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A POSITION OF HONOUR OR SHAME? YHWH AS AN ARMOUR BEARER IN PSALM 35:1-3

ABSTRACT

The imagery of a shield in the Psalms is applied to YHWH in many instances: from YHWH as the shield of salvation or as the shield of refuge, to the destroyer of the shield. In Psalm 35:2, YHWH takes on the position and duties of an armour bearer (or shield bearer) for the king. This article raises the question as to whether or not the position of armour bearer for the king is a position of honour or shame? To answer this question, the article evaluates the function and duties of an armour bearer from the context of honour and shame, using inter- and extra-textual sources.

1. INTRODUCTION

The imagery¹ of the shield in the Psalms is applied to YHWH in many instances: the shield (Ps. 7:10; 18:2; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11; 84:9; 115:9, 10; 119:114; 114:2); the shield of salvation (Ps. 18:35); the shield of refuge (Ps. 18:2, 30; 144:2); the destroyer of the shield (Ps. 76:3); a sun and shield (Ps. 84:11); the one to whom the shields of the earth belong (Ps. 47:9); his favour as a shield (Ps. 5:12), and his faithfulness is a shield and buckler (Ps. 91:4). In most of these instances, YHWH becomes a metaphor for protection² as a shield. In Psalm 35:2, YHWH takes on the position and duties of an armour bearer (or

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- 1 This article is dedicated to my colleague and friend Fanie Snyman. Thank you Fanie, for your leadership, wisdom, academic genius and friendship.
 - 2 Metaphoric imagery must be taken seriously, due to the fact that it is self defined and as such indicates the social values of the ancient Near East and Mediterranean world (Hobbs 1995:265).

shield bearer) for the king, when he takes up the small (מגן) and long shield (צנור). He also takes up the spear (חנית) and the javelin (סגור), the only instance in the psalms where YHWH takes up the spear. In Psalm 46:10, he destroys spears and, in Psalm 57:5, the imagery of the spear is used in connection with the one who prays the psalm and not with YHWH. The imagery of the shields and spears is problematic in Psalm 35. The question arises as to why it is necessary for YHWH to take up two shields and two spears? To answer this question, one needs to address the function, purpose or role of YHWH and the war imagery in Psalm 35:1-3. This will be done by addressing the main question for this article, namely whether or not the position of armour bearer for the king is one of honour or shame?

2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, a socio-scientific analysis of the armour bearer is made from a perspective of honour and shame in the context of Psalm 35:1-3: YHWH is portrayed as the armour bearer for the king when YHWH is asked to take up arms against the king's (or high ranking officer's) enemies. Is this a position of honour or shame for YHWH? To answer the question, the article first evaluates the meaning of armour bearer from the context of inter- and extra-textual sources, in order to provide an answer to the role and function of the armour bearer in war and from a perspective of honour and shame. Part of this analysis is to evaluate the use of weaponry (war imagery) in these verses. Secondly, the article also evaluates Psalm 35:1-3 based on these conclusions.

3. HONOUR AND SHAME IN WAR

Honour and shame are not strange concepts relating to the theme of war. War can serve as a way to either gain honour or be shamed. To be sent into exile is to be shamed, while the victor of the war gains honour through shaming the defeated (Olyan 2011:20). Honour and shame in the context of war must be understood in the public domain, as it is the honouring or shaming of a group (an individual as the king represents his people or group). To gain or lose honour did not suffice; it must have been recognised and acknowledged in public (Van Eck 1995:165-168; Pilch & Malina 2000:106-107; Sutton 2016:53-57). Therefore, public displays of the victor shaming the defeated were not a strange occurrence. To be defeated can happen when one has failed (literally or even an emotion of failure) or is conquered by another (Ford 2000:45). Although physical shame was the most prominent way to shame a person, the conqueror often tormented the victim even further with mockery, gloating, and malicious

glee. This verbal abuse was important to the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean person, because “a word is dynamic, creating what it names” (Ford 2000:46; Sutton 2016:53-57; 2017:318-319). The defeated were often cursed by the victor. The curse was viewed as a withdrawal of divine vitality and strength (Ford 2000:46; see Wright 2009:433-473). Israel’s (as a client) claim to honour was their special relationship with YHWH (as a patron). A national defeat was regarded as God leaving the nation, bringing shame over Israel (Pilch & Malina 2000:106-112; see Malina 2001:27-57; DeSilva 2008:287-300; Crook 2009:591-611; Sutton 2016:53-57). Van Eck (1995:166-168) explains this, using the term “political shame”. According to him, this occurred when a person was captured by the enemy and shamed in public, for example by being tortured, by his/her clothes being removed, and by making him/her walk naked. In this instance, not only the person, but also the entire group or nation, with which that person is associated, is shamed. Honour could be claimed or gained; therefore, it had to be protected (Van Eck 1995:166-168; Sutton 2016:53-57).

From beginning to end, political or holy war is understood as an armed battle between two groups, where lethal violence is used to force one to do the other’s will (see Klassen 1992:867; Wigoder 2005:978). Biblical writers used the language and imagery of war to show judgement, rule, power, honour and/or defeat (Joel 2:1-11; 3:9-12; Zeph. 1:14-18; Rev 12:7-8; 17:14; 19:11) (see Mattingly 1985a:1118-1119; Klassen 1992:868; Römer 2013:71-86). The methodology of war varied from nation to nation and from period to period. Nevertheless, some aspects of warfare were universal (Mattingly 1985a:1119). Invariables or characteristics that are always present include armies (two or more groups); strategy and method, as well as weapons and armour. The weaponry can be classified into two groups: offensive weapons (arms) and defensive weapons (armour) (Mattingly 1985b:1123-1124). Offensive weapons varied in nature and size, but all shared a common purpose: to be used in battle to attack or to assist in an attack. Some examples are: a battle axe, sword and dagger, spear and javelin, bow and arrow, sling, engine and battering-ram, war chariot, or horse chariot. Defensive weapons or armour were used in battle to protect a soldier against injury (see Grosheide 1955:467; Unger 1957:89-91, 189; Fensham & Oberholzer 1972:245-246; Charley 1974:83-84; Wigoder 2005:982; Seevers 2013:57-64; see Sutton 2016:53-57).³

3 These invariables or characteristics of war can be identified, within warfare language and imagery (metaphors), as the following three groups of descriptive language: warriors and enemies (human or divine), experiences of warfare (by the individual or group; this includes the entire experience of the war from start to finish), and implements of warfare (weaponry and armour) (Kelle 2008:829).

In Psalm 35:2-3, YHWH is asked to use both offensive and defensive weapons to help the king. The first function of defensive weapons or armour (warfare clothes) is to protect the soldier against injury from the enemy (see Ryken *et al.* 1998:44; Seevers 2013:64). The shield (as the first layer of protection) served as the soldier's main form of defence. It was made out of different materials (usually wood and leather) and was of various shapes and sizes. In Israel, there were two varieties of shields. The first was the large shield that was meant to protect the entire body (1 Kgs 10:16; Ps. 5:12). This shield was carried mainly by infantry men. The second was the small shield, used mainly by archers (2 Chron. 14:8). In many texts, the large shield and the spear are used in conjunction (1 Chron. 12:9, 25, 35; 2 Chron. 11:12; 14:7; 25:5; Jer. 46:3-4; Ezek. 39:9). De Backer (2009:2-17) indicates that the shield (especially the long or large shield) and spear are associated with the armour bearer (1 Sam. 17:7, 41), as they perform the task of protection (see Sutton 2015:37-39).

Offensive weapons such as the spear and the javelin were used for medium-distance warfare in nearly all the nations of antiquity. The length of the spear also depended on the nation that produced it (Num. 25:7; 1 Sam. 17:7, 45; 2 Sam. 21:19; 1 Kgs 18:28; 1 Chron. 11:12; 20:5). The spear was usually made of wood (see Grosheide 1955:467; Unger 1957:189.) The javelin, generally lighter and shorter than the spear, was designed for throwing. It resembled a large arrow that was hurled by the hand. Sumerian charioteers of the third millennium B.C.E. were armed with several javelins, carried like arrows in a quiver attached to the body of the chariot. Javelin heads were designed for penetration and were altered in shape and material as enemy armour became more effective. A head fashioned with sharp hooks or barbs was difficult and painful to extract from a wound. Similar in appearance to the javelin, the spear was larger, heavier, and designed primarily as a thrusting weapon (see Num. 25:7-8). The oldest military monuments known indicate that the spear was already well developed. On the Egyptian hunter's slate palette and on the black granite stele from Warka (3000 B.C.E), the warrior's personal weapon is a long staff tipped with a leaf-shaped blade with a sharp spine. Throughout the third millennium B.C.E., the spear was standard equipment for heavily armed infantry and the most effective weapon for both chariot and infantry charges. Excavations have shown that the spear was the common weapon of the seminomadic tribes who began pouring into Palestine from the north in the middle Bronze Age (Elwell *et al.* 2001:113; see Sutton 2015:37-39).

The descriptive language of the armour (clothing) is identified in the group "implements of warfare" and is then further understood as part of defensive implements of warfare.

4. THE ARMOUR BEARER

There are examples of armour bearers and shield bearers in the Old Testament. The phrase כָּלִים נֹשֵׂא in military texts translates as armour bearer or equipment bearer, who would carry weapons and baggage, or literally “the one carrying the armour” (Seevers 2013:65). Pfeiffer *et al.* (1975) describe an armour bearer “as a companion to an important warrior, a king (1 Sam. 31:4), commander-in-chief (2 Sam. 23:37), captain (1 Sam. 14:7) or champion (1 Sam. 17:7)”. All warriors of distinction had such an attendant in the period of the conquest and monarchy. He was responsible for carrying a shield and perhaps weapons to assist in battle. Stories of Abimelech, Jonathan, and Saul all involve their armour bearers (Judg. 9:54; 1 Sam. 14; 31). Joab, David’s general, had ten armour bearers (2 Sam. 18:15) (Pfeiffer *et al.* 1975). The armour bearer is an officer selected by kings and generals because of his bravery, not only to bear their armour, but also to stand by them in times of danger. According to Easton (1996:97-98), they were the adjudants of our modern armies (Judg. 9:54; 1 Sam. 14:7; 16:21; 31:6).

The shield bearer was a well-known figure in the chariots of Egypt and Assyria and among the Hittites, his business being to protect his fighting companion during the engagement. Designed to provide a barrier between the body of a soldier and the weapon of his foe, the shield was one of the oldest means of security devised. In the time of the judges and the early Israelite kings, persons of rank were frequently protected by a very large shield carried by a special shield bearer who constantly remained on the unprotected right-hand side of the warrior to whom he was assigned as a bodyguard (see Judg. 9:54; 1 Sam. 14:1; 17:7; 2 Sam. 18:15). The right-hand side of an armed combatant was unprotected; he carried his weapons in his right hand and his shield in his left. The shield bearer, therefore, had to stand by his master’s vulnerable right-hand side to protect him (1 Sam. 17:41; see Ps. 16:8). At that time, the shield was ordinarily anointed as part of the consecration of an Israelite warrior and his weapons for battle (see 2 Sam. 1:21; Tenney 1967:71; Douglas & Tenney 2011:119).

5. THE ARMOUR BEARER IN A CONTEXT OF HONOUR AND SHAME: AN INTER- AND EXTRA-TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In Judges 9:54, Abimelech called upon his armour bearer to kill him to avoid being shamed by the fact that a woman tried to kill him. The armour bearer’s function is to protect his master’s honour. In the warrior culture

of the times, to die at the hands of a worthy adversary of equal or superior rank or strength would be honourable. To die at the hands of an inferior enemy or women, not even a woman of note, would be shameful. To keep honour, the armour bearer killed Abimelech (Webb 2012:293).

In 1 Samuel 14:7, 12-14, 17, Jonathan is shown extreme loyalty by his armour bearer and the function of protection when the armour bearer ensures that the fallen enemy is dead and cannot harm Jonathan. This shows that the armour bearer is a skilled warrior (Tsumura 2007:360-363; see Hobbs 1989:56). In 1 Samuel 16:21, David becomes Saul's armour bearer, due to the fact that he loved and trusted him.

In 1 Samuel 31:4-6 (see also 1 Chron. 10:4-5), the Philistines pressed hard after Saul, and he became afraid. He asked his armour bearer to kill him, in order to protect his honour, but the armour bearer refused, bringing shame to both himself and the king. The king killed himself to protect his honour, whereafter the armour bearer also killed himself, sparing himself further humiliation. To shame the king further and to indicate their victory and domination, the Philistines beheaded Saul (Tsumura 2007:650-651). In 2 Samuel 18:15, Joab's armour bearers killed Absalom, protecting their master's honour.

In 1 Samuel 17:7 and 41, Goliath is described as having a shield bearer who walks in front of him, in order to protect him. The shield in this text is the large or long shield that protected the body against missile attacks such as archers (Tsumura 2007:444). Ironically, a missile attack killed Goliath, indicating that his shield bearer failed at his task, bringing shame over both himself and Goliath.

As external evidence of the function of the armour bearer and shield bearer, De Backer (2009:2-3) indicates that an innovation brought to reinforce the armour level on war chariots of the shooting-platform was represented on the Egyptian reliefs of Ramses II, showing the Hittites employing a third man on the chariot: the shield bearer. As a means to further develop the armour level of the vehicle, the number of shield bearers was doubled during the Neo-Assyrian period. Keel (1978:222-223) also indicates many examples where two shield bearers protect the Assyrian king and/or generals.

The seal of Peqah also indicates that the armour bearer, as protector of the king, could have been a high-ranking officer or soldier. According to Bordreuil (1986:1-2):

The characteristic element that allows us to identify the man on the seal of Peqah, who wears no crown but who bears a king's name, is

the javelin that he is brandishing; remember that on seals of this type the right hand is usually empty, with raised palm forward. Although the Bible gives us few details about Peqah, it does give us an account of his accession to the throne: He assassinated Peqahyah, the former king, whom he had served as *salis*, probably during the two years of Peqahyarrs reign between 742 and 740 B.C.E. The meaning usually given to the word *salis* in the Old Testament – that is, “third man (on a war chariot)” – has recently been called into question. Some now believe that *salis* is a title of the *qatil* type, analogous to such titles as *nagid* and *paqid*, which are used to designate an office in the king’s service. This rank, being below that of the king and his principal officers, would thus be “of the third rank.” The title *salis* could, therefore, include the office of aide-de-camp and armour bearer – that is, someone “on whose hand the king leaned” (2 Kgs 7:2, 17 – *hassalis* ‘äser-lammeleknis^cän cal-yàdô). We can suppose that the *salis* acted during battles in the royal chariot as bodyguard and armour-bearer. This function of protecting the king is represented on the seal of Peqah by the upraised javelin.⁴

Considering the inter- and extra-textual understanding of an armour bearer in line with Smalls’ (2017:1-2) analysis on these texts (Josh. 1; Judg. 9; 1 Sam. 14, 16, 31 and 2 Kgs 3), the duties and characteristics of an armour bearer in military context of honour and shame include:

- The position of armour bearer is always of a lower rank or position to the one served.
- The position is given to someone in great trust, as it is the duty of the armour bearer to:
 - Strengthen the position of his officer;
 - Exalt and uplift his officer;
 - Respect his officer;
 - Agree with and submit to his officer;
 - Repel any kind of attack against his officer, especially his back;
 - Rescue his officer from difficulty and hardship in order to prevent shame;
 - Keep watch while his officer rests;

4 See also Mastin (1979:154). It may be objected that, although the use of the three-man chariot was not constant in Syria-Palestine at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E., it was known in the middle of the 9th century, as is evident from the palace reliefs of Assurnasirpal II at Kalak and in the time of Sargon II – that is, approximately ten years after Peqah’s reign (Mastin 1979:131).

- Carry his officer's belongings;
- React with total intolerance to any false accusations against his officer (rumours, gossip, talking behind his back);
- Aid his officer in spiritual combat, and
- Demonstrate extreme loyalty.

These duties and characteristics show that the position of an armour bearer, although it is a position of shame (resembling slave work and that of lower status), is still a position that gives the bearer great responsibility. The armour bearer is the one on whom the king leans for protection and to defend his (the king) honour in battle or in a possible situation of shame, where the king's honour is being challenged. To uphold this position is a place of honour; to disgrace this position would be to bring shame to yourself as armour bearer and to the king.

6. PSALM 35:1-3

Psalm 35 is an example where justice is expressed as an act of law⁵ and an act of war.⁶ The psalm is described as an individual lament or a prayer of

5 According to Claassens (1990), "justice does not mean some standard of equity existing in the mind of the court independent of the actual provisions of the law. Justice is something which a court is bound to administer in accordance with the law". Justice as an act of law must be viewed from the understanding that law and society are inextricable mixed. Many jurists view law from outside society as a separate body and that some influences may come from religion and economic necessity (Thomas *et al.* 2000:6). There are many factors that determine how law should be understood and executed. To regard the law from "an ideological, political, social economic and other relevant factors of life as merely the background against which the law should be studied, is equally false and the result of another form of tunnel vision. Society and all its aspects form an integral part in the creation of and changes in the law. Law is part of society, created by society and in its turn influences and shapes society, just as the climate or the economic conditions" (Thomas *et al.* 2000:6). In this definition of law, justice must always be the desired outcome. If justice is not the desired outcome in society or in one of the other aspects of life, a corrupted view of what law is and how law is practised can occur and result in injustice. In this situation, an outcry for justice is mostly observed, and in the context of the book of Psalms an outcry to God for justice (Ps. 35; 82; 109), where God becomes the ruling officer or judge.

6 Resnik & Curtis (2011:12) argue the importance of justice as an act of war, particularly as an act to "justify" violence. This is especially noticeable where justice is used as part of a political utility to legitimate state violence. The

deliverance (Wilson 2002:578; Craigie & Tate 2004:285), consisting mainly of three sections with smaller subsections (see Terrien 2003:309):

Psalm 35

Superscription: For David

Stanza 1: verses 1-10

Strophe A, verses 1-3: A petition to God for divine action and deliverance

Strophe B, verses 4-8: Military attack

Strophe C, verses 9-10: Response and praise

Stanza 2: verses 11-23

Strophe D, verses 11-16: Legal action – Judiciary trial

Strophe E, verses 17-18: A petition and a promise of praise

Strophe F, verses 19-22: A petition against the enemies

Stanza 3: verses 23-28: An outcry for justice – Divine power and magnanimity.

As a lament, the psalm uses speech patterns of complaint (verses 7; 11-16; 20-21), petition (verses 1-3; 17; 22-25), and imprecation (verses 4-6; 8; 26) (Brueggemann & Bellinger 2015:174). The one praying is portrayed as the king or a high-ranking officer; in some instances, God (Ps. 35:3), the psalmist (Ps. 35:10), the enemy (Ps. 35:21, 25) and the community are also heard (Ps. 35:18, 27). According to Tanner (deClaissé-Walford *et al.* 2014:335), it is unclear who the supplicant is. The reason for the prayer is uncertain, but it appears to be some kind of national crisis (see Wilson 2002:578). According to Craigie and Tate (2004:286), the background could likely be the violation of an international treaty, which has both legal and military implications. This would explain the legal and military or war language in the psalm.

imposition “of law in both civil and criminal contexts disrupts ordinary persons’ lives. Not all political theories of leadership require wise, restrained, and generous governance, but all rely on authority to maintain order by sanctioning those deviating from communal norms. During ages in which faith in various conceptions of a god were pervasive, the premise that the king (and his judges) were earthly representatives of a divinity cushioned the violence of law” (Resnik & Curtis 2011:12). It is, therefore, not strange for the king (or an individual or nation) to ask God for justice through an act of violence or war. In the Psalms, this can be observed in many instances where the imagery of war is used as part of a petition to God to establish justice against enemies (Ps. 35; 57; 60; 108; 109; 139).

In stanza 1 from verse 1, a plea for justice⁷ is made from both an act of law and an act of war; with the verb ריב (*r-y-b*: to strife or contend), a plea is made as an act of law. The verb להם (*la-gem*: fight) is used as a plea for justice as part of an act of war (see Anderson 1981:276; Gerstenberger 1991:150; Kraus 1993:392). As an act of law, justice in the psalms is an appeal to God to indicate that the one praying or the petitioner is innocent and upright (Ps. 7; 17; 26; 35; 139). It is in this context that the strong appeal or outcry is made to God to “judge me” (Ps. 35:24). The claim of innocence (Ps. 7; 17; 26; 139) is made and followed, in many instances, by an appeal or plea to God to judge the accuser(s) or the wicked (Ps. 7). The petitioner finds confidence in the judgement of God and is, therefore, not afraid to be put to the test (Ps. 26:2; 139:23) of God to be judged. Confidence is declared that YHWH will restore justice and order (Ps. 103; 108; 109) and/or vindicate (Ps. 17:2; 26:1; 35:24; 43:1; 54:1) the petitioner (Miller 1994:108-110). In some of the psalms, formal administrative language alludes to a formal court proceeding such as the accused or defendant (Ps. 109), or witnesses (Ps. 35).

In Psalms, there are three instances of justice as an act of war. First, where imagery of war or violence is used to describe the experiences of one or of a group experiencing violence from others (Ps. 57; 109). The imagery of war and violence, as an outcry for justice, occurs mainly in three instances in the psalms, where violence is experienced through the acts of others. First, for those who are socially oppressed such as the poor, widows and orphans, the imagery of war becomes an outcry for justice as part of an act of deliverance from oppressors. In these circumstances, the imagery expresses, on a structural level, that the basic order of a specific society has been damaged and justice is needed (see Ps 94:3-7) (Firth 2015:75). Secondly, for those who are tormented by enemies or the wicked, the imagery of war becomes the outcry for justice as part of an act of salvation and even, in some cases, an act of retribution (Ps. 74:4-8). It mostly describes physical violence (Firth 2015:75; see Mafico 1992:1128; Ryken *et al.* 1998:474-475; Walton 2008:647-654). Thirdly, and closely related to the second, is an outcry by an individual (or one who represents a group) psychologically tormented by enemies or the wicked with

7 The second stanza, verses 11-23, takes on courtroom language and presents justice as part of an act of law. Witness is given and witnesses (עד) are called to testify (קום) in verse 11. Questions (שאל) are asked by the accusers in verse 11 and accusations (חשב) are made in verse 20. In verse 22, YHWH is also called upon to witness what He saw. The language continues in stanza 3, when God is again called upon to be the judge and vindicate (משפט) the accused, and let righteousness (verse 28, צדק) and justice be the outcome (Wilson 2002:581-583; see Craigie 2004:287; Goldingay 2006:495-496).

“threatening behaviour and words”. This becomes an outcry for justice as an act of deliverance and salvation (Ps. 3) (Firth 2015:75).

Secondly, justice as an act of war is observed where the imagery of war and violence is used to describe the legitimated enforcement of justice. The imagery is used where violence is necessary, in order to restore order and justice. The reasons and outcry of the one praying or of the petitioner are similar to the three points mentioned earlier when violence is experienced by the hand of others. In Psalms, this mainly concerns the activities of the king, as the representative of God, to restore justice. It also occurs when God Himself, as the judge and enforcer of order, is expected to restore justice (Ps. 2, 35, 72) (Firth 2015:76).

The third example of justice as an act of war or violence is the imprecatory psalms requesting God for a very specific act of retribution. Although a modern reader finds it difficult to understand these acts of violence, they must be understood, in the context of scripture as a whole and that of the context of the individual or group praying, as a specific hope for YHWH’s justice (Firth 2015:77-80). Justice finally belongs to YHWH who will distribute justice according to the “law of exact retribution (*lex talionis*) in general or the law of false accusation (Deut. 19:25-21)” (Firth 2015:81-82). According to Walton (2008:651), what

[t]he psalmist longs for is not prosperity per se but rather the presence of YHWH, which brings life and deliverance (Pss 31:14-24; 84; 102:28). In this sense, the retribution principle in the Psalms could be reformulated more specifically as “The righteous will enjoy God’s presence and its accompanying benefits; the wicked will forfeit the presence of God and will suffer the consequences of abandonment.”

Honour is sought in Psalm 35:1-3 as part of an act of war when YHWH is requested to intervene⁸ and protect the king or officer by taking up

8 As the judge for justice, God is a familiar concept in the Old Testament. In the ancient Near East, the concept of a god as judge meant the god in many instances understood as the one who created order and, therefore, is responsible to preserve that order, often as a universal judge (see Ps. 82). The title of judge was ascribed to many different gods in the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia, there were *Ea* (god of wisdom) and *Shamash* (sun god). In Egypt, the sun god *Re* also took up this function, mostly with some of the other gods such as *Horus*, *Hathor*, *Thoth* and *Maat* (Keel 1978:207-208). According to Keel (1978:208), in many of the Psalms, YHWH is also depicted with a household of gods (see Ps. 29:1; 82; 89:5-8; 95:3; 96:4-5; 97:9). In Genesis 18:25, God is shown as the judge over the entire earth (see Ps. 94:2) and as the judge over the other gods (Ps. 82) (Miller 1986:2-5). Most commonly, God is revealed as

defensive and offensive weapons in a military action against their pursuers and bring shame to the attackers (according to v. 4).

Presumably, a warrior would not take up either a large shield and a buckler or a spear and a javelin simultaneously (Goldingay 2006:491). The defensive imagery of the large shield is to protect the one praying. Wilson (2002:579) describes YHWH as a bodyguard who defends the supplicant, thus an armour bearer. A confrontation with close combat occurs when the buckler and the javelin take on a prominent role. Keel (1978:222) describes YHWH as a shield bearer, not considering the imagery of the spear and javelin in the next verse, describing him rather as an armour bearer. The supplicant's forceful request to intervene continues in verses 4-8 where both military and hunting imagery is used. Stanza 1, verses 1-10, uses war imagery to legitimate and enforce justice, in order to deliver the one praying from the onslaught of his enemies and to restore order and honour to the king or officer.

According to Keel (1978:222), YHWH as the armour bearer for the king (Ps. 35:1-3) must be viewed as having a subordinate position that denotes dishonour. The reason why YHWH would submit to this task, according to Keel (1978:222), is the intimate relationship between the king and YHWH. This is a similar intimacy to the one Jonathan showed his armour bearer (1 Sam. 14) and to the one Saul showed David (1 Sam. 16). This intimacy permits one to ask a friend to perform a lowly service without in any way offending him. This intimacy and trust is needed in order to ask someone to kill you so as to protect your honour, as in Judges 9 and 1 Samuel 31. Another reason would be that the king is the representative of YHWH on earth. If

a "God of justice" (Deut. 1:17; 32:4; Ps. 9:8; 94:2; 97:2; Is. 30:18; 41:1; 61:8; Jer. 12:1; Ezek. 7:27; Mi. 6:1; Mal. 2:17). God's judgement must not necessarily be understood in terms of being objective and separate from evaluating good and evil, as God's judgement is forceful when it comes to evil. It is, therefore, clear that God's judgement must not be understood as an impersonal act, but rather as a personal act determined by the nature of a merciful, loving, truthful and righteous God (Ps. 36:5-6; Ezek. 39:21; Hos. 2:19) (see Judge 2015:631). One must guard against interpreting justice from a modern perspective of "what is fair" and/or even "legal equality", as it is determined predominately in the Old Testament from the perspective of God's will and the nature of who God is (see Judge 2015:631; Payne 2015:634-636). God's judgement should not be understood in terms of fairness, but rather in terms of what is right (2 Chron. 12:6; Neh. 9:33; Jer. 22:15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek. 18:5) (Ryken *et al.* 1998:474). Mafico (1992:1128) describes God's justice according to fairness, because God is righteous (Ps. 7:11; 9:8; 119:137; 145). However, in his description of what fairness means, Mafico also describes God's nature as the reason for how His justice is executed.

the king's honour is challenged, then YHWH's honour is also challenged. In this regard, when the king asks YHWH to defend and intervene, it is not to take up a lower position, but rather to take up a position to defend YHWH's own honour or rather their honour. In this respect, the position between YHWH and the king is not one of higher or lower rank, but rather one of an equal position, as their honour in this situation is dependent on each other. Under normal circumstances, the king defends YHWH's honour. Regarding an armour bearer's duties, the position is a position of honour when the duties are performed accordingly. Thus, if YHWH would take up the supplicant's petition as well as the position and its duties, he would be defending the petitioner's honour (and, in this case, His own).

The interpretation changes when the supplicant is not the king, but a high-ranking officer. The character and most of the duties of an armour bearer are linked to honour, which rests in the high-ranking officer and which needs to be protected in a challenge or battle. Even Keel's (1978:222) interpretation of intimacy and trust between the officer and the armour bearer does not suffice, because intimacy and trust are part of a normal relationship between an armour bearer and his officer and part of the character expected from an armour bearer. In this context, the position of armour bearer for YHWH is a position of dishonour.

This article does not attempt to answer the question as to how one would interpret the text outside a strictly military context. One would then need to interpret the role of YHWH as the patron of Israel (as the client). As patron, YHWH would hold the higher position in society and honour would rest in YHWH. In Psalm 35:1-3, YHWH would then, as is the case with the king, defend his own honour, as the patron's role is to defend his honour where the client cannot. The client is supposed to uphold the honour of his patron when challenged. The position of armour bearer would then be a position of honour for YHWH as he defends his own honour.

7. CONCLUSION

Psalm 35:1-3 presents a situation where YHWH can be viewed as an armour bearer for the supplicant. Since the psalm is unclear as to who the supplicant is, it leaves room for multiple interpretations of the question as to whether or not the position of armour bearer is a position of honour or shame for YHWH. In a military context, the position of armour bearer is always a subordinate position, resulting in a position of shame for YHWH. YHWH taking up such a position tells more about the character and nature of YHWH as a righteous, caring, merciful and loving God than the position he bears.

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