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2005), which includes a major critique of Milgrom’s influential theory regarding the transfer of sins and physical ritual impurities to the sanctuary and their removal from it on the Day of Atonement.

Milgrom, who enjoyed a healthy debate and appreciated thoughtful analysis of his work, even when it disagreed with him, wrote the following for the back cover of “Cult and Character:” “[Gane’s] book is a marvel of close reading and impeccable logic... [it] is the first major critique of my work, and I am immensely happy and proud that it was done by my student and that my contribution is so comprehensively acknowledged... It is a major work and will be the standard for a long time.”

Milgrom formed lasting friendships with his students. After his death at the age of 87 in June of 2010, when memorial sessions were held in his honor at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in London (July 2011) and the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco (November 2011), many of the presenters were his former students.

Gane initiated the compilation and editing of the best papers from these sessions (selected by peer review), as well as some other invited essays (also peer-reviewed), into a memorial volume in honor of Milgrom titled, “Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond.” The Society of Biblical Literature will publish the forthcoming book as part of the Resources for Biblical Study series. It is edited by Gane and Ada Taggar-Cohen, an Israeli Hittitologist, with the assistance of an editorial board comprised almost entirely of Milgrom’s former students.

It was important to the editors of the Resources for Biblical Study series that the book be thematically cohesive, rather than a miscellaneous collection of essays, as is common of many volumes that honor individual scholars, including “Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom” (Eisenbrauns, 1995). Therefore, the forthcoming Milgrom memorial volume aims, as the Introduction states, “to serve as a more narrowly focused and cohesive resource for priestly and related literature.” It also includes a bibliography of Milgrom’s extensive publications, some of which were posthumous, ranging from 1994–2014. A bibliography of his earlier publications, ranging from 1955–1994, was included in “Pomegranates and Golden Bells.”

The 19 essays by scholars from around the world are centered around Milgrom’s main interests, which form the five sections or parts of the book: 1) interpretation of priestly and holiness texts, 2) composition of priestly and holiness texts, 3) literary structure of priestly and holiness texts, 4) relationships between priestly, holiness and Deuteronomistic texts, and 5) extra-biblical texts relating to priestly texts.

“He was so great in this field, such a pioneer,” says Gane. This new volume addresses the question: “Now that he has passed away, where do we go from here?” “It’s not just about him,” Gane explains; “the purpose of the book is to exemplify, in several different areas in which he was interested and to which he contributed, the kinds of contributions that are now being made by other scholars in these fields, which can inspire further exploration.”

Milgrom’s love for debate, which was so often witnessed in the classroom as he watched his students interact, is also honored in this volume. The writers show considerable differences of opinion, and the introduction to the volume clearly states that the editors have made no effort to harmonize the differences. Both Gane and Taggar-Cohen recognize that critical discussion, including further critique of Milgrom’s work, is necessary for progress in understanding the biblical texts that were so dear to his heart. The essays that comprise the volume are a good indication that his legacy of thorough analysis and profound reflection continues.

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre! He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry. — Psalm 147:7,9

Outside the classroom, Rahel Schafer, assistant professor of biblical studies, can be found camping with her church youth group or climbing mountains with her family. As a child, she was encouraged in her love for nature by her parents, both professors in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. “I’ve always been interested in animals, ever since I was a kid,” she remarks. “I thought I was going to become a biologist. A biologist trained in theology.”

As an undergraduate student at Andrews University, Schafer completed a Bachelor of Science in biology. But she was also drawn to biblical studies and completed a Master of Arts in religion, majoring in Old Testament, in the Seminary. She later pursued a Master of Science in biology, writing her thesis on paleontology and taphonomy under the direction of Thomas Goodwin. Her research project on turtle fossils in the Bridger Formation of Southwest Wyoming helped hone an attention to detail that has proven important in her current research.

After her master’s, she began looking into doctoral programs in both biology and theology and was accepted into Wheaton College’s doctoral program in biblical and theological studies. She proposed to do an interdisciplinary study in biology and theology, focusing on God’s care for creation, under Daniel Block, who was also interested in the topic. “I worked on it for about two years and realized it was going to be a big topical study. It was really overwhelming going through every single instance where an animal was mentioned in the Bible,” she says.

It became clear that a general study of God’s care for creation would result in an overview of previous studies and, while Schafer is interested in the topic, her real passion is pure exegesis. During a doctoral seminar on the topic of the possibility/impossibility of God, she wrote a paper on how God
Crying Ravens: Divine Responses to Animal Vocalization in the Old Testament

responds emotionally to animal suffering in three different psalms. “It was like the paper just jumped out at me,” she recalls. After some prayer, she rewrote and re-defended her doctoral proposal, this time focusing on God’s response to vocalized animal suffering in the Old Testament.

While her original plan was to support what she was finding in the text with scientific data, Schafer opted for a purely exegetical approach. However, she found similarities between the methods of her earlier biology research and biblical studies. Both required her to use a specific methodology that was then applied in a consistent manner to each data point. Data was analyzed through numerical comparisons and creating charts and lists. Finding patterns and exploring possible connections played an important role in understanding the significance of a find, whether it be textual or physical.

Schafer’s decision to focus on exegesis stemmed from her discovery that there was a lack of exegetical work on the subject of God’s responses to animals in the Bible. “In the past, most exegetes and theologians who have looked at this topic have approached it from only one angle,” she explains. Everything is either human-centric or earth-centric. Scholars endeavoring to seek a more centrist approach have used science, theology, or animal rights, but have not always been faithful to the text. For Schafer, it is imperative that, in theology or science, the researcher sticks to the data.

For her new topic she chose passages from Psalm 147, Job 38, Psalm 104, Psalm 165, and Jonah 3–4. “My main thesis is that God responds to animal vocalized needs in similar ways as He does to humans. Animals have needs for food, water, and shelter and they cry out to Him for those things and He responds with provision,” she says. In some of the passages, animals cry out, but not directly to God. However, He answers with provision, regardless of whether or not they directly “address” Him. In fact, the verbs used for their vocalized suffering are often the same as those used by humans.

The first thing she had to establish was whether or not these passages were metaphorical. In these passages, as in most biblical passages that deal with animal action/reaction, the animals are described anthropomorphically. “They may be anthropomorphic,” Schafer admits, “but anything we talk about that’s not human we talk about in an anthropomorphistic way, because we are human.”

Some scholars have argued that, just as the Bible says stones and wood cry out in a metaphorical sense, so animals crying out must also be metaphorical. Schafer disagrees. “The Bible makes a distinction between nefesh hayya, that is living creatures including human and non-human animals, and inanimate objects,” she says.

“God responds to animal vocalized needs in similar ways as He does to humans. Animals have needs for food, water, and shelter and they cry out to Him for those things and He responds with provision.”

Her core passages (with the exception of Jonah 3–4) describe animals literally crying out. In Job 38:41 and Psalm 147:9, it is the baby ravens that cry out (specifically to God in Job 38). Numbers 22: 23–30 describes Balaam’s donkey being given a voice, with which she registers her complaint with Balaam. Although she does not address God, God responds by rebuking Balaam. In Psalm 104:21, the young lions seek their food from God. Later, in verse 29, the psalmist describes God hiding His face and the animals being dismayed. Schafer sees this as the animals’ “need for a relationship with God.” Psalm 145, which parallels Psalm 104 in many ways, describes in verse 16 how God satisfies “the desire of every living thing.”

For the most part, Schafer has not drawn ethical implications from her study. “I think we often jump to implications without basing it on the text,” she muses. “I’m not discussing ethical consequences in my work at this point, simply because I want people to think [about the text] before they react. Then the implications will be clear.”

Her original dissertation topic on God’s care for creation did have some focus on implications, including exploring the extent to which animals communicate, have a spiritual connection with God, and are held accountable to Him. For example, God interacts with animals through covenants (the Noahic covenant in Genesis 8), grants them land possession after the Israelites are dispossessed as part of the covenant curses (Isaiah 13 and 34) and holds them accountable to keeping the Sabbath (Exodus 20). These are issues that she would like to continue exploring.

Schafer is particularly interested in examining the Bible’s portrayal of animal accountability/culpability as described in Old Testament law and in passages like the flood or the story of Jonah. “Many people have said that just because animals are punished for something they do doesn’t necessarily mean they understand that the action was wrong. Either people believe animals sin or they believe that sin is a completely human thing we project onto them,” she explains.

Genesis 6–9, for example, demonstrates that animals are somehow involved in the violence that brings on the flood. “It doesn’t say sin,” she clarifies, “but they are somehow involved in the sin of humans more than just being the passive bystanders or recipients of violence. But what does that mean? That’s one of the things I want to look at.”

Rahel Schafer