflects and represents social and

cultural experiences and concerns other than our own, hence being able to offer a critical rereading of our reading of the text.

The second node of the interpretive webs of the Malagasy-Norwegian dialogue on Gen 4 concerns the text itself, as this particular text is involved in various interpretive discourses. Such discourses are historically, culturally, and ideologically interdependent, and many of them probably have little to contribute to the current dialogue. Still, a couple of "African" discourses on Gen 4 from a generation ago deserve attention, as they focus on interpretive strategies for transformation. One is the potential of reading the Cain and Abel narrative from enculturation hermeneutical perspectives. An example here is the Nigerian linguist, Modupe Oduyoye, who in his commentary on Gen 1–11 argues that the Cain and Abel narrative reflects a conflict between settled civilization (Cain) and pastoral nomadism (Abel), a conflict that has counterparts in traditional Africa. The sympathy of the text is with the nomadic side, Oduyoye argues, and may thereby help contemporary African readers to see their cultural and political experiences from a nomadic perspective (1984, 63–74). Another is the potential of reading Gen 4 from liberation hermeneutical perspectives. Examples here are the South African theologians Allan Boesak and Itumeleng Mosala, both of whom use the Cain and Abel narrative to illustrate the struggle against apartheid, the former from a literary perspective (Boesak 1984), the latter from a source-critical and materialistic perspective (Mosala 1989). These "African" readings of Gen 4 from the 1980s received significant attention in the 1990s. In South Africa, Gerald West analyzed the interpretation of Boesak and Mosala, noticing the need for a biblical hermeneutics that has an explicit commitment to the community of the poor and oppressed (West 1995). In Ethiopia, Mark McEntire, an American missionary and biblical scholar, together with his Ethiopian students read Mosala, Boesak, and Oduyoye, noticing the need for a biblical hermeneutics that allows for various, and potentially contending, readings in various contexts (McEntire 2000).

I cannot go into all aspects of these two nodes of the interpretive webs of the Malagasy-Norwegian dialogue on Gen 4. Nevertheless, the discourses around the two nodes should be able to raise some questions relevant to the present search for transformative potentials in the dialogue. One question would then be to what extent the dialogue allows for an understanding of the two Bible study groups as equal interpretive subjects, irrespective of the colonial and missionary past. Another would be to what extent the dialogue enables the group members to see and be challenged

by the interpretive perspective of the culturally “other reader.” A third would be to what extent the dialogue encourages the groups to look for enculturation and liberation potentials in the encounter between biblical text and experienced life.

The Question of Justice in the Dialogue

In proceeding to the Bible study groups and their dialogue, we concentrate on one particular motif, namely, the question of justice. The term *justice* is not used in the Cain and Abel narrative, neither did it occur in the presentation of the project. This was intentional, so as not to influence the discussion. Still, concepts of justice are clearly present in the narrative—both as divine justice and as human justice—and the question of justice could therefore be fitting as an illustrative case.

In relation to Gen 4, the question of divine justice can be phrased: Does God really represent justice in a narrative where he is portrayed as looking with favor on the shepherd Abel and his offering from the first-born of the flock, while not looking with favor on the gardener Cain and his offering from the fruits of the soil?

This key plot of the narrative proved problematic to the members of the Stavanger group. In their first report they argue that God appears to act unfairly to people, and they ask—intended, I think, as a rhetorical question—whether it is actually better to be a shepherd than a gardener. The problem that Gen 4 seems to portray God as unjust continued to challenge the Stavanger group, and throughout the dialogue this was not resolved. On the one hand, the biblical portrayal of a God choosing some people—such as Jacob (a liar), Moses (a murderer), and Rahab (a prostitute)—does make sense, they argued, as God looks on the heart and knows all things. On the other hand, the parallel portrayal of a God rejecting others, such as Cain, does not make sense, and it can only be accepted from the perspective that God’s thoughts are higher than ours. Therefore, in their third report the Stavanger readers concluded somewhat hesitantly by simply clinging to their conviction: “We know that God is not unjust.”

The Fianarantsoa group saw no difficulty with this key plot of the narrative. In their first report, they argued that the rejection of Cain and his offering not only made sense when read from a traditional Malagasy perspective, but it was actually an obvious consequence of the kinds of offerings brought forward by the two brothers. Malagasy tradition distinguishes between bloody and nonbloody, that is, agriculturally based,

sacrifices. The former is the more expensive and prestigious, is offered to the creator god, Zanahary, and is performed for the atonement of sin. The latter is cheaper and less prestigious, and although it can be offered as a first crop offering to Zanahary, it is more often offered to ancestors and other spiritual beings. To the Fianarantsoa group, therefore, it is not surprising that God favors the more expensive and prestigious offering of Abel, intended for and fitting the expectations of the Creator. The decision of Abel to bring the most valuable offering also corresponds, the Fianarantsoa group argued, with the testimony of the New Testament: “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did” (Heb 11:4).

Another aspect of the portrayal of God in Gen 4 is the extent to which the Bible study groups expected God to intervene in their lives. The Fianarantsoa group expected God to intervene here and now in reaction to evil. This means, they argued, that victims of oppression and murder are not to react against the injustice they undergo but to wait for God, who will avenge them. He did so in the case of Cain, who, according to Malagasy culture, received the most terrible punishment of all, namely, that of being expelled from his own land. The Stavanger group had quite a different understanding of the punishment of Cain: that God continued to take care of him was interpreted positively and related to the saying at the end of the chapter: “at that time men began to invoke the LORD by name” (v. 26).

The diverging interpretations as to whether God is portrayed as just in this narrative had consequences for how the two groups understood the relationship between the human actors in the narrative. Interestingly, both groups acknowledged that the human actors were not only the two brothers but also their parents, though they are somewhat hidden beneath the surface of the narrative.

The conflict between the two brothers was easily recognizable to the two groups. The Fianarantsoa group pointed to the Malagasy tradition that the older son is normally responsible for the cultivation of the fields, whereas the younger son is responsible for the animals. Since the older brothers therefore become more familiar with the family fields, they might use their knowledge for personal benefit when the inheritance is distributed, and this might result in conflict among brothers. The group also pointed to the Malagasy tradition that a younger brother is not allowed in any way to supersede the older one. In this sense Cain’s anger is justified: Abel had taken a position belonging to Cain, and what Cain experienced is the behavior of an excluded or marginalized family member.

The Stavanger group, too, recognized the conflict between the two brothers. Like their peers in Fianarantsoa, they referred to experiences of conflicts among siblings. Some cases have to do with family property, others with different religious affiliations. Most attention, however, was given to the problem of general mistrust among siblings, with bad feelings as a result. Several of the group members told about sibling jealousy and not being able to talk together, and they tried to find signs in the Cain and Abel narrative of corresponding experiences. Perhaps Abel was arrogant; perhaps Cain invited him into the fields to make up to him, but then his anger took over. Generally speaking, the Stavanger group preferred psychological explanations. They emphasized that each has a responsibility for controlling one's feelings, even when wronged by others. It is better to address conflicts and talk about them, rather than sweeping them under the carpet. When this perspective was related to the Cain and Abel narrative, a point of contact was the narrative's focus on sin: "it desires to have you, but you must master it" (v. 7).

Both groups also asked about the role of the parents. Although the parents played marginal roles in the narrative—the father is mentioned in verses 1 and 25 only, the mother additionally in verse 2—both study groups gave them key roles in the relationship between the two sons. Already in the first report, the Fianarantsoa group criticized the parents for being too passive in a tense situation. According to Malagasy culture, the parents should be reconcilers: the parents should have intervened and solved the conflict before it got so serious. The Stavanger group noticed the parents' absence. In their first report, they suggested that the conflict resulted from something the parents had done. When sibling jealousy increases, parents are often more part of the problem than of the solution, they argued.

The second and third rounds of reports demonstrated that the two groups at this point had basically divergent views. In Madagascar, the Fianarantsoa group argued that the parents are indeed not the problem; they are the solution. Parents are responsible for their children even when they have grown up and have their own families, and as such the parents are entitled to intervene in the lives of their children. The Stavanger group, on the other hand, had as ideal that parents should not interfere in the lives of their grown-up children. As parents, they argue, we can say what we feel and think about certain issues, but we should not give advice. If we interfere with the lives of our grown-up children, they will be offended.

A Potential for Transformation

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, my interest in Gen 4 grew out of curiosity as to whether the Cain and Abel narrative might have a potential to facilitate some kind of transformation—personal, spiritual, or political—among contemporary readers. I admitted my prejudice against the narrative's portrayal of a God "disturbingly, even quite unjustly" looking with favor on Abel and his offering and not on Cain and his offering. Nevertheless, I decided to ask whether an intercultural dialogue on this narrative might reveal some transformative potential. During the process of working with the dialogue, it became clear that this was the case. I note three examples, following the three questions I raised in the conclusion of the section on analytical contexts.

My first question related to the extent to which the dialogue allows for an understanding of the two groups as equal interpretive subjects, irrespective of the colonial and missionary past. The background for this question is the historical interaction between Malagasy and Norwegian Lutherans, where the Norwegian Mission Society strongly influenced the development of the Malagasy Lutheran Church for more than a century. A reference to "Stavanger," the home city of the mission society and of the Mission School used to train its missionaries, is in such a context more than a geographical reference: it symbolizes the theological, organizational, and economic power of the mission agency that founded the Malagasy Lutheran Church.

There are no signs in the reports from the Bible study group in Stavanger that they were aware of this historical context or tried to be sensitive in that respect. On the contrary, in a couple of cases they asked questions that could easily have seemed somewhat patronizing to their partners in Fianarantsoa. One case was when the Fianarantsoa group, with reference to Malagasy tradition, argued that Abel's offering was better than that of Cain. This interpretation, and even more the rationale for it, came as a surprise to the Stavanger group. They asked with some concern, I think, whether Christians in Madagascar were still influenced by traditional Malagasy religion. Although this question could have been seen as an example of Western patronizing, the Fianarantsoa group responded in a friendly manner, explaining to the Norwegians some of the enculturation hermeneutical experiences of Madagascar. Pre-Christian thoughts do indeed continue to influence Malagasies, both Christians and non-Christians. However, the Fianarantsoa group emphasized, one should

acknowledge that not all aspects of pre-Christian religion are unbiblical. Another case was when the Fianarantsoa group—again with reference to Malagasy tradition—argued that we can expect God to intervene here and now in reaction to evil and that he will avenge those who have suffered harm. The Stavanger group was hesitant and asked with a critical undertone whether this point of view represents traditional Malagasy concepts or Malagasy Christian concepts as well. The Fianarantsoa group responded by noticing the many parallels between Malagasy and Old Testament concepts of God's retribution and judgment.

I would tend to argue that these two cases are indicative of interpretive equality between the two groups. In neither of the two cases were there any signs that the Malagasies felt inferior in their interpretation. On the contrary, in both cases the intercultural dialogue allowed the Fianarantsoa group to take the lead vis-à-vis their partners (even "Stavanger"!), and in both cases they referred to biblical motifs to legitimize their use of Malagasy traditions as interpretive resources for the Cain and Abel narrative.

My second question concerned the extent to which the dialogue enabled the group members to see and be challenged by the interpretive perspective of the culturally "other reader." The background for this question was the need to confront all biblical readers with their culturally biased readings. An effective way of doing so, Hans de Wit has argued (2012, 47–58), is to let a certain biblical reading be confronted with another reading representing other social and cultural experiences and concerns.

From the beginning, the two Bible study groups approached the biblical text quite differently. Whereas the Stavanger group read the Cain and Abel narrative in the light of their own personal experiences with siblings and parents, the Fianarantsoa group used their first report to give a survey of some general, religiocultural traditions in Madagascar in relation to the biblical narrative. The Norwegians were somewhat upset by this: in their second report they asked whether the groups had been given the same project presentation, and they criticized the Malagasies for presenting an academic lecture on traditional culture and religion rather than describing how they would apply the text to their lives as Christians. The Fianarantsoa group responded to this criticism by arguing that since their report was supposed to reflect the discussion of the group, they had wanted to communicate their thoughts in a "harmonized way."

In the final report from the group in Stavanger, this topic was addressed once more, but this time in a more relaxed manner. They said that initially they had wanted to read the text as Christians, not as Norwegians;

however, indirectly confirming De Wit's model about the "other reader," in retrospect they understood that they too were influenced by the culture in which they live. As examples they mentioned their egalitarian culture as opposed to more elitist cultures elsewhere, and the role of the family, which in the Norwegian context is of less importance than among the Malagasies. It would probably not be difficult to find other examples of how their interpretation of the Cain and Abel narrative was influenced by the Norwegian culture, such as their preference for psychological explanations and the individualism characterizing their interpretation, which allowed individual experiences to be presented on behalf of the group, as opposed to the "more harmonized way" of the Malagasies.

My final question had to do with the extent to which the dialogue encouraged the groups to look for enculturation and liberation potentials in the encounter between the biblical text and life experiences. Behind this question lies in the memories of the European colonization of Africa, a colonization that was expressed not only in political oppression and economic exploitation of the continent but also in the oppression of culture, religion, and language. The Bible played an important but ambiguous role in the history of colonial and postcolonial Africa. Certainly the Bible was used to legitimize the European oppression and exploitation, but eventually it was also used to nurture the African resistance, not the least from various enculturation and liberation theological perspectives (Holter 2008).

Turning to the material of the Malagasy-Norwegian dialogue, we notice a clear difference with regard to these two interpretive perspectives. On the one hand, enculturation theological perspectives are clearly visible in the dialogue. The Fianarantsoa group repeatedly refers to Malagasy cultural and religious tradition, partly as a general interpretive context but partly also as an explicit interpretive resource, such as in the interpretation of the two types of offerings, or in the interpretation of Cain being expelled from his country. The Stavanger group eventually acknowledged that their reading to some extent reflected their own cultural situation. Whereas the dialogue situation encouraged the Fianarantsoa group to look for interpretive resources in their cultural context, their Stavanger partners did not use their contextually based experiences and concerns explicitly as a means of reading the narrative.

When it came to the question of a liberation theological perspective, however, there was almost nothing to be found in the dialogue material. This could have been for several reasons. One is that both being typically

middle class, neither of the groups seemed to see a need for “liberation.” Another is that the Malagasies, who actually have been colonized, have a history of half a century of independence after liberation. Whatever the reason, it corresponds with the observation by De Wit in his empirical analysis of three thousand pages of popular readings of John 4 that such material often reflects little of the more explicitly sociopolitical concepts of liberation theology (2012, 63).

In a previous section on the analytical contexts of the present dialogue, I referred to a particular interest in reading Gen 4 from “African” perspectives back in the 1980s, particularly Modupe Oduyoye’s enculturation hermeneutical reading and Allan Boesak and Itumeleng Mosala’s liberation hermeneutical reading. I also noticed that these “African” readings of the Cain and Abel narrative received some significant attention in the 1990s. With this background, one would assume that Gen 4 might still be used to illustrate certain key experiences and concerns within “African” biblical interpretation. Nevertheless, more recent, explicitly “African” interpretive surveys of Genesis, such as those by Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa (2006) and Rodney Sadler (2010), unfortunately neglect the enculturation and liberation hermeneutical experiences and concerns of Oduyoye, Mosala, and Boesak. I tend to think that these recent readings of Genesis are fairly representative of the current interpretive situation.

The material on the present Malagasy-Norwegian dialogue is by no means sufficient to challenge the current interpretive situation. Still, the reading of Gen 4 by a Bible study group in Fianarantsoa, who intuitively makes use of enculturation hermeneutical perspectives, might be taken as a sign that the concerns for justice and transformation expressed by leading African professional interpreters of the Bible a generation or so ago still deserve attention.

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BIBLE AND TRANSFORMATION

THE PROMISE OF
INTERCULTURAL BIBLE READING

Edited by

Hans de Wit and Janet Dyk

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INTRODUCTION

Hans de Wit and Janet Dyk

Beginning as a grassroots movement, inspired by Latin American and other contextual hermeneutics, intercultural Bible reading has earned its own place within the field of biblical studies.

In 2001 the first phase of a worldwide initiative called "Through the Eyes of Another" was launched, and, with a focus on John 4, a method for bringing Bible reading groups to interact with one another was developed. The novelty of this project was not that readers from different cultures and contexts were asked to participate, nor that biblical scholars carefully began to listen or "read with" nonprofessional Bible readers. What was innovative was that distance was incorporated as a hermeneutical factor and that encounter and dialogue were organized between readers from different reading traditions and contexts.

The central research question was open and explorative: What happens when Bible readers from sometimes radically different contexts and cultures read the same Bible text and start dialoguing about its significance? Can this way of shared Bible reading become a catalyst for more openness and transformation? More than one hundred fifty groups from over thirty countries participated in the project. Its results were astonishing. Levinas's infinity—texts are inexhaustible—came to the fore. Over three thousand pages of vernacular readings of the story of the Samaritan women were collected. The theological reflection was varied and rich. Several participating scholars developed a qualitative analytical system for coding and decoding the material in order to detect which factors hampered and which promoted successful exchange and growth in intercultural and hermeneutical competence.

During the analysis of the empirical material, the question of the relationship between reading, (new) praxis, and transformation became increasingly intriguing. This relationship is almost always taken to be

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Willemien van Berkum received her Bachelor of Theology from the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in Kampen, the Netherlands. She completed her theological education with a Master of Theology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 2011. Until September 2014, she worked as the research assistant of Professor Hans de Wit on the field of intercultural hermeneutics and contextual Bible reading. In 2012 she started as an assistant pastor in an old neighborhood in Amsterdam, where she encounters many people with social and psychiatric problems and reads the Bible with them. Together they contextualize the gospel to their own life.

Janet Dyk has been affiliated with the Vrije Universiteit intercultural Bible reading project ever since translating the original project application into English in 1999. She has participated both in reading groups and in all of the conferences. As a linguist specializing in Semitic languages, she works as senior researcher at the Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer of the Vrije Universiteit, most recently in the project awarded her by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), entitled "Does Syntactic Variation Reflect Language Change? Tracing Syntactic Diversity in Biblical Hebrew Texts." Her recent publications include "Deportation or Forgiveness in Hosea 1:6? Verb Valence Patterns and Translation Proposals," *The Bible Translator* 65:235–79 (2014), and (with Percy van Keulen), *Language System, Translation Technique and Textual Tradition in Peshitta Kings* (Brill, 2013).

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