**Building Breakable Roofs: Old Testament/Hebrew Bible Exegesis and Disability**

**Introduction**

- honest text, hard problems

-is there, and do we need an OT/HB ‘theology of disability’?

**1. Tendencies**

*a) Defining Disability?*

*b) The Normate Hermeneutic*

‘A blind servant is useless, a deaf messenger ineligible. Everyone must realize that from his or her own experience’

(K. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, Hermeneia, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 149)

‘Both the infirm and the desert were considered by the people of the Bible to be in the thrall of death, barren and worthless.’

(J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 623)

**2. Temptations**

**3. Trends**

*a. Inclusion/Exclusion*

*b. Healing and Prophetic Utopian Visions*

*c. Metaphors and Imagery*

*d. Sensory Language*

**4. Beginning Exegesis**

Some pointers for considering your texts:

1. What does text say about God?
2. What does text say about humans?
3. Are people with disabilities included or excluded?
4. How is language of disability used?
5. If you could sum up the passage in a sentence, what would you say?
6. How would an understanding of this text on its own influence or impact a faith community thinking about disability and theology?

**5. Concluding Points: ‘Be more Leviticus’**

What would happen if we, and communities of faith, were to ‘be more Leviticus’? Would we face up to the presence of the variety of human embodied existence? Would we figure what we don’t understand into our communities, and into our approaches to God?

At its most basic level, Leviticus recognises that if the whole community is to come before God in worship then people with disabilities need to be figured into this community. Even if they way this pans out is different to in Leviticus, the call for action is the same. When this call dialogues with texts speaking of God’s multisensory, facilitative revelations of the past and God’s facilitative future actions, does the attitude of Leviticus, the accessibility of the Psalms and the promise of Jeremiah not speak together, teaching us that people with disabilities should, can and will be included and valued as people made in God’s image?

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| 8 Behold, I will bring them from the North country,       And gather them from the ends of the earth,       among them the blind and the lame,       the pregnant woman and she who is in labour       together;       A great company, they shall return here.  9 With weeping they shall come,       and with supplications I will lead them back,       I will cause them to walk by brooks of water,       by a straight path in which they shall not       stumble,  For I am a father to Israel,      and Ephraim is my firstborn. (Jer 31:7-9) | 8הִנְנִי מֵבִ֨יא אוֹתָ֜ם מֵאֶ֣רֶץ צָפ֗וֹן  וְקִבַּצְתִּים֮ מִיַּרְכְּתֵי־אָרֶץ֒  בָּ֚ם עִוֵּ֣ר וּפִסֵּ֔חַ  הָרָ֥ה וְיֹלֶ֖דֶת יַחְדָּ֑ו  קָהָ֥ל גָּד֖וֹל יָשׁ֥וּבוּ הֵֽנָּה׃  9בִּבְכִ֣י יָבֹ֗אוּ וּֽבְתַחֲנוּנִים֮ אֽוֹבִילֵם֒  אֽוֹלִיכֵם֙ אֶל־נַ֣חֲלֵי מַ֔יִם  בְּדֶ֣רֶךְ יָשָׁ֔ר לֹ֥א יִכָּשְׁל֖וּ בָּ֑הּ  כִּֽי־הָיִ֤יתִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל֙ לְאָ֔ב  וְאֶפְרַ֖יִם בְּכֹ֥רִי הֽוּא׃ ס |
| 5Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,      and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6Then will the lame man leap like a deer,      and the tongue of the mute man sing.  For in the wilderness water will gush forth,       and streams in the desert.  7The burning sand will become a pool,      the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the place of jackals, their resting place,       dry grass will become reeds and papyrus.  8And in that place there will be a highway;      it will be called the Way of Holiness;  The unclean will not pass on it;       it will be for those who walk on the Way,      wicked fools will not go about on it.  (Isa 35:5-8) | ‏ אָ֥ז תִּפָּקַ֖חְנָה עֵינֵ֣י עִוְרִ֑ים  וְאָזְנֵ֥י חֵרְשִׁ֖ים תִּפָּתַֽחְנָה׃  ‎6‏אָ֣ז יְדַלֵּ֤ג כָּֽאַיָּל֙ פִּסֵּ֔חַ  וְתָרֹ֖ן לְשׁ֣וֹן אִלֵּ֑ם  כִּֽי־נִבְקְע֤וּ בַמִּדְבָּר֙ מַ֔יִם  וּנְחָלִ֖ים בָּעֲרָבָֽה׃  ‎7‏וְהָיָ֤ה הַשָּׁרָב֙ לַאֲגַ֔ם  וְצִמָּא֖וֹן לְמַבּ֣וּעֵי מָ֑יִם  בִּנְוֵ֤ה תַנִּים֙ רִבְצָ֔הּ חָצִ֖יר לְקָנֶ֥ה וָגֹֽמֶא׃  ‎8‏וְהָיָה־שָׁ֞ם מַסְל֣וּל וָדֶ֗רֶךְ וְדֶ֤רֶךְ הַקֹּ֨דֶשׁ֙ יִקָּ֣רֵא לָ֔הּ  לֹֽא־יַעַבְרֶ֥נּוּ טָמֵ֖א וְהוּא־לָ֑מוֹ  הֹלֵ֥ךְ דֶּ֛רֶךְ וֶאֱוִילִ֖ים לֹ֥א יִתְעֽוּ׃ |
| 4Their idols are silver and gold,  Made by the hands of a man.  5They a mouth, but they do not talk,  They have eyes, but they do not see.  6They have ears, but they do not hear,  They have a nose, but they do not smell.  7Hands, but they do not touch, feet but they do not walk,  They do not make a sound in their throat.  (Ps 118:4-7) | ‏ עֲֽ֭צַבֵּיהֶם כֶּ֣סֶף וְזָהָ֑ב  מַ֝עֲשֵׂ֗ה יְדֵ֣י אָדָֽם׃  5פֶּֽה־לָ֭הֶם וְלֹ֣א יְדַבֵּ֑רוּ  עֵינַ֥יִם לָ֝הֶ֗ם וְלֹ֣א יִרְאֽוּ׃  ‎6‏אָזְנַ֣יִם לָ֭הֶם וְלֹ֣א יִשְׁמָ֑עוּ  אַ֥ף לָ֝הֶ֗ם וְלֹ֣א יְרִיחֽוּן׃  ‎7‏יְדֵיהֶ֤ם ׀ וְלֹ֬א יְמִישׁ֗וּן רַ֭גְלֵיהֶם וְלֹ֣א יְהַלֵּ֑כוּ  לֹֽא־יֶ֝הְגּ֗וּ בִּגְרוֹנָֽם׃ |
| 14Do not curse the deaf, and before the blind do not place a stumbling block, and/but you shall fear your God; I am the Lord. (Lev 19:14) | 14לֹא־תְקַלֵּ֣ל חֵרֵ֔שׁ וְלִפְנֵ֣י עִוֵּ֔ר לֹ֥א תִתֵּ֖ן מִכְשֹׁ֑ל וְיָרֵ֥אתָ מֵּאֱלֹהֶ֖יךָ אֲנִ֥י יְהוָֽה׃ |
| 18For all men with a blemish shall not approach; a man blind or lame or one with a mutilated face or a limb too long,19or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand,20or a hunchback or a dwarf or one impaired in his eyes, or an itching one, or scabby one, or whose testicles are crushed.21All men with a blemish who are of the offspring of Aaron the priest shall not come near to offer the Lord’s food offerings; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God.22He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things,23but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, then he will not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the Lord who sanctifies them.”  (Lev 21:18) | ‏‏18כִּ֥י כָל־אִ֛ישׁ אֲשֶׁר־בּ֥וֹ מ֖וּם לֹ֣א יִקְרָ֑ב אִ֤ישׁ עִוֵּר֙ א֣וֹ פִסֵּ֔חַ א֥וֹ חָרֻ֖ם א֥וֹ שָׂרֽוּעַ׃ ‎19‏א֣וֹ אִ֔ישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶ֥ה ב֖וֹ שֶׁ֣בֶר רָ֑גֶל א֖וֹ שֶׁ֥בֶר יָֽד׃ ‎20‏אֽוֹ־גִבֵּ֣ן אוֹ־דַ֔ק א֖וֹ תְּבַלֻּ֣ל בְּעֵינ֑וֹ א֤וֹ גָרָב֙ א֣וֹ יַלֶּ֔פֶת א֖וֹ מְר֥וֹחַ אָֽשֶׁךְ׃ ‎21כָּל־אִ֞ישׁ אֲשֶׁר־בּ֣וֹ מ֗וּם מִזֶּ֙רַע֙ אַהֲרֹ֣ן הַכֹּהֵ֔ן לֹ֣א יִגַּ֔שׁ לְהַקְרִ֖יב אֶת־אִשֵּׁ֣י יהו֑ה מ֣וּם בּ֔וֹ אֵ֚ת לֶ֣חֶם אֱלֹהָ֔יו לֹ֥א יִגַּ֖שׁ לְהַקְרִֽיב׃ ‎22‏לֶ֣חֶם אֱלֹהָ֔יו מִקָּדְשֵׁ֖י הַקֳּדָשִׁ֑ים וּמִן־הַקֳּדָשִׁ֖ים יֹאכֵֽל׃ ‎23‏אַ֣ךְ אֶל־הַפָּרֹ֜כֶת לֹ֣א יָבֹ֗א וְאֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּ֛חַ לֹ֥א יִגַּ֖שׁ כִּֽי־מ֣וּם בּ֑וֹ וְלֹ֤א יְחַלֵּל֙ אֶת־מִקְדָּשַׁ֔י כִּ֛י אֲנִ֥י יהוה מְקַדְּשָֽׁם׃ |
| 11Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made the mouth of a man? Or who makes him silent, or deaf, or seeing, or blind?  Is it not I, the Lord?” (Exo 4:11)  Consider (for the grammarians), are silent (or mute), deaf, seeing and blind (adjectives in Hebrew) attributive or substantive? And (for the Hebrew reader), what is unusual about the verb translated ‘makes’? | וַיֹּ֙אמֶר יהוה אֵלָ֗יו מִ֣י שָׂ֣ם פֶּה֘ לָֽאָדָם֒ א֚וֹ מִֽי־יָשׂ֣וּם אִלֵּ֔ם א֣וֹ חֵרֵ֔שׁ א֥וֹ פִקֵּ֖חַ א֣וֹ עִוֵּ֑ר  הֲלֹ֥א אָנֹכִ֖י יהוה׃ |
| Taste and see that the Lord is good,  Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (Ps 34:9 [Eng. 8])  He will cover over you with his pinions,  And there under his wings you will find rest. (Ps 91:4a)  Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving,  Make music to our God with the harp (Ps 147:7) | טַעֲמ֣וּ וּ֭רְאוּ כִּי־ט֣וֹב יְהוָ֑ה  אַֽשְׁרֵ֥י הַ֝גֶּ֗בֶר יֶחֱסֶה־בּֽוֹ׃  בְּאֶבְרָת֨וֹ ׀ יָ֣סֶךְ לָ֭ךְ  וְתַֽחַת־כְּנָפָ֣יו תֶּחְסֶ֑ה  עֱנ֣וּ לַיהוָ֣ה בְּתוֹדָ֑ה  זַמְּר֖וּ לֵאלֹהֵ֣ינוּ בְכִנּֽוֹר׃ |