

# Otto Kaiser's Obituary

As translated by Lester Grabbe, for SOTS-

*Otto Kaiser*

*30 November 1924 to 14 December 2017*

*Professor Dr Dr (h.c. mult.), in memoriam*



Otto Kaiser died on 14 December 2017 in Marburg, in the city in which he had lived since 1960, first as associate professor, then from 1962 until 1993 as full Professor of Old Testament, then was active as Professor Emeritus with great passion and charisma. With his death OT scholarship has lost a sensitive and productive researcher, a teacher and interpreter who influenced generations of students with his direct engagement and his teaching texts, an organizer of research who through taking on many editorships in his characteristic generosity made available sources as well as debates and reflections. Many have lost a friend.

Otto Kaiser was born in Prenzlau, Uckermark, as the son of the Prussian senior land inspector Oskar Kaiser and wife Berta who died early. After attending the gymnasium (grammar school) in Eberswalde he entered active war service as an applicant for medical officer in autumn and winter 1943-44. He began to study medicine in the military medical academy

already in 1944, but he would not continue to do so after the war and his experiences in the postwar period. Instead, from 1946-52 he studied Protestant theology at the universities of Tübingen and Marburg. After his curacy (1952-54) and while he was assistant to Arthur Weiser (1954-58) he received his doctorate from Tübingen in 1956 with his much-cited study, "The Mythical Meaning of the Sea in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel" ("Die mythische Bedeutung des Meeres in Ägypten, Ugarit und Israel"), followed by his Habilitationsschrift in 1957, "The Royal Servant: A Tradition-critical and Exegetical Study of the Servant-of-Yahweh Songs in Deutero-Isaiah" ("Der königliche Knecht: eine traditionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie über die Ebed-Jahwe-Lieder bei Deuterjesaja").

The breadth and extent of his books, commentaries, articles, and editorial activity in the decades of his life was organically inspired by a questioning curiosity, a continually new perspective on the sources and contexts, as well as a deep knowledge concerning the preliminary of everything, including the results of his own understanding. Besides the OT scholars Ernst Würthwein and Karl Elliger, the influence of Wilhelm Weischedel and Rudolf Bultmann is unmistakable. The first one represents the OT scholar's conversation with philosophy, the latter the image of his pressing question about the theological and existential relevance of the biblical text. Effecting a radical change in OT scholarship since the 1970s he more than practically anybody else influenced the new direction of research on the prophets. The second volume of his Isaiah commentary (ATD, on Isaiah 13-39) marked a consistent concentration on the redaction-critical development of the present book and a move away from focused efforts on the personality of the prophet. In his own investigations and the studies proposed by him he shifted his perspective on First and Second Isaiah as well as on Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He and his students demonstrated the elucidating force of redaction-critical questions for the domains of the Pentateuch, the Chronicler, and Job. From the 1980s his research interests

moved to the early Jewish wisdom books of Job, Qohelet and Proverbs, on to Ben Sira and finally to Tobit and the Wisdom of Solomon.

He felt compelled to offer a survey of the ever-changing state of research, accentuated by five editions of his introduction to the OT (1969-84), followed by an outline of his introduction (1992-94), and an introduction to the Apocrypha (2000). A synthesis of the history of religion and literature, combined with a comprehensive theology of the OT, was offered by his 3-volume work, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments: Theologie des Alten Testaments: Wesen und Wirkung* (1993-2003; revision of the 3rd volume 2013). A critical study edition of Hermann Hupfeld (2005) as well as a study of Philo of Alexandria (2015) signalled the focus of his late interests.

His energy and the pragmatic but likeable ability to motivate male and female scholars to (mutual) work projects showed itself not least in his editorial activity, which accompanied his scholarly life from 1974. He edited the *Poetischen Schriften* of the *Jüdisches Schrifttum aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* (1974-83), the *Texte zur Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (1981-2004), the commentary series *Altes Testament Deutsch* (ATD; 1970-99) and the *Kommentar zum Alten Testament* (KAT; 1973-2000) either as editor in chief or in collaboration with other colleagues. For a full ten years (1982-92) he was responsible for the production of the *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, founded in 1881, and the accompanying monograph series, *Beihefte zur ZAW* (BZAW), until 2003. Its establishment as an internationally recognized journal, considering all areas of research, that took a firm place in the scholarly landscape with its interconfessional and interreligious profile, was due to Otto Kaiser and his liberal, questing spirit and his wide-ranging networks in the academic world.

The resonance of his activities and his personality was not least confirmed in that he was honoured with the Burkitt medal of the British Academy, corresponding membership of the Göttinger Akademie der Wissenschaften, and honorary doctorates from the Theology Faculties in Jena (1991) and Tartu (1996), as well as the Catholic Faculty of the University of Salzburg (2002).

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