



# Connected leadership: Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 – a case study

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## Abstract

### Connected leadership: Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 – a case study

*The purpose of this article is to address the matter of connected leadership. The point of departure is a biblical passage from Jeremiah 8:18-9:3. The focus of this article is confined to the aspect of connectedness and related issues. The argument put forward is that the rhetorical nature of texts has the ability to engage many readers over time and generations. Not only did the poetic nature of Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 convey the words once spoken by a prophet, but the rhetoric also conveyed the passion of the prophet and of Yahweh for the wounded and broken people of Judah. Added to that is the fact that within the Christian tradition the belief is that the text will find meaning in new contexts as well. Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 brings to the table an element that leaders – especially religious and Christian leaders – need to take note of. Leaders should answer to a “higher power” and to ethical norms because of connectedness to this “higher power”. As a leader, Jeremiah identified with his people and their woeful condition. But because of his connectedness to Yahweh, he was willing to confront them and point out their wrongdoings. He was not prepared to sacrifice his beliefs and convictions for the sake of popularity.*

## Opsomming

### In-kontakleierskap: Jeremia 8:18-9:3 – 'n gevallestudie

*Die doel van hierdie artikel is om die kwessie van in-kontakleierskap te bespreek. Die teksgedeelte Jeremia 8:18-9:3 word as vertrekpunt geneem. Die fokus vir bespreking word beperk tot in-kontakkommunikasie en aangeleenthede wat daarmee verband hou. Die argument wat aangevoer word, is dat die reto-*

*riese karakter van die teks die vermoë het om oor geslagte heen lesers te raak en betrokke te kry. Die poëtiese aard van Jeremia 8:18-9:3 bevat nie net die woorde van 'n profeet uit die verlede nie, maar die retoriek slaag daarin om die passie van die profeet en van Jahwe vir 'n gekwesde en gebroke volk van Juda oor te dra. Hiermee saam gaan die oortuiging in die Christelike tradisie dat tekswoorde nuwe betekenis kry in nuwe kontekste. Jeremia 8:18-9:3 is van so 'n aard dat leiers daarvan kennis moet neem, veral godsdienstige- en Christenleiers. Leiers moet verantwoording doen aan 'n "hoër mag" en etiese vereistes vanweë hulle verbintenis aan hierdie "hoër mag". Jeremia het hom as leier met die betreurenswaardige omstandighede van sy mense geïdentifiseer. Hy het sy volksgenote gekonfronteer oor hulle verkeerde dade omdat sy verbintenis aan Jahwe by hom die hoogste prioriteit geniet het. Hy was nie bereid om sy oortuigings en opvattings prys te gee ter wille van gewildheid nie.*

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to address the matter of connected leadership. As a biblical scholar, it seemed suitable to address this topic by using a passage from the Old Testament. The passage in mind is Jeremiah 8:18-9:3. To address issues of leadership is quite a broad task, but for the purpose of this article, the focus will be confined to the one aspect mentioned and to issues relating to this aspect. An awareness of this leadership trait or characteristic came about by observing what has been taking place in the political arena in the last five years or so. South Africa had a leader who, despite having many competencies, was unable to connect with the people whose leader he was. This particular leader was then replaced by a more charismatic leader who indicated that he was in touch with the needs, concerns and – perhaps most importantly – the feelings of the people. The second leader is a good example of what is understood by “connected leadership”.

## 2. Motivation for the research

The observations about the local leaders mentioned in the introductory section are the result of reading the book by David Traversi (2007) entitled, *The source of leadership: eight drivers of the high-impact leader*.<sup>1</sup> In one of the chapters he discusses the issue of

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1 Traversi could be regarded as an advocate for the transformation of leadership (cf. Traversi, 2007:13).

“connected communication”. This concept is defined by Traversi (2007:174) as follows: “Connected communication is an exchange between two or more people, facilitated by empathy, honesty, and clarity of purpose and message”.<sup>2</sup> It argues cogently that a well-balanced leader should excel at connecting with people he/she wishes to lead. Leadership is not just to exercise power, to demand certain things from people or to order them to do something. It has to do with connecting with people and communicating with them on a deep level. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is Dr Martin Luther King Jr, best known for his “I have a dream” speech. It is said of him that he succeeded in leadership for the reason that his communication with people was “highly strategic and well articulated” (Traversi, 2007:187). As a leader in a difficult time in the history in the United States of America, he managed to communicate with people in a sincere way and on a deep level. He was able to communicate understanding and empathy to his followers. Traversi (2007:188) says that if he had to summarise what he has read and heard from King, it would boil down to the following: What King communicated was “I *feel* your pain, humiliation, fear, oppression, and isolation. I *feel* how the injustices of our society wear on you. And I *know* what you want. I *know* you yearn for freedom, acceptance, respect, opportunity and love.” The result of this connected communication was that people trusted him and were willing to follow him. Well-balanced leaders communicate an understanding of people’s needs, fears and aspirations, and convey sincere interest in and empathy for that matters in their lives.

After reading this fascinating description of King’s communication during the civil rights struggle in the USA, the passage in Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 immediately came to mind. This passage communicated to the reader experiences and feelings similar to those in the quotation from King’s speech. It is much more than good communication; it is leadership that connects with followers on a deep level of understanding. It is leadership which shows maturity and sincerity.

We tend to regard and speak of leadership mostly in terms of politics. Leadership is, however, displayed in many instances and in various situations and structures where people are involved. Leadership principles are usually generic in nature, but in their application

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2 Although this definition is clear, it does not elucidate whether this connected communication is used for good or bad purposes. Each case of such communication should be critically assessed.

they become more specific. Each and every context where leadership is displayed makes its own demands on leadership. The application of leadership principles should be context specific. These so-called generic leadership principles apply not only to politics, but also to business leadership, civil leadership, church leadership, and even leadership within relationships. The principle of connected leadership, in particular, is applicable to most situations where leadership is required.

In this article the interest is particularly in leadership as far as it relates to a religious context. We should acknowledge that, whereas religious leadership is not detached from other forms of leadership in a particular society, it is exercised within a context where God is acknowledged. But, as stated, even if the point of departure is leadership from a religious perspective, it will have a bearing on civil and political leadership as well. By reading the selected passage in the book of Jeremiah, it is clear that the prophet has a concern for ordinary people with regard to both their relationship to Yahweh and how they conduct their lives in their everyday relationships. This is where the prophet shows himself as a leader in society.

With the idea of connected leadership and the particular interest in religious leadership in mind, the passage in Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 seems appropriate to analyse. Whilst reading this passage in Jeremiah very closely, the realisation dawned on the author (WJW) that the passage has a voice of its own that needs to be heard. The approach followed in this article is to read the passage on its own merit, allowing the rhetoric of the text to invoke certain emotions and responses from the reader. The aim is for the reader to hear the text in its attempt to involve the reader, to challenge the reader and to convince the reader of views expressed and ideas highlighted. This entails reading the text within the context it intends to create and understanding it as it appeals to the situation that serves as background. After listening to the text and acknowledging what (possibly) the reader subjectively hears from the text, the aim is to capture what the text conveys in a broader context. The idea is to engage the results emanating from the text in the dialogue on connected leadership. It should be conceded that the reader comes to the text with a preconceived idea but, at the same time, acknowledges that the text creates meaning in its own right. The aim is to create a dialogue between what is understood from the text and the single aspect coined as “connected leadership”.

### 3. Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 in context (Masoretic Text 8:18-9:2)<sup>3</sup>

**Jeremiah 8:18-9:3:** <sup>18</sup>My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. <sup>19</sup>Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: 'Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?' ('Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?') <sup>20</sup>The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.' <sup>21</sup>For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. <sup>22</sup>Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

**Jeremiah 9:1:** Oh that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people! <sup>2</sup>Oh that I had in the desert a traveler's lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a band of traitors. <sup>3</sup>They bend their tongues like bows; they have grown strong in the land for falsehood, and not for truth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the LORD (NRSV).

When speaking of Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 (MT, 8:18-9:2) in context, both the literary context of the passage and the socio-historical context should be considered. With regard to the literary context, this passage forms part of the first main collection, Jeremiah 1-25. In general terms, these chapters are regarded as words from Jeremiah, both in prose and poetic form. Scrutiny of the text, however, reveals that the situation is much more complex and that each section should be treated on merit. There are many theories to explain the alternation between poetry and prose. Weippert (1973:228-234) has referred to the prose sections as sermons responding to poetic passages. From research it has also become clear that the text of Jeremiah has a long formation history and that the so-called Jeremiah tradition had a strong hand in the editing and formation of the text of the book of Jeremiah (cf. McConville, 2002:45-51; Collins, 2004:334-338).

Who is the person who shows the deep emotions displayed in this section? Some scholars do not regard this person as Jeremiah, but argue that it is the city that is personified in this poem. R. Carroll (1986:235-237) is the most prominent advocate of this view. It is in

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3 For the purpose of this article the numbering of the English Bible will be followed. The Masoretic Text (MT) differs in having 23 verses in Jeremiah 8.

line with his attempt to regard the prophet not as a real person, but as a literary character in the book. The most obvious person to whom this poem refers, is the prophet who was called by Yahweh to address both his own people and the nations of the world (cf. Lundbom, 1999:530). This, in all probability, is what the tradition responsible for the preservation of Jeremiah's prophecies wanted readers to believe. Other scholars who are more cautious about identifying the speaker as Jeremiah refer to the person in the lament as the poet, whoever he may be. Brueggemann (1998:92-93) believes that, in essence, the poet is expressing Yahweh's deepest emotions about his people. The pathos of Yahweh and that of the prophet are one and the same (cf. Fretheim, 2002:152-156; also Goldingay, 2009: 819). It is not coincidental that there are so many references to the expression "my people" in this passage. Jeremiah's people are Yahweh's people and vice versa.

It is clear that there are many views on the prophet Jeremiah, but for the purpose of this article, it is of no concern whether Jeremiah was a literary figure or a real person. His role in the book, and particularly in the selected passage, is to exercise a leadership role as a prophet representing Yahweh.

### 3.1 Literary structure of Jeremiah 8:18-9:3

Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 seem to be a literary unit. The previous section ends in 8:17 with a confirmation that Yahweh has spoken, followed by a *setumah* at the end of the section. A new unit therefore commences in verse 18 and ends in 9:3 with a confirmation that Yahweh has spoken, followed by a *setumah* to round off the section.

The poetic passage, Jeremiah 8:18-9:3, consists of two subsections, namely 8:18-21 and 8:22-9:3. A likely way of reading 8:18-21 is as follows (cf. Lundbom, 1999:529):

Verse 18	The prophet speaks about what he is experiencing.
Verse 19a-b	The prophet speaks on behalf of the people of Judah.
Verse 19c	Yahweh expresses his anger by raising questions.
Verse 20	The prophet speaks on behalf of the people of Judah.
Verse 21	The prophet expresses his compassion with his people.

The following subsection 8:22-9:3 reads as follows:

Verse 22	The prophet speaks on behalf of his people by raising questions.
Verse 1	The prophet expresses emotions about Judah.
Verse 2	The prophet speaks about the people of Judah.
Verse 3	The prophet voices what Judah is doing.

Jeremiah 8:18 has caused problems for translators as the Hebrew is not clear.<sup>4</sup>

Although the translation is difficult, the general connotation is clear. The prophet (or poet) has lost his joy and experiences a situation which makes his heart faint. He is emotionally deeply affected by something the people did, that took away his joy.

### 3.2 The rhetorical nature of the text

What is important to notice is the rhetorical nature of this passage. Rhetorical criticism is interested in the dynamic character of the text by means of which it persuades people in the communicative process. The aim of the text is to persuade or change its readers' minds by means of rhetorical techniques and effects (cf. Mitchell, 2006: 617-620).<sup>5</sup> The term is used here on the understanding that certain stylistic devices are used purposely to communicate not only in literary terms, but also holistically to persuade people. It is the means by which texts appeal to all the senses of readers of or listeners to the text to engage them and persuade them. It is an appreciation of the communicative ability of the text to affect people over periods of time. It is not an a-historic reading of the text, but an acknowledgement that the text is dynamic and has intrinsic power to affect multiple audiences and readers in various periods in history. The effect will probably be different, but certainly not unrelated, in each new context in which it is read, depending on the unique

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4 Translators differ on how the Hebrew should be translated –“from far and wide in the land” (NRSV) or “all across the land” (NLT). The NIV offers the translation “from a land far away”. The implications of the choice are far-reaching, since the NIV translation implies a cry from people in exile.

5 It should be admitted that scholars do not always agree on what rhetorical criticism entails. Some use it as an alternative term for literary readings of the text (cf. Mitchell, 2006:618-619, referring to Watson & Hauser, 1994), whilst others concentrate on the stylistic analysis of the text. For a more comprehensive study of the issue, consult Brueggemann (1997:53-59; also Mamahit, 2009:10-27).

dynamics and challenges each new context poses. In this regard Brueggemann (1997:59) says that "... rhetoric is indeed capable of construing, generating, and evoking alternative reality".

It is a lament on the state of affairs in Judah and its people. It is a passage loaded with emotive words. The reader should take note of the emotive words used in this passage: verse 18: sorrow, sick heart (broken heart in NLT); verse 19: cry of my people, provoked anger; verse 20: not saved; verse 21: hurt of my people, I am hurt, I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me; verse 22: no balm, no physician, health not restored; 9 verse 1: head a spring of water, eyes a fountain of tears, weep day and night; 9 verse 2: leave my people, adulterers, traitors (name calling); 9 verse 3: falsehood, evil, lack of knowledge about Yahweh.

Besides the use of emotive words, the passage also contains various types of questions to raise important issues: Verse 19: Is the Yahweh not in Zion?, Is her King not in her?, Why have they provoked me to anger with their images?; verse 22: Is there no balm in Gilead?, Is there no physician there?, Why has the health of my people not been restored? We should also take note of the important imperatives such as Hark! or Listen! (8:19) and exclamations like Oh! in 9:1 and 9:2 that set the tone of the passage.

The rhetoric of this passage is of such a nature that it has an impact on the reader. The question the reader has to answer is: What does this passage communicate? It communicates the passion and compassion of a person who is integrally connected to the well-being of his people. He feels the pain of his people, he identifies with their woundedness and he cries his eyes out because of their misery. He understands their sense of hopelessness and panic, because he is one of them. He is not detached or emotionally disengaged from them; he is emotionally connected to their plight. But the text also communicates the frustration of the prophet, because he knows that the people are the masters of their destiny and misery.

Besides the strong rhetorical appeal to readers of the text, a closer look at the content of the passage will surely give substance to the matters that stirred up the compassion we experience by reading the text.

#### **4. Exposition of 8:18-9:3 (MT 8:18-9:3)**

The book of Jeremiah is a collection of a great variety of literature. It seems that the passage under discussion forms part of a collection



of individual poems brought together in Jeremiah 8:4-9:26 as part of the bigger collection 7:1-10:25 (Carroll, 1986:86). The tone set in the first poem (8:18-21) by 8:18 reveals that it is a lament. The speaker's joy is gone; he is experiencing grief and is heartbroken. In verses 19a and 19b Jeremiah calls for attention to the outcry of the people of Judah that sounds from all over the land.<sup>6</sup> At this stage of the history of Judah, according to the text, it seems unlikely to presume an exilic context as some would argue (McKane, 1986:193-195).<sup>7</sup> However, it is not inconceivable that people experiencing the exile would relate to the cries of those referred to in the passage and the questions they were asking about Yahweh and their situation of hardship. It also ties in with the nature of the book of Jeremiah as material collected by the tradition who regarded Jeremiah's oracles as relevant to later generations. It might have formed part of the liturgy of later generations, as Brueggemann (1998:94-95) suggests.

#### 4.1 Historical context

We do not know the concrete historical circumstances the poem is alluding to. What we can gather from the text is that the people of Judah are experiencing a situation that has reduced them to despair.<sup>8</sup> They are in anguish, desperately asking questions about the symbols that up to now served as the pillars of their security. We know that Judah was under threat from the Babylonians who besieged Jerusalem in stages and eventually took the people into exile in the time that Jeremiah acted as prophet. In verse 19a Jeremiah is asking the questions on behalf of the people of Judah. Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King not in her? These questions reveal the cornerstone of their sense of security as a people. As his covenant

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7 Lundbom (1999:531) offers a discussion of the various ways scholars have interpreted the Hebrew phrase translated by some as “from a land far off” or “from far and wide in the land”. Lundbom regards the phrase as a later addition to the current Hebrew text.

8 Rudolph (1968:65) works with the possibility of a severe drought and therefore hunger. The hardship the people are experiencing is a current situation, not something anticipated in the future. Schmidt (2008:201-202) works with the possibilities of both hunger and war. In either case, war will result in hunger for the people.

people, they relied on Yahweh's presence with them. The temple served as his earthly abode in the city of God, Zion. Zion or Jerusalem was also the seat of the Davidic kingship, which was regarded as Yahweh's unconditional promise to the people of the Southern Kingdom. They relied on their interpretation of the unconditional promise that there will always be a king from the Davidic lineage on the throne. What the people of Judah experience makes them question the pillars of their trust. We know from the book of Jeremiah that the prophet did not support the unconditional promises which led to a false sense of security (Strydom & Wessels, 2002:124). Jeremiah 7:1-5 makes it clear that God demands obedience to Him and obedience to the covenant stipulations. Yahweh demands conduct that corresponds to the ethical obligations embedded in the covenant with his people. Jeremiah 8:19c states that Yahweh is angry because the people of Judah have been disloyal by worshipping images of foreign gods. Verse 20 speaks of summer and harvest, usually times that bring prosperity and joy. But the expectations accompanying good harvests did not materialise: instead, the outcome was negative. Judah probably expected Yahweh to save them from enemy threats and oppression, but nothing came to fruition; salvation did not come, Yahweh in his anger did not comply with the expectations associated with his presence.

The prophet speaks again in verse 21 and reveals his close identification with his people and his connectedness to their plight. He can understand that they are hurt by Yahweh's lack of response. They feel betrayed by Yahweh whom they expected to come to their rescue. Their pain is his pain. It is like death to the prophet; therefore he mourns and is overcome by grief. On the one hand he feels what they feel, but on the other hand he mourns and cries because of the disloyalty and ignorance of his people. He is grieved because they lack insight into why they are experiencing what they are experiencing. He cries with them, but also because of them.

## **4.2 A lament**

The second subsection (Jer. 8:22-9:3) is also a lament about the terrible state of affairs of the people of Judah. In Jeremiah 8:22 the prophet asks three questions which emphasise the state of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Their condition is that of a wounded person in need of ointment to heal the wounds. Gilead in the region east of the Jordan is known for a tree that produces a healing ointment (cf. Huey, 1993:117). Next, the prophet states that a physician is needed to attend to the wounds. The people are in ill

health but there seems to be no help or assistance to heal their wounds and to restore their health. The answer to the question why this is the case follows in Jeremiah 9:1-3. Jeremiah states that his people are adulterers, a band of unfaithful people. All of this seems too much for the prophet. Jeremiah 9:1 shows emotions of a deeply affected person who cries out because he is overwhelmed by the misery of his fellow Judeans and the sorrow their disloyal actions have caused. He does not have enough tears to mourn the state of the Judeans. They have become a bunch of liars, evil people who do not know Yahweh. Commenting on this, Mobley (2000:777) says: "In the OT knowledge is experiential and relational ... To know God is to be in relationship to God (Hos. 6:6). Knowledge of God involves reverent obedience to Him" (Prov. 1:7). The people show no signs of understanding Yahweh's covenant laws and ethical demands. Knowledge of Yahweh comes from living in relationship with God and, in the process, coming to know who He is and what He requires. To know Yahweh or have knowledge of Yahweh is terminology we often come across in the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 4:22 the reference is "to know me (Yahweh)". In Jeremiah 9:2, 6 it is expressed in the negative: "They do not know me (Yahweh)". In Jeremiah 5:4, 5 it is said that they do not know the way of Yahweh, they do not know the requirements. In Jeremiah 8:7 it is repeated that they do not know the requirements of Yahweh. It therefore seems that knowledge is about who God is and what God requires. Knowledge of Yahweh should result in having an attitude of care and ensuring that justice prevails for everyone in the society (cf. Brueggemann, 1994:66).

### 4.3 Summary

The passage under discussion can be summarised as follows: This passage shows that the people of Jerusalem and Judah experienced a situation that left them with feelings of being forsaken by God. A picture is painted of a people in pain caused by wounds afflicted on them. As a religious leader with great awareness of and sensitivity to the sociopolitical reality of his time, Jeremiah could not turn a blind eye to the misery of his people. As a prophet of Yahweh he sensed the pain and despair of his people and he identified with their situation. By doing this he expressed in his person the passion of God for her people. As Goldingay (2009:819) says: "Fundamental to a prophet is 'a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos'". He continues by saying: "Grief, like anger, is a reaction to loss and to being let down and abandoned. Jeremiah's grief will be a mirror of Yhwh's." As a leader, Jeremiah knew that it is

not enough to identify with his people's pain and misery, he also had the responsibility to lay bare the causes of the miserable state of affairs. The people of Judah had to realise that they broke their covenant relationship with Yahweh and acted in an ethically wrong manner (cf. Lee, 2007:201-202). They had stretched Yahweh's grace too far.

From the exposition of the passage under discussion it becomes clear that the connectedness to the people has a deeply rooted embeddedness in the covenantal relationship between God and his people. As mentioned, the phrase "my people" is repeated several times in the passage, clearly signaling the covenantal connection of Israel and Judah to Yahweh. This is further strengthened by the use of the verb "to know" in Jeremiah 9:3. This verb in the context of the covenant refers to the intimate relationship between Yahweh and his people as expressed in obedience to his covenant stipulations. Jeremiah 9:3 relates the misery of the people to their lack of knowledge as to what the covenant of God requires of them. They had been disobedient and disloyal to the God of their covenant.

Jeremiah's connectedness to the plight of his people is crystal clear from this passage, but that was not his only connection. The prophet's first and foremost connection is to Yahweh. This is clear from the broader context of the book of Jeremiah. The prophet, according to the text, was called by Yahweh to serve as his messenger to the people of Judah, but also to the nations of the world (cf. Jer.1). Not only was he to serve as the mouthpiece of Yahweh, but his calling would consume his whole life. He did not marry, was alienated from his family, the kings of Judah were in constant conflict with him and wanted to kill him and the enemies of the surrounding countries were the targets of divine oracles against them. His ministry totally consumed his person, and according to the text, at times caused him to despair and experience deep depression (cf. Jer. 15:10-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18).

The text tradition of Jeremiah wanted readers to understand that Jeremiah was so connected to Yahweh and his message, that it consumed his life. His connectedness to Yahweh and the covenantal obligations are undisputed and had radical consequences. The prophet therefore felt a strong urge to emphasise and uphold the ethical implications of being in a covenantal relationship with Yahweh. His connectedness to Yahweh had a strong ethical base and the ethical demands on the people, who claimed to be Yahweh's people, is the overriding theme of the prophet's message (cf. Wessels, 2008:729-744).

## **5. The relevance of Jeremiah 8:18-9:3**

At times it is difficult to show the relevance of an ancient passage for modern day situations. To show such relevance great care must be taken not to abuse the text for our present purposes. A sound hermeneutical approach is needed as well as respect for the intrinsic worth of the text. The point was made earlier that the rhetoric of the discussed passage was of such a nature that it would appeal to most readers who would read it with an open mind. It would appeal particularly to people who themselves experience hardship and pain and who as a consequence are questioning Yahweh.

This particular passage in the book of Jeremiah has another characteristic that leaves it open to interpretation and application in more contexts. As mentioned the passage consisted of two related poems, both in the form of laments. Both the lack of specificity in the texts and their poetic nature opened up possibilities to relate it to multiple contexts. The following observation was made by Brueggemann (1998:95):

The poignancy of the poem is matched by an absence of specificity. The poetry is left open and inconclusive. It does not allude to particular acts of kings or invading armies. No doubt the poet and his listeners have something particular in mind. But what lets the poetry function in every generation as a powerful disclosure is the concreteness of the language that is porous enough to let it touch new historical specificities. The first articulation of the poem can always be freshly presented with new concreteness. Heard in a new situation, this poem will have its powerful say toward new concreteness, almost without interpretation. Each new rendering in new circumstances permits the poem to be God's grief-stricken word in a quite fresh way.

The argument presented in this article is that it is essential for all leaders to be connected to the people they wish to lead. To win the trust of people they must feel that the leader has a sense of understanding of what they experience and what they need. A wise leader knows how to tap into the emotions and needs they experience. It is, however, obvious that this could lead to the abuse of people who feel that they are being understood and emotionally reached. To compensate for this, critical voices are needed to bring about checks and balances. It is an absolute requirement for a society to have critical voices and not to silence them. Leaders should be accountable to the people they lead. Leadership can be true only when the goals leaders pursue display the values, needs,

aspirations and expectations of all parties involved (cf. Price, 2008: 72). In a secular society, human rights need to be protected by values and principles acceptable to a specific society.

When it comes to religious and Christian leadership, there needs to be strong and clear ethical principles guiding the community. It is clear from the Jeremiah passage that the covenant obligations served as guidelines for the prophet's conduct. However, they also served as the yardstick for how the people of Judah should act towards their God and other people.

## **6. Connected leadership and connected communication**

The two concepts of importance in this article are *connected leadership* and *connected communication*. These two concepts are intrinsically related, but not synonymous. Connected leadership is the broader of the two concepts and encompasses connected communication. What is meant by this kind of leadership has to do with the nature of this leadership. It is the ability of the leader to step "into the shoes" of those people he/she attempts to lead, connecting on a deep level of understanding. A leader who connects manages to engage the other party in such a way that a sense of trust and openness is created (cf. Salacuse, 2006:191-207). The connection that is established is not only on a sensory level, but on a level that engages the whole person. This would therefore mean a connectedness on an emotional and intellectual level. This connectedness is established by the whole demeanor of the leader. Referring to the feeling aspect in communication, Hughes and Terrell (2007:90-91) say:

The feeling of communication is conveyed primarily through the nonsymbolic content, the dimension that includes such distinctions as tonality, posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact. These convey the feelings or emotional energy behind the message ...

This quotation on communication is comprehensive, but should not be regarded as prescriptive for every occasion of communication. Not all aspects mentioned will necessarily take place in the process of communication. The communicative process entails much more than a description on paper. For one, communication should be culture-sensitive (cf. Salacuse, 2006:97-98, 104-105). For instance, in some cultures eye-contact with a woman by a man might be regarded as offensive. Other important elements of effective com-

munication include aspects such as respect for who the other person is, acceptance of the person and the leader's attitude towards the other culture. Leaders should be aware of the many facets involved in communicating effectively and with purpose.

This brings us to the other concept of importance, *verbal communication*. This aspect is indispensable to the establishment of connectedness between parties. What is communicated by means of words enhances the already established connection created by physical contact. What is said and how it is conveyed to the other person are crucial. Many leaders have good content, but lack the ability to convey the content effectively. The most important function of language is to persuade people to accept a particular view or what the leader feels necessary for them to do (cf. Bethel, 2009:151-157; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2008:20). At this point in the article, the focus is on the verbal communication of leaders. This does not, however, exclude the fact that effective communication requires of the leader to be in touch with her/his audience. The process of good communication commences with listening as a means of understanding the audience's circumstances, feelings, needs, dreams and hopes (cf. Harkavy, 2007:173-174).<sup>9</sup>

In biblical context, the prophets are excellent examples of people who used language to convince ordinary people of what God expects of them. As messengers of God they had to deliver oracles on God's behalf to warn, reprimand and encourage people. They did this by skillfully employing the imaginative aspects of language such as metaphors, riddles and many other stylistic devices. It is clear that there is no substitute for skilful communication, because it engages audiences, creates understanding and trust and persuades people. Leaders want to win the hearts and minds of people. Using language effectively can help to break down resistance in the audience and then to influence and persuade people to follow (cf. Johnson & Luecke, 2006:121-144).

Oral communication is very powerful, but not the only way of communication. The written word also has an essential role to play in connectedness and connected leadership. We are not in the privileged position to hear leaders such as the prophets of the Bible orally. At some time in history there were those who had the op-

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9 Cf. Denhardt *et al.* (2009:190) who refer to Greenleaf (1977), the author of the book, *Servant leadership*, who admonishes leaders to listen to others and to their own inner voices.

portunity to listen to them, but as was explained, we only have the treasures preserved by the tradition. Fortunately these oral words have been preserved in written form in collections of texts. But the written word has its own power and attractiveness (cf. Doan & Giles, 2005:1-5).<sup>10</sup> In traditions such as Judaism and Christianity, the power of sacred texts is particularly important, since in most instances it defines these traditions. What these traditions tend to lose sight of is that, in order to access these sacred texts, interpretation is required. In many instances, however, this power of texts leads to abuse arising from incorrect interpretation and wrongful manipulation by leaders who have their own gain in mind.

The argument put forward in this article is that the rhetorical nature of texts has the ability to engage many readers over time and generations. The rhetorical nature of the poetry of Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 conveyed not only the words once spoken by a prophet, but also the passion of the prophet and of Yahweh for the wounded and broken people of Judah. Added to that is the fact that within the Christian tradition it is believed that the Holy Spirit brings life to texts in new contexts.

## **7. Leaders, power and communication**

Leaders have power, be it the power of position, of personality, of speech or of conviction (cf. Johnson & Luecke, 2006:37-56). Price (2008:73-92) is correct that a leader's self-interest can lead to abuse of power and, as a result, of people. Yet a leader needs self-interest to motivate his/her actions and efforts. What, however, is the root of this self-interest? In communicating with people, words enable leaders to gain and exercise power over their followers. Effective leaders appreciate this powerful tool and make use of it to influence people (Strydom & Wessels, 2000:61-62). The prophet Jeremiah is a good example in this regard.

Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 brings to the table an element that leaders cannot afford to ignore, especially religious and Christian leaders. Leaders should answer to a higher power and ethical norms, because of their connectedness to this higher power. As a leader, Jeremiah identified with his people and their woeful condition. But because of his connectedness to Yahweh, he was willing to confront them and point

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10 Doan and Giles (2005:3) hold the view that there are three relationships between writing and power: the first is power over the text, the second is power through the text and the third is power of texts.



out their wrongdoings. He was not willing to sacrifice his beliefs and convictions for the sake of popularity. Because of the covenant relationship with God and the ethical demands of such a relationship, Jeremiah was not willing to make any compromises.

## 8. Conclusion

In this case study, an attempt was made to illustrate how a prophetic text can be engaged in discourse on leadership, in particular Christian leadership. As stated in the introduction, only one aspect of leadership was addressed, namely that of connected leadership. Reference was made to contemporary political figures to illustrate the phenomenon of connected leadership. Due to the religious context within which our discussion of leadership takes place, and because of the fact that people use biblical texts to address leadership issues in this context, it seemed appropriate to use Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 for the purpose. An attempt was made to allow the chosen text to not only inform the exegete of the text, but allow the rhetorical nature of the text to engage the reader within his/her context.

The case study from Jeremiah served the purpose of a hermeneutical exercise on how a prophetic text could be used to be relevant for modern day discussions on leadership issues. Not only was shown how essential it is for leaders to connect with those they wish to lead, but also the importance of connected communication in order to bring across a particular message or idea. Finally it was emphasised that leaders, in particular religious leaders, who find themselves in positions of power and have the ability to use the power of speech to influence followers, should conform to ethical norms and answer to God.

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**Key concepts:**

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covenant stipulations  
rhetoric

**Kernbegrippe:**

in-kontakleierskap  
retoriek  
verbondsvoorskrifte

