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Chu, Peter Tin Yan. "Characterization in the Triangle of Intercession: A Literary and Theological Study of Genesis 18:16-33." Th.M., Tyndale University College & Seminary, 2008.

**Characterization in the Triangle of Intercession:  
A Literary and Theological Study of Genesis 18:16-33**

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Biblical Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Theology awarded by Tyndale Seminary

June, 2008

Toronto, Canada

## *Acknowledgements*

With profound gratitude and deepest appreciation:

Dr. Glen Taylor	your insightful and gracious comments
Dr. Rebecca Idestrom	the example of your intercessory prayer life
Dr. John Kessler	<i>mon guide et mon ami</i>
John & Shirley Chu	the legacy of your faith and sacrifice
Charlotte Eun Young	grace everlasting
Hyon	my beloved <i>opus dei</i>
The LORD	my God

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## *Chapter 1 - Introduction*

### *1.1 The Research Question*

Prayer is a practice common to almost all religions.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the diversity in the underlying belief systems of various religions, prayer appears to be a universal language and form by which adherents and practitioners are able to communicate with and seek aid from the supernatural or from a divine being.<sup>2</sup> Prayers may be simple and spontaneous expressions of need, gratitude, or praise. They may also be formal, elaborate, and carefully crafted liturgies. The traditional elements of prayer are praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition.<sup>3</sup> A petition may be of a personal nature or presented on behalf of a third party in which case it is termed intercession.<sup>4</sup>

Intercession is “prayer on behalf of another, usually with a view to obtaining help for that other, to secure aid, healing, deliverance, etc.”<sup>5</sup> “Intercession is a triangle

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<sup>1</sup> For many Christian traditions, prayer is one of several spiritual disciplines which are practised with a view towards spiritual growth and development in the Christian life. For discussions on spiritual disciplines including prayer, fasting, the reading and meditative contemplation of Scripture, giving, and service, see Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 130-192; Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 13-171.

<sup>2</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer: As a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 2-4; Ronald E. Clements, *In Spirit and in Truth: Insights from Biblical Prayers* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 6-9; Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 19-31; Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Clements, *Spirit and Truth*, 9-14; Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> In the context of spiritual warfare (particularly in charismatic circles), intercession has been assigned a more specific and technical definition. “It is important to make a distinction between prayer and intercession. Not all prayer is intercession. In fact, many people never truly interceded. They simply pray prayers of petition asking God to meet certain needs. True intercession is actually twofold. One aspect is asking God for divine intervention; the other is destroying the works of Satan.” See Cindy Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy: A Training Manual for Militant Intercession* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 63.

<sup>5</sup> R.S. Wallace, “Intercession,” *ISBE* 2:858-859.

of prayer: one person going to another person to get bread for a third person.”<sup>6</sup> The third party may be aware of his or her need and may also be praying for himself or herself in which case intercessory prayer joins those personal prayers. On occasion, intercession is made on behalf of a third party who may not be aware of a need or may not consider it to be an urgent matter.

There are many incentives which motivate intercession. These include: an element of personal gain, fulfilment of duty or obligation, obedience to a command, a personal or ministry calling, or an act of compassion, altruism and love. Intercession requires a commitment of time and effort as one pauses in the day to pray not for one’s self but for another. The intercessor seeks the good of the individual he or she is praying for and by so doing, demonstrates identification, sympathy, and compassion.

Christians are commanded to intercede for one another, for governments, for social justice, for their enemies, for the salvation of the world, and for the advancement of God’s purposes and kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Intercession is an integral part of each Christian’s role as a mediator between God and unbelievers and as a messenger of the gospel of Jesus Christ. “We are never more like Christ than when we are praying for others. Intercession is laying down our life for our friend; it is bearing one another’s burden; it is sharing in the suffering of Christ. The work of redemption is the work of intercession.”<sup>8</sup>

Mediation and intercession in the Christian tradition find their origins in the Hebrew Scriptures as these roles were first entrusted to the founding families,<sup>9</sup> to the

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<sup>6</sup> Ronald Dunn, *Don’t Just Stand There Pray Something: The Incredible Power of Intercessory Prayer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 73.

<sup>7</sup> Ps 122:6; Jer 29:7; Matt 5:44; 6:5-15; 9:38; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2-4; Jas 5:13-18;

<sup>8</sup> Dunn, *Don’t Just Stand There*, 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> Gen 12:3; 18:18-33; 20:17; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

nation of Israel,<sup>10</sup> to the prophets,<sup>11</sup> and subsequently to the New Testament Church. The Biblical record contains numerous narratives describing intercessory activity. In these narratives, intercession was made on behalf of a third party to either another individual or to God.<sup>12</sup> However, the majority of these accounts record intercession made on behalf of family members or on behalf of the nation of Israel. There are only a handful of accounts which describe intercession on behalf of those who stood outside the community of ancient Israel. Genesis 18:16-33 is the first account of intercession in the Pentateuch. It is also one of the few accounts in the Hebrew Bible in which intercession is made not only on behalf of a family member but more importantly, on behalf of an entire city of strangers who stand outside of Abraham's family and who do not share his moral and theological beliefs.<sup>13</sup>

If intercession is defined as petitionary prayer on behalf of another, then three parties are drawn into a relationship triangle by the process of intercession. These three parties are: the beneficiary for whom intercession is made, the intercessor who champions the cause of and advocates for the beneficiary, and the benefactor or patron

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<sup>10</sup> Exod 12:43-51; 19:4-6; Deut 14:29; 24:14-22; Ps 67:1-6.

<sup>11</sup> Exod 32-34; Jeremiah 14:7-9, 13; 15:1; Amos 7:1-9; 1 Sam 12:23

<sup>12</sup> Examples of intercession in the Hebrew scriptures include: Abraham for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16-33); Abraham for Abimelech's household (Gen 20:17); Isaac for Rebekah (Gen 25:21); Reuben for Joseph (37:21-30); Joseph requesting intercession on his behalf from the cupbearer to pharaoh (Gen 40:14); Judah interceding on behalf of Benjamin (Gen 44:14-44); Moses for Israel (Exod 32:11-14, 31-35; 33:12-23; Psa 106:23); Phinehas for Israel (Num 25:7-13; Psa 106:30-31); Samuel for Israel (1 Sam 7:5-11; 12:7, 23); David for his son (2 Sam 12:16-23); Hezekiah for Jerusalem and Judah (2 Ki 19:1-37; 2 Chron 32:1-23); Moses and Samuel cited as examples of intercessors (Jer 15:1); Jeremiah commanded not to intercede for Israel (Jer 7:16, 11:14, 14:11); Amos 7:1-6; Ezekiel 22:30; Daniel interceding in the context of spiritual warfare (Dan 10:12).

<sup>13</sup> John Goldingay, "The Logic of Intercession," *Theology* 101 (1998): 262; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 132; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 18; Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 266; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1994), 44, 51.

to whom intercession is made.<sup>14</sup> In the narrative of Gen 18:16-33, the beneficiaries are Sodom, Gomorrah and Lot, the intercessor is Abraham, and the benefactor/patron is Yahweh.

*The purpose of this study is to examine how each of the parties drawn together within the triangle of intercession is characterized in the narrative of Gen 18:16-33.* Several secondary questions arise from this primary research question. The following are a few examples of these secondary questions which will be addressed by this study. First, how does the author present each member of the triangle of intercession? Second, what is the relationship between each member's characterization and their function in the process of intercession? Third, what are the author's literary and theological purposes for each particular characterization? Fourth, are these characterizations unique to the narrative of Gen 18:16-33 or are they intended to be representative of the parties drawn together in the triangle of intercession? How do these characterizations compare with those found in other Biblical intercessory texts? How do the characterizations in Gen 18:16-33 compare with those found in the intercessory literature of other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cultures? Fifth, what are the dynamics in the relationships among the parties?

Surprisingly, even though Gen 18:16-33 is the first intercessory text in the Pentateuch, the attempt at intercession ultimately proves to be futile and a failure. As the events of the broader narrative of Gen 18-19 unfold, despite Abraham's intervention, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed. If intercession is a significant theological motif in the canon and a responsibility charged to all believers,

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<sup>14</sup> The terms beneficiary, intercessor, and benefactor/patron are not technical terms but have been designated and assigned by the author for the purpose of clarity in this study.

then what is the literary and theological purpose for the first account of intercession being the discouraging description of a failed attempt?

It is important to bear in mind that even prior to Genesis 18, the narrator has already supplied the audience with anticipatory information concerning the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah and that the two cities would ultimately be destroyed (Gen 13:10-13).<sup>15</sup> As the characters in the narrative direct their gaze towards Sodom in Gen 18:16, so too are the reader's thoughts, with the result that this anticipatory knowledge is brought to the fore. The opening verses of Yahweh's soliloquy firmly establish that Sodom is the focal point of the ensuing plot events. The information possessed by the reader results in the "uneasy feeling that Abraham's efforts to dissuade Yahweh will be in vain."<sup>16</sup> If this is the case, then what would be the literary and theological purposes for the inclusion of this futile and failed attempt at intercession in the Abraham Cycle, in the Pentateuch, and in the Hebrew Bible? This study proposes that the primary literary and theological purpose of the narrative of Gen 18:16-33 is the presentation of the characterization of the parties drawn together in the triangle of intercession. The characterization of the beneficiaries, intercessor, and benefactor is the means by which the theological concepts which form the basis for intercession are demonstrated and illustrated.

The Abraham Cycle is frequently regarded as the cornerstone of the book of Genesis. Kidner's description that "with this, the general history of man gives way in

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<sup>15</sup> See Nahum M. Sarna, "The Anticipatory Use of Information as a Literary Feature of the Genesis Narratives," in *The Creation of Sacred Literature: Composition and Redaction of the Biblical Text* (ed. Richard E. Friedman: Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 76-82.

<sup>16</sup> Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 86.

chapter 12 to the germinal story of Abraham and his seed”<sup>17</sup> is representative of the views of other Old Testament commentators such as Cassuto, Sarna, Brueggeman, Westermann, von Rad, Hamilton and Ross.<sup>18</sup> It is also generally recognized that Abraham is the first intercessor in the Pentateuch and that Gen 18:16-33 is the first intercessory text in the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>19</sup>

MacDonald describes the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham in Gen 18:16-33 as “one of the densest passages in the Book of Genesis, touching on many significant theological themes.”<sup>20</sup> However, despite these distinctions, relative to other sections of the Abraham Cycle, little scholarly attention has been paid to this pericope. Genesis 18:16-33 is a literary subunit within a larger extended narrative which spans the two chapters of Gen 18-19. However, most commentaries devote far greater attention to the immediately preceding (18:1-15) and following (19:1-38) pericopes. A literature search through several theological databases yielded relatively few articles and monographs in which Gen 18:16-33 is the primary focus.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (trans. Israel Abrahams; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 301; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Vol. 1 of *The JPS Torah Commentary*; ed. Nahum M. Sarna; New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 87; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 1-8; Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; London: SCM Press, 1972), 159-160; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 38-52, 369-376; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 80-83, 253-259.

<sup>19</sup> Goldingay, “The Logic of Intercession,” 262; Kidner, *Genesis*, 132; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 266.

<sup>20</sup> Nathan MacDonald, “Listening to Abraham --- Listening to Yhwh: Divine Justice and Mercy in Genesis 18:16-33,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 43.

<sup>21</sup> A search of three theological databases identified 7,719 articles on Genesis and 869 articles on Genesis 18. Of these 869 articles, there were only 28 articles in which Genesis 18:16-33 was the primary focus. Frequently, articles would cite Gen 18:16-33 only for the purpose of completeness within the context of a broader discussion of an issue which happens to be present in Gen 18:16-33. See also Annemieke Ter Brugge, “Bibliography of Genesis 18-19 and Judges 19 Since 1990,” in *Sodom’s Sin: Genesis 18-19 and its Interpretations* (eds. Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar; Themes in Biblical Narrative 7; Leiden: Brill,

The published scholarly literature in which Gen 18:16-33 is the primary focus includes studies on the subjects of textual criticism, grammatical and syntactical issues, literary and rhetorical analysis, source criticism, redaction criticism, and theological analysis.<sup>22</sup> Theological studies have mainly focused on the topics of justice and righteousness, theodicy, divine judgment, and more recently, the openness of God. In this debate, there is ongoing discussion as to whether God changes His mind or can be influenced to alter His decisions.<sup>23</sup> The scholarly literature surveyed reveals that very little has been written on the subject of intercession in Gen 18:16-33 even though it is generally recognized to be primarily an intercessory text.<sup>24</sup> In discussions of intercession in the Old Testament, Genesis 18 is often cited as the first example of intercession in Scripture but these discussions then quickly proceed to examine Exodus 32, Numbers

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2004), 189-193. Her bibliography is not comprehensive but confirms the paucity of scholarly examinations of Gen 18:16-33.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Zvi has provided an excellent summary of the history of interpretation of Gen 18:16-33. His summary is essentially an annotated bibliography in which the author, the journal reference, and the theological conclusions are provided in a single entry. See Ehud Ben Zvi, "The Dialogue Between Abraham and YHWH in Gen 18:23-32: A Historical-Critical Analysis," *JSOT* 53 (1992): 27-32.

<sup>23</sup> The subject of the openness of God is relevant to the study of Gen 18:16-33. However, it is beyond the focus and scope of this study to enter into that debate. For reviews and discussions of this issue, see Samuel E. Balentine, "Prayers for Justice in the Old Testament: Theodicy and Theology," *CBQ* 51 (1989), 597-616; Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Millard J. Erickson, *What does God Know and When Does He Know it?: The Current Controversy over Divine Foreknowledge*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Norman L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?: The New 'Open' View of God – Neotheism's Dangerous Drift*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997); Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders, *Does God Have a Future?: A Debate on Divine Providence*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998); R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Free Will Theism*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996); John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism*, (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2001); Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity and Immutability*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Goldingay, "Logic", 262; Kidner, *Genesis*, 132; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18; Waltke and Fredericks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 266.

14, or 1 Samuel 12 as their primary texts.<sup>25</sup>

Exegetical studies of this pericope have historically commented on matters of textual, source, historical, and redaction criticism. More recently, literary critical studies of this text have identified its many intricate and complex rhetorical features.<sup>26</sup> However, none of these studies have placed their literary critical findings within the context of the theological motif of intercession which dominates the narrative of Gen 18:16-33.

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<sup>25</sup> Examples include Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 262-280; Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 89-117.

<sup>26</sup> MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham", 43; Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 219-227; Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), 77-88.

## 1.2 Methodology

This study will begin by first examining selected ANE intercessory texts in order to establish a historical, literary, and cultural context for the subsequent examination of characterization in Gen 18:16-33. The examination of intercession in the literature and religion of the Ancient Near East will focus on ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, Canaanite, Akkadian, and Hittite cultures. It will be accomplished through an analysis of the translated primary source ANE texts collected in the standard works of *The Ancient Near East*<sup>27</sup> by Pritchard and *The Context of Scripture*<sup>28</sup> edited by Hallo and Younger. This examination will attempt to answer several questions. First, was intercession practised within the religious life of these ANE cultures? Second, how was intercession carried out in the ANE? What were the cultic rituals, rhetorical formulae, prayers, conventions, and expectations? Third, how was intercession presented in the literature of the ANE? Was there a common genre or literary form which was used to present the dialogue between intercessor and benefactor? Fourth, how were the parties (beneficiary, benefactor, and intercessor) involved in the process of intercession characterized? Were these characterizations intended to be representative stereotypes or were they unique to the particular literary work? What were the needs of the beneficiary which prompted intercession? Fifth, what particular theological beliefs were revealed through the practice of intercession in each of the above ANE cultures? Lastly, what was the role of intercession in the daily and religious life of the ANE? How was intercession integrated into the theology and belief systems of the cultures of the ANE?

The findings from the analysis of the ANE intercessory texts will be compared

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<sup>27</sup> James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3d ed. with supplement; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997-2002).

with the results of the study of Gen 18:16-33. This comparative study will focus on the research question of characterization within the triangle of intercession. Distinct elements of characterization as well as those shared in common will be identified and their literary and theological significance discussed.

There are several limitations to the methodology of this study. First, it was beyond the scope of this study to examine all extant ANE texts in which intercession is the primary or secondary subject. Instead, only the texts contained in *The Ancient Near East* and in *Context of Scripture* were chosen to be the basis for this study. These two compilations of ANE texts are widely recognized to be standard reference collections containing texts considered by scholars to be representative of a particular culture, historical period, literary form, or dealing with an important subject matter.<sup>29</sup> This study acknowledges that such a selective examination of extant ANE intercessory texts would limit the strength of any derived conclusions. Second, the language limitations of the author precluded access to the pertinent ANE texts in their original form. The author relied on the English translations of the original ANE texts. Third, it is beyond the scope of this study to place the findings concerning intercession in the literature and religious life of the ANE alongside the Biblical record and to perform a comparative study. This would be reserved for subsequent studies. Fourth, this study will focus on intercession, the particular form of petition in which aid is requested by an individual on behalf of a third party. Conceptually, cursing or execration is the theological, moral, and spiritual opposite of intercession. There is a sizeable body of ANE execration texts which have been recovered but these will not be considered in this study.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See comments concerning the purpose and selection criteria for *Context of Scripture* in William W. Hallo, "Introduction," *COS* 1:xxiii-xxviii.

<sup>30</sup> "The Execration of Asiatic Princes," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 328-329); "Curses and

The examination of the selected ANE intercessory texts will be followed by a close reading or a literary and synchronic analysis of Gen 18:16-33. A canonical approach will be followed which will set the exegesis of Gen 18:16-33 within the immediate context of the Abraham Cycle and the broader contexts of the book of Genesis and of the Pentateuch.<sup>31</sup> The study will begin with a translation of Gen 18:16-33 with accompanying notes addressing issues of grammar, syntax, and textual criticism. A discussion of the form, structure, and setting of the pericope will be presented followed by a verse by verse exegesis of Gen 18:16-33. Following the methodology of literary criticism, a synchronic reading of the text in its final form will be employed.<sup>32</sup>

A disadvantage of a purely literary and synchronic reading strategy which focuses exclusively on the final form of the text and disregards its historical and cultural setting is that an “anachronistic interpretation” may result.<sup>33</sup> Historical matters such as dating, authorship, and source critical issues will be briefly surveyed but otherwise this study will not engage in a discussion of these matters for several reasons. First, there is a growing doubt concerning the feasibility of following the streams of the various

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Threats,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 326-328); “Execration Texts,” translated by Robert K. Ritner (*COS* 1.32:50-52).

<sup>31</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 104-106.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion and evaluation of various reading strategies employed in Biblical studies, see Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, xxxv-xxxviii; idem., “Pondering the Pentateuch: The Search for a New Paradigm,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, (eds. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 116-144; John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 20-157; R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, (JSOTSup 53; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 17-242; James Barr, “The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?” in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, (ed. Johannes C. de Moor; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 2-14;

<sup>33</sup> David Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 5.

narrative traditions in the Pentateuch back to their original sources. Second, the process by which the text was transmitted from the original source document to the final form is fragmented with gaps in the history of transmission which have proven thus far to be unrecoverable. Third, the final form of the text is the only one that is available for study and interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

Form critical issues will be examined as the literary form or genre of Gen 18:16-33 is critical to its rhetorical and theological purpose. The results of the analysis of the selected ANE intercessory texts will be incorporated into the discussion of form critical issues.

A verse by verse exegesis of Gen 18:16-33 will be presented including a literary analysis of the pericope. The literary analysis of Gen 18:16-33 will employ the traditional or classical literary criticism of Muilenberg, Fokkelman, Alter, Bar-Efrat, Sternberg, and Berlin<sup>35</sup> and will not employ derivations of literary criticism such as deconstructionism, reader-response approach, structuralism and semiotics, and ideological readings such as Marxist, feminist, liberation, and New Historicism.<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> For a critique of source criticism and the documentary hypothesis, see T. Desmond Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," (PhD diss., Queen's University of Belfast, 1982), 68-106, 265-291; Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch*, 17-242; Wenham, "Pondering the Pentateuch," 116-144; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, (trans. John J. Scullion; JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 108-133; T. Desmond Alexander, "Authorship of the Pentateuch," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, (eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 61-72.

<sup>35</sup> Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Jan P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (trans. Ineke Smit; Leiderdorp: Deo Publishing, 1999); Jean Louis Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us": *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (SubBi 13; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> Tremper Longman III, "Literary Approaches to Old Testament Study," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*. (eds. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 97-115. See also Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 104-157.

literary analysis will study the pericope using the standard tools of literary criticism: narrative type, points of view, conflict and plot development, characterization, setting, narrative time, and poetics.<sup>37</sup> This study will examine how the use of literary techniques such as repetition, changing points of view, strong or weak characterization, creation of conflict and ensuing resolution, variation in narrative time, etc. contributes to the communication of the theological message of Gen 18:16-33.

Theological motifs identified from the exegetical study will be discussed. These motifs include divine judgment and theodicy, the righteousness and justice of the way of Yahweh, intercession, and the preserving (salvific) influence of the righteous remnant.

The findings from the exegetical study will then be incorporated into a detailed analysis and discussion of characterization within the triangle of intercession depicted in Gen 18:16-33. The discussion will not attempt to undertake an exhaustive and comprehensive examination of the characterization of Sodom, Gomorrah, Lot, Abraham, and Yahweh. Instead, only those elements in their characterization which are pertinent to the study subject of intercession will be analysed and discussed.

Lastly, the findings of the study will be summarized and final conclusions presented.

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<sup>37</sup>Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 47-177; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 13-82.

## *Chapter 2 - Intercession in the Religion and Literature of the Ancient Near East*

### **2.1 Introduction**

Despite the significant presence of intercession as a theological theme in the Hebrew Bible, it is recognized by scholars that this particular form of petitionary prayer has been neglected in the field of Biblical studies.<sup>1</sup> There are numerous popular treatments extant on this topic<sup>2</sup> but few scholarly examinations from an exegetical, literary, linguistic, or historical perspective.<sup>3</sup> From the historical perspective, further understanding of the theology and practice of intercession in the Hebrew Bible may be gained through a comparative study of intercession in the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cultures contemporaneous with the Biblical record.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to examine intercession in the literature and

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel E. Balentine, "The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment," *JBL* 103 (1984): 161-162; Goldingay, "Logic of Intercession," 262; François Rossier, *L'intercession entre les hommes dans la Bible hébraïque. L'intercession entre les hommes aux origines de l'intercession auprès de Dieu* (OBO 152; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 1-15; Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer*, 7-8. For an extended reflection and discussion concerning possible reasons for the lack of interest among Biblical scholars on the topic of prayer and intercession in the Hebrew Bible, see Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible*, 1-32, 225-259.

<sup>2</sup> For bibliographic references of popular studies on the topic of intercession, see Dunn, *Don't Just Stand There*, 267-269; Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates*, 31, 60, 69, 79, 155, 171, 206, 221, 247, 264; David Bryant, *In the Gap* (Ventura: Regal, 1984), 281-287; Dutch Sheets, *Intercessory Prayer: How God Can Use Your Prayers to Move Heaven and Earth* (Ventura: Regal, 1996), 263-264.

<sup>3</sup> Recent scholarly studies on the subjects of prayer and intercession include Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer*; Clements, *In Spirit and in Truth*; Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*; Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible*.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions concerning the strengths and limitations of the comparative method, see Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1966), 87-111; K. Lawson Younger, Jr., "The 'Contextual Method': Some West Semitic Reflections," *COS* 3:xxxv-xlii; William W. Hallo, *Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach* (PTMS 34; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980), 1-26; K. Lawson Younger, Jr., William W. Hallo, Bernard F. Batto, eds. *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*. Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies 11, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1991.

religion of the Ancient Near East with a focus on ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, Canaanite, Akkadian, and Hittite cultures. This study will be accomplished through an examination and analysis of the translated primary source ANE texts collected in the standard works of *The Ancient Near East*<sup>5</sup> by Pritchard and *The Context of Scripture*<sup>6</sup> edited by Hallo and Younger. The study will attempt to answer several questions. First, was intercession practised within the religious life of these ANE cultures? Second, how was intercession carried out in the ANE? What were the cultic rituals, rhetorical formulae, prayers, conventions, and expectations? Third, was there a particular literary form in which intercessory prayers and petitions were recorded and was there a form common to all the major cultures of the ANE? Fourth, how were the parties (beneficiary, benefactor, and intercessor) involved in the process of intercession characterized? Fifth, what particular theological beliefs were revealed through the practice of intercession in each of the above ANE cultures? Lastly, what was the role of intercession in the daily and religious life of the ANE? How was intercession integrated into the theology and belief systems of the cultures of the ANE?

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<sup>5</sup> James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3d ed. with supplement; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997-2002).

## 2.2 *Intercession in Ancient Egyptian Literature and Religion*

### 2.2.1 *A Hymn to Amon-Re*<sup>7</sup>

This hymn dating from the Eighteenth Dynasty is recorded on papyrus Boulaq 17 in the Cairo Museum as well as on statue 40959 located in the British Museum.<sup>8</sup> Even though intercession is not a component of this hymn, it has been included in this study because it addresses tenets of Egyptian religious thought and belief which were necessary for the practice of petition and intercession. The hymn praises Amon-Re as the supreme deity in the Egyptian pantheon, the omnipotent source and sustainer of all life, and who is victorious over all his enemies. The text is divided by intrinsic disjunctive markers into four stanzas. The following lines from stanza II are relevant to the present study:

Who hears the prayer of him who is in captivity,  
Gracious of heart in the face of an appeal to him.  
Saving the fearful from the terrible of heart,  
Judging the weak and the injured.<sup>9</sup>

These four lines are representative of several fundamental spiritual beliefs in the religion of ancient Egypt which provide the foundation for prayers of petition and intercession. First, Amon-Re is portrayed as being aware of the needs of his human worshippers who may have been in captivity, weak, injured, or facing fears. Second, Amon-Re is described as hearing the prayers of his people and is not portrayed as being

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<sup>7</sup> “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 365-367).

<sup>8</sup> “A Hymn to Amon-Re” (*ANET*, 365).

<sup>9</sup> “A Hymn to Amon-Re” (*ANET*, 366).

a distant or indifferent deity. Third, goodness, kindness, and graciousness are attributes ascribed to this chief god of Egypt. Lastly, Amon-Re is capable and does act to save those who worship him.

For a people to present prayers of petition and intercession, there must be the *a priori* belief that the deity to whom those prayers are made will hear, will respond in kindness and compassion, and will act to provide, protect, or deliver. Otherwise, the presentation petitions and intercessions would be a futile and vain religious practice. This hymn is evidence of the existence of such beliefs within the theology and religious life of ancient Egypt.

### 2.2.2 *The God Amon as Healer and Magician*<sup>10</sup>

This Nineteenth Dynasty manuscript provides further evidence of ancient Egyptian beliefs in the character and capability of their gods. Again, even though this text does not directly address the topic of intercession, it is pertinent to this study because it reveals ancient Egyptian religious beliefs which provided the theological basis and motivation for petitionary and intercessory prayers in the religious life of ancient Egypt. Using anthropomorphic language, Amon is described as possessing eyes and ears which enable him to see the needs and to hear the prayers of those whom he loves and who call out to him. Distance and time are not barriers to Amon's awareness or action to deliver his people. Amon is capable of healing both physical and spiritual ailments, of lengthening life, and even restoring to life individuals who have died. This text demonstrates that underlying ancient Egyptian petitionary and intercessory prayers

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<sup>10</sup> "The God Amon as Healer and Magician," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 369).

was the belief that those prayers would be heard by the gods and that the gods would act to save and deliver in answer to those prayers.

### 2.2.3 *Gratitude for a God's Mercy*<sup>11</sup>

This inscription is found on a memorial stela dating from the Nineteenth Dynasty which resides in the Berlin Museum (Berlin 20377). The text is an expression of gratitude to Amon-Re by an artisan of the necropolis at Thebes, Neb-Re, for Amon-Re's healing of his son, Nakht-Amon. The text opens with two stanzas of praise to Amon-Re with particular emphasis on Amon-Re answering calls of distress and rescuing those in need. In the middle stanzas, Neb-Re recounts the events concerning his son Nakht-Amon who had fallen ill to the point of being near death. His illness was thought to be the result of Nakht-Amon having acted profanely with respect to a cow that had been dedicated to Amon-Re. In desperation, Neb-Re offered prayers and supplications to Amon-Re on behalf of his ill son. The concluding stanzas describe the healing of Nakht-Amon and the twofold response of Neb-Re. First, he praises Amon-Re for his mercy, for listening to his prayers, for his short-lived anger against Nakht-Amon, and for healing his son. Second, Neb-Re makes a two element promise to Amon-Re. His first promise is that his household will not repeat the profane act in the future. His second vow is to memorialize Amon-Re's healing of his son on a stela as a testimony of Amon-Re's mercy and response to Neb-Re's prayers.

This text provides several insights into the religious thought and life of ancient Egypt. First, Nakht-Amon's physical illness was attributed to a spiritual or moral

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<sup>11</sup> "Gratitude for a God's Mercy," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET* 380-381).

transgression against Amon-Re. Second, intercession is made by Neb-Re directly to his deity, Amon-Re, on behalf of his ill son. There was no need nor utilization of an intermediary such as a priest or lesser deity.<sup>12</sup> Third, the basis for Neb-Re's intercession was his belief that Amon-Re's character and divine attributes would result in a favourable response. In particular, Neb-Re appealed to Amon-Re's mercy, compassion, short-lived anger, and immanence, believing that his deity would hear his prayers and respond by healing his son. The favourable response of healing by Amon-Re would imply that Amon-Re had not only heard Neb-Re's prayers but had forgiven his son's transgression. This text assumes the possibility of divine forgiveness. Fourth, Neb-Re confessed and acknowledged his son's moral sin and transgression against Amon-Re. Lastly, the inscription describes the response to answered intercessory prayer. In his expression of gratitude, Neb-Re makes two vows to Amon-Re. The first vow is evidence of repentance as he pledges that in the future, having learned from this incident, his household will not repeat his son's profane act. The second promise is that the incident would be recorded on a stela as a testimony to Amon-Re's mercy, goodness, and greatness.

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<sup>12</sup> The use of an intermediary in personal petitions or intercession was common in Hittite religious and secular practice. The intermediary could be a lesser god, a member of the priesthood, a family relative, deceased family member, a member of the royal family, or a government official. This subject will be discussed subsequently in Section VI, Intercession in Hittite Religion and Literature.

#### 2.2.4 *The Legend of the Possessed Princess* <sup>13</sup>

This tale of miraculous healing by the Theban god Khons is found on a black sandstone stela discovered in 1829 in a sanctuary near the temple of Khons at Karnak built by Ramses II.<sup>14</sup> Although Ramses II reigned in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the stela dates from the much later Persian or Ptolemaic periods of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. This discrepancy in dating has led scholars to believe that it was a later work of priestly propaganda cast back to an earlier time period. Several theories have been proposed concerning the rhetorical purpose of this tale. First, the tale may have been intended to raise the profile of the two principal forms of the Theban god Khons: Khons the Merciful (*Khons-in-Thebes-Neferhotep*) and Khons-the-Provider. Alternatively, instead of promoting the unified worship of Khons, it may have reflected a rivalry between separate priesthoods, each of which promoted one particular manifestation of Khons. Lastly, the tale may have been an attempt to recall an earlier and more glorious time in Egypt's pharaonic history during a contemporary period of foreign domination by either the Persians or Greeks.<sup>15</sup>

The projection of this tale back to the time period of Ramses II is evidenced by the placement of the stela in the Karnak Temple complex and by the characterization and events of the tale. The tale opens by describing the marriage of the king of Egypt to the eldest daughter of the Prince of Bekhten who was a vassal to Egypt and paid tribute to pharaoh. The new queen greatly pleased the Egyptian pharaoh who officially renamed

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<sup>13</sup> "The Legend of the Possessed Princess," translated by Miriam Lichtheim (*COS* 1.54:134-136) and "The Legend of the Possessed Princess," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 29-31).

<sup>14</sup> The stela, named the Bentresh Stela, resides in the Louvre and is identified as Louvre C 284. See "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*COS* 1.54:134).

<sup>15</sup> "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*COS* 1.54:134).

her as “the Great King’s Wife, Nefru-Re”. This marriage and the renaming of the queen were overt references to Ramses II’s marriage to the eldest daughter of the Hittite king and her subsequent renaming as “the King’s Wife Maat-Nefru-Re”.<sup>16</sup>

As the tale unfolds, following the marriage of pharaoh to the eldest daughter of the prince of Bekhten, the prince sends a message to pharaoh explaining that a younger sister of the new queen is sick and requesting that pharaoh dispatch a healer to Bekhten. A healer is sent and discovers that the younger sister is possessed by an evil spirit. The healer concludes that the sister is curable but that he himself lacked the skill and power to exorcise the spirit. As a result, the prince of Bekhten sends a second message to pharaoh and requests that he dispatch a god of Egypt to exorcise the spirit from his daughter. Pharaoh asks Khons-in-Thebes-*Neferhotep* to send Khons-the-Provider to heal his sister-in-law.<sup>17</sup> Khons-in-Thebes-*Neferhotep* assents and Khons-the-Provider is sent to Bekhten, casts out the evil spirit, and heals the princess. Prior to retreating before the power of Khons-the-Provider, the evil spirit requests that the prince of Bekhten hold a feast and make an offering to it. Khons-the-Provider agrees and the prince of Bekhten complies. In gratitude, the prince of Bekhten sends Khons-the-Provider back home to Egypt with great gifts, soldiers, and horses. The tale concludes with a description of how Khons-the-Provider places all the gifts in the temple of Khons-in-Thebes-*Neferhotep* and keeps nothing for his own temple.

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<sup>16</sup> “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*COS* 1.54:135) and “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*ANET*, 29).

<sup>17</sup> The Theban god Khons was one member of the divine Theban triumvirate of Amon, Mut, and Khons. He was worshiped in several manifestations. Khons-in-Thebes-*Neferhotep* or Khons-the-Merciful was the chief manifestation. A secondary manifestation was Khons-the-Provider who granted specific requests, including those for physical or spiritual healing. See “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*COS* 1.54:135) and “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*ANET*, 30).

This tale is evidence of the complexity of the religious life and theology not only of ancient Egypt but of the surrounding Ancient Near East. First, in this tale, religion and theology are merged with politics. The prince of Bekhten intercedes on behalf of his daughter who is ill. However, as a political and economic vassal to Egypt, he does not appeal to his own gods but to the gods of Egypt.<sup>18</sup> Further, in his position as a vassal, he does not appeal directly to the gods of Egypt but requests that his suzerain, the pharaoh, intercede on his behalf. In this tale, intercession occurs via an intermediary as a vassal appeals to his sovereign to appeal to the sovereign's gods.

Second, pharaoh is regarded as a god, the son of Amon who was chief of the gods of Egypt. As a result, pharaoh has unique and direct access to members of the Egyptian pantheon of which he is a member. He facilitates intercession not as a human priest but as deity.

Third, in the exorcism of the evil spirit, this tale describes intercession for spiritual healing and not just physical healing. As was discussed above, the unity between the material and the immaterial was typical of the religious thought of the ANE.

Lastly, offerings and tribute are given by the prince of Bekhten to Khons-the Provider as an expression of gratitude for the favourable response to his intercession on behalf of his daughter. It is interesting to note that the tale describes gifts being given to Khons-the-Provider but does not mention any gifts given to pharaoh who was the intermediary between the prince of Bekhten and the Egyptian god.

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<sup>18</sup> The prince of Behkten was merely employing the theological calculus common to the ANE. As a vassal to Egypt, he and his gods had been conquered by Egypt and its gods. Therefore, the Egyptian gods were more powerful than the gods of Behkten.

### 2.2.5 *The Creation by Atum*<sup>19</sup>

This text was found carved inside the pyramids of both Mer-ne-Re and Nefer-ka-Re, pharaohs who ruled in the Sixth Dynasty (24<sup>th</sup> century B.C.). The text was used as part of the dedication ceremony of a royal pyramid. The dedication looks back at creation when the god Atum of Heliopolis stood on a primeval hill which had arisen out of the watery chaos and created the first gods. Atum is asked to bless the rising pyramid which is symbolic of that primeval hill.

Following an opening stanza of praise to Atum, the text implores Atum to protect the pharaoh, the ongoing construction work, and the completed pyramid. This request is repeated three times and with the final iteration, all of the first nine gods (Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys) are called upon to provide protection against all forms of evil for eternity.

This dedicatory text is an example of intercession on behalf of pharaoh and the survival of his soul in the afterlife. Divine protection is requested on behalf of pharaoh, the construction of his pyramid, and the completed pyramid for eternity from all sources of evil including the dead and the divine. Following the opening stanza of praise, this intercessory request is repeated threefold throughout the dedicatory text with a progressive development in the breadth and comprehensiveness of the request until it reaches its climax in the final repetition.

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<sup>19</sup> “The Creation by Atum,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 3). Wilson notes that the original text is replete with word play including examples of assonance, alliteration, anaphora, paronomasia.

This climactic development is evidenced by several rhetorical elements. First, with the first two iterations of the request for protection, only Atum is called upon to guard pharaoh, the construction work, and the completed pyramid. In the final iteration, intercession is made to all nine of the pre-eminent gods in the Egyptian pantheon (Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys) to provide protection to pharaoh. Second, the potential threats to pharaoh and his pyramid are specifically identified in the third iteration of the intercessory request. Evil originating from the dead or the divine as well as the “Nine Bows” are listed as potential sources of danger.<sup>20</sup>

The threefold repetition of intercession on behalf of pharaoh and his pyramid is significant from several perspectives. First, the progressive nature of each iteration culminating in a climactic conclusion creates a dramatic rhetorical effect. Second, repetition conveys rhetorical emphasis from the author(s) of the text to the audience. Third, from a theological perspective, the threefold repetition demonstrates perseverance and earnestness which potentially would increase the likelihood of a favourable response from Atum and the other leading Egyptians deities.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The “Nine Bows” were the nine traditional enemies of Egypt: Nubians (south of Aswan), land of Shat (south of Nubia), Near Easterners (Asiatics), Libyans, Egyptians, the Iuntiu of Ta-sety, the people of Ta-shu (the “empty quarter”), the Tjehenu (west of the Nile Delta), and the Tjemehu (oasis dwellers of the Western Desert). See Kekri Hassan, “Geography,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* 2:16-20; Geoffrey Graham, “Insignias,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* 2:165-167.

<sup>21</sup> The numeral “3” and its multiples were regarded with particular significance by Egyptians. The prime number “3” was a symbol of perfection and its multiples often signified emphasis or the magnification of a particular quality. In addition to the many examples of paronomasia, the rhetorical construction of this dedicatory prayer contains many iterations of the number “3” or its multiples. Intercession is made for protection on behalf of three individuals or objects: pharaoh, the ongoing work of construction, and for the completed pyramid. This request for protection is repeated three times. The third and final repetition of the request for protection invokes the nine pre-eminent gods of the Ennead and cites the Nine Bows representing the traditional enemies of Egypt. Lastly, the dedicatory text is structurally arranged into three stanzas.

### 2.2.6 *The Eloquent Peasant*<sup>22</sup>

This composition dates from the Middle Kingdom (12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) and exhibits a combination of both narrative prose and poetic verse typical of the genre classified as speculative wisdom literature from that time period.<sup>23</sup> The text is replete with imagery, figures of speech, proverbs, assonance, alliteration, and paronomasia.<sup>24</sup> In terms of rhetorical function, the peasant's predicament served as a social commentary condemning the corruption, injustice, and oppression of that time period. Concurrently, there was a call to restore and preserve justice and social order. The text is pertinent to this study because intercession on behalf of the peasant is a key element in the unfolding of the events in the narrative.

A peasant is robbed and presents his case to the local high steward, Rensi, for justice and restitution. Rensi is convinced of the merits of the peasant's case and brings it before the local magistrates to obtain a judicial ruling. Unfortunately, the magistrates think otherwise and deny Rensi's petition on behalf of the peasant. In an effort to secure justice for the peasant, Rensi appeals to Pharaoh on behalf of the peasant. Pharaoh's initial ruling did not address the peasant, the robber, nor the magistrates. Instead, four obligations were placed on Rensi the intercessor. He was commanded to be silent and to listen and record all that the peasant would say for the pharaoh to hear. Lastly, during this time period of listening and recording, Rensi was to provide food and shelter for the peasant from his own resources but without the peasant being aware of it.

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<sup>22</sup> "The Eloquent Peasant," translated by Nili Shupak (*COS* 1.43:98-104).

<sup>23</sup> "The Eloquent Peasant" (*COS* 1.43:98).

<sup>24</sup> "The Eloquent Peasant" (*COS* 1.43:98).

As the narrative continues, Rensi complies with all of pharaoh's commands. The peasant subsequently presents nine petitions to Rensi demanding justice with each petition supported by various social, theological, legal, moral, ethical, and philosophical arguments. At the conclusion of the ninth petition, Rensi gathers up all the petitions which he has dutifully recorded and presents them to pharaoh. Pharaoh is pleased with Rensi's obedience to his edicts and grants him full authority to render justice as he deems appropriate. Rensi arrests the robber and restores the peasant's property to him. There is no mention of the peasant thanking Rensi or pharaoh for the restoration of his goods.

Three characteristics of intercession are evident in this composition. First, persistence and perseverance appear to be crucial to the successful resolution of petitions and intercession. The peasant exhibited persistence in the ninefold presentation of his petitions demanding justice to the high steward Rensi.<sup>25</sup> Perseverance was also required of and demonstrated by the intercessor, Rensi. His initial appeal to the local magistrates was rebuffed. Undeterred, he brought his intercession on behalf of the peasant before pharaoh. Instead of pronouncing a ruling, pharaoh placed four obligations on Rensi which had to be fulfilled before Rensi could appear before pharaoh again. Rensi fulfilled all the obligations and his intercession was ultimately successful and he secured justice and restitution for the peasant. Perseverance demonstrated the earnestness, zeal, worthiness and commitment of the intercessor. Rensi's persistence and compliance with pharaoh's requirements were evidence of the depth of his belief in and commitment to the peasant's cause.

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<sup>25</sup> See preceding footnote for the significance of the sum of the peasant's petitions being a multiple of "3".

Second, this intercessory text suggests that intercession may be a costly and difficult undertaking on the part of the intercessor. Although it was the peasant who had lost his goods, it was upon Rensi that obligations were placed by pharaoh before he ruled on the matter. As Rensi waited for pharaoh to render judgment, his inaction and silence were misinterpreted by the peasant. In an ironic turn of events, Rensi is castigated for apparent corruption and indifference by the peasant on behalf of whom he was interceding before pharaoh. Further, while awaiting pharaoh's ruling, Rensi was required by pharaoh to anonymously provide food and shelter for the peasant.

The high steward Rensi is characterized in this ancient Egyptian intercessory text as demonstrating perseverance as he remained steadfast in his intercession for the wronged peasant in the face of opposition, false accusations, slander, abuse, and personal material cost. Through the characterization of Rensi, the text suggests several possible reasons which may motivate an intercessor to approach a benefactor and intervene on behalf of a beneficiary. These reasons include a fulfilment of duty or obligation, a commitment to a principle or a cause, a concern for justice, or compassion and selfless altruism which sought the good of another without any personal gain. An intercessor may be motivated by one or a combination of the above factors.

Lastly, as discussed above, one of the rhetorical functions of this composition was to serve as a social commentary pointing out the corruption, injustice, oppression, and social breakdown of that time period. In so doing, the narrative illustrates that in ancient Egypt, intercession was made not only for illness, for deliverance from enemies, for successful business, political or military ventures, but also for moral and social justice.

## 2.3 *Intercession in West Semitic Literature and Religion*

### 2.3.1 *The Kirta Epic*<sup>26</sup>

The *Kirta Epic* recorded on three tablets was discovered during the excavation and exploration of Ras Shamra. Large portions of the original text were destroyed and unrecoverable. However, the prevalence of repetition within the poetic narrative allowed for the reconstruction of many of these portions with a high degree of certainty.<sup>27</sup> The epic recounts the fortunes of Kirta, the king of a city named Betu-Hubur. The tale opens with Kirta grieving over the loss of his siblings (seven brothers and one sister) and seven wives without having fathered an heir. An appeal to the chief god ʾIlu is answered with Kirta receiving divine instructions resulting in him obtaining a royal wife, Hurraya from a neighbouring city-state. Hurraya subsequently bears Kirta eight sons and six daughters in fulfilment of ʾIlu's blessing bestowed upon them at their wedding banquet.

Several years later, Kirta becomes deathly ill and summons ʾIluha ʾu his son, charging him with the task of finding and informing his sister, Titmanatu, of her father Kirta's illness. Upon learning of her father's illness and grave condition, Titmanatu returns to the royal palace and mourns at the prospect of her father's death. Undeterred, Titmanatu decides to intercede on behalf of her father and appeals to the chief deity ʾIlu

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<sup>26</sup> "The Kirta Epic," translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.102:333-343). For an earlier translation of the same text, see "The Legend of King Keret," translated by H. L. Ginsberg (*ANET* 142-149). The translation by Pardee in *Context of Scripture* was chosen for two reasons. First, it is a more recent work which incorporated developments in Ugaritic studies and the results of text critical analyses of the recovered tablets subsequent to Ginsberg's initial translation. Second, Pardee's translation in *COS* is comprehensively annotated with detailed translation, grammatical, syntactical, and exegetical comments. For other detailed studies of "The Kirta Epic", see Michael D. Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 52-74; Simon B. Parker, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition: Essays on the Ugaritic Poems Keret and Aqhat* (SBLRBS 24; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 145-216.

<sup>27</sup> "The Kirta Epic" (*COS* 1.102:333).

to heal her father.

Unfortunately, at this juncture in the epic, portions of the tablet are destroyed and the full text of Titmanatu's appeal to ʾIlu is unavailable. However, from what is extant, it appears that Titmanatu's intercession on behalf of her father to ʾIlu is based on two arguments.<sup>28</sup> First, as king, Kirta is the son of ʾIlu and Titmanatu appeals to ʾIlu to fulfill his paternal obligation to heal his own divine and royal offspring. Second, Titmanatu calls upon ʾIlu to answer her intercession and to act according to his gracious and kind character. These two benevolent attributes of ʾIlu appear on three occasions within the preceding portions of the narrative and their prior appearance anticipates Titmanatu's appeal.

The Epic resumes with ʾIlu gathering all the gods and asking one of them to heal Kirta. Despite ʾIlu asking seven times, not one of the gods responds. In the end, ʾIlu creates a female healer, Saʿtiqatu, and sends her to heal Kirta. Kirta recovers and resumes his reign. There is no record of Kirta or his daughter expressing gratitude to ʾIlu for his healing of the king.

This composition reveals several insights concerning intercession in West Semitic life and religion. First, the Epic provides evidence that intercession was part of the religious thought and practice in the West Semitic cultures of the ANE.

Second, this composition reveals two bases by which intercession could be made on behalf of a third party to a superior. Intercession could be made by invoking the superior's obligation to and relationship with the third party and/or by appealing to the

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<sup>28</sup> For a word study of an Ugaritic term possibly possessing specific meaning and use in the context of intercession, see James W. Watts, "Hnt: An Ugaritic Formula of Intercession," *UF* 21 (1990): 443-449.

superior's merciful and kind character. In the case of the *Kirta Epic*, Kirta was the son of the chief god ʾIlu and Titmanatu called upon him to heal his own divine and royal offspring. In the event that ʾIlu chose not to respond in fulfilment of paternal obligation and duty, Titmanatu also concurrently appealed to ʾIlu's gracious and kind character.

Third, this narrative illustrates that the objective of West Semitic intercession included fundamental human needs such as spouses, offspring, and health. Titmanatu appealed to ʾIlu for the healing of her father who was gravely ill. Kirta himself sought ʾIlu's aid in finding a wife who could bear children and provide an heir for him. Lastly, the *Kirta Epic* reveals that in West Semitic theology and religious thought, petition and intercession could be heard and answered by the gods. The gods were not distant and indifferent to the needs of humanity but could be aware, attentive, and gracious.

### 2.3.2 *Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege*<sup>29</sup>

This ritual text was discovered in 1961 at Ras Shamra among a large collection of similar ritual and cultic texts. It is generally recognized to be the clearest and most complete example of a cultic text in the Ugaritic language.<sup>30</sup> The text is a unique composite combining an introductory ritual component written in prose with a concluding prayer which is in poetic verse. The composition provides cultic instructions by which divine intervention and deliverance could be reliably and repeatedly secured in the event of invasion and siege by a foreign power.

Divine salvation was secured by faithfully completing a two part process as

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<sup>29</sup> "Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege," translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.88:283-285).

<sup>30</sup> "Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege" (*COS* 1.88:283); Francesco Saracino, "A State of Siege: Mi 5:4-5 and an Ugaritic Prayer," *ZAW* 95(1983): 263.

outlined in the cultic instructions. The process began with a series of purification rituals and animal sacrifices. Specific and detailed instructions were provided concerning the date and timing of the ritual cleansings and sacrifices, the nature of the sacrifices (cow, bull, lamb, dove, donkey, birds, sheep), the sequence of the sacrifices, and the manner in which they were to be offered. The cleansing rituals and animal sacrifices rendered the king and population of the city ritually pure and acceptable before their god, Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu (Baal). Having been cleansed from sins and transgressions against Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu, the cultic ceremony culminated in the recitation of a prayer of intercession by the king on behalf of the city.

*In the context of the climactic prayer of intercession, the preceding ritual purification ceremonies and animal sacrifices served several purposes. First, they propitiated any guilt the king and the people may have had from transgressions and sins against Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu. Second, they demonstrated earnestness, worthiness, and zeal in their approach to Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu. Third, the cultic rituals were believed to please and satisfy Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu, thereby increasing the likelihood of a successful reply in response to intercession and petition.*

The prayer is a conditional clause in which the protasis describes the request made to Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu to deliver the city from the besieging army. The apodosis outlines the actions the king and the people will undertake in gratitude if Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu answers their petition. In this case, the king and the city's inhabitants commit to fulfilling a four element promise. First, animal sacrifices of a bull and a firstborn animal will be made. Second, an unspecified vow and offering will be fulfilled. Third, a feast will be held in honour of Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu's deliverance. Fourth, the people would faithfully worship Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu in his

temple.

Further rhetorical analysis of the prayer reveals that not only is the prayer structured as a condition, it is also framed by an introduction and a conclusion syntactically linked as conditional clauses.<sup>31</sup> The conditional introductory and concluding statements imply the assurance of a successful outcome if the prayer contained between them is offered during a time of need and the vows and rituals promised within the prayer are fulfilled.

When a strong (foe) attacks your gate, a warrior to your walls,  
You shall lift your eyes to Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu (and say): ...

... And Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu will hear [your] prayer:  
He will drive the strong (foe) from your gate, the warrior from your walls.<sup>32</sup>

The conditional structure and syntax of the prayer and the details of the preceding ritual combine to suggest that this composition was regarded as a cultic intercessory formula which was invoked to secure Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu's aid in time of need. If a city was attacked, by carrying out the prescribed purification rituals, offering the requisite sacrifices, and voicing the scripted prayer, the inhabitants would be assured of Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu's response in deliverance and salvation. The cycle of need-supplication-ritual/vow-fulfilment and its predictability are a common theme in the religion of the ANE.<sup>33</sup>

This cultic composition suggests that in West Semitic theology and religious life, intercession could be based on the following three assumptions concerning their

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<sup>31</sup> The *inclusio* created by the prayer's introduction and conclusion is reinforced semantically and phonologically by the repetition of the terms "strong (foe)", "your gate", "a warrior to your walls". The pairing of the petitioner lifting his eyes to Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu with Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>lu's ears hearing his prayers further emphasizes the *inclusio* structure framing the prayer.

<sup>32</sup> "Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege" (*COS* 1.88:284-285).

<sup>33</sup> Saracino, "A State of Siege and an Ugaritic Prayer," *ZAW* 95(1983): 264.

gods. First, a god's actions to save or provide could be secured once magic or cultic rituals, prayers, and incantations were accomplished or promised. Second, there was the assumption and belief that the deity was wholeheartedly committed to and worked towards the well-being of the community. Lastly, the god identified himself or herself with the state and destiny of the community. The community's economic, political, military, cultural, and social standing and success was inextricably linked to the pre-eminence and prominence of the deity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Saracino, "A State of Siege and an Ugaritic Prayer," *ZAW* 95(1983): 269.

## 2.4 *Intercession in Akkadian Literature and Religion*

### 2.4.1 *Atrahasis*<sup>35</sup>

The primeval history of humanity was a central theme in the epic literature of Mesopotamia. In Akkadian literature, the *Atrahasis* epic provided an explanation of the purpose and the process by which humankind was created. However, as the human population grew, the resulting clamour disturbed the tranquillity and repose of the gods. In response to the mounting noise and chaos, Enlil the chief deity, made several attempts to destroy humanity. These attempts included plagues, pestilence, famine, barrenness, and ultimately culminated in the Flood. With each threat, humanity was preserved by the actions of Ea, a deity who was a friend of humanity, and Atrahasis, the human hero of the epic. In Akkadian, the name Atrahasis meant “exceedingly wise”. This eponym was associated with more than one hero in the epic literature of Mesopotamia.<sup>36</sup>

The Atrahasis Epic is preserved on multiple tablets and fragments in both Babylonian and Assyrian versions. Pertinent to this study is the text contained in what has been classified as Neo-Assyrian Version II on a tablet named Fragment D. In this account, the noise and clamour of humanity has disturbed the sleep of Enlil the chief deity. In an attempt to restore tranquillity and quiet, Enlil seeks to destroy humankind by bringing upon it plagues and pestilence. As humanity begins to experience the symptoms of the plagues, the hero, Atrahasis, discerns their divine origin and intercedes

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<sup>35</sup> “Atrahasis”, translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 104-106); “Atrahasis - Additional Texts,” translated by A. K. Grayson (*ANET* 512-514); “Atra-hasis”, translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.130:450-452).

<sup>36</sup> The name “Atrahasis” is also applied to the protagonists of other Mesopotamian literary works such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Etana*, and *Adapa*. See introductory notes by E. A. Speiser in “Atrahasis”, (*ANET*, 104).

on behalf of all humanity with Ea, the deity who is a friend of humankind. Atrahasis implores Ea to intercede on behalf of humanity before Enlil and the other gods of the pantheon in order to stop the plague and spare humanity.

This account reveals three aspects of intercession in the religion, life, and literature of Mesopotamia. First, the intercessor is portrayed as a heroic figure possessing unusual knowledge, discernment, physical abilities, and access to the gods. Atrahasis is described as one who was:

Endowed with wisdom, the man Atrahasis  
His mind alert to Ea, his lord  
Converses with his god.  
His lord, Ea, converses with him.<sup>37</sup>

The name ascribed to the hero meant “exceedingly wise” and further reinforced the characterization of him as one who stood out from among his peers. Atrahasis’s wisdom allowed him to understand the cosmologic significance of the plagues affecting humankind and to see beyond what was happening in the temporal realm. He was favoured by the god Ea and had access to Ea’s presence and attention. As he brings his petition before Ea, Atrahasis stands before the divine pantheon as the representative of humanity.

Second, the Atrahasis epic provides contrasting portraits of the Akkadian gods. Enlil is selfish, vindictive, and impulsive, decreeing the destruction of all humanity because they have disturbed his sleep. In contrast, Ea is immanent, compassionate, good and kind who is characterized as a friend of humanity. In this account, the one to whom intercession is made possesses goodness and kindness as well as the ability and

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<sup>37</sup> “Atrahasis” (*ANET*, 106).

authority to influence the outcome of events. Intercession is made to one who will not only capably but also reliably provide a favourable response.

Lastly, the theology and moral order in Akkadian religious practice is partially revealed in the argument presented by Atrahasis as the basis for his intercessory appeal to Ea. Atrahasis argues that because the gods created humankind, they have an obligation to subsequently protect and to provide for their creation. He appears to appeal to a higher moral order that dictates that even the gods cannot destroy what they have created.

#### 2.4.2 *A Vision of the Nether World*<sup>38</sup>

In this mythic tale, an arrogant Assyrian prince named Kumma presumptuously desires a view of the nether world ruled by Nergal and Ereshkigal. On a rhetorical level, the tale appears to be a political commentary on the state of the Assyrian royal household in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. In a dream, the prince's wish is granted as he is brought into the assembly of the royal court of the nether world and stands before the ruler of the dead, Nergal. The members of Nergal's court are introduced including the vizier Namtar, the vizier's concubine Namtartu, and Ishum who is described as Nergal's "counsellor, the intercessor who spares life, who loves truth, and so forth".<sup>39</sup>

As he stands before the ruler of the nether world, Prince Kumma apparently acts in a disrespectful manner to Ereshkigal, the queen of the nether world. In anger, Nergal steps forward to take Prince Kumma's life and to avenge his queen's honour. As he

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<sup>38</sup> "A Vision of the Nether World," translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET* 109-110).

<sup>39</sup> "A Vision of the Nether World" (*ANET* 110).

does so, Ishum speaks and successfully intercedes on behalf of Prince Kamma, urging Nergal to set aside his anger and to spare the prince's life. Nergal spares Kamma's life but delivers a stern warning to the prince to change his haughty ways. The mythic tale concludes with the prince awakening from his dream and resolving to obey Nergal's admonition and to praise Nergal and Ereshkigal before his subjects.

In this account, effective intercession is achieved by Ishum, the counsellor to the king of the nether world, on behalf of Prince Kamma. The successful appeal is the result not of any merit on Kamma's part but of Ishum's standing before Nergal and his shrewd manipulation of Nergal's pride. Ishum is a trusted member of Nergal's court and serves as his counsellor. Ishum is described as being righteous, merciful, and the "intercessor who spares life, who loves truth". As was seen in the *Atrahasis Epic*, a major determinant of successful intercession in Akkadian literature and religion appeared to be the character, standing, and abilities of the intercessor rather than the merit or standing of the individual in need. In the case of Prince Kamma, he deservedly faced Nergal's judgement of death as punishment for his pride and disrespect for the queen of the nether world. If not for Ishum's intercession on his behalf, Prince Kamma would have become a citizen of the nether world and not only a visitor.

#### 2.4.3 *A Hymn to Nanaya with a Blessing for Sargon II*<sup>40</sup>

This two part composition begins with a lengthy hymn of praise to Nanaya followed by a shorter concluding request for the bestowal of blessing upon the Assyrian

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<sup>40</sup> "A Hymn to Nanaya with a Blessing for Sargon II", translated by Alasdair Livingstone (*COS* 1.141:472-473).

king, Sargon II. The *Sitz im Leben* for the hymn may have been the dedication of a statue or temple to the female deity Nanaya. The concluding request for blessing upon Sargon II is pertinent to this study of intercession in the literature and religion of the ANE. This text provides an example of intercession made to a nation's deity on behalf of a nation's monarch.<sup>41</sup>

The request for divine blessing is introduced by an affirmation of the Assyrian monarch's loyalty and obedience to the goddess Nanaya. Requests then follow for a long and healthy life, a stable and lengthy reign, success in battle, and protection from the ravages of locusts and grasshoppers.<sup>42</sup>

There appears to be a twofold basis by which this intercession for blessing on behalf of Sargon II is made to the goddess Nanaya. First, the Assyrian king's loyalty and obedience to Nanaya are presented as compelling reasons and proof that the king is deserving of blessing.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the request for blessing is preceded by a hymn to Nanaya which may have marked the occasion of the dedication of a statue or temple to her is evidence of her prominence in Sargon II's religious practice. The second reason is specific to the request for protection from the plagues of locusts and grasshoppers. The failure on the part of Nanaya to provide such protection would result in a famine and the

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<sup>41</sup> The assumption has been made that this hymn to Nanaya with the concluding request for blessing of the king was offered by the priests and worshippers and not by the king himself as he led supplicants in the worship of Nanaya. The latter scenario would obviously disqualify this as an intercessory prayer.

<sup>42</sup> There is evidence from letters recovered from Sargon II's archives that a locust plague afflicted Assyria during the time of his reign. For a discussion of the historical context of this composition and a comparative study with the locust plague in Joel 1:4-20, see Victor A. Hurowitz, "Joel's Locust Plague in Light of Sargon II's Hymn to Nanaya," *JBL* 112 (1993): 597-603.

<sup>43</sup> References to a monarch's piety and loyalty were typical elements found in dedicatory ANE texts. See Victor A. Hurowitz, "YHWH's Exalted House: Aspects of the Design and Symbolism of Solomon's Temple," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (ed. John Day; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 63-110.

loss of harvest produce. This would lead to the reduction or cessation of offerings to the Assyrian gods and goddesses. Therefore, it would be in Nanaya's best interests to protect Assyria from pestilence and plagues so that the nation could continue to serve and worship her and the other gods of the Akkadian pantheon.

## 2.5 *Intercession in Sumerian Literature and Religion*

### 2.5.1 *Inanna's Descent to the Nether World*<sup>44</sup>

This mythic tale provides insight into the religious beliefs of ancient Sumer concerning death and the after-life. The myth describes how Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of fertility, desires to visit the nether world ruled by her older sister and apparent enemy, Ereshkigal. The reason and motivation underlying Inanna's plans are unknown and the text is strikingly silent on this matter, providing no clues to the reader. Fearing that her sister may do harm to her, prior to departing, Inanna formulates a plan for her rescue with her servant Ninshubur. If Inanna fails to return in three days, Ninshubur is to intercede on his mistress's behalf before Enlil, the chief god. If Enlil refuses to intervene, then Ninshubur is to bring his petition before Nanna, the moon-god. Lastly, if he is rebuffed by Nanna, he is to intercede before Enki, the god of wisdom. Inanna assures Ninshubur that she is confident that Enki will certainly respond and rescue her.

As the tale unfolds, Inanna is captured and put to death by her sister Ereshkigal. Failing to see the return of his mistress, Ninshubur loudly mourns in the assembly of the gods. As instructed, he first appeals to Enlil to intervene and rescue Inanna from the nether world. Enlil refuses his aid stating that Inanna understood the dangerous consequences of the decision to pursue her desires to visit the nether world. The moon-god Nanna gives a similar answer. As predicted by Inanna, Enki responds favourably to Ninshubur's pleas and devises a plan to restore Inanna to life, rescue her from the nether

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<sup>44</sup> "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET* 52-57).

world, and return her to the world of the living. In contrast to the impassive responses of Enlil and Nanna, Enki states in fourfold repetition that he is troubled by the news of Inanna's fate at the hands of Ereshkigal.

In examining Ninshubur's intercession on behalf of Inanna, there are several interesting features which may reflect Sumerian attitudes and practices concerning intercession. First, it is Ninshubur's concern, devotion, and love for his mistress which motivates him to carry out Inanna's pre-arranged plan for intercession and rescue. The account describes in detail his mourning and grieving at the failure of his mistress to return from the nether world. In the epilogue to the myth, Inanna praises Ninshubur as a faithful and true servant. Among many possible incentives, intercession can be motivated by concern, compassion, and varying degrees of love by the intercessor for the one for whom intercession is made.

Second, the account suggests that successful intercession requires not only motivation and good intentions but also a stubborn perseverance which will not be denied. Ninshubur appeals first to the chief deity, Enlil, but is rebuffed. A visit to the moon-god Nanna yields a similar result. It is only on the third attempt when he presents his petition to Enki that he is met with success. It is interesting that in the account, Nishubur approaches the chief deity first and subsequently progresses to lesser deities rather than the reverse. Even when rebuffed by Enlil and Nanna, Nishubur did not become discouraged and ceased his efforts on behalf of his mistress Inanna. Rather, he persisted and fully complied with Inanna's instructions and brought his petition before Enki.

Third, the argument advanced by Ninshubur in support of his intercessory plea is

noteworthy, particularly in light of the rhetorical devices employed by the author to highlight his speech. Ninshubur argues that failure to rescue Inanna would be a wasteful action as her beauty, worth, and power would be needlessly and foolishly lost forever. The five lines of his intercessory presentation are syntactically linked by synonymous parallelism with the additional structural feature of the first and last lines being repeated to form an *inclusio* which frames the entire argument. The combined rhetorical effect distinguishes Ninshubur's speech from the surrounding text and serves to secure the attention of the audience (both the gods and the reader) and to emphasize the urgency and gravity of his appeal on behalf of his mistress Inanna,

O Father [Enlil/Nanna/Enki], let not thy daughter be put to death in the nether world,  
 Let not thy good metal be covered with the dust of the nether world,  
 Let not thy good lapis lazuli be broken up into the stone of the stoneworker,  
 Let not thy boxwood be cut up into the wood of the woodworker,  
 Let not the maid Inanna be put to death in the nether world.<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, despite such careful persuasive rhetoric, Ninshubur fails to move Enlil and Nanna to action. However, Enki does respond favourably and Inanna is saved.

Of great interest to scholars is the existence of a later Akkadian or Semitic version of this myth entitled *Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World*.<sup>46</sup> The Sumerian tale is the older and primary source but the Akkadian (Semitic) version is more than a simple translation. The later version shares many similarities with the older one to the extent that it is clear the Sumerian myth is the original and primary source. However, at the same time, there are significant differences which transcend the linguistic features of

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<sup>45</sup> Lines 182 - 213 of "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET* 56). Consistent with the prevalence of repetition in ANE literature, the five lines of Ninshubur's argument are repeated a total of six times throughout the entire account.

<sup>46</sup> "Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World," translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET* 106-109).

semantics, grammar, and syntax that would be expected of a simple translation. Instead, the Akkadian (Semitic) version possesses discernable differences in rhetorical elements such as structure, characterization, plot, and dialogue which demonstrate that it has evolved beyond the original Sumerian mythic tale.<sup>47</sup> As a result, when compared with the earlier Sumerian version, the Akkadian (Semitic) account “provides us with an ancient and highly instructive example of literary borrowing and transformation.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The differences in the Akkadian version include the following: (1) no *a priori* rescue plan of intercession formulated between Ishtar and her servant, (2) it is not Ishtar’s servant but Papsukkal, the vizier of the gods, who mourns Ishtar’s disappearance and intercedes with Ea, king of the gods, (3) unlike Enlil in the Sumerian version, Ea does respond to Papsukkal’s intercession and devises a plan similar to Enki’s, and (4) Papsukkal’s argument in support of his intercession is different from Ninshubur’s in the Sumerian account. Papsukkal points out that the disappearance of the goddess of fertility has resulted in famine and barrenness over the land. Ishtar must be rescued and returned from the nether world or all living things would cease to exist.

<sup>48</sup> See introductory notes to “Inanna’s Descent to the Nether World,” translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET* 52) and to “Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World,” translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET* 107).

## 2.6 *Intercession in Hittite Religion and Literature*

### 2.6.1 *Plague Prayers of Mursilis (Mursili II)* <sup>49</sup>

The Hittite king, Mursilis or Mursili II, ruled during the last half of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century BC. When he ascended the throne, an epidemic of unknown nature had been raging throughout the empire for approximately twenty years. Both his father, Suppiluliuma I, and his brother, Arnuwanda II, had succumbed to the epidemic, opening the way for Mursili II to ascend to the throne. The plague prayers are a collection of four prayers believed to have been composed either by the king himself or pseudepigraphically on his behalf by scribes or priests.<sup>50</sup> In them, Mursili II speaks in the first person and intercedes on behalf of his empire, attempting to persuade the gods to bring an end to the plague and if not, to at least make known to him the reason for its continuance. This collection of prayers provides valuable insight into the religious beliefs, practices, and theology of the Hittite empire. Theological issues such as divine judgment, theodicy, human suffering, hamartiology, forgiveness of sins and salvation, intercession, discernment of divine pleasure and displeasure, and appropriation of divine mercy are encompassed within the prayers.

Thematically, the plague prayers possess three main components. First, the historical and theological background for the origin of the plague is presented. It appears that the carriers of the plague were prisoners brought back as slaves from a war with Egypt. Many prisoners died from the plague but not before it had spread

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<sup>49</sup> “Plague Prayers of Mursilis,” translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET* 394-396); “Plague Prayers of Mursili II,” translated by Gary Beckman, (*COS* 1.60:156-160).

<sup>50</sup> See introductory notes by Gary Beckman, “Plague Prayers of Mursili II,” (*COS* 1.60:156).

throughout the Hittite empire. Ultimately, Mursili II believed that it was the gods who had allowed the plague to enter the Hittite empire or had deliberately sent it. As he searched the omens and oracles for an inciting cause, Mursili II concluded that the plague was divine judgment and punishment for his father having waged war against Egypt in violation of a treaty signed before the witness of the Hittite gods.

In the second component, Mursili II intercedes on behalf of his nation and presents a petition to the gods requesting an end to the plague or at least the revelation of the cause for its continuance so it could be addressed.<sup>51</sup> He asks that a clear sign be revealed by means of an omen, a dream, or a prophetic declaration.

In the final component, a series of arguments is put forward by Mursili in support of his intercessory request. These arguments demonstrate the merits of his request and justify a favourable response from the gods. They form the bulk of the composition of the prayers.

In order to justify and leverage a favourable response from the Hittite gods, Mursili II presents a host of compelling arguments in support of his petition. The arguments can be grouped into three categories. First, he and the Hittite nation are deserving of mercy and relief from the plague. Second, the continuation of the plague is disadvantageous to the gods. The continued loss of the population meant fewer servants for the gods and the curtailment of offerings and worship. The decimated and diseased nation could no longer yield the produce and livestock required for offerings and

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<sup>51</sup> Mursili II's prayer reflected the following theology. First, suffering was divine judgment and punishment for sin against another person or against the gods. Second, if the sin could be atoned for, then divine mercy and forgiveness could be secured and the suffering brought to an end. Third, however, if the suffering persisted despite initial attempts at offering atonement, then the gods were not appeased and the supplicant would search for other unconfessed sins or additional requirements for atonement.

sacrifices let alone attend at the temples to present them. Lastly, in the event that the first two groupings of arguments fail to move the gods to action, Mursili II makes a desperate plea for mercy, casting himself and his people at the mercy of the gods and promising to do whatever is required to appease them.<sup>52</sup>

In presenting the case that he and his people are deserving of mercy, Mursili II outlines all the efforts that have been made by his father and by himself to atone for any transgression against the Hittite gods. Through the use of oracles, omens, and divination, he has sought to discern all possible reasons for the plague and its continuance. He has identified all broken oaths and treaties. Confession has been made of his own sin guilt, his father's guilt, and of the nation's guilt for various offenses. Reparations have been made in the form of prayers, worship, offerings, and sacrifices to all the gods without showing favouritism of one over another. None of the gods have been neglected as all have been prayed to for the abatement of the plague. Research and restoration have been undertaken regarding the traditional offerings to all the gods of the Hittite pantheon including the forces of nature such as the Mala River.

As a final plea that he and his people are deserving of a favourable response from the gods, Mursili II cites the example of the relationship between a servant and his lord. If a servant has offended his lord, then the lord can do whatever he wishes as punishment. However, if the servant confesses his wrongdoing, then the lord is appeased and should not punish him. The Hittite king points out that he has confessed the sins of himself and his father and estimates that reparations worth twenty times the

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<sup>52</sup> For another example of Mursili II's rhetorical eloquence in presenting arguments to justify his petition or actions, see Harry A. Hoffner, "A Prayer of Mursili II About His Stepmother," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 187-192.

value of the transgressions have been made. As a result, he and his nation should not be punished any further. However, in the event that additional reparations are required, Mursili II requests that the gods inform him and that he would immediately comply.

Lastly, in terms of form and literary genre, unlike the majority of extant examples of Hittite prayers, Mursili II prays directly to all the gods of the Hittite pantheon and in particular, to the Storm god. A common characteristic of Hittite prayers is the indirect route by which the prayer progresses from the supplicant through a third party intermediary who then brings it forward on the supplicant's behalf to the individual or deity who is the intended final and ultimate audience. The intermediary was usually a lesser god, a member of the priesthood, a deceased family member, or the king.<sup>53</sup> The significance of Mursili II's departure from convention and of his direct appeal to all the gods of the Hittite pantheon may be twofold. First, in his plague prayers, Mursili II alludes to the ineffectiveness of previous prayers which may have been made to lesser gods in the hope that they would act as intermediaries and bring his petition before the chief gods. Mursili II's direct appeal may reflect his frustration with the failure of the intermediaries to secure a favourable response to end the plague. Second, his direct appeal to all the gods of the Hittite pantheon may be evidence of the degree of his desperation and sense of urgency. The plague had now run unchecked for

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<sup>53</sup> For examples of Hittite prayers in which petitions were presented by the supplicant to an intermediary who was then asked to bring the petition forward to the one to whom the request was ultimately intended, see "Prayer of Pudu-hepas to the Sun-Goddess of Arinna and her Circle," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET* 393); "Prayer to Lelwanis," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET* 393); "Prayer to Zintuhis," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET* 394); "Prayer to Mezzullas," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET* 394); "Prayer to the Storm-God of Zippalanda," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET* 394). For discussions on this topic, see Itamar Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (SBLWAW 11; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 88-112; Johan de Roos, "Hittite Prayers," *CANE* 3:1997-2005. For an Egyptian example of an intermediary being asked to advance an intercessory request, see "The Legend of the Possessed Princess," translated by Miriam Lichtheim (*COS* 1.54:134-136) and "The Legend of the Possessed Princess," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 29-31).

twenty years and during that time period, he had watched it claim the lives of his father and brother and decimate the population, resulting in a weakening of the Hittite empire.

## 2.7 Discussion and Conclusions

### 2.7.1 Underlying Theological Beliefs

Even though the many civilizations and empires of the Ancient Near East were separated by geography, time and history, language, orthography (e.g. Egyptian hieroglyphic, early Semitic cuneiform, late Semitic alphabetic), and societal organization and norms, there were many cultural elements that were shared in common, particularly in religious life and literature. The above survey of select Egyptian, Sumerian, Ugaritic/Canaanite, Akkadian, and Hittite texts confirms that intercession was a common element and practice in the religious life of the ANE.<sup>54</sup>

In general, in the ANE, the most common forms of communication between an individual and deity were prayer, omens, divination, dreams, and prophetic declarations. Petitions for self and on behalf of others, intercession, were common components of prayer. Prayer was believed to be an efficacious and worthwhile practice because of several underlying fundamental beliefs commonly held in the religious thought and theology of the various cultures of the ANE.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> A comparative study of Biblical intercession and intercession in extra-Biblical ANE cultures is a worthwhile undertaking but beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>55</sup> The theological beliefs underlying prayer and intercession in the ANE are evident in texts such as “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 366-367); “The God Amon as Healer and Magician,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 369); “Hymn to Ishtar,” translated by Ferris J. Stephens (*ANET* 542); “Hymn to Enlil, the All-Beneficent,” translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET* 573-576); “Hymnal Prayer of Enheduanna: The Adoration of Inanna of Ur,” translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET* 579-582); “Gratitude for a God’s Mercy,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET* 380-381); “The Kirta Epic,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.102:333-343); “Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.88:283-285); “Atrahasis,” translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 104-106); “Atrahasis,” translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.130:450-452); “Plague Prayers of Mursilis,” translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET* 394-396); “Plague Prayers of Mursili II,” translated by Gary Beckman, (*COS* 1.60:156-160). Other references include Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995) and Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, eds. *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

First, it was believed that the gods were capable of intervening in the affairs of humanity in order to save, to deliver, to protect, and to provide for their servants and worshippers.<sup>56</sup>

Second, within the pantheon of each ANE culture, there were at least one or two gods who were portrayed as being generally good in their character, concerned about human circumstances, and benevolent in their dealings with their human worshippers. Their kindness often stood in contrast with the selfishness, capriciousness, and indifference demonstrated by other members of the pantheon.<sup>57</sup> As a result, these benevolent deities were often the intended recipients of petitionary and intercessory prayer.

Third, the deities of the ANE were believed to listen to and answer prayer. They were not distant and indifferent to the suffering, needs, and petitions of their servants. Instead, they would act in response to the prayers and petitions of their human worshippers and servants. Responses included healing, deliverance from danger or harm, and the provision of rain, finances, or justice.

Fourth, it was believed that the gods were predictable in their response to human cultic practices and that they were susceptible to manipulation by the performance of cultic rituals to provide the response desired by the supplicant. The religious system of each culture possessed various cultic formulae which were generally believed to be

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<sup>56</sup> There are ANE texts which document appeals to demons and dark powers for aid. Consideration of these texts is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>57</sup> For example, in the Akkadian pantheon, Enlil's fickle, impulsive, and vindictive character is contrasted with Ea who is characterized as a friend of humanity. Similarly, in the Canaanite pantheon, Baal is often portrayed as being favourably inclined towards humanity in contrast to the indifference and at times, antagonism of Mot, Yamm, and El. For a discussion on the characterization of Canaanite gods with specific reference to their foibles, limitations, and deficiencies, see Johannes C. de Moor, "Theodicy in the Texts of Ugarit," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 108-150.

effective in securing favourable responses to petition and intercession. If certain rituals were performed, sacrifices offered, vows promised, and prayers uttered, then the gods would be either pleased or appeased and respond by granting the desire of the supplicant.<sup>58</sup> Failure to secure a favourable response would result in the supplicant searching for a cultic ritual which had been omitted or a transgression which had been overlooked.<sup>59</sup>

### 2.7.2 *The Members of the Triangle of Intercession*

If intercession is prayer on behalf of another, then three parties are linked in a relationship triangle by the act of intercession. These three parties are: the beneficiary for whom intercession is made, the intercessor who champions the cause of and advocates for the beneficiary, and the benefactor or patron to whom intercession is made.<sup>60</sup>

The benefactor or patron to whom intercessory prayer is addressed is usually an individual or being who is superior in rank, authority, and capability than both the intercessor and the beneficiary. Generally, the benefactor/patron is a deity, master or employer, commanding military officer, government official, older family relative, or a monarch. In most cases, the intercessory appeal is made directly to the benefactor/patron by the intercessor on behalf of the beneficiary. However, in some cultures, particularly

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<sup>58</sup> Illustrative examples are found in “Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege” (*COS* 1.88:283-285) and “Plague Prayers of Mursili II” (*COS* 1.60:156-160).

<sup>59</sup> In the “Plague Prayers of Mursili II” (*COS* 1.60:156-160), Mursili II pleads with the Hittite gods to either remove the plague which has afflicted the empire for twenty years or at least reveal to him what other tasks must be performed to appease them.

<sup>60</sup> The terms beneficiary, intercessor, and benefactor/patron are not technical terms but have been assigned by the author for the purposes of clarity in the ensuing discussion.

Hittite, petitions for self and intercession on behalf of another were presented to an intermediary who would then be asked to bring the request forward to the benefactor/patron who was the ultimate intended audience.<sup>61</sup> Examples of intermediaries included a lesser god, a member of the royal family, a member of the priesthood, another family member, or a lower ranking government official or military officer.

From the above survey of documents and texts from the ANE, it is apparent that intercession was practised in both secular and religious contexts and in both horizontal (human-human) and vertical (human-divine) relationship planes. Of note, it was the identity of the benefactor/patron to whom intercession was made and not the particular need of the beneficiary which determined whether the context for intercession was secular or religious. For example, an appeal for food could be made to the king, government official, or a military officer in a secular context or to one of the national deities in a religious context.

The intercessor is the pivotal member of the triangle of intercession as it is he or she who connects the beneficiary who is in need with the benefactor/patron who possesses the resources to meet that need. The intercessor's role can be examined from the perspective of function, character, and incentive or motivation. First, the intercessor

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<sup>61</sup> For examples of Hittite prayers in which petitions were presented by the supplicant to an intermediary who was then asked to bring the petition forward to the one to whom the request was ultimately intended, see "Prayer of Pudu-hepas to the Sun-Goddess of Arinna and her Circle" (*ANET* 393); "Prayer to Lelwanis" (*ANET* 393); "Prayer to Zintuhis" (*ANET* 394); "Prayer to Mezzullas" (*ANET* 394); "Prayer to the Storm-God of Zippalanda" (*ANET* 394). For discussions on this topic, see Itamar Singer, *Hittite Prayers*, 88-112; Johan de Roos, "Hittite Prayers," *CANE* 3:1997-2005. Although common in Hittite prayers, there are examples extant in other ANE cultures as well such as "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*COS* 1.54:134-136) and "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*ANET*, 29-31).

functions as an advocate who champions the cause of the beneficiary, brings forward a request on his/her behalf, and secures favour, mercy and forgiveness. In the case of the latter function, the intercessor may stand between a beneficiary who is guilty of an offence and the judgment and wrath of the benefactor/patron. Interposed between the two, the intercessor quells the benefactor's anger and turns judgment and punishment away from the beneficiary.<sup>62</sup>

Second, the character and standing of the intercessor appears to play a crucial role in the outcome of an intercessory petition. The ANE texts studied above suggest that successful intercession requires boldness, audacity, and a stubborn persistence on the part of the intercessor. More importantly, the standing and reputation of the intercessor before the benefactor/patron appears to play a pivotal role. In the ANE texts surveyed, the intercessor was on occasion a lay person of no particular status or distinction. However, frequently, the intercessor was characterized as a heroic protagonist who possessed standing and approval before the benefactor/patron on the basis of moral character, wisdom, physical strength, office, family lineage, or being a member of the divine pantheon.<sup>63</sup> The favourable or high standing of the intercessor strengthened the petition and augmented the likelihood of a successful outcome.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> For ANE examples of intercessors turning away divine judgment, see "Gratitude for a God's Mercy" (*ANET* 380-381); "A Vision of the Nether World" (*ANET* 109-110). The image of the intercessor "standing in the gap" is also a prevalent theme in Biblical intercessory texts. See Ezek 22:30; Num 16:48; Psa 106:23,30; Isa 58:12; 59:16; Jer 15:1.

<sup>63</sup> For examples of intercessors who were held in high regard, see "The Kirta Epic" (*COS* 1.102:333-343), "A Vision of the Nether World" (*ANET* 109-110); "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*COS* 1.54:134-136) and "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*ANET*, 29-31); "Atrahasis" (*ANET*, 104-106); "Atrahasis - Additional Texts" (*ANET* 512-514); "Atra-hasis" (*COS* 1.130:450-452);

<sup>64</sup> Biblical examples include Abraham (Gen 18:18,19,22), Moses (Exod 32:11-14; 31-35; 33:12-23), Daniel (Dan 10:11,12,19) and texts such as Jas 5:13-17.

Examples of intercessors who were so characterized include intermediary or lesser gods, monarchs, crown princes and princesses, priests, or a representative for an oppressed people. In particular, kings in the ANE were often regarded as being divine in nature and a member of the pantheon of gods worshipped by their nation. As a result, the king possessed access to and influence with the leading deities and could secure a favourable answer to petitions.<sup>65</sup>

Third, in several of the ANE intercessory texts, intercession required effort, personal sacrifice, and even a willingness to suffer persecution on the part of the intercessor.<sup>66</sup> In light of the obstacles and personal costs that could be encountered, the incentive which motivates an intercessor to become involved in the plight of another and to advocate on their behalf is worthy of examination. An opportunity for personal gain or advancement may be an incentive and motivation for intercession. In cases of intercessory prayer on behalf of family members, friends, and business partners for their healing from illness, for the forgiveness of their transgression and cancellation of judgment, or for their financial success, the intercessor may stand to gain personally from a favourable response.<sup>67</sup> Another possible incentive arises from the intercessor and the beneficiary being bound together in a relationship such that the intercessor is under obligation to render aid to the beneficiary in time of need. Intervention by the intercessor on behalf of the beneficiary is then an act in fulfilment of duty and

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<sup>65</sup> An example is provided in the Egyptian tale “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*COS* 1.54:134-136) and “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*ANET*, 29-31).

<sup>66</sup> “The Eloquent Peasant” (*COS* 1.43:98-104).

<sup>67</sup> “Gratitude for a God’s Mercy” (*ANET* 380-381; “The Kirta Epic” (*COS* 1.102:333-343); “Inanna’s Descent to the Nether World” (*ANET* 52-57).

responsibility.<sup>68</sup> Lastly, an intercessor may intervene even though there is no obligation or responsibility to the beneficiary and the intercessor stood to receive no personal gain from a favourable outcome. In these circumstances, intercession appears to be motivated by a desire to uphold justice or social order or, by the qualities of compassion and altruism.<sup>69</sup>

In the texts of intercession studied above, the third member of the triangle of intercession, the beneficiary, is a passive and almost silent character. The intercessor holds centre stage and is portrayed as the heroic protagonist advocating on behalf of the beneficiary. The spotlight is on the interaction between the intercessor and the benefactor/patron.

A beneficiary may require the intervention of an intercessor for several reasons. First, the beneficiary may lack the resources to overcome the particular need, obstacle, opposition, or oppression. Second, the beneficiary's own petitions may be ineffective and the intercessor's efforts represent a new and stronger attempt at securing the desired response. Third, the intercessor may also bolster the beneficiary's case before the benefactor and increase the likelihood of a favourable response. The beneficiary may lack the means, standing, merit, or qualifications to directly approach the benefactor. This obstacle is overcome by utilizing the intercessor's standing and influence with the benefactor. Fourth, the beneficiary may be completely oblivious and ignorant of the danger or need he or she is facing. The intercessor however, may become aware of the

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<sup>68</sup> "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*COS* 1.54:134-136); "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*ANET*, 29-30);

<sup>69</sup> "A Vision of the Nether World" (*ANET* 109-110); "The Creation by Atum" (*ANET*, 3); "The Eloquent Peasant" (*COS* 1.43:98-104).

danger or need as a result of the social, economic, political, or religious position held by the intercessor. In response to this knowledge, the intercessor may take the initiative to intercede on behalf of the beneficiary, even without the beneficiary's knowledge or request to do so.

With respect to the objects of intercession which lie at the centre of the triangle of intercession, there was tremendous breadth and variety in the types of requests. This variation reflected the fact that the requests arose from the needs and desires of daily life in the ANE. The requests can be placed in one of two broad categories. First, there were requests which addressed present needs such as illness and health including infertility,<sup>70</sup> military threat (a city under siege),<sup>71</sup> impending judgment for an offence,<sup>72</sup> famine, plagues,<sup>73</sup> and insect infestations (locusts).<sup>74, 75</sup> The second type of requests looked ahead into the future and was a bestowal of blessing and fullness of life for the future or of protection against misfortune. There was no immediate need or danger facing the beneficiary and intercession was intended for the continuation or augmentation of good fortune. Requests of this type included those for long life, financial prosperity, bountiful

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<sup>70</sup> "Gratitude for a God's Mercy" (*ANET* 380-381); "The Kirta Epic" (*COS* 1.102:333-343); "The Legend of the Possessed Princess ('Bentresh Stela')" (*COS* 1.54:134-136); "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*ANET*, 29-30); "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World" (*ANET* 52-57); "The Legend of King Keret" (*ANET* 142-149).

<sup>71</sup> "Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege" (*COS* 1.88:283-285).

<sup>72</sup> "Gratitude for a God's Mercy" (*ANET* 380-381).

<sup>73</sup> "Atrahasis" (*ANET*, 104-106); "Atra-hasis" (*COS* 1.130:450-452); "Plague Prayers of Mursili II" (*COS* 1.60:156-160).

<sup>74</sup> "A Hymn to Nanaya with a Blessing for Sargon II" (*COS* 1.141:472-473).

<sup>75</sup> Biblical examples include health and healing (2 Ki 1:1-18; 4:18-37; 5:1-19;), drought and rain (1 Ki 17:1; 18:41-46); children (Gen 25:21; 2 Ki 4:11-17), deliverance from military threat (2 Ki 18 & 19); spiritual warfare (Dan 10:10-21); deliverance from impending judgment (Gen 18:16-33; Exod 32:6-33:23), building (Neh 1:1-2:20).

harvests, success in battle or business ventures, an abundance of children, and secure, lengthy reigns for monarchs.<sup>76</sup>

### 2.7.3 *An Ancient Near Eastern Literary or Cultic Form for Intercession*

From the above survey of the selected ANE intercessory texts, there does not appear to be a single literary or cultic form common to the cultures of the ANE by which intercession was presented. Certain elements appear with greater frequency and prevalence but not to the extent that a distinctive and consistent form could be supported.<sup>77</sup> The following were the most common elements observed in the selective survey of ANE intercessory texts. First, most accounts began with an introduction containing praise for the character, standing, honour, power, and compassion of the benefactor/patron. Second, historical precedent would then be reviewed with descriptions of the heroic deeds of the benefactor/patron, previous examples of intervention by the benefactor, a survey of the prior faithfulness, obedience, upright character and piety of the beneficiary, and the relationship between the benefactor/patron and the beneficiary (in particular, obligations of the benefactor towards the beneficiary). Third, the needs of the beneficiary would be presented along with the request for intervention and aid. On occasion, the intercessory text would omit the introductory salutation and praise of the benefactor along with the historical review and open directly with the presentation of the request for aid.

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<sup>76</sup> “The Creation by Atum” (*ANET*, 3); “A Hymn to Nanaya with a Blessing for Sargon II” (*COS* 1.141:472-473).

<sup>77</sup> For a comparison of the selected texts of intercession, please refer to the chart appended at the end of this study.

Fourth, the bulk of each intercessory text consisted of arguments put forward in support of the petition for aid and as justification for why the benefactor/patron should respond favourably. The advantages and disadvantages to the benefactor/patron were often presented and discussed. These arguments provide insights into the theology of the religious systems of the ANE; particularly on the issues of theodicy, divine attributes, judgment, forgiveness, atonement and salvation, divine favour and displeasure, the relationship between gods and humanity, and the openness of ANE gods to human actions.

Fifth, the conclusion of the intercessory texts varied in their content. The possibilities observed included various combinations of a reprise of praise to the benefactor/patron, a description of rituals which accompanied the intercession, anticipatory thanks and expressions of gratitude, and promises or vows to undertake a particular action if the petition was granted. Accompanying actions were either purification rituals to render the intercessor and beneficiary worthy of standing before their benefactor or cultic practices to please the benefactor, increase the likelihood of success, or to demonstrate the earnestness, zeal, sincerity, and worthiness of the intercessor and beneficiary. Examples of promises and vows made in response to the granting of an intercessory request included repentance and a change in behaviour if the context was a moral, legal, or spiritual offence, memorializing the benefactor's actions on a stela, the presentation of offerings to the benefactor/patron, or the dedication of a statue or temple in the benefactor's honour.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> "Gratitude for a God's Mercy" (*ANET* 380-381; "The Kirta Epic" (*COS* 1.102:333-343); "Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege" (*COS* 1.88:283-285).

Lastly, at first glance, there appears to be a striking paucity of documented thanks for intercession and petitions which had been granted. However, this may not indicate a lack of gratitude but a difference in the manner by which thanks was expressed in the ANE. Gratitude was often expressed not in written form but in action through the dedication of statues, stelae, and temples or the offering of prayers, gifts, and sacrifices in honour of the benefactor.<sup>79</sup> It must be kept in mind that the absence of recorded thanks in the archeological record is not evidence of the absence of gratefulness on the part of the ANE peoples.

#### 2.7.4 *Arguments in Support of a Favourable Response to an Intercessory Request*

The preceding discussion sought to demonstrate that the majority of the content of ANE texts of intercession consisted of arguments put forward in support of a particular request for aid. These arguments provided the reasons and justification for why the benefactor/patron should feel compelled to respond favourably. Within these intercessory texts, a wide range of arguments were presented, drawing from the realms of morality and ethics, theology, philosophy and sociology. These appeals served to provide insights into the moral, ethical, and theological beliefs and practices of the ANE. The following is a review of the most common supporting arguments found in this study of selected ANE texts of intercession.

First, the benevolent character of the benefactor/patron was frequently invoked in the presentation of a request for aid. Most intercessory texts opened with an

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<sup>79</sup> “Gratitude for a God’s Mercy” (*ANET* 380-381; “The Kirta Epic” (*COS* 1.102:333-343); “Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege” (*COS* 1.88:283-285).

introduction which lauded the goodness, compassion, kindness, and mercy of the benefactor/patron.<sup>80</sup> This emphasis suggested that by providing a favourable response to the intercessory request, the benefactor would simply be acting in a manner consistent with his or her well known compassion and munificence. Closely related to this line of reasoning was an associated belief in the predictability of divine actions in response to the fulfilment of specific cultic rituals. The completion of a prescribed series of feasts, purification rites, hymns, and offerings would reliably secure the intervention of a deity to yield the desired result.<sup>81</sup> The underlying assumption was that the gods could be counted upon to act in a predictable manner, either consistent with their ascribed character or in response to the fulfilment of cultic ritual.

Second, the benefactor/patron may have been under obligation to aid the beneficiary as a result of the nature of the relationship between the two. A king, master, or employer may have had a suzerain-vassal type relationship with a subject, slave, or employee respectively.<sup>82</sup> As a result, the superior (benefactor/patron) would have been responsible to protect and to provide for their dependents. On a cosmologic level, this argument was cited in the *Atrahasis* epic in which the hero argues that as creators, the gods had an obligation to protect and provide for creation. Destroying creation through plagues and flood would be a violation of this duty.<sup>83</sup> This argument of responsibility

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<sup>80</sup> “Gratitude for a God’s Mercy” (*ANET* 380-381); “The Legend of the Possessed Princess (‘Bentresh Stela’)” (*COS* 1.54:134-136); “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*ANET*, 29-30); “The Creation by Atum” (*ANET*, 3); “A Hymn to Nanaya with a Blessing for Sargon II” (*COS* 1.141:472-473).

<sup>81</sup> “Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege” (*COS* 1.88:283-285).

<sup>82</sup> “The Legend of the Possessed Princess (‘Bentresh Stela’)” (*COS* 1.54:134-136); “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*ANET*, 29-31); “The Eloquent Peasant” (*COS* 1.43:98-104).

<sup>83</sup> “Atrahasis” (*ANET*, 104-106); “Atra-hasis” (*COS* 1.130:450-452).

through relationship was also employed to support intercession made to deities in the ANE pantheon on behalf of ANE kings or members of the royal family. Monarchs of the ANE were often considered as deities, members of the divine pantheon, and usually the sons of the chief god of the pantheon. Intercession on behalf of these rulers frequently appealed to the chief god to fulfill his paternal obligation and protect and provide for his divine and royal offspring.<sup>84</sup> The intercessor merely pointed out and reminded the benefactor/patron of these obligations. The granting of the intercessor's request for aid on behalf of the beneficiary was simply the fulfilment of the duty owed by the benefactor/patron to the beneficiary.

Third, the character, standing, or circumstances of the beneficiary were cited as further reasons why an intercessory request should be granted. The piety, good and morally upright character of the beneficiary, his or her loyalty and obedience to the benefactor, or the victimization of the beneficiary were all put forward as compelling supportive arguments. In cases in which the beneficiary was the victim of a crime, the argument was advanced that the benefactor was obliged to secure justice and reparations as this would be the morally correct course of action and would preserve social order.

Fourth, the intercessor would attempt to leverage a favourable response by describing the incentives for the benefactor/patron if he or she took action to produce the desired result. Both positive and negative incentives were presented to the benefactor/patron. Advantages included promises to honour the benefactor by the presentation of offerings (precious metals, livestock, produce), prayers, and sacrifices, the holding of celebratory feasts, or the dedication of a memorial stela, statue, or

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<sup>84</sup> "The Kirta Epi" (*COS* 1.102:333-343); "The Legend of King Keret" (*ANET* 142-149).

temple.<sup>85</sup> Potential adverse outcomes were also described if a petition was not granted. These included the loss of produce and livestock for offerings and tribute, the reduction of servants and of worshippers, and the cessation of worship at cultic sites.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the above arguments, the study of the selected texts revealed two other factors which served to strengthen an intercessory appeal before a benefactor/patron. These factors were not part of the formal arguments but nevertheless, were crucial elements in the entire intercessory presentation to the benefactor. As discussed above, the favourable or high standing of the intercessor before the benefactor/patron increased the likelihood of a successful outcome. In these texts, the intercessor was commonly depicted as a heroic protagonist who was held in favour and high regard by the benefactor/patron on the basis of moral character, unusual wisdom, physical strength, office, family lineage, or being a member of the divine pantheon. These esteemed characteristics placed the intercessor in a unique and influential position from which effective intercession could be made on behalf of the beneficiary. At the same time, it is important to note that these same characteristics were the very attributes which motivated him or her to notice and champion the cause of the beneficiary in the first place.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> “Gratitude for a God’s Mercy” (*ANET* 380-381); “The Kirta Epic” (*COS* 1.102:333-343); “Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege” (*COS* 1.88:283-285); “A Hymn to Nanaya with a Blessing for Sargon II” (*COS* 1.141:472-473).

<sup>86</sup> “A Hymn to Nanaya with a Blessing for Sargon II” (*COS* 1.141:472-473); “Inanna’s Descent to the Nether World” (*ANET* 52-57); “Plague Prayers of Mursilis” (*ANET* 394-396); “Plague Prayers of Mursili II” (*COS* 1.60:156-160).

<sup>87</sup> For examples of intercessors who were held in high regard and with the influence of their position were able to successfully intercede, see “The Legend of King Keret” (*ANET* 142-149); “A Vision of the Nether World” (*ANET* 109-110); “The Legend of the Possessed Princess (‘Bentresh Stela’)” (*COS* 1.54:134-136) and “The Legend of the Possessed Princess” (*ANET*, 29-31); “Atrahasis” (*ANET*, 104-106); “Atrahasis - Additional Texts” (*ANET* 512-514); “Atra-hasis” (*COS* 1.130:450-452);

The second factor which served to strengthen an intercessory appeal before a benefactor/patron was the repetition of the request for aid. From a rhetorical perspective, repetition served to provide evidence of earnestness, zeal, and sincerity as well as to convey the degree of desperation and urgency. The prevalence of repetition in the intercessory texts suggests that it was believed that perseverance and persistence increased the effectiveness and likelihood of securing a favourable response.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, on many occasions, despite the eloquent and forceful presentation of several compelling arguments, the intercessor concludes with the humble acknowledgement that ultimately, the beneficiary is at the mercy of the benefactor/patron. The presentation of votive offerings, the completion of cultic acts and rituals, even the standing of the intercessor, could not guarantee the desired favourable result. In the end, a humble and desperate plea for grace and mercy supercedes all the arguments demonstrating the merit of the beneficiary's and the intercessor's case.

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<sup>88</sup> "The Creation by Atum" (*ANET*, 3); "The Kirta Epic" (*COS* 1.102:333-343); "The Eloquent Peasant" (*COS* 1.43:98-104); "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World" (*ANET* 52-57).

*Table 1 - Summary of Selected Ancient Near Eastern Intercessory Texts*

Text	Outline	Need	Triangle of Intercession	Basis for Successful Appeal	Repetition	Promised Acts of Gratitude	Accompanying Action
<i>Gratitude for a God's Mercy</i> [Testimony]	1. Praise 2. Specific appeal to mercy & compassion 3. Presentation of need 4. Confession of sin 5. Healing 6. Praise for answer 7. Promises in gratitude	1. Illness of son with physical illness due to transgression against Amon. 2. Physical & spiritual linked.	1. By father 2. On behalf of son 3. To deity, Amon-Re.	1. Amon-Re's mercy & compassion. 2. Vow that family will repent and not repeat same transgression. 3. Erection of memorial stela in testimony of Amon-Re's actions.		1. Repentance and vow that family will not repeat transgression in future. 2. Memorial stela as testimony of Amon-Re's mercy & power.	1. Vow of memorial stela fulfilled.
<i>The Legend of the Possessed Princess</i> [Narrative Tale]	1. Praise to gods 2. Suzerain-vassal b/w Egypt and Bekhten 3. Presentation of Need with intercession thru intermediary (pharaoh) 4. Healing 5. Gifts in gratitude	1. Illness – princess possessed by evil spirit 2. Spiritual, emotional, mental illness.	1. By Father 2. On behalf = daughter 3. Through pharaoh = intermediary 4. To deity = Khons-the Provider	1. Suzerain's treaty obligations to vassal. 2. Pharaoh's mercy & compassion. 3. Pharaoh's deity and access to fellows deities in Egyptian pantheon.			1. Feast and offering made to evil spirit by father, prince of Bekhten 2. Gifts given by father to Khons-the-Provider in gratitude.
<i>The Creation by Atum</i> [Dedicatory Text]	1. Praise to Atum 2. 1 <sup>st</sup> request to protect 3. 2 <sup>nd</sup> request 4. Climactic 3 <sup>rd</sup> & final request for protection	Protection of 1. pharaoh 2. work of construction 3. completed pyramid	1. By priests 2. On behalf = pharaoh 3. To Atum and other 8 leading deities of Ennead.		3x repetition of request with progression in details climaxing in 3 <sup>rd</sup> and final request.		
<i>The Eloquent Peasant</i> [Wisdom Literature]	Narrative+poetic verse 1. Peasant robbed 2. Appeal to steward 3. Intercession to magistrates rebuffed 4. Appeal to pharaoh 5. Nine petitions 6. Intercession second time to pharaoh. 7. Justice for peasant	1. Justice 2. Restitution	1. By steward, Rensi 2. For peasant 3. To magistrates first and then to pharaoh	1. Justice 2. Moral code 3. Civic order	1. Nine petitions by peasant to Rensi 2. Rensi first to magistrates but failed 3. Rensi to pharaoh 2x 4. Rensi obliged to a. remain silent b. listen to peasant c. record peasant d. support peasant		1. No record of thanks from peasant to Rensi or pharaoh.

Text	Outline	Need	Triangle of Intercession	Basis for Successful Appeal	Repetition	Promised Acts of Gratitude	Accompanying Action
<p><i>The Kirta Epic</i></p> <p>[Poetic Epic Narrative]</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kirta the king loses siblings &amp; wives.</li> <li>2. Kirta appeals to ʾIlu and finds a wife who bears royal progeny.</li> <li>3. Kirta deathly ill.</li> <li>4. Titmanatu appeals to ʾIlu to heal her father.</li> <li>5. ʾIlu creates a female healer who heals Kirta.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Illness</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By daughter</li> <li>2. On behalf of father</li> <li>3. To deity = ʾIlu</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ʾIlu's mercy, grace, and kindness.</li> <li>2. Promise of gifts to deity in gratitude for answered petition.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Threefold repetition that ʾIlu is gracious and kind.</li> <li>2. Seven times ʾIlu asks one of the other gods to step forward and heal Kirta. None respond.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If he is successful in obtaining Hurraya as wife, Kirta promises to give to Atiratu, goddess of Tyre &amp; Sidon: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. 2x H's wt in silver</li> <li>b. 3x H's wt. in gold</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kirta forgets to fulfill vow to Atiratu</li> <li>2. Both Titmanatu and Kirta do not thank ʾIlu for healing Kirta.</li> </ol>
<p><i>Ugaritic Prayer for a City Under Siege</i></p> <p>[Cultic Prayer]</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Purification and sacrificial rituals</li> <li>2. Prayer: conditional elements framed by conditional <i>inclusio</i>.</li> <li>3. Predictability of Baʿlu's response, a formula for successful intercession.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Military &amp; Political</li> <li>2. City under siege</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By the king</li> <li>2. On behalf = besieged city</li> <li>2. To deity = Baʿlu</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Predictability of Baʿlu's response – underlying assumption Baʿlu obliged to answer if intercessory formula invoked and fulfilled.</li> <li>2. Promises of worship, vows, offerings, feasts, and sacrifices.</li> </ol>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sacrifice of bull and firstborn animal</li> <li>2. Fulfillment of vow &amp; offering</li> <li>3. Celebratory feast</li> <li>4. Worship at Baʿlu's temple</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Purification rites</li> <li>2. Animal sacrifices</li> <li>3. Offerings</li> </ol>
<p><i>Atrahasis</i></p> <p>[Primeval Epic]</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Epic narrative</li> <li>2. Gods make humanity to ease their work.</li> <li>3. Noise of growing population disturbs sleep of gods.</li> <li>4. Enlil sends plagues and pestilence to destroy humankind.</li> <li>5. Atrahasis intercedes to Ea on humanity's behalf to stop plagues.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Plagues &amp; pestilence threaten humanity.</li> <li>2. Other threats in epic include famine, barren wombs, Flood.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By hero, Atrahasis</li> <li>2. On behalf of all humanity</li> <li>3. To Ea who in turn will intercede for humanity before Enlil, the chief god.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gods cannot destroy that which they created.</li> <li>2. Gods created humanity and have obligation to protect and provide.</li> <li>3. Standing of the hero Atrahasis before Ea.</li> <li>4. Ea being a member of the pantheon of Mesopotamian gods.</li> </ol>			
<p><i>A Hymn to Nanaya with a Blessing for Sargon II</i></p> <p>[Divine Hymn and Prayer for King]</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Praise to Nanaya</li> <li>2. Affirmation of king's loyalty and obedience to Nanaya.</li> <li>3. Requests: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. long, healthy life</li> <li>b. long, stable reign</li> <li>c. military success</li> <li>d. protect fr. locusts and grasshoppers</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Long healthy life</li> <li>2. Long, stable reign</li> <li>3. Military success</li> <li>4. Protection from plagues of grasshoppers and locusts.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By priests and lay worshippers</li> <li>2. On behalf = Assyrian king, Sargon II</li> <li>3. To Nanaya, female Assyrian deity</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loyalty &amp; obedience of Sargon II to Nanaya</li> <li>2. Failure to protect from locusts would result in the loss of offerings of produce to the Assyrian gods.</li> <li>3. Dedication of statue or temple = evidence of Sargon's fealty.</li> </ol>			<p>Preceding hymn to Nanaya possibly on the occasion of the dedication of a statue or temple to her.</p>

Text	Outline	Need	Triangle of Intercession	Basis for Successful Appeal	Repetition	Promised Acts of Gratitude	Accompanying Action
<i>A Vision of the Nether World</i> [Mythical Poem]	1. Proud Assyrian prince desires to see nether world. Granted in dream. 2. Insults Ereshkigal, queen of nether world and faces anger of Nergal her husband. 3. Ishum, Nergal's counsellor, intercedes. 4. Nergal spares prince but warns him to change arrogant ways. 5. Prince awakens.	1. Death as punishment for insulting queen of nether world.	1. By Ishum, counsellor to Nergal, ruler of nether world. 2. On behalf = Kumma, proud Assyrian prince 3. To Nergal, ruler of nether world.	1. Ishums' standing before Nergal. 2. Ishum manipulates Nergal's pride and soothes his anger.			1. Prince praises Nergal and Ereshkigal before his subjects. 2. Prince changes his arrogant ways.
<i>Inanna's Descent to the Nether World</i> [Mythic Tale]	1. Inanna descends to nether world and is put to death by Ereshkigal. 2. Ninshubur appeals in vain to Enlil & Nanna. 3. Ninshubur's appeal to Enki is successful & Inanna restored to life and returned to world of the living.	1. Inanna, goddess of fertility, is put to death and held captive in the nether world by her sister, Ereshkigal, ruler of the nether world.	1. By Ninshubur 2. On behalf = Inanna 3. To 3 gods: a. Enlil, chief god (No) b. Nanna, moon god (No) c. Enki, god of wisdom (Yes)	1. Sumerian Version: failure to rescue Inanna = needless and foolish waste of her beauty, worth, power. 2. Akkadian Version: absence of goddess of fertility = famine and barrenness, all life would soon perish.	1. Ninshubur's five line argument repeated 6x. Two rhetorical features: a. Repetition of first & last lines = <i>inclusio</i> b. Each line linked by <i>synon. parallelism</i> . 2. Perseverance as Ninshubur appeals 3x: Enlil, Nanna, & Enki.		
<i>Plague Prayers of Mursili II</i> [Prayer]	1. Collection of four prayers. 2. Theological and historical background. 3. Petition to end the plague or at least reveal reason for continuance. 4. Arguments to justify and leverage favourable response from gods.	1. Plague	1. By Mursili II 2. On behalf of Hittite empire and himself 3. To all gods of Hittite pantheon with Storm god specifically named.	1. Deserving of mercy a. sins confessed b. reparations made c. all gods worshipped, offerings made, prayed to without favouritism 2. Disadvantageous to gods if Hittite nation decimated. No worship. 3. Desperate plea for mercy and deliverance.			
<i>The Legend of King Keret</i> [Poetic Epic Narrative]	1. Loss of children, 1 <sup>st</sup> wife, and siblings. 2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> wife Hurriya but no children. 3. Baal's intercession 4. Children 5. Other experiences	1. Barren, no children	1. By Baal 2. On behalf = Keret & his wife, Hurriya. 3. To El, chief god of Canaanite pantheon.	1. Baal's high standing before El and among other Canaanite gods. 2. El's kindness 3. Keret's noble character and standing as beloved son of El			

## *Chapter 3 - Translation*

### *3.1 Translation*

- 18:16** *Then the men arose from there and looked down toward Sodom and Abraham (1) was walking with them to send them on their way (2) .*
- 18:17** *And (1) Yahweh said to himself (2), "Shall I conceal from Abraham that which I am about to do?"*
- 18:18** *For (1) Abraham will surely become (2) a great and mighty nation and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed (3).*
- 18:19** *For (1) I have chosen (2) him in order that (3) he may command his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of Yahweh by doing (4) righteousness and justice so that Yahweh may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken concerning (5) him.*
- 18:20** *Then (1) Yahweh said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed (2) great and their (3) sin is indeed (2) very grave.*
- 18:21** *I will go down (1) now (2) and (3) see (4) if they have done entirely (5) according to its outcry which has come (6) to me; and if not, I will know (7)".*
- 18:22** *Then the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but (1) Abraham remained standing (2) before (3) Yahweh.*
- 18:23** *Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you really (1) sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"*
- 18:24** *Suppose (1) there are fifty righteous within the city, will you really (2) sweep away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?*

- 18:25** *Far be it from you to do (1) such a thing, to slay (2) the righteous with the wicked so that (3) the righteous are as the wicked. Far be it from you! Shall the one who judges all the earth not do justice?"*
- 18:26** *And Yahweh replied, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then (1) I will spare the whole place for their sake.*
- 18:27** *Then Abraham answered and said, "Now (1), since (2) I have ventured to speak to my Lord although (3) I am dust and ashes,*
- 18:28** *Suppose (1) the fifty righteous are lacking (2) five, will you destroy the whole city because (3) of the five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there (4)."*
- 18:29** *And yet again (1) he spoke to him and said, "Suppose (2) forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it for the sake of the forty."*
- 18:30** *Then he said, "Please (1), do not be angry (2) my Lord so that (3) I may speak (4). Suppose (5) thirty are found there?" And he said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there (6)."*
- 18:31** *And he said, "Now (1), since (2) I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose (3) twenty are found there?" And he said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty."*
- 18:32** *Then he said, "Please, do not be angry my Lord so that I may speak (1) just (2) once more; suppose (3) ten are found there?" And he said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten."*
- 18:33** *Then Yahweh departed when he had finished speaking to Abraham, but (1) Abraham (2) returned to his place.*

### 3.2 Translation Notes

#### 18:16

- (1) Circumstantial clause (18:16b).<sup>1</sup>
- (2) Piel infinitive construct with third masculine plural pronominal suffix and ל preposition from the verb שלח. In the Qal stem, שלח means “to send or to stretch out (eg. a hand, a rod, a sceptre)”. In the Piel stem, שלח means to “to send off or send away, to let go or set free, to give free rein to, to dismiss, or to shoot”.<sup>2</sup>

#### 18:17

- (1) This study has chosen to consider 18:17-19 as a compound, extended, participial circumstantial clause which takes the form of a divine soliloquy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The circumstantial clause is indicated by the *waw* conjunction, change in word order from the conventional *verb-subject-object* to *subject-verb-object*, and the verb being in the form of a participle. See Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (Janua Linguarum Series Practica 231; The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1974), 81-92; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 37, 49; Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 83.

<sup>2</sup> “שלח”, *BDB*, 1018-1019; “שלח”, *HALOT* 4:1511-1516.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 18:17 exhibits grammatical and syntactical features which are characteristic of a participial circumstantial clause. These features include a change in the word order with introductory subject (subject-verb-object rather than verb-subject-object), the absence of the *waw* consecutive + imperfect verbal forms, and the predicate use of participles with accompanying independent personal pronouns in an otherwise verbless clause. However, the syntax of Gen 18:18-19 suggests that these two subordinate explicative clauses are logically, theologically, and rhetorically linked to Gen 18:17 and that Gen 18:17-19 should be considered as a single literary subunit within the broader narrative of Gen 18:16-33. Depending on the breadth of one’s definition of a circumstantial clause, Gen 18:17-19 could be considered as either a compound, extended, participial circumstantial clause or as a parenthesis or thematic digression. Jouon and Muraoka have noted the difficulty in classifying participial clauses as circumstantial or as independent clauses functioning as parentheses or thematic digressions. See Paul Jouon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (SubBi 27; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), 565.

On the basis of the reasons outlined above, this study has chosen to consider Gen 18:17-19 as a compound, extended participial circumstantial clause. This interpretation follows the positions of Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 77-86; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 37; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 304.

For studies on circumstantial clauses, see Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 83; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 626-627; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 182-183; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 525-527, 543-547, 565-566; Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 77-91.

- (2) Qal perfect third masculine singular in pausal form from the verb אָמַר. In Gen 18:17, אָמַר is best translated “to say to oneself or to think” for the following reasons. First, as discussed above, there is grammatical, syntactical, and contextual evidence that Gen 18:17-19 is a circumstantial clause in the form of a divine soliloquy. Second, there is significant lexical support for this translation choice as well.<sup>4</sup>

## 18:18

- (1) Explicative or expegetical *waw* introducing the reasons why God will not conceal from Abraham His plans for Sodom and Gomorrah. This introductory *waw* serves the same syntactical function as the introductory כִּי in verse 19.<sup>5</sup>
- (2) The infinitive absolute + imperfect verbal construction conveys intensity and emphasis to the verbal action in view. In this construction, the infinitive absolute and the finite verb share the same verbal root, הִיָּה.<sup>6</sup> The repetition of the same verbal root creates a paronomastic effect which serves to affirm, intensify, and emphasize the certainty of the verbal action.<sup>7</sup>
- (3) Niphal perfect third common plural with a *waw* consecutive from the verb בָּרַךְ. In the Niphal stem, בָּרַךְ may possess a passive (“to be blessed”), a middle (“to find blessing”), or a reflexive voice (“to bless oneself”, or “to wish on oneself a blessing comparable to that of another”).<sup>8</sup> This study has chosen to translate בָּרַךְ with a passive voice. A discussion of the translation options available and the

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<sup>4</sup> “אָמַר”, *BDB*, 55-56; “אָמַר”, *HALOT*, 1:65-67. The verb אָמַר may be translated as “to think, to say to oneself or to say in the heart” in two circumstances. The first circumstance occurs when אָמַר appears in combination with the prepositional phrases בְּלִבָּב or לְלִבָּב such as in Deut 8:17; 1 Kgs 12:26, 14:1, 35:25; Isa 14:13, 47:8,10, 49:21; Eccl 2:1,15, 3:17,18; and Hos 7:2. The second circumstance is when אָמַר appears alone and it is the syntax and the context which dictate that it should be translated as “to think, to say to oneself, to say in the heart”. Examples of this second situation include Gen 20:11, 26:9, 44:28; 1 Sam 20:26; 2 Sam 5:6, 12:22; 2 Kgs 5:11; Job 29:18; Ps 82:6, 139:11; Lam 3:18-28; Jer 3:7,19.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 71; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 147, 178; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 599; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 640-641, 652-653.

<sup>6</sup> “הִיָּה”, *BDB*, 224-228; “הִיָּה”, *HALOT*, 1:243-244.

<sup>7</sup> A more detailed discussion of the syntactical function and exegetical implications of the infinitive absolute + imperfect verbal construction is found in the following section entitled “Exegesis”. See Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 252; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 37-38; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 74-76; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 584-588; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 392-394; Takamitsu Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985), 86-92.

<sup>8</sup> “בָּרַךְ”, *BDB*, 138-139; “בָּרַךְ”, *HALOT*, 1:159-160.

strengths and weaknesses of each is presented in the “Exegesis” portion of this study.

### 18:19

- (1) Conjunction ׀ with causal or explicative syntactical function.<sup>9</sup>
- (2) Qal perfect one common singular with the third masculine singular pronominal suffix from the verb ידע which means “to know” with a wide range of meaning depending on the context.<sup>10</sup> Following Bergman, Botterweck and others,<sup>11</sup> this study has chosen to translate ידע with the term “chosen” which conveys their ideas of recognition, selection, or special status.<sup>12</sup> Sarna translates ידע in Gen 18:19 as “I have singled him out” or, “I have entered into a special relationship with you”<sup>13</sup> with the result that Abraham enjoys a “special degree of intimacy with God”.<sup>14</sup>
- (3) Preposition למען conveying the syntactical function of purpose.<sup>15</sup>
- (4) Qal infinitive construct with a ל preposition from the verb עשה.<sup>16</sup> The infinitive construct with the ל preposition following a finite verb serves an epexegetical, explicative, or gerundive syntactical function.<sup>17</sup> The ל + infinitive construct of עשה explains the manner by which Abraham and his descendants are to keep (שמר) the way of Yahweh.

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<sup>9</sup> Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 149, 178; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 72; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 599; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 640-641.

<sup>10</sup> “ידע”, *BDB*, 393-395; “ידע”, *HALOT*, 1:390-392.

<sup>11</sup> J. Bergman and G. Johannes Botterweck, “ידע”, *TDOT* 5:448-481. See also Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yada*,” *BASOR* 181 (1966): 31-37; Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J.A. Baker; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 2:290-94; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 209-210; Sarna, *Genesis*, 31, 131; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 288; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 96, 269; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 350; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 50.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of other texts in which ידע has the same nuance of selection, choosing, or election include Amos 3:2; Exod 33:12, 17; Deut 34:10; 2 Sam 7:20.

<sup>13</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 131.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 115; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 61-62;

<sup>16</sup> “עשה”, *BDB*, 793-795; “עשה”, *HALOT*, 2:889-893.

<sup>17</sup> Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 605-610; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 407-408.

- (5) Preposition translated with syntactical function of specification.<sup>18</sup>

### 18:20

- (1) The reappearance of the *waw* consecutive with the introductory verb אָמַר indicates the resumption of the narrative sequence begun in 18:16 and which had been interrupted by the extended circumstantial clause and divine soliloquy of 18:17-19.
- (2) The conjunction וְ has an asseverative syntactical function and emphasizes the magnitude of the outcry against and the severity of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>19</sup>
- (3) The third masculine plural pronominal suffix refers to the inhabitants of the two cities.

### 18:21

- (1) Qal cohortative<sup>20</sup> one common singular from the verb יָרַד.<sup>21</sup> The presence of the particle אֲנִי confirms the volitive aspect of this verb and indicates the particular nuance of meaning associated with the cohortative.<sup>22</sup>
- (2) The particle אֲנִי is frequently associated with all three of the volitive forms (imperative, jussive, cohortative) and is an indicator not only of their presence but also of the particular nuance of meaning associated with the volitive form.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 51; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 218. Waltke and O'Connor observe that the preposition לְ often possesses the syntactical function of specification when appearing with verbs describing modes of communication such as in this case with דָּבַר.

<sup>19</sup> For the asseverative use of the conjunction וְ, see Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 153; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 73; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 580-582; Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 158-164.

<sup>20</sup> Pratico and Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 214-215; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 65-66; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 345-347; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 573-578.

<sup>21</sup> “יָרַד”, *BDB*, 432-434; “יָרַד”, *HALOT*, 2:434-435.

<sup>22</sup> Pratico and Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 208, 219.

<sup>23</sup> The particle אֲנִי appears in association with volitive forms and has a variety of functions which serves to specify the particular nuance of meaning and force associated with the verbal action of the volitive form. In addition to its association with volitive forms, אֲנִי may also appear on its own or in combination with other particles such as הִנֵּה, אִם, or לַעֲתִיד. Its wide range of syntactical functions include serving as a

The force of meaning of the cohortative encompasses a wide range and includes exhortation, a request, expression of a wish or desire, or determined resolve. The presence of the particle **נַן** specifies the particular nuance and force of meaning associated with the cohortative. The verbal construction in which the cohortative is followed by **נַן** indicates resolve and the speaker's determination to undertake an action that is within his or her ability to accomplish.<sup>24</sup>

- (3) *Waw* conjunction connecting the two one common singular cohortatives **וַיֵּרָד** and **וַיֵּרָא**. With respect to syntax, when coordinating volitive verbal forms, the *waw* conjunction can serve two possible functions: temporal or logical succession (“I will go down now *and then* I will see ...”) or, purpose/result (“I will go down now *so that* I will see ...”).<sup>25</sup> This verse contains three one common singular cohortatives (**וַיֵּרָד**, **וַיֵּרָא**, and **וַיֵּדַע**). The grammar, syntax, and logic of the verse favour each of the two *waw* conjunctions being translated with the nuance of succession or consecution. The end result is a volitive sequence linking the three cohortative forms in temporal or logical succession (“I will go down, *and then* I will see, *and then* I will know, ...”).
- (4) Qal cohortative one common singular from the verb **וַיֵּרָא**.<sup>26</sup>
- (5) This term has two possible translation options depending on the identity of the vowel associated with the first root consonant. If the vowel is a *qamets* then the term is a substantive noun meaning “complete destruction, consumption, or annihilation” and is almost always used with God as the subject. If the vowel is a *qamets hatuf* then the term is an adverb meaning “completely, entirely, altogether”.<sup>27</sup> This study has chosen to translate the term as an adverb.
- (6) This term is from the verb **וַיָּבֹא** which means “to go, to go in, to come, to come

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precative or particle of entreaty, as a logical particle indicating that its associated action is a logical consequence of a preceding statement or of the immediate context, as an indicator of resolve, and as the equivalent of a conjunction introducing causal, conditional, or adversative clauses. In addition to verse 21, the particle **נַן** also appears in Gen 18:27, 30, 31. With each of these occurrences, the particle demonstrates a different syntactical function. For the syntactical range of the particle **נַן**, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 578-579; Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 170-171; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 322-323.

<sup>24</sup> Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 65-66; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 578-579.

<sup>25</sup> For the use of the *waw* + volitive forms, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 650, 653-654; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 345-350, 352-357.

<sup>26</sup> “וַיֵּרָא”, *BDB*, 906-909; “וַיֵּרָא”, *HALOT*, 3:1157-1161.

<sup>27</sup> “כִּלְהָ”, *BDB*, 478; “כִּלְהָ”, *HALOT*, 2:477.

in, to enter, to come up to, or to come upon.”<sup>28</sup> The determination of the grammatical and syntactical value of this term requires the consideration of two factors: the location of the accent and the presence of the ה definite article. The MT places the accent on the middle syllable which would result in the verb being understood to be a Qal perfect third feminine singular. However, in early Biblical Hebrew, it is highly unusual for the Qal perfect to take the ה definite article.<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, if the accent is shifted to the final syllable, then the verb would be parsed as a Qal feminine singular active participle and the ה definite article would be a normal grammatical construction associated with the participle. This latter, alternative position is the one chosen by the editors of the BHS as well as by this study.<sup>30</sup> Further, in this case, the ה article does not confer definiteness but serves as a relative marker (syntactical equivalent to a relative pronoun) coordinating two subordinate clauses.<sup>31</sup>

- (7) Qal imperfect one common singular from the verb יָדַע.<sup>32</sup> Syntactically, this verb functions as a cohortative and is the final element in the volitive sequence present in this verse.

## 18:22

- (1) *Waw* adversative introducing a circumstantial clause<sup>33</sup> and contrasting the activity and the position of the visitors with that of Abraham. The men turned and went toward Sodom while Abraham remained standing in the same location.
- (2) Qal active participle masculine singular from the verb יָמַד which means “to stand in position, to stand respectfully before or to present oneself before, to remain standing, to be motionless, to take one’s stand”.<sup>34</sup>
- (3) According to tradition, Gen 18:22 contains the first of eighteen *tiqqune sopherim*

<sup>28</sup> “בִּוֹא”, *BDB*, 97-99; “בִּוֹא”, *HALOT*, 1:112-114.

<sup>29</sup> The definite article + Qal perfect verb is found in later books of the Hebrew Bible such as Ezra and Chronicles. See Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 339.

<sup>30</sup> See also Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 339; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 504; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> For the use of the ה article as a relative marker, see Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 18-19; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 503-505; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 338-340.

<sup>32</sup> “יָדַע”, *BDB*, 393-395; “יָדַע”, *HALOT*, 2:390-392.

<sup>33</sup> Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 83-85; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> “יָמַד”, *BDB*, 763-764; “יָמַד”, *HALOT*, 2:840-842.

in the Masoretic Text (MT).<sup>35</sup>

### 18:23

- (1) Coordinating adverb with הַ interrogative particle. This term is one of two major coordinating adverbs in Biblical Hebrew with the other adverb being דַּלְגָּ. <sup>36</sup> The possible syntactical functions of הַ include additive, correlative, emphatic or asseverative, rhetorical, compounding or intensifying, and an *a fortiori* sense with the meaning of “how much more/less”.<sup>37</sup> In Gen 18:23, הַ has an emphatic or asseverative function which when placed within the context of a question “indicates something contrary to expectation”.<sup>38</sup> This term also appears in Gen 18:13, 24.

### 18:24

- (1) Adverb meaning “perhaps, peradventure, perchance, may be or suppose”. It has a range of meaning and can denote hope (Gen 16:2; Num 22:6,11; 23:3; 1 Sam 6:5; Jer 20:10) but also fear, doubt, or uncertainty (Gen 27:12; Job 1:5).<sup>39</sup> This term introduces the protasis of the conditional clause in Gen 18:24 and serves a similar function for the conditional clauses in Gen 18:28, 29, 30, 31, 32.
- (2) See notes on this term under Gen 18:23.

### 18:25

- (1) Qal infinitive construct with the מִן preposition from the verb עָשָׂה.<sup>40</sup> This verb

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<sup>35</sup> A discussion of the *tiqqune sopherim* in Gen 18:22 is presented in the following chapter entitled “Exegesis and Commentary”.

<sup>36</sup> *BDB* classifies “הַ” as a conjunction but Arnold and Choi, Williams, Waltke and O’Connor, and Jouon and Muraoka classify it as an adverb. See “הַ”, *BDB*, 64; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 130; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 663; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 64; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 581.

<sup>37</sup> For the range of syntactical function of “הַ”, see “הַ”, *BDB*, 64-65; “הַ”, *HALOT*, 76; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 130-132; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 663-664; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 64-65; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 581-582.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 64.

<sup>39</sup> “אֲרִלִּי”, *BDB*, 19; “אֲרִלִּי”, *HALOT*, 1:21.

<sup>40</sup> “עָשָׂה”, *BDB*, 793-795; “עָשָׂה”, *HALOT*, 2:889-893.

occurs twice in this verse and also appears in Gen 18:17 (Qal active participle), Gen 18:19 (Qal infinitive construct), Gen 18:21 (Qal perfect), Gen 18:29, 30 (Qal imperfect).

- (2) Hiphil infinitive construct with ל preposition from the verb מוֹת. In the Hiphil stem, the verb means “to kill, to slay, to cause to die, to put to death, or to execute”.<sup>41</sup>
- (3) *Waw* consecutive which has been translated with the syntactical value of an epexegetical or explicative *waw*.<sup>42</sup>

### 18:26

- (1) *Waw* consecutive translated with the syntactical value of a resumptive or conditional *waw* which introduces the apodosis of the conditional clause of Gen 18:26.<sup>43</sup>

### 18:27

- (1) Presentative or demonstrative particle with causal function introducing the reason for Abraham’s bold persistence in continuing to negotiate with God. Both הִנֵּה and the particle אֵל, with which it is found in association, have a causal syntactical function in this verse.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> “מוֹת”, *BDB*, 559-560; “מוֹת”, *HALOT*, 2:562-563.

<sup>42</sup> See Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 71; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 147, 178; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 640-641, 652; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 599-601.

<sup>43</sup> See Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 72; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 147-148, 173-174; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 591, 607-610.

<sup>44</sup> הִנֵּה is one of two presentative or demonstrative particles with the other being הִן. הִנֵּה usually occurs in association with the verb אָמַר and in the context of direct speech. Without the *waw* conjunction, it serves two syntactical functions. First, it introduces short, succinct exclamations of immediacy with an emphasis on the “here-and-now-ness of the situation” (Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 168). In this role, הִנֵּה is often inflected with a pronominal suffix. Second, it presents “longer or fuller exclamations which serve to ground and define the material that follows them” (Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 676). The longer exclamation serves “to introduce a fact upon which a following statement or command is based” (Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 169). The logical relationship between the exclamation and the subsequent material can be causal, conditional, circumstantial, temporal, oppositional, or resultative in nature. Whether the exclamations introduced are short and succinct or long and detailed, הִנֵּה has the literary effect of “indicating that the speaker or writer wants to draw the special attention of the hearer or the reader respectively to a fact or object which can be said to be important, new, unexpected, etc.” (Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 138).

The form of the particle with the *waw* conjunction, (וְהִנֵּה), is found more commonly in narrative

- (2) The particle **וְ** has a wide range of syntactical function. In this context, it serves as a causal conjunction introducing Abraham’s reason for persisting in his negotiations with God.<sup>45</sup>
- (3) *Waw* concessive introducing a concessive circumstantial clause.<sup>46</sup>

### 18:28

- (1) Adverb introducing the protasis of Abraham’s proposal framed as a conditional statement. See notes for Gen 18:24. This adverb introduces and marks each progressive downward revision of Abraham’s proposal in his negotiation with Yahweh (Gen 18:24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32).
- (2) Qal imperfect third masculine plural with a paragogic **וְ** from the verb **חסר** which means “to lack, to be lacking or devoid of, to need, to decrease, to diminish, to lessen”.<sup>47</sup>
- (3) Preposition **בְּ** with causal syntactical function.<sup>48</sup>

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and occurs in association with verbs of perception or functions as a logical connector (causal, conditional, circumstantial, temporal, result, oppositional, etc.) linking two clauses.

For detailed discussions of the lexical and syntactical features of this particle, see “הנה”, *BDB*, 243-244; Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 674-678; Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 168-169; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 158-161; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 323; Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 137-141; Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (Janua Linguarum Series Practica 231; The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1974), 94-96.

<sup>45</sup> The particle **וְ** frequently appears in association with volitive forms and serves to specify the particular nuance of meaning and force associated with the action of volitive form. In addition, **וְ** may also appear on its own or in combination with other particles such as **הנה**, **אם**, or **עתה**. It possesses a wide range of syntactical function and can serve as a precative or particle of entreaty, as a logical particle indicating that its associated action is a logical consequence of a preceding statement or of the immediate context, as an indicator of resolve, and as the equivalent of a conjunction introducing causal, conditional, or adversative clauses. In addition to verse 27, the particle **וְ** also appears in Gen 18:21, 30, 31. With each of these occurrences, the particle demonstrates a different syntactical function. For the syntactical range of the particle **וְ**, see Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 578-579; Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 170-171; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 322-323.

<sup>46</sup> Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 183-184; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 601-602; Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 90; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 38.

<sup>47</sup> “חסר”, *BDB*, 341; “חסר”, *HALOT*, 1:338.

<sup>48</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 45; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 105; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 198; E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (trans. A. E. Cowley. 2d ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1910), 380.

- (4) The apodosis precedes the protasis indicating that the more important content is in the apodosis.<sup>49</sup>

### 18:29

- (1) Hiphil imperfect third masculine singular with a *waw* consecutive from the verb **וַיִּסַּף**. In the Hiphil stem it is an idiomatic term meaning “to add, to do again, to increase, to do something again”.<sup>50</sup>
- (2) Adverb introducing the protasis of Abraham’s proposal framed as a conditional statement. See notes for Gen 18:24. This adverb introduces and marks each progressive downward revision of Abraham’s proposal in his negotiation with Yahweh (Gen 18:24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32).

### 18:30

- (1) The particle **נַא** has a wide range of syntactical function. In this context, it is functioning as a precative or a particle of entreaty.<sup>51</sup>
- (2) Qal imperfect third masculine singular from the verb **חָרָה**.<sup>52</sup> Syntactically, this term functions as a jussive.
- (3) *Waw* conjunction which continues the volitive aspect and extends the volitive sequence which started with **חָרָה**. The *waw* conjunction conveys the syntactical meaning of purpose/result or consecution.<sup>53</sup> As a result, the volitive sequence is translated as, “Please do not be angry my Lord *so that* I may speak.”
- (4) Piel imperfect one common singular with a *waw* conjunction from the verb **דָּבַר**.<sup>54</sup> Syntactically, this term functions as a cohortative with the nuance of expressing a wish or desire.

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<sup>49</sup> Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 590-595; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 38.

<sup>50</sup> “וַיִּסַּף”, *BDB*, 414-415; “וַיִּסַּף”, *HALOT*, 2:418-419.

<sup>51</sup> The particle **נַא** also appears in Gen 18:21, 27, 31. With each of these occurrences, the particle demonstrates a different syntactical function. In addition to the references provided by the preceding footnote concerning **נַא**, for the precative or particle of entreaty, see also Stephen A. Kaufman, “An Emphatic Plea for Please,” *Maarav* 7 (1991): 195-198.

<sup>52</sup> “חָרָה”, *BDB*, 354; “חָרָה”, *HALOT*, 1:351.

<sup>53</sup> See Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 352-357; Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 118; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 650-654.

<sup>54</sup> “דָּבַר”, *BDB*, 180-182; “דָּבַר”, *HALOT*, 1:210-211.

- (5) Adverb introducing the protasis of Abraham's proposal framed as a conditional statement. See notes for Gen 18:24. This adverb introduces and marks each progressive downward revision of Abraham's proposal in his negotiation with Yahweh (Gen 18:24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32).
- (6) Similar to 18:28, the apodosis precedes the protasis.

### 18:31

- (1) Presentative or demonstrative particle with causal function.<sup>55</sup>
- (2) The particle **כִּי** has a wide range of syntactical function. In this context, it serves as a causal conjunction introducing Abraham's reason for persisting in his negotiations with God.<sup>56</sup>
- (3) Adverb introducing the protasis of Abraham's proposal framed as a conditional statement. See notes for Gen 18:24. This adverb introduces and marks each progressive downward revision of Abraham's proposal in his negotiation with Yahweh (Gen 18:24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32).

### 18:32

- (1) The same volitive sequence appears in 18:30. Please refer to preceding translation notes.
- (2) Adverb possessing either an asseverative meaning (eg. surely) or a restrictive force (eg. yet, but, only, just). The context favours a restrictive force.<sup>57</sup>
- (3) Adverb introducing the protasis of Abraham's proposal framed as a conditional statement. See notes for Gen 18:24. This adverb introduces and marks each progressive downward revision of Abraham's proposal in his negotiation with Yahweh (Gen 18:24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32).

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<sup>55</sup> See translation notes and footnote on this term for Gen 18:27 which shares the same construction.

<sup>56</sup> See preceding footnotes on the syntactical range of the particle **כִּי**.

<sup>57</sup> “**כִּי**”, *BDB*, 36. For other examples of this same verbal construction, see Exod 10:17 and Judg 6:39.

**18:33**

- (1) *Waw* adversative introducing the concluding circumstantial clause of the narrative.<sup>58</sup>
- (2) Consistent with the characteristics of a circumstantial clause, the word order has changed from the conventional and expected *verb-subject-object* to *subject-verb-object*.

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<sup>58</sup> Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 81-82; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 38.

## *Chapter 4 - A Close Reading of Genesis 18:16-33*

### *4.1 Form*

A survey of Biblical scholarship reveals a myriad of proposals and an absence of consensus concerning the literary form of Gen 18:16-33. The identification of the literary form of this pericope is important because the form chosen by the author is closely related to the rhetorical function and theological message of the text.

Brueggemann proposes that Gen 18:16-33 is a bargaining or haggling text.<sup>1</sup> Garrett extends Brueggemann's position by proposing that the narrative is a "negotiation tale" and is part of a recurring literary motif in Genesis. Garrett links Gen 18:16-33 with three other narrative accounts which he also classifies as "negotiation tales". These other accounts are the death and burial of Sarah (Gen 23), the betrothal of Rebekah to Isaac (Gen 24), and the negotiation for the bride price of Dinah between her brothers and Hamor of Shechem (Gen 34).<sup>2</sup>

Kidner presents an alternative perspective and writes that "it would be easy to say that this prayer comes near to haggling but the right word is 'exploring': Abraham is feeling his way forward in a spirit of faith (superbly expressed in 25c, where he grasps the range and rightness of Yahweh's rule), of humility, in his whole mode of address, and of love, demonstrated in his concern for the whole city, not for his kinsmen alone."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 162-177. A similar perspective is also found in literary critical studies of Genesis such as Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 242-253 and Cotter, *Genesis*, 121.

<sup>2</sup> Garrett, Duane A. *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 147-157.

<sup>3</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 133.

Kidner perceives the interaction between Abraham and Yahweh as an event in the process of theological exploration in which Abraham discovers new aspects of Yahweh's character, the nature and limits of divine justice and mercy, and new territory in his own relationship with Yahweh. The purpose of such discovery is so that Abraham can fulfill his covenant obligations and teach his descendants this knowledge of Yahweh (Gen 18:19).

In a similar vein, albeit without Kidner's more intimate and relational tone, Gunkel and Westermann suggest that Gen 18:16-33 possesses the literary form of a "theological inquiry presented in the form of a dialogue."<sup>4</sup> Westermann observes that such inquiries do not conclude with a solution but remain unresolved in an ongoing dialogue of investigation and discovery between the participants.<sup>5</sup> The lack of resolution creates dramatic tension and suspense which draw the audience into the dialogue resulting in their participation in the theological inquiry as well. Von Rad observes that in comparison to Gen 18:1-15 and Gen 19:1-29, the text under study is much more reflective in tone than an action or event dominated narrative. He notes that in Gen 18:16-33, the narrator's voice is much more explicit and the use of literary devices such as soliloquy, monologue, and conversation reveal the thoughts, intent, anxieties, and inner workings of the characters. The resultant rhetorical effect is the communication of a theological message rather than the description of a sequence of actions and events.<sup>6</sup> Of note, Westermann and Gunkel believe that the events and dialogue of Gen 18:16-33 were inserted into the Abraham cycle by a late redactor as a "factitious narrative" meant

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<sup>4</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286; Herman Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), 200-204.

<sup>5</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286.

<sup>6</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 209.

to produce theological inquiry and reflection in the reader.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to Kidner's more relational reading of Gen 18:16-33, Bruckner, von Rad, and Waltke perceive a more formal and pragmatic tone in the pericope. They believe that the dialogue follows the format of a legal proceeding with the use of judicial and trial terminology.<sup>8</sup> Waltke suggests that in the account the "Lord investigates the accusations thoroughly (Gen 18:22), ensures two objective witnesses, involves the faithful in his judgment, displays active compassion for the suffering, and prioritizes divine mercy over indignant wrath (ie. not to be destroyed if even ten are righteous)."<sup>9</sup> Brodie also concurs that the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham follows a legal format and sees Abraham as an advocate or lawyer pleading the case for Sodom before Yahweh the judge.<sup>10</sup> In pleading Sodom's case, Alter observes that Abraham employs "a whole panoply of the abundant rhetorical devices of ancient Hebrew for expressing self-abasement before a powerful figure."<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, Hamilton, proposes that the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham follows the suzerain-vassal covenant treaty format previously employed in Genesis 15 and 17.<sup>12</sup> Hamilton argues that treaty and covenant terminology is present in Gen 18:17-19 which has the effect of bringing the suzerain-vassal covenant treaty form

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<sup>7</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 200-201.

<sup>8</sup> J. K. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis* (JSOTSup 335; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 83-122; von Rad, *Genesis*, 211; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 269-271.

<sup>9</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 271.

<sup>10</sup> Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 249-250.

<sup>11</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 82. Unfortunately, Alter does not identify or comment on the rhetorical devices which he observes as being employed by Abraham.

<sup>12</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18.

encountered in Genesis 15 and 17 into the context of Gen 18:16-33.<sup>13</sup> In support of his position, Hamilton offers three lines of evidence.

First, the covenant treaty form is emphasized by the reaffirmation of the covenant promises in Gen 18:18. Second, Hamilton suggests that  $\mathcal{Y}\mathcal{T}$  in Gen 18:19 is a technical use of the term in a treaty or covenant context and that it refers to “mutual legal recognition on the part of the suzerain and the vassal.”<sup>14</sup> In the setting of Gen 18:19, the term would possess the nuance of meaning that Yahweh recognized Abraham “as a legitimate servant or granted recognition to Abraham.”<sup>15</sup> Hamilton’s interpretive position is also evident in his translation of the term  $\mathcal{Y}\mathcal{T}$  as “covenanted” in his commentary.<sup>16</sup> Third, Hamilton points out that Abraham’s activities, as described in the broader context of Genesis 18, fulfill his obligations as Yahweh’s vassal. Abraham is fulfilling covenant vassal responsibilities as he hosts Yahweh (Gen 18:1-15), is charged with teaching his family the terms of the covenant (Gen 18:19), and acts as intercessor (Gen 18:22-33).<sup>17</sup>

Any proposed literary form must consider not only the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham in 18:23-33 but also the divine soliloquy (Gen 18:17-19) and the divine monologue (Gen 18:20-21) which precede it. Several of the above proposed literary forms fall short by considering only the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham

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<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> In support of his position, Hamilton cites the work of the following authors: Bergman and Botterweck, *TDOT* 5:448-481; Huffmon, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yada*,” 31-37; Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:290-94. However, even though Bergman and Botterweck cite the work of Huffmon in their word study, their conclusions do not support Hamilton’s position with respect to the meaning of  $\mathcal{Y}\mathcal{T}$  in Gen 18:19. See Bergman and Botterweck, *TDOT* 5:468.

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18-19.

and failing to take into account the soliloquy and monologue that precede it. Further, the text under consideration is a complex construction with many literary and theological elements woven into the final composition. This complexity reflects the importance of Gen 18:16-33 as a pivotal event in Abraham's growing understanding of the way of Yahweh (יהוה), specifically, his justice, righteousness, and mercy. The author brings together many elements in this dramatic conversation which progresses from reflection, to revelation, to inquiring dialogue. MacDonald describes the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham in Gen 18:16-33 as "one of the densest passages in the Book of Genesis, touching on many significant theological themes."<sup>18</sup> Any proposal regarding literary form must be able to capture the many elements skilfully incorporated by the author into this passage.

When the above proposed literary forms are critically evaluated, limitations and weaknesses become apparent with each one and none appears to be a satisfactory solution. The negotiation or bargaining literary form focuses exclusively on the dialogue between Abraham and Yahweh in Gen 18:23-32 and fails to take into account several key elements present in the passage. First, it ignores the opening divine soliloquy (Gen 18:17-19) which describes and defines the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham. As will be presented subsequently, the unique nature of this relationship provides the foundation and the context for the rest of the narrative. The relationship between Yahweh and Abraham is the reason why Yahweh chooses to confide in Abraham and forms the basis for the ensuing negotiation dialogue between them.

Second, the negotiation literary form fails to take into account the legal terminology and

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<sup>18</sup> Nathan MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham --- Listening to Yhwh: Divine Justice and Mercy in Genesis 18:16-33," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 43.

judicial atmosphere which von Rad, Waltke, Bruckner, and Brodie have identified.<sup>19</sup>

Third, the negotiations which occur between Yahweh and Abraham are quite unconventional. Yahweh acquiesces to each proposed downward revision by Abraham of the number of righteous required to spare Sodom and Gomorrah. Yahweh never presents a counter-offer or challenge to Abraham's proposals. Such a striking departure from convention poses a challenge to the suitability of negotiation or haggling as the primary literary form for the text.

Westermann and Gunkel's suggestion of theological inquiry has merit but this appears to address the issue of rhetorical function and skirt the question of what literary form was employed to accomplish this function.

The legal or judicial literary form has substantial support from the text but it also has shortcomings. First, in a manner similar to the negotiation form, this proposal also fails to take into account the soliloquy of Gen 18:17-19 which introduces the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham. Their relationship establishes the theological and rhetorical framework for the remainder of the narrative. Second, the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham appears to be less a trial and more akin to a plea bargain. Abraham does not dispute Sodom and Gomorrah's reputation nor Yahweh's opinion of their moral state. He does not advocate for their innocence. Rather, he tacitly acknowledges the guilt of the majority of the citizens and concentrates his efforts on having Yahweh's judgment commuted and the cities pardoned. Third, a judicial or legal form is inherently adversarial in nature. However, as discussed above, Yahweh readily agrees to each revised proposal from Abraham without any counter-

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<sup>19</sup> Bruckner, *Implied Law*, 83-122; von Rad, *Genesis*, 211; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 269-271; Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 249-250.

proposals or debate.

The suzerain-vassal covenant treaty form proposed by Hamilton also encounters some difficulties. First, the term *ברית* is nowhere to be found in the entire extended narrative spanning Genesis 18-19. It does appear in Genesis 15 and 17 where it supports the presence of the covenant treaty form in those chapters.<sup>20</sup> However, the absence of the term *ברית* weakens Hamilton's position that the covenant treaty form is also present in Gen 18:16-33.

A second difficulty with the suitability of the suzerain-vassal covenant treaty form as the primary literary form of the text arises from the observation that in Gen 18:23-32 Abraham is interceding before Yahweh on behalf of those who are not participants in the covenant treaty between him and Yahweh. Participation in the covenant was limited to descendants of Abraham through Isaac (Gen 17:1-21). The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah fail to meet this inclusion criteria and are not participants in the covenant treaty between Yahweh and Abraham. As for Lot, he had previously been eliminated by Yahweh as a potential heir for Abraham (Gen 12:1; 13:5-11; 15:1-4; 17:19) and joins his neighbours in Sodom in being excluded from the covenant treaty between Yahweh and Abraham. Under the terms of the covenant treaty with Abraham, Yahweh was under no obligation to Sodom, Gomorrah, or Lot. It would appear that the description of Abraham's intercession in Gen 18:23-32 is being set within another traditio-historical and literary context.

Third, as Hamilton has noted, covenant treaty terms and references are present in Gen 18:16-33. However, as will be discussed subsequently, the relationship between

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<sup>20</sup> The term *ברית* occurs in Gen 15:18; 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, 21. In Gen 15:18, it is the narrator who employs this term whereas in Gen 17, it is God who uses this term repeatedly within the context of direct speech.

Yahweh and Abraham which is described by this pericope demonstrates a degree of intimacy, trust, status and privilege which exceeds the boundaries of the suzerain-vassal type relationship. Hamilton's translation of  $\text{ׁוּבְרִית}$  as "covenanted"<sup>21</sup> is a key element in his interpretive position. However, as will be subsequently presented, his lexical choice may not be the most appropriate.

The suzerain-vassal covenant treaty relationship may be the starting point and foundation for the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham. However, in Gen 18:16-33, this relationship is portrayed with terms, boundaries, characteristics, and dynamics which go beyond those of a relationship between a suzerain and a vassal. If the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham described in Gen 18:16-33 cannot be adequately captured by the suzerain-vassal relationship, then it follows that the covenant treaty form is also inadequate as the primary literary form for the pericope. It would appear that in comparison with the suzerain-vassal covenant treaty form present in Genesis 15 and 17, in Gen 18:16-33, the author is introducing a different traditio-historical and literary form to not only describe new aspects and developments in the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham but to also serve as the primary literary form of the pericope. This study proposes that it is the *Yahweh-prophet* form which is the primary literary and traditio-historical form of the narrative of Gen 18:16-33. There are several lines of evidence which support the suitability of this form over the others which have been reviewed in the preceding discussion.

First, Yahweh's introductory rhetorical question in Gen 18:17 plays a central role in the theological and rhetorical direction and development of the ensuing narrative. The divine soliloquy of Gen 18:17-19 provides the reasons for the implicit answer to the

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<sup>21</sup>Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 14.

rhetorical question. These reasons arise from the nature of the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham which is described in Gen 18:18-19. The divine monologue of Gen 18:20-21 informs Abraham of Yahweh's intentions concerning Sodom and Gomorrah and represents Yahweh implementing the answer to his rhetorical question. The negotiation dialogue of Gen 18:23-32 is initiated by Abraham in response to Yahweh's revelation of his intentions in answer to his initial rhetorical question. The various literary and theological components of the narrative are connected through their relationship with Yahweh's opening rhetorical question.

As part of its central role in establishing the theology and literary composition of Gen 18:16-33, Yahweh's rhetorical question introduces the *Yahweh-prophet* form as the primary traditio-historical and literary form of the narrative. Rephrased as a statement, Yahweh's rhetorical question would read, "I shall reveal/confide to Abraham what I am about to do." Within the Hebrew Bible, the prophets were one select group of individuals to whom Yahweh revealed his purposes and plans (Amos 3:7; John 15:15). Trust, intimacy, and privileged access to divine counsel characterized the relationship between Yahweh and his prophets. The point of the question is whether Abraham would be elevated to the status of Yahweh's prophet, become privy to the divine deliberations (Jer 23:18, 22), and experience the same privileged and intimate relationship with Yahweh that the later prophets enjoyed. The events of the ensuing narrative confirm the implied answer to the rhetorical question as Yahweh interacts with Abraham as one of his prophets by confiding in him and inviting him to participate in the divine deliberations concerning Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20-21, 23-32; 20:7).<sup>22</sup>

Second, in Gen 18:18, the first reason is provided which justifies Yahweh

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<sup>22</sup> In Gen 20:7, God explicitly identifies Abraham as a prophet.

confiding in Abraham and revealing his intentions. The reiteration of the promises first given to Abraham in Gen 12:2-3 elevate “Abraham to a level of importance and honor such that he is deemed worthy to share in God’s plan.”<sup>23</sup> The promises testify to Abraham’s high and favoured standing before Yahweh. His high standing and consequential knowledge of Yahweh’s counsel are more compatible with Abraham being characterized as Yahweh’s prophet than as Yahweh’s vassal.

Third, as introduced above, Hamilton’s translation of the term  $\text{ׁוּת}$  as “covenanted”<sup>24</sup> may not be the most appropriate lexical choice within the context of Gen 18:16-33. A more suitable translation may be the term “chosen”<sup>25</sup> which captures the nuances of intimacy and trust which accompany Bergman and Botterweck’s ideas<sup>26</sup> of recognition, selection, or special status.<sup>27</sup> Sarna translates  $\text{ׁוּת}$  in Gen 18:19 as “I have singled him out” or, “I have entered into a special relationship with you”<sup>28</sup> with the result that Abraham enjoys a “special degree of intimacy with Yahweh”.<sup>29</sup> Von Rad (“I have made him acquainted with me”) and Kidner (“I have made him my friend”) see this degree of intimacy and trust to be existing within the context of a friendship.<sup>30</sup> Yahweh’s selection of Abraham set him apart and bestowed on him special status and

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<sup>23</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 288.

<sup>24</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 288; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 209-210; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 269; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 350; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 50; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 169.

<sup>26</sup> Bergman and Botterweck, *TDOT* 5:468.

<sup>27</sup> Examples of other texts in which  $\text{ׁוּת}$  has a similar nuance of selection, choosing, or election include Amos 3:2-7; Exod 33:12, 17; Deut 9:24; 34:10; 2 Sam 7:20; 1 Chron 17:18; Jer 1:5; 12:3; Hos 13:5.

<sup>28</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 31. See also Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 132-133; George W. Coats, *Genesis* (FOTL 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 140.

<sup>29</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 131. See also Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 96, 269.

<sup>30</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 210; Kidner, *Genesis*, 132. See also Isaiah 41:8 and John 15:15.

recognition. This was the second reason which justified Yahweh confiding his plans to Abraham. It was further evidence of Abraham's high and favoured standing and special relationship with Yahweh which exceeded the status of a vassal and was more compatible with the status of being Yahweh's prophet.

Fourth, in addition to denoting a relationship of trust, intimacy and high standing with Yahweh that is consistent with that enjoyed by the prophets, the term  $\text{יָדַע}$  also serves to establish the prophetic motif in Gen 18:16-33. This term is also found in descriptions of Yahweh's appointment and endorsement of prophets such as Moses (Exod 33:12, 17) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:5). In addition to  $\text{יָדַע}$ , Wenham has noted the occurrence of several terms associated with the prophetic motif and ministry in both the accounts of Abraham's intercession in Gen 18:16-33 and of the intercession of Moses in Exod 32-34. These terms include  $\text{יָדַע}$  (Gen 18:19; Exod 33:12, 17),  $\text{נָשָׂא}$  (Gen 18:24, 26; Exod 32:32; 34:6,7),  $\text{שָׁחַת}$  (Gen 18:28, 31, 32; Exod 32:7),  $\text{אֲלֹנָא יַחַר לְאָדָי}$  (Gen 18:30, 32; Exod 32:22).<sup>31</sup> Further, the phrase "righteousness and justice" ( $\text{רְמִשְׁפֻּט וְצַדִּיקָה}$ ) which appears in Gen 18:19 is also a recurring phrase and motif in the prophetic writings.<sup>32</sup> The presence of terminology associated with the prophetic office and ministry support the suitability of the *Yahweh-prophet* form as the literary form of Gen 18:16-33.

Fifth, Abraham was chosen by God for the purpose of teaching his descendants the righteousness and justice which marked the way of Yahweh (Gen 18:19). Hamilton has suggested that this charge represented a covenant treaty obligation and was evidence in support of the suzerain-vassal literary form in Gen 18:16-33. Alternatively,

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<sup>31</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Isa 32:16; 33:5; 56:1; 59:9, 14; Jer 9:23; 22:3, 15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Amos 5:7, 24.

Abraham's duty to teach the righteousness and justice of the way of Yahweh can also be interpreted as representing another aspect of his characterization as Yahweh's prophet. One of the primary functions of Yahweh's prophets was the instruction of ancient Israel in the way of Yahweh.<sup>33</sup> By charging Abraham with this same responsibility, Yahweh was effectively appointing Abraham to the prophetic office. This alternative interpretive position would support the presence of the *Yahweh-prophet* literary form in Gen 18:16-33.

Sixth, intercession was another significant element of prophetic ministry.<sup>34</sup> As Abraham negotiates with God over Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 18:23-32, he is undertaking the prophetic function of intercession. Abraham's actions as intercessor are further evidence in support of the *Yahweh-prophet* form as the primary literary form of Gen 18:16-33.

Seventh, not only does Yahweh reveal his plans to Abraham, he invites Abraham to participate in the divine decision making process concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham is not merely a passive observer of Yahweh's deliberations but is allowed to play an active and central role in determining the criteria by which the fate of the two cities would be decided. Abraham's participation in Yahweh's decision making process is consistent with the role of Yahweh's prophet<sup>35</sup> and supports the *Yahweh-prophet* form as the primary traditio-historical and literary form of Gen 18:16-33.

Eighth, in Gen 18:23-32, Abraham intercedes before Yahweh on behalf of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with his nephew Lot and his family included among the

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<sup>33</sup> Lev 10:11; Deut 4:14; 6:1; 18:15-22; 1 Sam 12:20-25; 2 Chron 24:19; Isa 58:1; Ezek 22:2; 43:10; Hos 12:10; Mic 3:8.

<sup>34</sup> Exod 32-34; Num 12:11-13; 14:13-19; Deut 9:16-29; 1 Sam 7:5-9; 12:19-25; 1 Kgs 17:17-23; 2 Kgs 4:33; 6:15-20; Jer 15:1; Amos 7:1-6.

<sup>35</sup> Exod 32-34; Num 11:1-2; 14:11-20; 1 Sam 7:1-11; 12:19-25.

inhabitants of Sodom. As discussed above, not one of these three parties is a participant in the covenant treaty between Abraham and Yahweh described in Gen 15 and 17.

Yahweh is not bound by any duty or obligation towards Sodom, Gomorrah, or Lot. This suggests that Abraham's intercession in Gen 18:16-33 is presented on a basis other than the suzerain-vassal relationship between him and Yahweh.

An alternative basis by which Abraham intercedes before Yahweh is found in his high standing and favoured status as Yahweh's prophet. This role would provide him with the opportunity, access, and privilege of approaching Yahweh and presenting a petition on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. The negotiations between Abraham and Yahweh are compatible with the *Yahweh-prophet* relationship model. Further, as noted above, the negotiations are unusual in that Yahweh never presents a counter offer or a challenge to Abraham's proposals. Rather, he readily accepts each one of Abraham's offers. The proposed negotiation and legal literary forms are inherently adversarial and such ready acquiescence on Yahweh's part would be unconventional, unexpected, and problematic for both of these literary forms. However, acquiescence on the part of Yahweh is possible within the context of the *Yahweh-prophet* relationship if the prophet had found favour in Yahweh's eyes and if the prophet was pursuing the same objectives as Yahweh. Abraham's high standing in Yahweh's eyes is attested to by none other than Yahweh himself in his divine soliloquy (Gen 18:17-19).

Ninth, in Gen 18:22, Abraham is described as "standing" (״מַעֲמֹד״) before Yahweh. The term ״מַעֲמֹד״ may refer to an act of worship (Jer 7:10), to entering into someone's presence (Deut 19:17; 29:14), to the service of Yahweh (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kgs 3:14; 5:16), or, to a special use of the term to describe the intercessory ministry of a prophet

of Yahweh (Jer 15:1, 9).<sup>36</sup> In the context of the negotiation dialogue which follows in Gen 18:23-32, it would appear that in Gen 18:22, this final technical meaning of prophetic intercessory ministry is employed<sup>37</sup> which supports Abraham's characterization as Yahweh's prophet. The use of this particular nuance of meaning of *נָבִיא* in Gen 18:22 further establishes the prophetic motif and the suitability of the *Yahweh-prophet* form as the primary literary form of Gen 18:16-33.

Lastly, in Abraham's dialogue with Yahweh, Westermann and Gunkel have noted that theological inquiry underlies Abraham's negotiations with Yahweh.<sup>38</sup> As Abraham presents his arguments and rationale for why Yahweh should grant his intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, he is inquiring about the nature and limits of divine justice and mercy. Adopting Kidner's term, Abraham is "exploring" uncharted territory in his relationship with Yahweh as he tests the boundaries and dynamics of Yahweh's righteousness, justice, and mercy.<sup>39</sup> This form of theological inquiry is more compatible with Abraham being characterized as Yahweh's prophet than as his vassal and is further evidence in support of the *Yahweh-prophet* form as the primary traditio-historical and literary form of Gen 18:16-33.

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<sup>36</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 200-204.

<sup>39</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 133.

## 4.2 *Structure*

The narrative sequence that spans Genesis 18:1 -19:38 is the longest single literary unit within the Abraham cycle.<sup>40</sup> It has been described as “an accomplished work of epic art”<sup>41</sup> and is a densely packed narrative with all the events occurring within a twenty four hour time span.<sup>42</sup> The broader narrative is generally divided into four smaller units consisting of the announcement of Isaac’s birth (18:1-15), Abraham’s intercession for Sodom (18:16-33), the destruction of Sodom and the deliverance of Lot and his family (19:1-29), and incest between Lot and his daughters with the birth of Lot’s sons (19:30-38).

Genesis 18:16-33 is essentially a dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham that occurs between the time of the departure of two of the visitors from Abraham’s tents (18:16) and their arrival at the gates of Sodom (19:1). The conversation is inserted between the birth announcement and reaffirmation of the promise of Isaac (18:1-15) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the birth of Lot’s sons, Moab and Ben-Ammi (19:1-38).

Within chapter 18, the two smaller narrative units (Gen 18:1-15 and 18:16-33) are linked on many levels. First, both narrative accounts take place at the same setting, Abraham’s encampment at Mamre. Second, the same characters (Abraham, Yahweh, the two angels) are present in both scenes. Third, an annunciation of divine intent with respect to a future event is made in each scene. In Gen 18:1-15, the time of Isaac’s birth

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<sup>40</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 40; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 265-266, 272-273; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 204; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 274, 285-286.

<sup>41</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 204.

<sup>42</sup> The plot begins in 18:1 with three visitors arriving during the heat of the day. The events conclude early the next morning when Abraham looks down upon the destruction that has occurred in the Jordan Valley (Gen 19:27-29).

is announced whereas in Gen 18:16-33, judgment and death await Sodom and Gomorrah. Fourth, the major motif of each scene is communicated in the form of a rhetorical question; “Is anything too difficult for Yahweh?” (Gen 18:14) and “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Gen 18:25).<sup>43</sup> Lastly, in each scene, a form of vocalization provokes Yahweh and elicits a confrontation and response from Him. In Gen 18:1-15, it is Sarah’s laugh of disbelief upon hearing the pronouncement that Isaac’s birth would occur in a year’s time (Gen 18:12-15). In the second narrative, the outcry of wickedness from Sodom and Gomorrah results in a judicial inquiry and judgment from Yahweh.

With respect to the relationship between chapters 18 and 19, it is well recognized that the literary elements of Gen 18:1-33 find numerous parallels with the components of the ensuing narrative in Gen 19:1-29 and that the two chapters are examples of the literary technique of paneling and form a paired account or diptych.<sup>44</sup> Both Wenham and Waltke have described in detail the many parallels between the two chapters and the resulting palistrophic or chiasmic structure.<sup>45</sup> In his detailed analysis, Wenham demonstrates that not only are the events, settings, and characters of chapters 18 and 19 “arranged palistrophically so that the second half of the story is a mirror image of the first”,<sup>46</sup> but that this palistrophic structure extends to include the literary techniques employed by the author to compose the narrative.<sup>47</sup>

Within the broader context of the book of Genesis, the events of chapters 18 and

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<sup>43</sup> Secondary rhetorical questions are also present in Genesis 18:16-33: “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” (18:17), “Will You really sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (18:23, 24).

<sup>44</sup> Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 244-253.

<sup>45</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 41-44; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 273-274.

<sup>46</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 41.

<sup>47</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 42-44.

19 find numerous parallels with an earlier description of universal destruction, namely the Flood narrative. Again, Wenham provides a detailed comparison of the two narratives<sup>48</sup> and shows that the parallels exist not only at the level of the literary components of characterization, plot, and setting, but also in the literary forms and techniques employed by the authors.<sup>49</sup> Specifically, Wenham demonstrates that both lengthy narratives are arranged as elaborately and carefully constructed palistrophes.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the literary and theological complexity of Gen 18:16-33, the structure and outline of the text are relatively straightforward as evidenced by the consensus among scholars.<sup>51</sup> The text consists of three accounts of direct speech (18:17-19, 20-21, 23-32) framed and separated by three narrative descriptions of movement (18:16, 22, 33) with each description containing a circumstantial clause.<sup>52</sup>

18:16            Transition and Introduction: Three Visitors Arise to Depart

18:17-19        Divine Soliloquy: Yahweh's Intentions for Abraham<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 42-43.

<sup>49</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to review the authorship and source critical evidence for the Flood narrative and for Genesis 18 and 19. For reviews and analysis of this issue, see Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 30-58, 275-276, 286-287, 299-300; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 159-169; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 44-45; von Rad, *Genesis*, 13-30, 119-125, 204, 216; T. Desmond Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," (PhD diss., Queen's University of Belfast, 1982), 68-106, 265-291; Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch*, 17-242; Wenham, "Pondering the Pentateuch," 116-144; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, (trans. John J. Scullion; JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 108-133; T. Desmond Alexander, "Authorship of the Pentateuch," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, (eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 61-72.

<sup>50</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 155-158; idem., *Genesis 16-50*, 41-44.

<sup>51</sup> Waltke and Fredriks, *Genesis*, 266; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 209; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 349; Kidner, *Genesis*, 132-133.

<sup>52</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 37-38; Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 79-82.

<sup>53</sup> A monologue is a dramatic speech delivered by a single speaker, who may or may not be alone on stage, and that does not include another's response. A soliloquy is a form of monologue in which a speaker delivers a speech which is heard only by the audience and not by the other characters. The speaker may be alone on stage, may believe himself to be alone, or may be speaking to himself. See Ronald W. Vince, "Monologue," *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre & Performance*, 2:875-876; Ronald W. Vince, "Soliloquy," *OETP*, 2:1258; B. Ashton Nichols, "Monologue," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of*

- 18:20-21      Divine Monologue: Yahweh's Intentions for Sodom and Gomorrah
- 18:22            Transition: Two Visitors Depart
- 18:23-32      Dialogue between Yahweh & Abraham: Abraham's Intentions for Sodom and Gomorrah
- 18:33            Transition and Conclusion: Yahweh Departs and Abraham Returns Home

*Table 2 - Structure of Genesis 18:16-22*

	Literary Form	Syntax	Dramatic Action
18:16	Transition and Introduction	1. Circumstantial clause	1. Visitors arise 2. Visitors' gazes turn towards Sodom 3. Abraham arises as well
18:17-19	Soliloquy	1. Interruption of narrative sequence a. <i>waw</i> of accompaniment b. change in word order c. change in verbal forms with participles + independent personal pronouns 2. Extended circumstantial clause with: a. rhetorical question b. explicative clause (ו) c. explicative clause (וְעַד)	Action involves only 3:  1. God 2. narrator 3. reader/audience
18:20-21	Monologue	1. Resumption of narrative sequence 2. Volitive sequence in 18:21 with 1cs cohortatives	1. God alone speaks 2. Abraham and visitors listen.
18:22	Transition	1. Circumstantial clause	1. Two visitors depart
18:23-32	Dialogue	For detailed analysis, see Table 3	1. God and Abraham
18:33	Conclusion	1. Circumstantial clause 2. Change in word order 3. Change in verbal form with perfects instead of <i>waw</i> + imperfect 4. <i>waw</i> adversative contrasting final actions of Abraham and God.	1. God departs 2. Abraham returns home.

### 4.3 *Setting*

With respect to the historical setting for the composition of Gen 18:16-33, commentators are divided into two schools of thought. The first school holds that Gen 18:16-33 was a late insertion by redactors into the Abraham narrative.<sup>54</sup> The second school argues that it was the work of the same author and written concurrently with the rest of the account spanning Gen 18:1 to 19:38.

Several lines of evidence have been advanced in support of Gen 18:16-33 being a late insertion. First, the theological issues and concerns raised in the text parallel those which occupied Biblical authors during later periods in the history of ancient Israel. Following this line of reasoning, three possible late settings have been postulated.<sup>55</sup> The book of Job questions the justice of Yahweh and whether Yahweh truly treats the righteous and the wicked differently (Job 12:4, 16; 9:22; 21:17). As a result, it has been suggested that Gen 18:16-33 was written after the time of Job by an author seeking to address these questions and concerns regarding theodicy and divine justice. A slightly later date of authorship finds parallels with the writings (Psalms, Proverbs). A major motif in this body of Hebrew scripture is the righteous and the wicked and the opposite fates which await each. Psalm 1 is cited as an illustrative example. The postexilic period is probably the most commonly proposed date for the authorship of Gen 18:16-33. Proponents of this view see

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<sup>54</sup> Commentators who support Gen 18:16-33 as a late insertion include Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286-287; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 200-202; Skinner, *Genesis*, 298, 303; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 209; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 162-164. Scholars who support a late date of authorship of Gen 18:16-33 also tend to hold to a late date (postexilic) for the existence of the author of the J or Yahwistic source document. For a discussion on this issue, see J. A. Emerton, "The Date of the Yahwist," in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (ed. John Day; JSOTSup 406; New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 107-129; Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch*, 17-131; 221-242; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, (trans. John J. Scullion; JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 108-133; Alexander, "Authorship of the Pentateuch," 61-72.

<sup>55</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286-287.

parallels between the text in question and the prevalence of the motif of Yahweh's judgment of the nations in the writings of the postexilic prophets (eg. Ezek 14:12-20; Jer 18:7-10; Jonah 3-4; Zeph 2:1-15; Amos 4:1-13; Nah 1-3; Hab 1:5-17; 2:2-20). They suggest that the author of Gen 18:16-33 is referring back to the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah in order to explain to his contemporaries who have experienced captivity and exile, Yahweh's justice in the context of the history of the nations. By so doing, the author also reminds the postexilic audience of Yahweh's promises to Abraham and points to Abraham as the model of justice and righteousness for his generation.<sup>56</sup>

The second line of evidence is closely related to the first and involves the issue of individual versus corporate or communal guilt.<sup>57</sup> In the culture, history, and literature of early Ancient Israel, communal relationships were paramount and life was experienced in community. No one lived or acted in isolation. The consequences of an individual's actions affected the community and individuals were included in the fate of their community as well (Gen 20:9; Josh 7:1, 10-15, 24-26; Deut 21:1-9).<sup>58</sup> In the late seventh and early sixth centuries B.C.E., there was a transition from this communal perspective to individualism and a shift from corporate to individual responsibility for sin guilt (Deut 24:16; 2 Kgs 14:6; Ezek 18:1). Proponents of a late date of authorship see evidence of this individualistic perspective in Abraham's negotiations with Yahweh and argue that this supports their position.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286-287. Westermann cites L.Schmidt, " 'De Deo'. Studien zur Literarkritik und Theologie des Buches Jona, des Gesprächs zwischen Abraham und Jahwe in Gen 18,22ff. und von Hiob 1," *BZAW* 143 (1976): 131-164.

<sup>57</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 212.

<sup>58</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1962-1965), 1:264-269, 1:380-383, 1:389, 1:392-399, 1:412-414, 1:443, 2:232.

<sup>59</sup> Unlike other proponents of a late date of authorship, von Rad voices caution concerning this line of evidence. He does not believe that Gen 18:16-32 is an expression of the transition from a communal to individual perspective. Rather, von Rad argues that Abraham remains communal in his perspective and questions which element within a community determines the community's fate. Is it the actions and moral state of the majority or can a minority of righteous individuals carry the day because the righteous, no

The third line of evidence supporting a late date of authorship for Gen 18:16-33 is found in the comparison between the literary form of this text with the forms of the preceding (Gen 18:1-15) and following narratives (Gen 19:1-38). In contrast to the material which comes before and after, there is a paucity of action in Gen 18:16-33. Instead, the content is abstract theological principles and the tone is reflective and revelatory. Von Rad observes that the narrator's voice is much more explicit and the use of literary devices such as soliloquy, monologue, and dialogue reveals the thoughts, intent, anxieties, and inner workings of the characters. The rhetorical purpose of the author is the communication of a theological message rather than events in a plot sequence.<sup>60</sup> This departure from the literary form of Gen 18:1-15 and 19:1-38 suggests a different author and possibly a later author who inserted the text to provide essential background information to explain the theological significance of what would transpire in 19:1-29. The inclusion of Gen 18:16-33 explains that Yahweh's decision and actions concerning Sodom and Gomorrah were not capricious and arbitrary. Instead, they were just and followed due judicial process. More importantly, the insertion of Gen 18:16-33 demonstrates that Yahweh's desire was to show mercy and the resultant judgment of destruction was a reluctant act on His part.

Lastly, a late date of authorship is suggested by the presence of terms and phrases in Gen 18:16-33 which are associated with later Biblical authors. The phrase "the way of Yahweh" is a common expression in the Psalms while "doing righteousness and justice" is a frequent postexilic expression and a theological concept common in Deuteronomy (Deut

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matter how few, are (more) important to Yahweh. The righteous are so precious to Yahweh that on their account, He would pardon the larger community who would otherwise receive merited judgment. Abraham initially asks that the righteous be spared the fate of the wicked in Sodom. On the surface, it appears that he is thinking individualistically and not collectively. However, as he presses his case before Yahweh, he is actually seeking the pardon of the entire city which Von Rad argues demonstrates a communal or collective perspective. See von Rad, *Genesis*, 212-213; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:392-399.

<sup>60</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 209.

33:21) and in wisdom literature (Prov 21:3).

In contradistinction to the above lines of argument, Wenham proposes that Gen 18:16-33 was authored by the same individual who wrote the literary unit from Gen 18:1 to 19:38 and that it was written contemporaneously with the narratives announcing the birth of Isaac and describing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In support of his position, Wenham offers two lines of evidence. First, he points out that the concept of individual responsibility was not exclusive to the postexilic period but was present in second millennium Mesopotamian literature and in wisdom literature (eg. Psa 51).<sup>61</sup> Second, Gen 18:16-33 is critical to the internal coherence of the larger narrative from 18:1 to 19:38. Wenham cites the elaborate palistrophic structure and the use of panelling in chapters 18 and 19 as evidence that 18:16-33 is an essential component in the composition of the overall narrative, that is was written contemporaneously, and that it was not an editorial interlude inserted by a later redactor.<sup>62</sup>

There are several weaknesses in Wenham's position. First, he does not address the presence of theological issues in Gen 18:16-33 that were the concern of later rather than earlier Biblical authors. Second, he also fails to address the issue of the terms and phrases in Gen 18:19 which were typical of later compositions such as the Psalms, wisdom literature, and postexilic writings. Third, at least one element in Wenham's proposed palistrophic outline of Gen 18 & 19 is problematic. In his outline, Wenham pairs Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah with what he describes as Lot's intercession for Zoar.<sup>63</sup> A close reading of Gen 19:18-23 reveals that it would be dubious to consider Lot's desperate prayer

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<sup>61</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 44.

<sup>62</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 41.

as an attempt at intercession for Zoar. The text suggests that in contrast to his uncle's prayer, Lot's concern is for his own survival and that his prayer is motivated by self-preservation.

At this point in time, in the absence of new evidence for consideration, it appears that there is more support for the position that Gen 18:16-33 is a late insertion into the broader literary unit of Gen 18-19.<sup>64</sup> However, despite some shortcomings, Wenham's observations that Gen 18:16-33 is structurally and rhetorically integrated into the literary and theological composition of the broader narrative of Gen 18-19 cannot be simply ignored. Genesis 18:16-33 is a component of the palistrophic structure of Gen 18-19 and as such, contributes to the internal coherence of the larger narrative spanning Gen 18-19.

From his observations, Wenham has concluded that a single individual authored the *entire literary unit spanning Gen 18-19 and that Gen 18:16-33 was written contemporaneously with the birth announcement of Isaac and the destruction of the two cities*. However, an alternative conclusion can be drawn from Wenham's observations. The internal coherence of Gen 18-19 and the integration of Gen 18:16-33 into the literary and theological structure of the broader narrative may represent evidence that Gen 18:16-33 was not an arbitrary and incongruent insertion by a late redactor. Rather, Wenham's studies suggest that the postulated late insertion of Gen 18:16-33 was an editorial act which was carefully undertaken to produce a final text which remained internally coherent and

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<sup>64</sup> As reviewed above, there are two hypotheses concerning the setting and authorship of Gen 18:16-33. The first suggests that one author, the Yahwist, wrote 18:1-15 and 19:1-38 and that 18:16-33 was a later insertion composed by a second author. The alternative hypothesis held by Wenham is that the entire account from 18:1 to 19:38 was written by a single author and that 18:16-33 was not a subsequent insertion. Van Seters has put forward a third hypothesis which incorporates features of the other two. Like Wenham, Van Seters proposes that chapters 18 and 19 were entirely written by a single author. Further, he postulates that this author wrote during a late period in Israel's history, either exilic or postexilic. Van Seters' contribution to the discussion comes in his suggestion that this author of 18:1 to 19:38 was not the same author who wrote the rest of the Abraham Cycle but was instead a second author who contributed the Mamre-Sodom narrative to the Abraham account. See John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 206-215.

theologically consistent.

## 4.4 *Exegesis and Commentary*

### 4.4.1 *Transition and Introduction (18:16)*

This verse functions as a point of transition marking the end of the preceding narrative announcing Isaac's birth and introducing a new account with its annunciation of impending judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the first of three verses within the narrative of Gen 18:16-33 which contain descriptions of movement by the characters and which serve to frame and separate the units of direct speech in Gen 18:16-33.

The author signals the beginning of a new narrative by the presence of three literary cues in this opening verse. First, the visitors stand up and by so doing, provide a cultural cue that from their perspective as Abraham's guests, the visit is over. Second, the description of the men looking down towards Sodom indicates a change in the subject of the broader narrative which runs from 18:1 to 19:38. The focus of the narrative has now shifted from Abraham's family to the inhabitants of Sodom. The narrator's description of the new focus of the visitors' gaze is intended to direct the gaze and attention of the reader towards Sodom as well. Third, following ANE custom, Abraham accompanies them for a short distance to send them off. As the host, his actions acknowledge and accept the end of the visit as well.

This shift in plot and subject is also marked by a grammatical clue as well. The verb  $\eta\kappa\psi$  occurs in both the Niphal and Hiphil stems. The lexical entry in *HALOT* differentiates the nuance of meaning associated with each stem. It specifies that in the Niphal,  $\eta\kappa\psi$  means "to look down from above, from the standpoint of the observer" whereas in the Hiphil,  $\eta\kappa\psi$  means "to look down from above from the standpoint of the one observed". In this case, the one observed is the city of Sodom. The author's choice of the Hiphil stem serves as a rhetorical indicator to the reader that the focal point of narrative has now shifted from

Abraham's family to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and from a promise of life and hope to the pronouncement of judgment and death.<sup>65</sup>

In the preceding chapters, the narrator has interspersed comments concerning Sodom (Gen 13:10-13; 14:1-24). These comments serve an anticipatory function to create suspense in the reader and to prepare the reader for future plot events involving Sodom.<sup>66</sup> By directing the gaze of the characters towards Sodom, the author now brings this anticipatory information from the earlier chapters into the forefront of the reader's mind, creates an ominous, foreboding tone, and heightens the dramatic tension as the plot begins to unfold.

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<sup>65</sup> “קש”, *HALOT*, 4:1645.

<sup>66</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, “The Anticipatory Use of Information as a Literary Feature of the Genesis Narratives,” in *The Creation of Sacred Literature: Composition and Redaction of the Biblical Text* (ed. Richard E. Friedman; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 76-82.

#### 4.4.2 *Divine Soliloquy: Yahweh's Intentions For Abraham (18:17-19)*

##### 4.4.2.1 *General Comments on the Literary Form and Function of Genesis 18:17-19*

This literary subunit is notable for being one of the few divine soliloquies<sup>67</sup> in the Hebrew Bible<sup>68</sup> as Yahweh addresses Himself and only the narrator and the reader are aware of Yahweh's thoughts and intentions.<sup>69</sup> The soliloquy opens with a rhetorical question followed by two causal or explicative subordinate clauses which provide the reasons for the inherently obvious negative answer to that question.<sup>70</sup>

As a literary or dramatic device, soliloquies are employed by authors to reveal information to the audience which is withheld from the other characters. This information may serve several functions: historical background to provide context and inform the audience, anticipatory clues which lay the groundwork for future plot events, revelation of the reason, purpose, or intent behind a decision or action by a character, and character development as the inner thoughts, emotions, and deliberations of a character are exposed. Typically, the character delivering the soliloquy is alone, is speaking audibly or internally to himself or herself, and is only heard by the audience and not by the other characters. By

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<sup>67</sup> A soliloquy is a form of monologue in which a speaker delivers a speech which is heard only by the audience and not by the other characters. The speaker may be alone on stage, may believe himself to be alone, or may be speaking to himself. See Ronald W. Vince, "Monologue," *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre & Performance*, 2:875-876; Ronald W. Vince, "Soliloquy," *OETP*, 2:1258; B. Ashton Nichols, "Monologue," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 798-800.

<sup>68</sup> The following commentators view Gen 18:17-19 as a divine soliloquy: Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 288; von Rad, *Genesis*, 209; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 49-50; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 268; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 17; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 349; Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 248-249; Skinner, *Genesis*, 303.

<sup>69</sup> The syntax, content, and context support the translation of וַיְהוָה אֵלָיו in Gen 18:17 as "And Yahweh said to Himself." There is also strong lexical support for אֵלָיו having the translation value of "to think, to say to oneself, to say in the heart." For a discussion on this issue, see *Chapter 3: Translation and Translation Notes*.

<sup>70</sup> Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 178; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 599-601; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 640-641.

convention, a soliloquy is understood to always be truthful as the speaker's thoughts are the very words of the soliloquy and one cannot lie to oneself.<sup>71</sup> "This indeed is the value conventionally ascribed to the monologue: it imprints on a speech the mark of utmost sincerity and of absolute truthfulness."<sup>72</sup>

The soliloquy has a powerful rhetorical function. By providing information to the audience which is withheld from the other characters, the audience now possesses more knowledge than those who are in the narrative. Frequently, this knowledge is information which is critical to the unfolding of the plot. The net result is a heightening of dramatic tension and suspense and increased attention and interest on the part of the audience as they are drawn into the narrative. The reader is no longer an observer but is now a participant in the plot.

There have been several studies of soliloquies in the Hebrew Bible. Unfortunately, these studies are limited by their sociological, psychological, and anthropological perspectives, by a failure to employ literary critical methods in the examination of a literary device, and by the use of questionable definitions with the inclusion of texts which are clearly dialogue and the omission of recognized soliloquies such as Gen 18:17-19.<sup>73</sup> At the same time however, these studies have advanced the understanding of the literary function and significance of soliloquies in the Hebrew Bible.

Mackenzie attempted to identify a divine soliloquy literary form or schema and proposed that they contained two elements: motivation with a description of need or

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<sup>71</sup> The exception would be a character who is portrayed as having a psychiatric disorder such as schizophrenia or multiple personalities.

<sup>72</sup> Roger Lapointe, "The Divine Monologue as a Channel of Revelation," *CBQ* 32 (1970), 180.

<sup>73</sup> R. A. F. Mackenzie, "The Divine Soliloquies in Genesis," *CBQ* 17 (1955), 157-166; Lapointe, "The Divine Monologue," 161-181.

judgment, and proposition which outlined the plan of action.<sup>74</sup> Within Genesis, several of the divine soliloquies occur in the context of judgment (Gen 3:22; 6:3, 7; 8:21, 22; 11:6, 7; 18:17-19) but this is not always the case in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible.

In his study, Lapointe made four observations concerning the possible rhetorical purpose intended by a Biblical author when a soliloquy is employed. First, a soliloquy is “authentic, unadulterated, and truthful”.<sup>75</sup> The author provides the reader with direct access to Yahweh’s thoughts, intentions, and purposes. The reader can be assured that the content of the soliloquy is true and trustworthy. Second, a soliloquy is a vehicle for immanent anthropomorphic depictions of Yahweh. Yahweh is portrayed as an individual with motives, plans, intentions, and doubts.<sup>76</sup> Third, when speaking in soliloquy, a character is alone on stage or in a scene and is isolated from the other characters. For Lapointe, the isolation of a divine soliloquy is a reminder of Yahweh’s transcendence.<sup>77</sup> Lastly, by employing a soliloquy to provide divine reflection, the author serves a prophetic function, mediating knowledge of Yahweh by revealing Yahweh’s thoughts and intentions.<sup>78</sup>

In the context of Gen 18:16-33, the soliloquy of 18:17-19 fulfills several critical literary and theological functions. First, the soliloquy’s initial rhetorical question is central to Gen 18:16-33 and directs the subsequent literary and theological development of the narrative. The implied answer to the rhetorical question regarding whether Abraham should be informed of Yahweh’s intentions indicates Yahweh’s invitation to Abraham to share in

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<sup>74</sup> Mackenzie, “Divine Soliloquies in Genesis,” 279-280. Mackenzie did not include Gen 18:17-19 in his list of divine soliloquies in Genesis because he believed that it was a late insertion and not the work of the Yahwist. He also acknowledges that the literary form and content of the soliloquy in Gen 18:17-19 did not follow that of the other soliloquies in Genesis.

<sup>75</sup> Lapointe, “The Divine Monologue,” 179.

<sup>76</sup> Lapointe, “The Divine Monologue,” 180.

<sup>77</sup> Lapointe, “The Divine Monologue,” 180.

<sup>78</sup> Lapointe, “The Divine Monologue,” 180.

the divine knowledge, counsel, and deliberations. This invitation foreshadows aspects of the prophetic office (Amos 3:7; Jer 23:18) and casts Abraham in the role of Yahweh's prophet.<sup>79</sup>

Second, by repeating the promises of nationhood and mediation of blessing within the literary structure of a soliloquy, the author affirms the authenticity, veracity, and trustworthiness of those promises. In fact, this is the first and only time that the promises given to the patriarchs are affirmed in a soliloquy. However, Yahweh's soliloquy also introduces the condition that the fulfilment of the promises will be predicated on the obedience of Abraham and his descendants to Yahweh's commands. In Gen 18:19, the realization of the promises is causally connected to the ability of Abraham and his descendants keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice. Both the promises and the responsibilities given to Abraham are affirmed and authenticated by Yahweh's soliloquy.

Third, the soliloquy delivers an endorsement by Yahweh Himself of Abraham's high standing before Yahweh. Brueggeman describes this divine testimonial as "an extravagant credentialing of Abraham, perhaps the most extravagant of all scripture."<sup>80</sup> As discussed above, by convention, a soliloquy is understood to be always truthful as the speaker's thoughts are the very words of the soliloquy. Therefore, Yahweh's endorsement is neither hyperbole nor falsehood but an authentic and true affirmation of Abraham's high standing. This high standing is one reason which justifies Yahweh's decision to confide in Abraham and reveal his intentions.

Lastly, as discussed above, the author's use of soliloquy achieves a powerful rhetorical function. It is important to bear in mind that even prior to Genesis 18, the narrator

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<sup>79</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 17-19.

<sup>80</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II: Embrace of Pain," *CBQ* 47 (1985), 409.

has already supplied the audience with anticipatory information concerning the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah and that the two cities would be destroyed (Gen 13:10-13).<sup>81</sup> As the characters in the narrative direct their gaze towards Sodom, so too are the reader's thoughts and this anticipatory knowledge is brought to the foreground of the reader's mind. The opening verses of Yahweh's soliloquy firmly establish that Sodom is the focal point of the ensuing plot events. The information possessed by the reader results in the "uneasy feeling that Abraham's efforts to dissuade Yahweh will be in vain."<sup>82</sup> As will be discussed subsequently in this study, if this is the case, then what would be the literary and theological purpose for the inclusion of this futile attempt at intercession in the Abraham Cycle?

The author's use of soliloquy complements the *a priori* provision of anticipatory information to the reader. Through these two literary techniques, the reader possesses more knowledge than the characters in the narrative and is aware of the final outcome even as events are unfolding in the plot of Gen 18:16-33. The end result is a heightening of dramatic tension and suspense and increased attention and interest on the part of the audience as they are drawn into the narrative.

In summary, the introductory verses of Gen 18:17-19 are critical to the unfolding of the ensuing narrative. This central status is emphasized by the author's decision to present these verses in the literary form of a divine soliloquy.

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<sup>81</sup> See Sarna, "Anticipatory Use of Information," 76-82.

<sup>82</sup> Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 86.

#### 4.4.2.2 *Genesis 18:17*

This is the second of five rhetorical questions posed in Genesis 18.<sup>83</sup> Yahweh's rhetorical question plays a central role in the theological and rhetorical direction and development of the ensuing narrative. The remaining verses in the divine soliloquy, Gen 18:18-19, provide the reasons for the implicit negative answer to the rhetorical question and why Abraham merits God's trust. These reasons arise from the nature of the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham as characterized in Gen 18:17-19. The divine monologue of Gen 18:20-21 informs Abraham of Yahweh's intentions concerning Sodom and Gomorrah and represents Yahweh implementing the answer to his rhetorical question. The negotiation dialogue of Gen 18:23-32 is the result which arises from Yahweh's revelation of his intentions in answer to his initial rhetorical question.

The context emphatically provides the implicit answer in the negative to the rhetorical question. Rephrased as a statement, Yahweh's rhetorical question would read, "I shall reveal/confide to Abraham what I am about to do." Within the Hebrew Bible, the prophets were one select group of individuals to whom Yahweh revealed his purposes and plans (Amos 3:7). The point of the question is whether Abraham would be elevated to the status of Yahweh's prophet and become privy to the divine deliberations (Jer 23:18, 22) and experience the same privileged relationship with Yahweh that the subsequent prophets enjoyed. The events of the ensuing narrative confirm the implied answer to the rhetorical question as God interacts with him as one of his prophets by confiding in Abraham and inviting him to participate in the divine deliberations concerning Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20-21, 23-32; 20:7). This invitation not only foreshadows aspects of the prophetic office

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<sup>83</sup> The other rhetorical questions are found in Gen 18:14, 23, 24, 25.

(Gen 20:7; Amos 3:7; Jer 23:16-22; John 15:15)<sup>84</sup> but as a participant in Yahweh's rule, Abraham is in effect, transported back to Genesis 1 and 2 as a steward and co-regent of creation with Yahweh (Gen 1:26-31; 2:15, 19).

Yahweh's rhetorical question possesses an element of ambiguity which prompts the reader to consider what exactly is Yahweh about to do.<sup>85</sup> Yahweh does not specify His intended action and the vagueness and mystery create suspense in the reader's mind thereby drawing the reader further into the narrative. Is Yahweh affirming that He will fulfill the covenant promises granted to Abraham or is His intended action directed towards Sodom? The context favours Sodom being the object of Yahweh's attention. In the preceding chapters, Yahweh repeatedly assured Abraham that He intended to and could be trusted to fulfill His promises (Gen 12:1-7; 13:14-18; 15:1-21; 17:1-22). In fact, a key theme in the Abraham cycle is that independent of his circumstances, Abraham could trust Yahweh to be faithful. For Yahweh to reaffirm yet again His faithfulness to the promises given to Abraham would appear to be redundant. Also, as discussed above, in Gen 18:16, the narrator directs the gaze of the visitors and the reader from Abraham to Sodom; thereby indicating that Sodom is the focus of the narrative in 18:16-33.

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<sup>84</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 17-18; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 50; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 268; Sarna, *Genesis*, 131.

<sup>85</sup> The verb  $\text{הָיָה}$  in Gen 18:17 is a Qal active participle. In terms of syntax, it functions as a *futurum instans* participle and conveys the nuance of "certainty, often with immanency". See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 37; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 623-627; Skinner, *Genesis*, 304.

#### 4.4.2.3 Genesis 18:18

Genesis 18:18 is introduced by an explicative or exegetical *waw*.<sup>86</sup> It is the first of two successive explicative clauses which answer the rhetorical question of Gen 18:17 by providing the reasons why Yahweh should confide in Abraham and reveal to Abraham his intentions regarding Sodom and Gomorrah.

The exegetical issues which shape the translation and understanding of this verse are ones related to grammar and syntax. The first issue is the voice of the verb **בָּרַךְ** which occurs in the Niphal stem in 18:18. Should the verb be translated with a passive, reflexive, or middle voice? To date, there is no clear exegetical solution acceptable to all and scholarly debate continues. A review of each interpretive option with respective supporting arguments follows in section 4.4.2.4.

The second exegetical issue is the author's skilful combination of syntactical and literary techniques to emphasize the authenticity and veracity of Yahweh's promises to Abraham and the certainty of their fulfilment. Four asseverative or emphatic techniques are employed in Gen 18:18 to accomplish this rhetorical purpose. First, as discussed above, by placing the promises within a divine soliloquy, the author has chosen a literary form which is understood to be intrinsically truthful and trustworthy<sup>87</sup> with the result that the soliloquy emphasizes that the promises are "authentic, unadulterated, and truthful."<sup>88</sup>

Second, in a manner similar to 18:17, there is a change in the expected word order with the verse beginning with the subject followed by the verb and object rather than the conventional *verb-subject-object*. As reviewed previously, a change in the conventional

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<sup>86</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 71; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 147, 178; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 599; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 640-641, 652-653.

<sup>87</sup> Lapointe, "The Divine Monologue," 180.

<sup>88</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 17.

word order in biblical Hebrew is employed by the author to accomplish a variety of rhetorical purposes.<sup>89</sup> In Gen 18:18, it is the subject *Abraham* which opens the verse rather than the verb. This indicates that it is the author's intent to emphasize that the focus of this verse is on Abraham and the certainty of his realization of Yahweh's promises. This emphasis on Abraham is also conveyed by the threefold repetition of Abraham's name in Gen 18:16-18.

Third, affirmation of the authenticity and certainty of the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises is indicated by the *infinitive absolute + imperfect* verbal construction which opens the verse.<sup>90</sup>

Lastly, Wenham and Westermann have noted that the repetition of the promises in Gen 18:18 contains two modifications which augment the magnitude of the original promises given in Gen 12:1-7. First, the "families" or "clans" (משפחות) of 12:3 has been replaced by the more expansive term of "nations" (גוי) in 18:18. Second, the adjective "powerful" or "mighty" (עצום) has been added to the description of the "great nation" (גוי גדול) that Abraham is promised his descendants will become.<sup>91</sup> By expanding the scope of the promises, Gen 18:18 emphasizes the authenticity and trustworthiness of the original promises of Gen 12:1-7.

In summary, the author desires to draw the reader's attention to the authenticity and veracity of Yahweh's promises to Abraham and the certainty of their fulfilment. To

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<sup>89</sup> A change in the word order of a sentence in Biblical Hebrew such that the subject precedes the verb is employed by the author to indicate emphasis, contrast, or a change of subject, to express anterior time, or when the subject is an interrogative pronoun. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 96-98; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 547.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed discussion of the grammatical and syntactical features of the infinitive absolute, see Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 37-38; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 74-76; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 584-588; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 392-398; Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 83-92.

<sup>91</sup> Wenham, *Genesis*, 50; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 288.

accomplish this, four emphatic or asseverative syntactical and literary techniques are concurrently employed. The use of multiple literary devices to convey the rhetorical effect of emphasis underscores the importance of the theological message of Gen 18:18. This message is that in light of being the recipient of the promises from Yahweh, Abraham's status had now been elevated "to a level of importance and honour such that he is deemed worthy to share in God's plan."<sup>92</sup> The first reason why God should confide in Abraham is the fact that as the recipient of such wonderful promises, Abraham deserves to be informed of God's intentions and plans.

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<sup>92</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 288.

#### 4.4.2.4 *The Voice of בָּרַךְ in the Niphal in Genesis 18:18*

The verb בָּרַךְ is most commonly found in the Hebrew scriptures with an active voice in the Piel stem.<sup>93</sup> It is infrequently found in the Niphal and Hithpael stems. The Niphal of בָּרַךְ appears on only three occasions in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 12:3, 18:18; and 28:14) and each of these are parallel passages and iterations of the blessing formula involving Abraham and the nations of the earth.<sup>94</sup> The Hithpael of בָּרַךְ occurs in Gen 22:18; 26:4 (also iterations of the blessing formula involving Abraham and the nations); Ps 72:17; Isa 65:16 (twice, once as a participle and once as an imperfect); Deut 29:18; and Jer 4:2.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, any examination of the meaning of בָּרַךְ in Gen 18:18 requires a study of its use in Gen 12:3 where it first appears.

Discussion and debate concerning the translation of נִבְרַכְו in Gen 12:3 are ongoing and remain unresolved. Historically, three interpretive positions have been advanced with each supported by equally compelling arguments and evidence put forward by highly respected scholars.<sup>96</sup> The first interpretation sees the Niphal of בָּרַךְ in Gen 12:3 as possessing a reflexive voice meaning “to bless themselves” and translated as “may we be blessed like Abram was blessed”.<sup>97</sup> The second argues for a passive sense meaning “to be

<sup>93</sup> בָּרַךְ is found 235 times in the Piel stem in the Hebrew scriptures. See “בָּרַךְ”, *BDB*, 138 and “בָּרַךְ”, *HALOT*, 160.

<sup>94</sup> “בָּרַךְ”, *BDB*, 138 and “בָּרַךְ”, *HALOT*, 160.

<sup>95</sup> “בָּרַךְ”, *BDB*, 139 and “בָּרַךְ”, *HALOT*, 160.

<sup>96</sup> For a historical survey of scholarship in support of each interpretive position (reflexive, middle, or passive voice readings), see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1994), 277-278; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 151-152.

<sup>97</sup> Those who support a reflexive sense include: Speiser, *Genesis*, 85-88; Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (trans. Sophia Taylor; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888; repr., Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1978), 378-380; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 244-245; Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis* (ed. and trans. Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob; New York: Ktav Publishing, 1974), 85-87; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 120; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 163-165; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 144-152; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 158-161; Sarna, *Genesis*, 89-90; and the RSV and NEB translations of the Bible. Interestingly, even though Sarna translates נִבְרַכְו with a reflexive voice, he acknowledges that the “more likely

blessed”.<sup>98</sup> The third interpretive position advocates a middle voice translated as “to find blessing, to gain blessing, or to win blessing”.<sup>99</sup>

Hebrew grammarians generally believe that the Niphal was originally the simple reflexive, serving as the reflexive of the Qal stem.<sup>100</sup> Over time, it also acquired the passive meaning of the Qal stem as the Qal passive gradually disappeared linguistically.<sup>101</sup> According to Jouon and Muraoka, the principal meaning of the Niphal is reflexive but they acknowledge that it often has a passive sense and can also have “the force of the Greek *middle voice*”.<sup>102</sup> Further, Waltke and O’Connor suggest that the passive sense of the Niphal developed from the middle and that although the passive sense is more prevalent in the Hebrew Bible, it is the middle which has the broadest range of meaning.<sup>103</sup> When translating into English, capturing a particular nuance from within this diversity of meaning in the Hebrew has proven to be quite challenging.

In an attempt to capture the various nuances of meaning associated with the Niphal stem, Lambdin classified the usage of the Niphal into four categories on the basis of their

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translation of the verb is as a passive: ‘shall be blessed through — because of — you.’ ”

<sup>98</sup> Those supporting a passive voice for the Niphal of בָּרַךְ include: Oswald T. Allis, “The Blessing of Abraham,” *PTR* 25 (1927): 263-298; Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis*, 2:315; Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 370-376; Kidner, *Genesis*, 114; David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (vol. 1 of *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*; ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 88-91; Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), 50-51; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 13; and the KJV, NASB, and NIV translations of the Bible.

<sup>99</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 266, 277-278.

<sup>100</sup> For discussions of the grammar and syntax of the Niphal stem, see Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 154-156; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 38-41; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 378-395; T.O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 175-178; Pratico and Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 286-292.

<sup>101</sup> Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 154-156; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 38-41.

<sup>102</sup> Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 138-140.

<sup>103</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 380-381.

translational equivalents in English: incomplete passive, middle, reflexive, and resultative.<sup>104</sup> However, he cautioned that “the four categories have been defined on the basis of English. In Hebrew, however, they are one: the medio-passive as expressed by the Niphal form. Only a careful study of the context will enable the reader to decide among the various possibilities.”<sup>105</sup>

Alternatively, Waltke and O’Connor propose classifying the Niphal stem as middle, passive, adjectival (simple adjectival, ingressive, gerundive), and double status (reflexive, benefactive, reciprocal, tolerative, causative-reflexive).<sup>106</sup> They share the same opinion as Lambdin that there is a common nuance of meaning associated with the Niphal stem. However, unlike Lambdin, Waltke and O’Connor classify this common meaning as medio-reflexive rather than medio-passive.<sup>107</sup> Their position is summarized by their observation that “in all the specific uses of the Niphal, we find the common notion(s) that the action or state expressed by the verb affects the subject (as in the middle voice) or its interests (as in the reflexive). Species 1, 2, and 3 can plausibly be associated with the middle notion and the others with the reflexive.”<sup>108</sup>

Lambdin, Waltke and O’Connor agree that the Niphal possesses a common idea in which the subject is affected by the verbal action. This action can be self initiated (reflexive) or originate from a source extrinsic to the subject (middle or passive). This common verbal idea is expressed with diverse nuances of meaning depending on the context. Waltke and O’Connor agree with Lambdin in noting that “the stem’s value differs according to a word’s

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<sup>104</sup> Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 176-177.

<sup>105</sup> Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 177.

<sup>106</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 380.

<sup>107</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 380.

<sup>108</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 380.

meaning in context”.<sup>109</sup> Capturing this diversity of meaning when translating into English is what has proven to be challenging. The challenge arises from the limitations of the English verbal system which lacks the syntactical flexibility of Hebrew verbs resulting in an awkwardness when translating the middle and passive voices of the Niphal.<sup>110</sup>

Adopting the positions of Lambdin, Waltke and O’Connor, this study proposes that there is no significant difference in meaning or translational value between a middle and a passive reading of the Niphal of בָּרַךְ. In both cases, the subject is affected by a verbal action originating from a source extrinsic to the subject. The proposed English translational equivalents (to find blessing, to win blessing, to gain blessing) advocated by proponents of the middle voice are unsatisfactory as each introduces and assigns a transitive verb (to find, to win, to gain) to the subject when no such verb exists in the Hebrew text.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, this study proposes that the interpretive choice in the translation of the Niphal of בָּרַךְ is between a medio-passive voice or a reflexive voice.

Determining whether the Niphal of בָּרַךְ should be translated with a medio-passive or with a reflexive sense is not an esoteric point of grammar and syntax but has deep theological implications as noted by Speiser who writes, “the distinction may be slight on the surface, yet it is of great consequence theologically.”<sup>112</sup> If נִבְרַכְו is taken passively, then Gen 12:3 “clearly articulates the final goal in a divine plan for universal salvation, and

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<sup>109</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 380.

<sup>110</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 380-381.

<sup>111</sup> Perhaps the basis for a distinction between middle and passive is more theological in nature than grammatical, lexical or linguistic. Are the nations of the earth passive recipients of blessing or do they earn it, seek for it and find it in Abraham? Is the distinction a continuation of the debate between Calvin and Arminius? With respect to this study, the events of Gen 18:16-33 suggest a passive context. Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah without any initiating request or knowledge on the part of the inhabitants of the two cities.

<sup>112</sup> Speiser, *Genesis*, 86. See also Allis, “The Blessing of Abraham,” 263-264.

Abram is the divinely chosen instrument in the implementation of that plan.”<sup>113</sup> Von Rad concludes that a passive voice has the implication that “Abraham is assigned the role of a mediator of blessing in Yahweh’s saving plan, for ‘all the families of the earth’.”<sup>114</sup> Applying the passive sense to the parallel texts (Niphal - Gen 18:18; 28:14; Hithpael - Gen 22:18; 26:4) which are subsequent iterations of the blessing formula first given in Gen 12:3, results in Abraham’s mediatorial role being extended to his descendants who are “viewed as a channel of divine blessing.”<sup>115</sup> Even though he translates **נברכו** with a reflexive sense, Westermann makes a theological conclusion which is consistent with the passive voice reading when he observes that “Yahweh’s action proclaimed in the promise to Abraham is not limited to him and his posterity, but reaches its goal only when it includes all the families of the earth.”<sup>116</sup> Writing in support of the passive voice reading of **נברכו** in Gen 12:3, Childs makes the following conclusion:

However, Genesis makes it clear that the election of Israel was a means and not the end of Yahweh’s purpose for the world. In the important passage of Yahweh’s promise to Abraham of a posterity (12.1ff), the fundamental relationship between Israel and the nations is spelled out. ‘Yahweh said to Abraham: I will make of you a great nation and I will bless your name ... and by you shall all the families of the earth be blessed’ (vv. 2f.). ... Yahweh commanded Abraham, and he obeyed, and Israel became the vehicle by which Yahweh’s whole creation was to be reconciled to its creator.<sup>117</sup>

On the otherhand, if **נברכו** is taken reflexively (“to bless oneself by Abraham” or, “to wish on oneself a blessing like that which Abraham received” ), then Abraham and his descendants are portrayed as primary examples of recipients of divine favour and blessing

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<sup>113</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis: 1-17*, 374.

<sup>114</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 160.

<sup>115</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 84.

<sup>116</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 152.

<sup>117</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 103-104.

and whose names are to be incorporated into the blessing formulae of other nations or as a proverb or idiom of blessing.<sup>118</sup> Skinner summarizes this position in writing that “the name of Abraham will pass into a formula of benediction, because he himself and his seed will be as it were blessedness incarnate.”<sup>119</sup> Other families and nations will only be able to observe the blessed status of Abraham’s family and invoke their name as an expression of their hope and desire to experience a similar state of blessedness for themselves. Further, with a reflexive voice reading of *נברכו*, Gen 12:1-3 and the related parallel passages (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14) no longer contain any element of a divine plan to bring salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*) and blessing to those outside of Abraham’s family.<sup>120</sup>

This study has chosen to read and interpret the Niphal of *ברך* with a passive voice in Gen 12:3; 18:18; and 28:14. This interpretive position is supported by six lines of reasoning.

First, the LXX has chosen to translate *נברכו* with a passive voice in Gen 12:3; 18:18; and 28:14. In addition, Gen 12:3 and 22:18 are cited by Paul in Gal 3:8 and Acts 3:25 respectively. In both cases, the Greek New Testament has chosen to translate *ברך* with a passive voice even though in Gen 22:18, *ברך* is in the Hithpael stem which is generally understood to have a reflexive or reciprocal sense. Further, Kaiser has observed that all five of the blessing formula parallel passages are rendered with a passive sense in the Samaritan, Babylonian, and Jerusalem Targums.<sup>121</sup>

The second line of reasoning in support of a passive voice reading of *נברכו* comes from an examination of the parallel passages in Genesis (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4;

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<sup>118</sup> Chisholm, *Exegesis to Exposition*, 84.

<sup>119</sup> Skinner, *Genesis*, 245.

<sup>120</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis: 1-17*, 374; Allis, “The Blessing of Abraham,” 266-267; Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods* (ConBOT 1; Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1967), 79-81; Kaiser, *Toward an OT Theology*, 12-13.

<sup>121</sup> Kaiser, *Toward an OT Theology*, 13.

28:14) which speak of the nations being blessed (or blessing themselves) through Abraham and his descendants. In three of these passages, בָּרַךְ appears in the Niphal stem (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 28:14) while in Gen 22:18 and 26:4, it appears in the Hithpael which takes a reflexive or reciprocal sense. Given that the Hithpael is generally reflexive and rarely passive whereas the Niphal can be either reflexive or passive, it has been argued that the reflexive sense of the Hithpael in Gen 22:18 and 26:4 should take precedence and be extended to the other parallel passages in which בָּרַךְ appears in the Niphal stem.<sup>122</sup> However, the converse is equally possible in which the passive voice of the Niphal is extended to the Hithpael. There is evidence in support of this converse possibility. First, as discussed above, the LXX translates the Hithpael of בָּרַךְ in Gen 22:18 and 26:4 with a passive sense. In addition, Gen 22:18 is cited by Paul in Acts 3:25 in which it is translated by the Greek New Testament with a passive voice. Second, contrary to the conventional understanding in biblical Hebrew that the Hithpael stem is either reflexive or reciprocal in meaning, there are examples in the Hebrew Bible in which the Hithpael stem is best translated with a passive sense.<sup>123</sup> It appears that there is relatively more evidence to support the passive sense of the Niphal being extended to the Hithpael than the converse. Source critical studies have attempted to determine the chronology of each of the parallel passages in order to establish precedence in meaning so that later passages could be interpreted in light of the oldest one. However, this methodology assumes that it is the oldest passage which most accurately captures the intent

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<sup>122</sup> Delitzsch was an early advocate of this line of reasoning and his position found subsequent support from later commentators such as Westermann, Skinner, Albrektson, and Speiser. See Delitzsch, *New Commentary on Genesis*, 378-380; Albrektson, *History and the Gods*, 79-81; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 144-152; and Skinner, *Genesis*, 244-245.

<sup>123</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis: 1-17*, 375. Hamilton cites Kaiser, *Toward an OT Theology*, 13. Kaiser in turn, refers to the article by Allis, "The Blessing of Abraham," 280-284. In his article, Allis presents a lengthy and extensive argument in support of a passive translation of נִבְרַכְתָּ in Gen 12:3; 18:18; and 28:14. Further, he advocates for a passive reading of the Hithpael of בָּרַךְ in Gen 22:18 and 26:4. Allis lists 18 Old Testament references in which the Hithpael is best translated with a passive sense. To Allis's list, Hamilton adds Prov 31:30; Eccl 8:10; and Ps 72:17.

of the author and not the later passages. In either case, these studies have been inconclusive.<sup>124</sup>

The remaining four lines of evidence in support of a passive reading of the Niphal of בָּרַךְ in Gen 12:3 (also Gen 18:18; 28:14) arise from a close reading of Gen 12:1-3.

The third line of reasoning in support of a passive voice arises from the characterization that is present in the narrative. Yahweh is clearly the protagonist in Gen 12:1-3. He is the sole speaker as He issues the commands and promises to Abraham. Abraham is the primary and passive recipient of His actions with the nations of the earth being secondary recipients. A passive reading of נִבְרַכְו would continue the characterization of Yahweh as the protagonist and the one who blesses the nations through Abraham at the climactic conclusion of the divine speech. A reflexive reading would see the nations blessing themselves and the theocentric point of view of Gen 12:1-3a would suddenly be changed to an anthropocentric one at the climactic conclusion of the narrative's divine speech. Such an abrupt change in point of view at the climax of Yahweh's speech to Abraham is inconsistent with the narrative's established tone and rhetorical development. Further, the reappearance of an anthropocentric perspective would be unlikely given its firm and unequivocal rejection in the account of the tower of Babel in the immediately preceding chapter.

The fourth line of reasoning in support of a passive voice reading of the Niphal of בָּרַךְ is associated with the phrase, וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה, which occurs in Gen 12:2b. This phrase exhibits an unusual and infrequent construction.<sup>125</sup> Historically, three interpretive positions have been advanced with each position dependent on the grammatical value and syntactical

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<sup>124</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 151.

<sup>125</sup> The only other occurrences are Isa 19:24 and Zech 8:13. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 276.

function of the verb **והיה**.<sup>126</sup> In the Masoretic Text (MT), **והיה** appears as a Qal masculine singular imperative. The first interpretive position reprints the verb, converting it to a Qal third masculine singular perfect form with the resulting translation of “and it [your name] will be a blessing.”<sup>127</sup> The other two interpretive positions accept the MT form of **והיה** as an imperative but differ on its syntactical function. The specific syntactical issue is whether **והיה** possesses a direct volitive mood and is an independent volitive form and an equal element in the volitive sequence in Gen 12:2, or, does it exhibit an indirect volitive mood and is syntactically subordinate to the preceding cohortatives?

The second interpretive position proposes that **והיה** possesses a direct volitive mood and is an independent and syntactically equivalent element in the volitive sequence present in Gen 12:2. This position would translate **והיה ברכה** as, “and be a blessing.”<sup>128</sup>

Alternatively, if **והיה** possesses an indirect volitive mood and is subordinate to the preceding cohortatives, then the imperative is expressing the purpose or consequence associated with the preceding volitive forms. The phrase **והיה ברכה** would then be translated as “and you will be a blessing”.<sup>129</sup> This represents the third interpretive position which views **והיה ברכה** as communicating the theological point that Yahweh’s actions in making Abraham a great nation, blessing him, and making his name great are for the purpose of, or have the consequence of, Abraham being a blessing to others.

This study favours the third interpretive position which is held by Westermann and

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<sup>126</sup> For a discussion of the three interpretive positions, see Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 265-266, 276. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 369-373; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 144-150.

<sup>127</sup> See Skinner, *Genesis*, 242-244; Speiser, *Genesis*, 83-86; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 161-163. This interpretive position is adopted by the Jerusalem Bible (JB) and the New English Bible (NEB).

<sup>128</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 369-373; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 345-350.

<sup>129</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 144, 150; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 265-266, 276; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 352-357.

others who share the above conclusion that because Abraham is blessed, he will be a source of blessing to others.<sup>130</sup> Yahweh's blessing of Abraham "is to have its effects on others beyond him."<sup>131</sup> This reading of וְהָיָה בְרָכָה would be compatible with and support a passive reading of the Niphal of בָּרַךְ in Gen 12:3. Genesis 12:2b ("and you will be a blessing") and 12:3b ("in you all the families of the earth will be blessed") would then be almost converse statements of each other.

The fifth line of reasoning in support of a passive reading of נִבְרַכְו arises from the observation that in Gen 12:2-3, there is an elaborate and multi-level progression which reaches its climactic conclusion in 12:3b. This progression occurs simultaneously on two literary levels and favours the Niphal of בָּרַךְ possessing a passive voice. In Gen 12:2-3, there is the development of a theological theme and a concurrent progression at the level of syntax and sentence structure. The progression in syntax and sentence structure conveys and emphasizes the theological theme which is developed. In terms of syntax and sentence structure, Yahweh's intention to bless is divided into three parts: 12:2, 12:3a, and 12:3b. The root בָּרַךְ occurs five times and is distributed among the three parts in the following manner:

12:2 Piel imperfect 1cs but syntactically a cohortative,  
A noun paired with Qal imperative 2ms of הָיָה

12:3a Piel imperfect 1cs but syntactically a cohortative  
Piel participle

12:3b Niphal 3cp perfect with *waw* consecutive

In general, the verbal construction in which a series of *waw* consecutive + imperfect verbal forms is followed by a *waw* consecutive + perfect verb conveys the idea of succession

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<sup>130</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 150; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 265-266;

<sup>131</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 150.

and consecution (either temporal or logical) in which a future action is subsequent to another action. In the specific context in which each of the imperfect forms functions syntactically as a cohortative, then the entire series of imperfect forms constitutes a volitive sequence and the concluding *waw* consecutive + perfect verb expresses the logical or temporal consequence of the situation created by the volitive sequence.<sup>132</sup> In the case of Gen 12:2-3, the concluding Niphal perfect continues the volitive mood and completes the volitive sequence by providing the end result. The syntax of the verbal construction ascribes a logical progression ending in a climactic conclusion with the Niphal perfect of בָּרַךְ.

Following the above line of argument, Gen 12:2-3 would then read as follows:

- 12:2 And I will make you a great nation,  
 And I will bless you,  
 And I will make your name great,  
 And you shall be a blessing.
- 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you,  
 And the one who curses you I will curse,  
 And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

This progression in verbal structure and syntax with its climax in the Niphal perfect of בָּרַךְ in 12:3b is paralleled by a similar development in the theological theme conveyed by Gen 12:2-3.

- 12:2 **Abraham:** Yahweh will bless him and he will be a blessing.
- 12:3a **Those who interact with Abraham:** their response to Abraham determines the divine response to them and their subsequent well-being.
- 12:3b **All nations of the earth:** will be blessed through Abraham

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<sup>132</sup> Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 368-372; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 523-530.

The initial recipient of divine blessing is Abraham. Then, the circle of recipients of divine blessing widens to include those who interact with Abraham with their treatment of Abraham determining the divine treatment of them. Lastly, the circle expands even more to include all the nations of the earth.

Genesis 12:2-3 demonstrates a progression theologically as well as grammatically and syntactically with a concluding climax in Gen 12:3b.<sup>133</sup> Even though Westermann favours a reflexive reading of *נברכו*, he acknowledges this thematic and syntactical development and that “the syntactical progression hastens on to the final sentence.”<sup>134</sup> Similarly, Sarna observes that “Yahweh’s promises to Abram would then proceed in three stages from the particular to the universal: a blessing on Abram personally, a blessing (or curse) on those with whom he interacts, a blessing on the entire human race.”<sup>135</sup> A passive reading of *נברכו* would best support and be most consistent with the theological and syntactical progression present in Gen 12:2-3. It would allow the pericope, which began with Yahweh blessing one individual, to conclude with the promise of universal divine blessing through that one individual. In light of the thematic and syntactical progression discussed above, a reflexive reading is possible but it would result in Gen 12:3b being a more forced and incongruous conclusion to Gen 12:2-3a.

The sixth line of reasoning in favour of a passive reading of *נברכו* also arises from the verbal features of Gen 12:1-3. The volitive is the dominant verbal aspect in this pericope with an initial imperative (*הלך* in Gen 12:1) introducing a volitive sequence of cohortatives and a concluding *waw* consecutive + perfect. The volitive sequence conveys the certainty

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<sup>133</sup> Cassuto suggests that Gen 12:1-3 is in the genre of poetic verse demonstrating synthetic parallelism which builds to a climax in 12:3b with that verse representing “a beautiful conclusion to the promises of blessing given to Abram.” See Cassuto, *Genesis*, 315.

<sup>134</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 149.

<sup>135</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 89. See also Speiser, *Genesis*, 86; Alter, *Genesis*, 55.

and force of the divine intent to bless. Translating נברכו with a passive voice preserves this certainty and divine intent which would otherwise be lost with a reflexive reading. A reflexive reading would be translated as “pray to be blessed” or “to wish on oneself a blessing like that which Abraham received”. Instead of Yahweh using Abraham as His agent to mediate blessing to all the nations of the earth, Abraham becomes an example of how one should wish to be blessed, and his name is incorporated into blessing formulae or idiomatic expressions. A reflexive reading would transform the certainty of the divine intent to bless into the fragility and uncertainty of human desire, hope, and wish.

With only three occurrences in the Hebrew scriptures, the Niphal of בִּרַךְ is an unusual and infrequent verbal form in the Hebrew Bible. It is particularly noteworthy that all three occurrences are in the parallel passages (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 28:14) describing Yahweh’s promises to Abraham and specifically, how all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham. This study proposes that the use of this infrequent verbal form in the parallel passages is a literary device deliberately chosen by the author to emphasize and to draw the reader’s attention to the declaration of Yahweh’s intention to bless Abraham and for Abraham to be the agent by which all the nations of the earth will be blessed. The unusual verbal form becomes the literary hallmark of these passages. As discussed above, the promise to bless all the nations through Abraham in Gen 12:3b is the climactic conclusion of the declaration of divine intent and purpose. This climactic conclusion with its unusual and characteristic verbal form becomes a refrain which appears repeatedly throughout the Abraham Cycle and the patriarchal narratives (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> In light of the preceding discussion presenting evidence in support of the possibility that the Hithpael stem can possess the passive voice normally associated with the Niphal stem, I have included Gen 22:18 and 26:4 in this list of parallel passages.

In the early stages of the Abraham Cycle, the particulars concerning the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises of land, seed, and blessing remain shrouded in mystery. As the events of the Cycle unfold, the narrative begins to provide answers. Some of these answers are found in the account of Gen 18:16-33 which reveals details concerning how Abraham is blessed, how he is a blessing to others, and how other nations will be blessed in him. The inclusion of the climactic refrain of blessing from Gen 12:3b at the introduction to the events of Gen 16:18-33 creates a narratologic link between the two pericopes with the latter providing specific details about the former.

A passive voice reading of the Niphal of בָּרַךְ in Gen 18:18 would result in an interpretive position which regards Abraham as Yahweh's designated mediator of blessing to the other nations. Genesis 18:18 provides two reasons in support of Abraham's high and favoured standing before God. First, Abraham is the recipient of Yahweh's promises. Second, Yahweh has designated him to be a mediator of blessing to all the families of the earth. Abraham's elevated and favoured status with Yahweh answers Yahweh's rhetorical question in Gen 18:17 and justifies why God should confide in Abraham. As a recipient of Yahweh's promises and as a designated mediator of blessing, Abraham merits and possesses the right to knowledge of divine intentions and participation in the divine decision making process.

As will be discussed subsequently in this study, the events of Gen 18:16-33 reveal that one manner by which the nations of the earth will be blessed in Abraham is through Abraham's intercession on their behalf as they stand under divine judgment. Cassuto refers to this role and responsibility which has been placed upon Abraham when he writes, "Hence, it appears preferable to take the meaning to be that the father of the Israelite nation will be privileged to become a source of benison to all the peoples of the world, and his merit and

prayer will protect them before the Heavenly Court of Justice.”<sup>137</sup>

Mediation of blessing and the specific act of intercession are functions associated with the prophetic office. Therefore, a passive reading of the Niphal of בָּרַךְ in Gen 18:18 which sees Abraham as Yahweh’s designated mediator of blessing, supports the characterization of Abraham in Gen 18:16-33 as Yahweh’s prophet and the *Yahweh-prophet* form as the primary literary form of the pericope.

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<sup>137</sup> Cassuto, *Genesis*, 315.

4.4.2.5 *Genesis 18:19*

This verse is another explicative clause and provides the second reason for the implicit answer to the rhetorical question posed in Gen 18:17. A close reading reveals that the verse is a carefully constructed sequence of subordinate clauses connected by three key particles which direct the logic and theological message of the verse. The introductory conjunction **כִּי** functions in a causal manner and indicates that syntactically, the entire verse is an extended expegetical or explicative clause providing the second reason why Yahweh should not hide His intentions from Abraham.<sup>138</sup> The conjunction **כִּי** is then followed twice by the preposition **לְמַעַן** which introduces two purpose clauses which are related by logical consecution with the action described in the second clause dependent on that of the first clause.<sup>139</sup>

The resulting theological message contains three elements. First, Yahweh had selected Abraham to enter into a relationship with Yahweh and had bestowed on him special status and recognition. Second, Abraham's selection was not an end in itself but was for the purpose of teaching his descendants to observe the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice. Third, if Abraham and his descendants did so, then Yahweh would fulfill His promises to Abraham.<sup>140</sup> This pattern of election-promise-obedience-fulfilment of promise is found throughout Scripture and is a key component in the theology of the Old Testament.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 72; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 149, 178; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 599; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 640-641.

<sup>139</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 61-62; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 115.

<sup>140</sup> Reference is made to Yahweh's promises to Abraham at the beginning and at the conclusion of Yahweh's divine soliloquy in Gen 18:17-19. These opening and closing references form an *inclusio* which frame the soliloquy.

<sup>141</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 269; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 50; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 350; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 19.

In Gen 18:19, Yahweh's relationship with Abraham is described through the use of the verb  $\text{ׁוּתַב}$  which possesses a wide range of nuances of meaning.<sup>142</sup> Hamilton has suggested that the suzerain-vassal covenant treaty context of chapters 15 and 17 is replicated by the author in Genesis 18:16-33. He proposes that Abraham is fulfilling covenant vassal responsibilities as he hosts Yahweh (Gen 18:1-15), teaches his family the terms of the covenant (Gen 18:19), and acts as intercessor (Gen 18:22-33).<sup>143</sup> In light of this covenant treaty context, Hamilton believes that  $\text{ׁוּתַב}$  in Gen 18:19 represents a technical use of the term and that it refers to "mutual legal recognition on the part of the suzerain and the vassal."<sup>144</sup> In his proposed covenant treaty setting for Gen 18, the term would possess the nuance of meaning that Yahweh recognized Abraham "as a legitimate servant or granted recognition to Abraham."<sup>145</sup> Reflecting his interpretive position, Hamilton translates the term  $\text{ׁוּתַב}$  as "covenanted" in his commentary.<sup>146</sup>

However, as was introduced in the preceding discussion concerning the literary form of Gen 18:16-33, Hamilton's translation of the term  $\text{ׁוּתַב}$  as "covenanted"<sup>147</sup> is not the most appropriate lexical choice within the context of Gen 18:16-33.<sup>148</sup> A more suitable

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<sup>142</sup> " $\text{ׁוּתַב}$ " is a *leitwort* in Genesis 18 and 19. It appears repeatedly with different nuances of meaning depending on the context: Gen 18:19 (Qal perfect 1cs); 18:21 (Qal cohortative 1cs); 19:5 (Qal cohortative 1cp); 19:8 (Qal perfect 3cp); 19:33 (Qal perfect 3ms); 19:35 (Qal perfect 3ms). For the lexical range of meaning, see " $\text{ׁוּתַב}$ ", *BDB*, 393-395; " $\text{ׁוּתַב}$ ", *HALOT*, 1:390-392.

<sup>143</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18-19.

<sup>144</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18.

<sup>145</sup> In support of his position, Hamilton cites the work of the following authors: Bergman and Botterweck, *TDOT* 5:448-481; Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yada*," 31-37; Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:290-94. However, even though Bergman and Botterweck cite the work of Huffmon in their word study, their conclusions do not support Hamilton's position with respect to the meaning of  $\text{ׁוּתַב}$  in Gen 18:19. See Bergman and Botterweck, *TDOT* 5:468.

<sup>146</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 14.

<sup>147</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 14.

<sup>148</sup> See the preceding discussion on the literary form of Gen 18:16-33 for weaknesses with Hamilton's proposal.

translation is the term “chosen”<sup>149</sup> which captures the nuances of intimacy and trust which accompany Bergman and Botterweck’s ideas<sup>150</sup> of recognition, selection, or special status.<sup>151</sup> Sarna translates  $\text{ׁוּבְחַרְתִּי}$  in Gen 18:19 as “I have singled him out” or, “I have entered into a special relationship with you”<sup>152</sup> with the result that Abraham enjoys a “special degree of intimacy with Yahweh”.<sup>153</sup> Von Rad (“I have made him acquainted with me”) and Kidner (“I have made him my friend”) see this degree of intimacy and trust to be existing within the context of a friendship.<sup>154</sup>

In addition to being the recipient of Yahweh’s promises and a designated mediator of blessing, Yahweh’s selection of Abraham set him apart and bestowed on him special status and recognition. This was another reason which justified Yahweh confiding his plans to Abraham. The relationship that is described in Gen 18:16-33 between Abraham and Yahweh possesses qualities of intimacy, trust, status and privilege which are more compatible with Abraham being characterized as Yahweh’s prophet than as Yahweh’s vassal. The term  $\text{ׁוּבְחַרְתִּי}$  is employed in descriptions of Yahweh’s appointment and endorsement of prophets such as Moses (Exod 33:12, 17) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:5). Its presence in Gen 18:19 serves to further establish the prophetic motif in Gen 18:16-33 and Abraham’s characterization as Yahweh’s prophet.

Abraham’s unique relationship with Yahweh was not bestowed on him for self

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<sup>149</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 288; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 209-210; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 269; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 350; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 50; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 169.

<sup>150</sup> Bergman and Botterweck, *TDOT* 5:468.

<sup>151</sup> Examples of other texts in which  $\text{ׁוּבְחַרְתִּי}$  has a similar nuance of selection, choosing, or election include Amos 3:2-7; Exod 33:12, 17; Deut 9:24; 34:10; 2 Sam 7:20; 1 Chron 17:18; Jer 1:5; 12:3; Hos 13:5.

<sup>152</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 31. See also Speiser, *Genesis*, 132-133; Coats, *Genesis*, 140.

<sup>153</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 131. See also Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 96, 269.

<sup>154</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 210; Kidner, *Genesis*, 132. See also Isaiah 41:8 and John 15:15.

enjoyment but for a greater purpose. With the privilege of an intimate knowledge of Yahweh came the responsibility of instructing his descendants to observe the way of Yahweh (יהוה דרך). The way of Yahweh is a technical and figurative term in the Hebrew scriptures which refers to the spiritual journey which every individual was believed to be undertaking which led ultimately either to life or death.<sup>155</sup> The result was dependent on the nature of the individual's relationship with Yahweh and the degree of obedience to the stipulations set out by Yahweh which governed their relationship. In the history of Ancient Israel, these stipulations were eventually formalized in the form of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel. The way of Yahweh then referred to "the whole course of life lived in conformity to covenant obligation."<sup>156</sup>

The infinitive construct of עשה explains how Abraham's heirs are to keep the way of Yahweh.<sup>157</sup> The particular verbal combination of שמר followed by לעשות occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible and provides the details and specifics that Abraham's family is to observe the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice (צדקה ומשפט).<sup>158</sup>

In Gen 18:19, the term צדקה, translated as "righteousness", refers to right action or correct behaviour in accordance with a standard of conduct established and accepted by a community. The key concept was conduct which produced and contributed to right communal relations. In Ancient Israel, righteousness was not defined solely on the basis of

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<sup>155</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "דרך," *NIDOTTE*, 1:989-993; J. Bergman, K. Koch, A. Halder, and H. Ringgren, "דרך," *TDOT* 3:270-293.

<sup>156</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "דרך," *NIDOTTE*, 1:989.

<sup>157</sup> When an infinitive construct with the ל preposition is placed after a verb, the infinitive construct serves an epexegetical, explicative, or gerundive syntactical function and provides additional details concerning, or explains the circumstances or nature of the verb which it follows. See Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 605-610; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 407.

<sup>158</sup> The term "צדקה ומשפט" is a prominent theme in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the writings (Ps 33:5; 99:4; Prov 21:3) and prophets (Isa 32:16; 33:5; 56:1; 59:9, 14; Jer 9:23; 22:3, 15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Amos 5:7, 24).

successful adherence to an absolute set of rules. Rather, it was understood as living rightly in community, in relationships which had been “predetermined according to some form.”<sup>159</sup>

The rules for conduct existed and were applied within the context and confines of a community. They were intended to produce right relationships within a community and not merely obeyed as an end in themselves. Righteousness referred to the degree of success of living in right relationship to one’s community by observing and practising the rules governing life within the community.<sup>160</sup>

The term *צדק*, translated justice, finds its origins in the commands given by Yahweh to Israel through Moses in Exod 21-24 which governed civil matters. The term referred to not only the commands but also the judgments arising from their application to civil cases which together became the standard for civic conduct in the community of Ancient Israel. Therefore, doing justice described a determination to observing and maintaining this civil code in order to preserve right relationships within a community.<sup>161</sup>

In summary, observing the way of Yahweh in Gen 18:19 was not intended to be achieved by blind obedience to a set of divine commands or laws. Instead, the central concept in the conduct demanded by the way of Yahweh was that of maintaining right relationships within the community of which an individual was a member. In the case of Ancient Israel, the commands and laws which governed community relationships were formalized in the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. The commands, laws, precepts of the covenant were intended to guide behaviour which would produce and maintain right relationships within the community. In this context, doing justice referred to a commitment

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<sup>159</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 213.

<sup>160</sup> David J. Reimer, “צדק,” *NIDOTTE* 3:744-769; H. Ringgren and B. Johnson, “צדק,” *TDOT* 12:239-264. For a philological study of “צדק”, see Ahuva Ho, *Sedeq and Sedaqah in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

<sup>161</sup> Peter Enns, “צדק,” *NIDOTTE* 2:1142-1144; B. Johnson, “צדק,” *TDOT* 9:86-98.

to observe and maintain the terms and conditions of conduct which defined relationships within the community.

In addition to receiving the blessing of Yahweh's promises, Abraham is charged with the responsibility of teaching his family the righteousness and justice which define the way of Yahweh (דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה). Therefore, the purpose for Abraham's selection and special relationship with Yahweh was the formation of a believing community, faithful and obedient to Yahweh. In response to their obedience, Yahweh would fulfill his promises and bless Abraham's descendants who in turn would mediate blessing to all the nations of the earth. As designated mediators, Abraham and his descendants were responsible to inform the other nations about Yahweh and to intercede on their behalf before Yahweh.

In order to practice and to teach righteousness and justice, Abraham had to first know from experience that Yahweh Himself was righteous and just. It is for this reason that Abraham challenges Yahweh's justice by posing three questions to him in Gen 18:23-25. First, will Yahweh treat the righteous and the wicked alike? Second, will Yahweh let the righteous minority determine the fate of the wicked majority? In other words, are the righteous not more precious and worthy to Yahweh than the wicked? Third, will Yahweh, being the Judge of all the earth, not act justly and in a manner consistent with his position.

With respect to Sodom and Gomorrah, it was crucial that Abraham be informed of Yahweh's decision making process and not be limited to only seeing and hearing the devastating results of divine judgment being executed. Abraham needed to know that Yahweh was not capricious and fickle, did not show partiality, but followed due judicial process and was righteous and just in His decisions.

The divine soliloquy which opens this pericope describes the complex relationship between Yahweh and Abraham. Yahweh's rhetorical question is central to the ensuing

narrative. The remainder of the divine soliloquy establishes Abraham's high, favoured, and trusted status before Yahweh. It is this standing which answers Yahweh's question and justifies Yahweh confiding his intentions to Abraham. Abraham's high and favoured standing is evidenced by being the recipient of Yahweh's promises, by being designated as a mediator of blessing, by the special use of the term  $\text{יְהוָה}$ , and by the responsibility of teaching his family the way of Yahweh for the purpose of forming a believing community faithful and obedient to Yahweh.

The description of Abraham's relationship with Yahweh and his roles and responsibilities as designated by Yahweh support his characterization in Gen 18:16-33 as Yahweh's prophet. It is Abraham's high and favoured standing before Yahweh which prompts Yahweh to confide in him. Westermann captures this point when he writes that "Yahweh's reflection in vv. 17-19 is therefore to be understood in the following way: because Abraham enjoys such esteem, I will make him privy to my plans. Yahweh's esteem for his servants, the prophets, is such that he does nothing without having revealed his plan to them."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 290.

### 4.4.3 *Divine Monologue: Yahweh's Intentions for Sodom and Gomorrah*

#### 4.4.3.1 *Genesis 18:20*

The introductory *waw* consecutive with the imperfect form of אָמַר indicates the resumption of the narrative sequence following the circumstantial clause of the divine soliloquy in 18:17-19. Divine direct speech continues but this time in the form of an annunciation monologue. In the presence of Abraham and the other two visitors, Yahweh declares His assessment of the moral state of the two cities and His intentions in response. The divine monologue of Gen 18:20-21 represents the answer to the rhetorical question posed in Gen 18:17.

In the preceding chapters, the narrator has provided the reader with anticipatory comments and opinion concerning the moral state and historical fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. In Gen 13:10, the reader is informed that the two cities were indeed destroyed. Two verses later, the narrator provides an assessment of the moral state of the cities. The inhabitants are described as being “sinners against Yahweh” (חַטָּאִים לַיהוָה) and “exceedingly wicked” (רָעִים מְאֹד). This anticipatory information is in the mind of the reader when Gen 18:20 is encountered. In this verse, Yahweh’s assessment of the moral state of Sodom and Gomorrah is added to that of the narrator.

In Gen 18:20, the author juxtaposes the outcry (זַעֲקָה) with the sin (חַטָּאת) of the two cities. This appositional parallelism clearly connects the outcry of the cities with their sin and is emphasized by the use of the conjunction וְ in the description of each. In the context of 18:20, the conjunction וְ serves an asseverative syntactical function and emphasizes the magnitude of the outcry against and the severity of the sin of Sodom and

Gomorrah.<sup>163</sup> In the description of the outcry, the verb רבה possesses primarily the nuance of number or quantity (much, many, numerous, multiple, abundant) and to a lesser degree, the quality of greatness.<sup>164</sup> As a result, it is the numerous and repeated occurrences of the outcries rather than their volume that is in view. By comparison, in describing the sin of the cities, the verb כבד is more qualitative in meaning with the nuance of severity, seriousness, and gravity. In addition to the lexical choice of the verb כבד, the author employs two additional emphatic terms to underscore the extent and severity of the sin of the two cities. The verb כבד is framed by the conjunction כי and the adverb מאד which was employed previously in Gen 13:13. The end result is that Yahweh's assessment of the moral state of Sodom and Gomorrah is even more poignant, severe, and damning than the narrator's from Gen 13:13. In combination, these two moral assessments underscore the theological message that the two cities merited divine judgment and in Gen 18:16-33, stood at the very brink of destruction. The terms, syntax, and verbal construction of Gen 18:20 are strikingly similar to the divine assessment of the immoral state of creation in Gen 6:5 which preceded the Flood.

The term translated outcry, זעקה, merits further discussion. In Biblical Hebrew, there are two terms, זעקה and צעקה, which are translated “cry” or “outcry”. Phonologically, these terms are homonyms and semantically, they are synonymous with the result that they are used interchangeably in the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>165</sup> The verbal root first appears in Gen 4:10 and in the literary unit spanning the events of Genesis 18 and 19, the terms appear in Gen 18:20, 21 and 19:13. Within the narrative of Gen 18:16-33, זעקה

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<sup>163</sup> For the asseverative use of the conjunction כי, see Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 153; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 73; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 580-582; Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 158-164.

<sup>164</sup> “רבב”, *BDB*, 912; “ררב”, *HALOT*, 3:1174.

<sup>165</sup> In the Hebrew scriptures, “זעקה” occurs twenty times while “צעקה” occurs twenty one times. Texts which illustrate the interchangeable use of these terms include: Gen 18:20, 21; 1 Sam 4:13, 14; Jer 25:34, 36; Isa 65:14, 19; Jer 48:3-5. See Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 20.

(18:20) and צעקה (18:21) are juxtaposed with צדקה (18:19) to create a paranomasia.<sup>166</sup> The זעקה of Sodom<sup>167</sup> speaks of the city's wickedness while צדקה characterizes the way of Yahweh.

There is general consensus among scholars that the terms זעקה and צעקה are technical and legal terms which “connote the anguished cry of the oppressed, the agonized plea of the victim for help in the face of some great injustice.”<sup>168</sup> Sarna also observes that when this term is used in the Hebrew scriptures, three actions result. First, injustice and evil are loudly identified by the victim. Second, the outcry evokes sympathy and moral outrage in the hearts of Yahweh or His servants. Third, in response, action is taken by Yahweh or His servants to deliver the oppressed victim, to restore his or her rights, and to punish the wicked. In the Old Testament, Yahweh is frequently portrayed as the respondent to the זעקה of the oppressed.<sup>169</sup>

The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 18:20 has been linked to the clamour of the lesser gods and of humanity described respectively in the Akkadian literary works of the *Enuma elish*<sup>170</sup> and the *Atrahasis Epic*.<sup>171</sup> In these accounts, the chief deity becomes annoyed

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<sup>166</sup> Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 350. For another example of paranomasia involving these terms, see Isa 5:7.

<sup>167</sup> The nature of the genitive relationship between the construct noun זעקה and the absolute noun זעקה is a point of debate. The presence of pronominal suffixes in 18:21 and 19:13 seems to suggest that the cry originates from the city rather than from nonresidents. However, it is inconclusive whether the cry originates figuratively from the evil present and perpetrated in the city (an anthropomorphism), or literally, from evildoers or from the victims of evil. For a discussion on this point, see Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 21.

<sup>168</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 132. See also Von Rad, *Genesis*, 211; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 290; H. G. Hasel, “זעקה,” *TDOT*, 4:115.

<sup>169</sup> See Exod 2:23; 3:7; 22:21-23; Isa 5:7.

<sup>170</sup> “The Creation Epic (Enuma elish),” translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 60-72); “Epic of Creation (Enuma Elish),” translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.111:390-402).

<sup>171</sup> “Atrahasis,” translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 104-106); “Atrahasis - Additional Texts,” translated by A. K. Grayson (*ANET* 512-514); “Atra-hasis,” translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.130:450-452).

and angry when he is unable to sleep due to the noise created by the lesser deities and humanity respectively. Three elements are common to the Akkadian and Biblical texts: noise which garners the attention and displeasure of the chief deity, divine provocation resulting in the judgment of the destruction of humanity, and a human heroic figure who intercedes and saves humanity and creation from destruction.

Some have proposed that these common elements are evidence that the Genesis account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was derived from the Akkadian works. Critics of this position have identified two problematic issues with such a hypothesis. First, unlike the deities of the various ANE pantheons, the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible is never characterized as being asleep or in need of rest or sleep (Psa 121:4). This very point is an element of the polemic against Baal worship in 1 Kgs 18:16-45. Second, there is a significant difference in the nature of the noise which provokes the deities in the three accounts. In the Akkadian accounts, the chief deity is disturbed by the random clamour of human activity. In Gen 18:16-33, it is not the volume of noise from the two cities which provokes Yahweh to judgment but the immorality, the “exceedingly grave sin” which produced the outcry. There is a moral component to the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah as evil and injustice have been perpetrated and the victims are crying out in distress and asking for aid, deliverance, and justice. In the Biblical account, Yahweh is provoked not by a petty issue such as noise which interferes with His rest, but by the decrepit moral state of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Gen 18:20, Yahweh’s assessment of the moral state of Sodom and Gomorrah is added to narrator’s assessment which had been provided to the reader in Gen 13:13. Through the use of emphatic terms and structures, the divine assessment is even more damning than the one provided by the narrator. The two assessments, coupled with the anticipatory

information in Gen 13:10 that the cities were ultimately destroyed, greatly increase the dramatic tension as the reader perceives that the cities are on the very brink of destruction. The reader knows the outcome but Abraham does not. However, both are kept in suspense concerning how that outcome is arrived at. The audience and Abraham question if there is any evidence to support the opinions of Yahweh and the narrator regarding the moral state of Sodom and Gomorrah. This question serves as the transition to Gen 18:21 in which Yahweh describes His intention to gather evidence personally. "Yahweh decides to step in as judge. The intervention begins with verification, a judicial inquiry, whether the situation is in accord with the cries of lamentation."<sup>172</sup> Yahweh's intention is ominously similar to another judgment episode described in Gen 11:5-7.

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<sup>172</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 290.

#### 4.4.3.2 Genesis 18:21

This verse contains three syntactical and literary elements which are key to its exegesis. These elements are the volitive sequence of cohortatives, the anthropomorphic terminology, and the structure of the concluding conditional clause.

Upon reading Genesis 18:21, the audience's attention is arrested by the sudden change in the verbal construction from the preceding imperfect and perfect forms to a volitive sequence consisting of a triplet of first person common singular cohortatives. This volitive sequence has two grammatical and syntactical features that are pertinent to the understanding of the verse.

First, in the context of this verse, the verbal construction in which the cohortative is followed by the particle **וְ** indicates resolve and the speaker's determination to undertake an action that is within his or her ability to accomplish.<sup>173</sup>

Second, within a volitive sequence, the verbal forms are often connected by a *waw* conjunction as is the case in Gen 18:21. Syntactically, when coordinating volitive verbal forms, the *waw* conjunction can serve to indicate either temporal or logical succession ("I will go down now *and then* I will see ...") or, a purpose/result ("I will go down now *so that* I will see ...").<sup>174</sup> This verse contains three first person common singular cohortatives (**וְיָרַד**, **וְיָרָא**, and **וְיָדַע**). The grammar, syntax, and logic of the verse favour each of the two *waw* conjunctions being translated with the nuance of succession or consecution. The end result is a volitive sequence linking the three cohortative forms in temporal or logical succession ("I will go down, *and then* I will see, *and then* I will know, ...").

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<sup>173</sup> For the syntactical range of the particle **וְ**, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 578-579; Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 170-171; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 322-323; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 65-66.

<sup>174</sup> For the use of the *waw* + volitive forms, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 650, 653-654; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 345-350, 352-357.

Thus, by means of the volitive sequence, Yahweh expresses His resolve to personally investigate the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in order to determine if the accusatory outcry of their moral state is justified and supported by objective evidence. The theological message is that Yahweh's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah is the result of careful investigation and evaluation of firsthand objective evidence concerning their moral state. The temporal or logical succession of the volitive sequence mirrors the elements of due judicial process and implies that Yahweh followed such a process in arriving at His judgment. The volitive sequence of Gen 18:21 echoes a similar sequence found in Gen 11:7. Both verses share a context of divine inquiry leading to judgment which is based on full, accurate, and firsthand evidence.

In addition to the above theological message, the three verbs in the volitive sequence serve a literary function as well. When used in the context of divine speech, these three verbs are anthropomorphisms and contribute to the anthropomorphic motif that is present in chapter 18. The use of this form of imagery begins with Yahweh visiting Abraham, receiving hospitality (sitting and resting under a tree, having His feet washed), and eating in Gen 18:1-15. It continues with the outcry (הֲלֹקֵהוּ) of Sodom and Gomorrah in 18:20 as voices are ascribed to the two cities. The three verbs of the volitive sequence in Gen 18:21 (יֵרֵד, הֲרָא, and יִפְעַל) further extend the anthropomorphic imagery.

The anthropomorphic language of Gen 18:21 appears to indicate that Yahweh has yet to make a final decision concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. This stands in apparent contradiction to Gen 18:17 and 18:20 which indicate that Yahweh is aware of the moral state of the two cities, has already arrived at a judicial decision, and is poised to execute that judgment. The solution to this apparent internal contradiction lies in the fact that Yahweh's monologue in Gen 18:20-21 is the answer to His rhetorical question posed in Gen 18:17.

With this context in mind, the monologue and the anthropomorphic language employed to deliver it are for Abraham's benefit. The anthropomorphic language of the volitive sequence reveals to Abraham the thoroughness and fairness of Yahweh's decision making process and that Yahweh observed due judicial process in arriving at His judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah. This judgment was reached only after personally gathering firsthand evidence concerning the moral state of the cities. The significance of this information being made known to Abraham will be discussed in the conclusion to this section.

The third exegetical element of note in Gen 18:21 is the construction of the concluding conditional clause. The protasis is stated in the negative ("if not ...") rather than in the positive ("if so ..."). This is significant for two reasons. First, the negative phrasing of the protasis suggests a divine bias in favour of the cities not being as evil as the outcry would portray them. It appears that Yahweh is hoping that the charges would be proven false and that he would not have to destroy the cities. Second, the negative condition of the protasis conveys a sense of hope, albeit faint, that Yahweh's decision may not be final and that the possibility existed that it could be postponed, attenuated, or reversed. From Yahweh's perspective, this possibility becomes his invitation to Abraham to enter into an intercessory dialogue with Him on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. From Abraham's perspective, the possibility that Yahweh's decision may not be final represents hope which provides some of the motivation behind his intercessory efforts.

If the monologue of Gen 18:20-21 and its literary elements of a volitive sequence, anthropomorphic language and a conditional clause were all intended for Abraham's benefit, then what was the divine purpose in revealing to Abraham what Yahweh was about to do? This study proposes that Yahweh's purpose was twofold. First, as discussed above, the anthropomorphic language of the volitive sequence reveals to Abraham and to the audience

that Yahweh observed due judicial process and was thorough and fair in His decision making concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. In order for Abraham to fulfill his covenant obligations and teach his descendants the justice and righteousness that characterized the way of Yahweh, he needed to know by personal experience that Yahweh Himself was just and righteous. It is also critical for the reader to know that in the context of judgment, Yahweh would act in a just and equitable manner (Gen 6:5-13; 11:1-9). Yahweh's desire to verify the extent and severity of Sodom's sin echoes the divine prophecy concerning the sin of the Amorites in Gen 15:16.<sup>175</sup> The just and fair judgment of Yahweh with respect to the Flood and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah anticipate the future judgment of the Canannite nations and the *herem* texts in the conquest narratives. Therefore, the narrative of Gen 18:16-33 is a vindication of divine justice and an essential component in the motif of theodicy in the book of Genesis and in the broader context of the Pentateuch.

Second, Yahweh reveals to Abraham his awareness of the moral state of Sodom and Gomorrah and his intended response in order to invite Abraham to act by interceding on their behalf. There are several reasons why Abraham would be prompted to intercede upon learning of Yahweh's intentions. Abraham knows what Yahweh will find when he investigates the two cities. Their reputation for wickedness will certainly be substantiated and Yahweh will execute his judgment of the two cities by destroying them. Abraham also knows that his nephew Lot is residing in Sodom.

In possession of this knowledge of Yahweh's intentions, Abraham is confronted by several troubling questions. What will be the fate of any righteous inhabitants who may be present in the two cities? Will they also be destroyed along with the wicked? Would it be just for the righteous to be destroyed with the wicked? What will be the fate of his nephew

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<sup>175</sup> Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 351.

Lot?

Yahweh's revelation to Abraham of his intentions results in Abraham being confronted with the preceding questions and more importantly, with the dilemma of what his response will be? If Abraham is to do righteousness and justice, how should he respond to the knowledge of the judgment awaiting Sodom and Gomorrah? "This dialogue between the Lord and Abraham is for Abraham's benefit, to challenge him to act wisely and nobly for justice."<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 268.

#### 4.4.4 *Transition: Two Visitors Depart (18:22)*

This circumstantial clause is the second point of transition in the narrative of Gen 18:16-33. It serves two literary purposes. First, it clearly demarcates the divine soliloquy and monologue of Gen 18:17-21 from the dialogue between Abraham and Yahweh in 18:23-32. Second, consistent with the other two transition circumstantial clauses in this passage (18:16; 18:33), the movement of characters is described. In this case, two of the visitors depart, leaving Yahweh and Abraham alone on the stage of the narrative. This movement of characters with the removal of Yahweh's companions from the scene anticipates and sets the stage for the dramatic negotiation dialogue which will take place between Yahweh and Abraham.

In contrast to the departure of the two visitors towards Sodom, Abraham is described as continuing to stand before Yahweh.<sup>177</sup> It is noteworthy that as the events of Genesis 18 unfold, Abraham progresses from “standing by” Yahweh (18:8) to “walking with” Yahweh (18:16) to “standing before” Yahweh (18:22). This concluding subordinate clause, “but Abraham remained standing before Yahweh”, presents two exegetical questions which require examination. First, what is the nuance of meaning associated with the term “to stand before” (עמד)? A brief survey reveals that it can refer to an act of worship (Jer 7:10), to entering into someone's presence (Deut 19:17; 29:14), to the service of Yahweh (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kgs 3:14; 5:16), and to a special use of the term to describe the intercessory ministry of a prophet of Yahweh (Jer 15:1, 9).<sup>178</sup> In the context of the negotiation dialogue which follows, it would appear that in Gen 18:22, this final technical meaning of prophetic

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<sup>177</sup> The context supports the reading of the coordinating *waw* as a *waw* adversative. See Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 284; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 15; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 34.

<sup>178</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 24.

intercessory ministry is employed.<sup>179</sup>

The second exegetical issue is text critical in nature and concerns the presence in Gen 18:22 of a *tiqqune sopherim* or Masoretic scribal correction. The Masoretic Text (MT) contains eighteen scribal emendations in which the original Hebrew text has been changed by the ancient scribes. Collectively these corrections are termed the *tiqqune sopherim*.<sup>180</sup> These textual corrections were apparently undertaken by the ancient scribes to “avoid what they considered to be irreverent, idolatrous, or blasphemous expressions. Such changes were done, for example, by avoiding the juxtaposition of ‘curse’ with Yahweh (1 Sam 3:13), by changing the pronoun (Num 11:15; Jer 2:11; Ezek 8:17), or by changing the word order (Gen 18:22).<sup>181</sup> Genesis 18:22 is the first of these scribal emendations with the *tiqqune sopherim* suggesting that the original text may have read “Yahweh remained standing before Abraham”. It is postulated that thinking it would be inappropriate for Yahweh to be standing before Abraham in a subservient position, the scribes may have inverted the order of the proper nouns. Controversy exists as to whether the MT is correct or is an emendation.

This issue of whether the MT is correct or represents an emendation does impact the rhetorical and theological message of Gen 18:16-33. If the MT is the correct version, then Gen 18:22 characterizes Abraham as deliberating and formulating his response to what Yahweh has revealed to him in Gen 18:20-21. In answer to His rhetorical question of Gen 18:17, Yahweh has announced His awareness of the reputation of the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah and His intention to personally investigate the veracity of this reputation. In addition, Yahweh has hinted that divine judgment may not yet be final and that hope existed

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<sup>179</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 24.

<sup>180</sup> The passages in the MT containing *tiqqune sopherim* are: Gen 18:22; Num 11:15; 12:12; 1 Sam 3:13; 2 Sam 16:12; 20:1; 1 Ki 12:16; 2 Chron 10:16; Jer 2:11; Ezek 8:17; Hos 4:7; Hab 1:12; Zech 2:12; Mal 1:12; Ps 106:20; Job 7:20; 32:3; Lam 3:20. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 23.

<sup>181</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 23.

that it could be postponed, reversed, or attenuated. Against what Yahweh has revealed, Abraham weighs his own knowledge concerning the two cities. He is aware of the moral state of the two cities and is certain that Yahweh will imminently discover for himself that *the cities are deserving of judgment*. However, as previously discussed, Abraham also knows that his nephew Lot is living in Sodom and that there may be a righteous minority present in the two cities. As Abraham stands before Yahweh, he is faced with the decision of how he should respond to what Yahweh has revealed to him.

On the otherhand, if the *tiqqune sopherim* is correct and the MT is an emended version with the original text placing Yahweh standing before Abraham, then two interpretive positions have been proposed. First, by delaying, remaining before Abraham, and not departing with His companions, Yahweh is prodding, challenging, even provoking Abraham into action to alter the outcome for Sodom and Gomorrah. As He remains before Abraham, Yahweh is portrayed as waiting in expectation, urging Abraham to respond to the revelation of His intentions in Gen 18:20-21. Alternatively, others interpret Yahweh's position before Abraham as the introduction to the ensuing negotiation dialogue in which they see Abraham holding Yahweh accountable for justice.<sup>182</sup>

This study will now examine the evidence supporting or rejecting the existence of a scribal emendation for Gen 18:22. First, the piety and reverence for the divine attributed to the ancient scribes have been enlisted in support of both the MT reading and the presence of a *tiqqune sopherim*. Their piety and concern for divine dignity have been cited as motivation and evidence that the original reading was emended to remove Yahweh from an irreverent, subservient position before Abraham and that the MT is a *tiqqune sopherim*. However, those who support the MT reading as the correct and unaltered text argue that the same piety

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<sup>182</sup> Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology," 410; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 168.

would result in the scribes holding too much reverence for the text as the word of Yahweh to dare to alter it. Andersen aptly describes the tension of these opposing views by summarizing, “How could the scribes decide between reverence for the text and reverence for Yahweh? The piety that removed it as abhorrent would never have invented it.”<sup>183</sup>

Second, it is important to examine the evidence which has been marshalled in support of an original reading of Gen 18:22 of which the MT is proposed to be a scribal emendation. Hamilton and Andersen observe that the LXX, Targum, Vulgate, Peshitta, and some of the early midrashim contain no indications of an original reading which had been corrected by the ancient scribes.<sup>184</sup> If this is the case, then what were the historical circumstances surrounding the suggestion of a scribal emendation and what was the supporting textual evidence? Andersen notes that the earliest suggestion that the MT represented a scribal emendation was made by Rabbi Simeon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and postulates that Simeon’s position arose from knowledge of a variant tradition or a variant text.<sup>185</sup> However, a close examination and evaluation of the evidence in support of scribal emendations and the tradition of *tiqqune sopherim* will reveal that there is not much evidence. What little exists is tenuous, consisting of citations of the opinions of earlier rabbinical teachers, scholars, and commentators with little objective text critical or exegetical support.<sup>186</sup>

On the other hand, there appears to be much stronger exegetical evidence in support

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<sup>183</sup> Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 84.

<sup>184</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 24; Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 84; W. Emery Barnes, “Ancient Corrections in the Text of the Old Testament (*Tikkun Sopherim*),” *JTS* 1 (1900): 396-399, 404-406.

<sup>185</sup> Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 84.

<sup>186</sup> For discussions and reviews of the *tiqqune sopherim*, see E. J. Revell, “Scribal Emendations,” *ABD* 5:1011-1012; Barnes, “Ancient Corrections in the Text of the Old Testament,” 387-414; D. Barthélemy, *Les Tiquuné Sopherim et la Critique Textuelle de l’Ancien Testament* (VTSup 9; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), 285-304.

of the MT reading being the correct version rather than representing the scribal emendation of a *tiqqune sopherim*.<sup>187</sup> First, the prepositions in Genesis 18 which describe Abraham's physical location as the narrative unfolds, support the MT reading as the correct textual version. Abraham's location on the stage of the narrative is consistently described in relation to Yahweh with Yahweh's position being the constant reference point. Abraham stood "by" (ל)Yahweh in Gen 18:8. He walks "with" (ע) Yahweh in Gen 18:16. And, according to the MT reading, in Gen 18:22, Abraham remains standing "before" (לפני) Yahweh. The MT reading rather than the *tiqqune sopherim* maintains the point of view chosen by the narrator.

Second, the intercessory context of Gen 18:16-33 supports the MT reading that it was Abraham who remained standing before Yahweh. Hamilton suggests that as Abraham stood before Yahweh and interceded on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, he was acting as a "precursor of the mediating prophet".<sup>188</sup> In addition, he proposes that the term "to stand before Yahweh" is used in a special, technical sense in Gen 18:22 to "designate the intercessory ministry of the prophet" as described in Ps 106:23 and Jer 15:1.<sup>189</sup>

Lastly, context supports the MT version of Gen 18:22 as the correct reading. At the conclusion of the Lot-Sodom narrative, Gen 19:27 describes Abraham looking out over the destruction of the Jordan Valley from the same vantage point where he had previously stood before Yahweh in Gen 18:22. However, there is no *tiqqune sopherim* found in association with Gen 19:27. Further, in the broader context of the Pentateuch, Yahweh is described as

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<sup>187</sup> Using discourse analysis, Andersen has presented arguments in support of a *tiqqune sopherim* in Gen 18:22. However, he acknowledges that his evidence is far from conclusive and only represents another perspective which should be considered in the textual critical analysis of this passage. See Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 84-85.

<sup>188</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 23.

<sup>189</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 23.

standing before Moses in Exod 17:6. Again, there is no accompanying *tiqqune sopherim* or any other indication of a scribal emendation to correct the perceived inappropriate and irreverent positioning of Yahweh before Moses.

#### 4.4.5 Dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham: Abraham's Intentions for Sodom and Gomorrah

##### 4.4.5.1 Overall Structure of the Dialogue

The negotiation dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham consists of six rounds of proposals from Abraham with corresponding responses from Yahweh. Each round follows a similar formula with respect to grammatical and syntactical structure. The opening round is the most critical as Abraham establishes the principles of divine justice which would govern the subsequent negotiations. Once agreement has been reached on those governing principles, the remaining five rounds focus simply on determining the final number of righteous individuals.

In each of the six rounds of negotiations, Abraham presents his proposal in the form of a conditional clause with protasis and apodosis. The adverb אולי introduces the protasis of each conditional clause in each round of negotiations,<sup>190</sup> and serves to indicate and introduce each round of negotiations.<sup>191</sup> The ה interrogative particle serves as the marker for the apodosis of each conditional clause.

Yahweh responds to Abraham's proposals by following the syntactical pattern that Abraham has initiated. Yahweh answers using conditional statements as well but his introductory indicators for the protasis and apodosis are different. The protasis for each of the divine responses is introduced by the conjunction וְ and the apodosis by the resumptive or conditional *waw*.<sup>192</sup>

The flow of the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham is intriguing. On the

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<sup>190</sup> “אולי”, *BDB*, 19

<sup>191</sup> A new proposal marking a new round of negotiations is found in Gen 18:24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32.

<sup>192</sup> Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 147-148, 173-174; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 591, 607-610.

surface, Abraham appears to be the one who takes the initiative by approaching Yahweh and opening the negotiations in Gen 18:23. Abraham also appears to be the one driving the negotiations and pushing Yahweh with successive downward revisions of the number of righteous. Yahweh responds to each new proposed number in the affirmative and with little apparent resistance. However, at the conclusion of the negotiations in Gen 18:33, the direction of the conversation abruptly reverses as the narrator describes Yahweh as the one who has finished speaking with Abraham and who terminates the dialogue by departing.<sup>193</sup>

Abraham only appears to be the initiator if one considers the dialogue between himself and Yahweh to have commenced in Gen 18:23. However, a closer examination of the text reveals that the dialogue began much earlier in the chapter. The entire interaction between Yahweh and Abraham began in Gen 18:1 with Yahweh's visit to Abraham's tents at Mamre. After receiving hospitality and revealing new details concerning the birth of Abraham and Sarah's promised heir, Yahweh moves the dialogue forward to the subject of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yahweh reveals His assessment of and intentions for the two cities (Gen 18:20-21). He also suggests that his judgment may not be final and that there may be opportunity for it to be averted or altered (Gen 18:21). In his monologue (Gen 18:20-21), Yahweh invites Abraham to respond by interceding on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the light of this context, Abraham's negotiations are his response to Yahweh's initiative. The flow of the dialogue in Genesis 18 is always from Yahweh to Abraham with Yahweh initiating and Abraham responding.

A summary of the grammatical, syntactical, structural, and lexical elements in the construction of the negotiation dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham is provided in Table 3.

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<sup>193</sup> MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham", 25-43; Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 243.

#### 4.4.5.2 *Principles for Negotiations Established (18:23-25)*

##### 4.4.5.2.1 *The Rhetoric of Persuasion*

As Abraham approaches Yahweh to intercede on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, he employs a variety of persuasive techniques to secure Yahweh's favour and improve his chances of a successful outcome. There are several reasons why Abraham is required to utilize the full range of persuasive rhetorical methods in his dialogue with Yahweh. First, a vast existential chasm separates Abraham from his deity. Yahweh is Yahweh, the Creator, while Abraham is the creature. From his lowly position in the cosmological order, Abraham approaches Yahweh with a petition. Second, Abraham is not presenting a petition for himself but for those who are outside the covenant treaty relationship that he and his descendants enjoy with Yahweh. Yahweh is not bound by suzerain obligations to these individuals who are excluded from the covenant with Abraham. Third, not only are these individuals outside of the covenant relationship with Yahweh, they are well known for their wickedness and evil. They have transgressed Yahweh's standard of justice and righteousness and merit divine judgment. Fourth, the ambitious nature of Abraham's requests demands a skilful presentation in order to garner a favourable response from Yahweh. As will be subsequently demonstrated, Abraham begins by asking for justice but his ultimate goal is to petition Yahweh to go beyond justice and to extend mercy to those who merit judgment.

These four factors compound the enormity of the challenge facing Abraham as he approaches Yahweh. In the end, Abraham is successful in audaciously securing agreement from Yahweh that ten righteous citizens would redeem an entire wicked city. The persuasive techniques employed by Abraham are worthy of a closer examination even though as will be discussed later, the successful outcome of the negotiations was due more to Yahweh's desire

to show mercy than to Abraham's persuasive rhetoric.

Abraham's first priority was to secure agreement from Yahweh that the righteous within the two cities would not be treated in the same manner as the wicked and be destroyed alongside the wicked. Abraham argues that Yahweh would not be just if He treated the wicked and the righteous without any distinction. To emphasize this point, Abraham employs three rhetorical structures to convey that it would be shockingly unbelievable and inconceivable for Yahweh to treat the righteous and the wicked alike.

The use of rhetorical questions is the first technique employed by Abraham to persuade Yahweh that justice demanded that a distinction be made between the righteous and the wicked. Each of the three opening verses in the dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham contain a rhetorical question: "Will You really sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen 18:23), "Will You really sweep it away and not spare the place ... ?" (Gen 18:24), and "Shall the one who judges all the earth not do justice?" (Gen 18:25).<sup>194</sup> By posing each as a rhetorical question, Abraham emphasizes that the implicitly understood negative answer to each question is an obvious and indisputable truth. He presents the argument to Yahweh that it is a universally accepted truth that justice would not see the righteous and the wicked treated in the same manner. By so doing, Abraham holds Yahweh accountable to the standard of justice and righteousness that Yahweh has revealed to Abraham to be intrinsic to His character and which mark the way of Yahweh.

The second rhetorical technique employed to convey disbelief and amazement is Abraham's use of the coordinating adverb וְ with the ה interrogative particle in Gen 18:23, 24. This adverb appears twice within these two verses to further emphasize the tone of incredulity. It was also used by Yahweh in describing Sarah's disbelief upon hearing that

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<sup>194</sup> Rhetorical questions are a recurring motif in Genesis 18 and appear in 18:14, 17, 23, 24, 25.

she would bear a son in a year's time (Gen 18:13). The adverb וְאִם is one of two major coordinating adverbs in Biblical Hebrew with the other adverb being וְאִלּוּ.<sup>195</sup> Of the two coordinating adverbs, וְאִלּוּ is much more common than וְאִם in prose with the latter appearing with greater frequency in poetry.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, the appearance of וְאִם in the prose narrative of Gen 18:16-33 represents an unusual syntactical construction which would draw the attention of the reader to the verse.

The possible syntactical functions of וְאִם include additive, correlative, emphatic or asseverative, rhetorical, compounding or intensifying, and an *a fortiori* sense with the meaning of “how much more/less.”<sup>197</sup> In Gen 18:23, וְאִם is generally viewed as possessing an emphatic or asseverative sense<sup>198</sup> and, being placed within the context of a question, functions to “indicate something contrary to expectation.”<sup>199</sup>

On this particular issue, Muraoka offers some pertinent insights. First, he agrees that in the poetic context in which וְאִם is most commonly employed, this adverb frequently possesses an emphatic or asseverative function and “is often used as a stylistic feature ‘to emphatically introduce a new thought’ (BDB, s.v. 1) in a climactic fashion.”<sup>200</sup> However, Muraoka suggests that in the more uncommon context of prose, and in particular, in the

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<sup>195</sup> BDB classifies “וְאִם” as a conjunction but Arnold and Choi, Williams, Waltke and O’Connor, and Jouon and Muraoka classify it as an adverb. See “וְאִם”, BDB, 64; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 130; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 663; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 64; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 581; Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 141.

<sup>196</sup> “וְאִם”, BDB, 64-65; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 130; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 64.

<sup>197</sup> For the range of syntactical function of וְאִם, see “וְאִם”, BDB, 64-65; Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 130-132; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 663-664; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 64-65; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 581-582; Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 141-143.

<sup>198</sup> “וְאִם”, BDB, 64-65; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 64-65; Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 475.

<sup>199</sup> Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 64.

<sup>200</sup> Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 142.

setting of rhetorical questions such as Gen 18:23, 24, the forcefulness and function of וְאֵל is reduced from an asseverative to an additive role.<sup>201</sup> Specifically, in a rhetorical question, וְאֵל adds the elements of amazement and disbelief to the tone of the question. The result is an expression of “something unexpected, unbelievable, or an exaggerated, extreme case.”<sup>202</sup> Lastly, Muraoka proposes that the additional elements of incredulity and disbelief are not limited to the words immediately following the adverb וְאֵל, but extend to the entire clause.<sup>203</sup>

By inserting the coordinating adverb וְאֵל within his rhetorical questions, Abraham magnifies the sense of shock, astonishment, and disbelief that Yahweh would not make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

Third, complementing his use of rhetorical questions and the adverb וְאֵל, Abraham utters the exclamation, חַלְלֵה לִי, in Gen 18:25. Similar to the repetition of וְאֵל in Gen 18:23, 24, this phrase is repeated twice in Gen 18:25 for emphatic effect. The alliteration created by the ל consonantal sound further draws the reader’s attention to the presence of this special term of exclamation, oath, or emphasis. Genesis 18:25 is the first occurrence of this term in the Pentateuch which more frequently appears with the first person pronominal suffix (חַלְלֵה לִי) and is translated as “far be it from me”, “God forbid”, or “heaven forbid”.<sup>204</sup> This negative oath strongly expresses an undesired outcome or wish, rejection, repulsion, or aversion.<sup>205</sup> It is usually followed by a dependent clause which specifies the

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<sup>201</sup> Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 142-143; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 582.

<sup>202</sup> Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 141.

<sup>203</sup> Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 141. Muraoka adopts Andersen’s comments concerning וְאֵל to his study of the syntactical function of וְאֵל. See Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 166.

<sup>204</sup> This term also appears in Gen 44:17; 1 Sam 24:7; 2 Sam 20:20; Job 27:5.

<sup>205</sup> Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 258, 324, 584; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 680.

outcome which is so abhorrent or undesired.<sup>206</sup>

These three rhetorical techniques intensify the force of Abraham's argument that in judgment, a just Yahweh must make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Independently, each of these techniques functions as an emphatic term or structure. When used together, the net literary effect is compounded and multiplied. Not only would it be unbelievable (rhetorical questions with adverb **אֵיךְ**) for Yahweh to treat the righteous and the wicked in the same manner, it would also be an undesirable and abhorrent outcome (**לֹד חללה**).

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<sup>206</sup> Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 680.

#### 4.4.5.2.2 *The Logic of Abraham's Intercession*

During the first of six rounds of negotiations in Gen 18:23-25,<sup>207</sup> Abraham presents to Yahweh the rationale and arguments which justify and support the merits of his intercessory request on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. He seeks to secure acknowledgement and agreement from Yahweh on the principles of divine justice which would govern their ensuing negotiation dialogue over the fate of the two cities. In so doing, Abraham is exploring the issue of theodicy and discovering the nature and boundaries of divine justice.<sup>208</sup> Specifically, Abraham seeks to understand the nature and dynamics of the relationship between Yahweh's righteousness and Yahweh's mercy. This process is another step in Abraham's growing understanding of the righteousness and justice that are characteristic of the way of Yahweh which he is charged with teaching his descendants to observe. Ultimately, Abraham gains new knowledge regarding the character of Yahweh and Yahweh's relationships with humanity.

The issue in Gen 18:16-33 which prompts Abraham's exploration of the nature of divine justice and the relationship between Yahweh's righteousness and mercy is the possibility that the moral composition of Sodom and Gomorrah may not be homogeneous but heterogeneous. Abraham poses his questions to Yahweh as a result of his anticipation of what Yahweh will find when he investigates the moral state of the two cities. If all the inhabitants are found to be wicked, then there would be no debate nor doubt that the cities

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<sup>207</sup> For a survey of the history of interpretation of Gen 18:23-32, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," *JJS* 33 (1982): 119-132; Ehud Ben Zvi, "The Dialogue Between Abraham and YHWH in Gen 18:23-32: A Historical-Critical Analysis," *JSOT* 53 (1992): 27-32. Ben Zvi provides his summary of the history of interpretation of Gen 18:16-33 in an extended opening footnote. The body of his article is a historical-critical analysis of Gen 18:16-33.

<sup>208</sup> For an examination of theodicy in Old Testament prayers, see Samuel E. Balentine, "Prayers of Justice in the Old Testament: Theodicy and Theology," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 597-616. Balentine centres his study on four texts: Gen 18:22-33; Exod 32:7-14; Jos 7:7-9; 1 Kgs 17:17-24. Unfortunately, the majority of his discussion focuses on the last three texts and only a cursory study of Gen 18:22-33 is undertaken.

are deserving of judgment. However, what if the results of Yahweh's investigation are not unanimous but equivocal, with a minority of righteous citizens found among the wicked majority? Would the righteous few suffer the same judgment as the wicked around them? What determines the fate of a community with a mixed moral composition? Is it the righteous, the wicked, or another standard of determination?

With these questions of theodicy in mind, Abraham presents his proposals and rationale to Yahweh. By His acceptance of Abraham's opening proposal of fifty righteous individuals, Yahweh is also indicating His acceptance of the rationale, arguments, and principles concerning divine justice which Abraham has presented. Having reached an agreement on the principles by which Yahweh would judge the two cities, the remaining five rounds of negotiations focus on determining the final number of righteous individuals without any further discussions of theodicy.

Of note, in his opening arguments, Abraham questions the justice of Yahweh's intention to punish Sodom but he does not question the divine assessment of Sodom's moral state. He acknowledges and accepts that Sodom is wicked and deserving of Yahweh's judgment. The reputation of the two cities is such that Abraham knows full well what Yahweh will discover when He visits the cities for His own judicial investigation. Abraham acknowledges Sodom's corporate guilt. He initially expresses concern for the fate of the righteous minority but ultimately requests that Yahweh spare the entire city on account of the righteous few.

On this issue of the fate of the righteous in the two cities, the reader shares Abraham's questions of theodicy. The narrator has provided the reader with even more

information concerning the two cities than Abraham.<sup>209</sup> Both wonder about the fate of the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah. Yahweh has charged Abraham and his descendants with the covenant obligation to walk in way of Yahweh characterized by righteousness and justice. Would Yahweh be just if He treats the righteous and the wicked alike and destroys the righteous with the wicked?

It is this question of theodicy that Abraham addresses first in his dialogue with Yahweh. Abraham argues that Yahweh would not be acting justly if He treated the righteous and the wicked alike and destroyed the righteous with the wicked. In addition to this argument from logic, Abraham also appeals to Yahweh's character. He points out that it would be inconceivable and unbelievable for the "judge of all the earth" to render the same judgment to both the righteous and the wicked.

Assuming that Yahweh would agree to and accept his arguments, Abraham is faced with the dilemma of what alternative fate should await the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah. There are two possible outcomes. First, the righteous are somehow selectively spared while only the wicked are punished and destroyed.<sup>210</sup> Alternatively, the wicked are spared merited judgment on account of the righteous in their midst who would otherwise suffer unjustly. It is this second outcome that Abraham seeks to secure from Yahweh.

In summary, Abraham makes two requests of Yahweh in Gen 18:23-25. First, he asks Yahweh to act justly by not treating the righteous in the same manner as the wicked and by not including the former in the punishment of the latter. Second, he then requests that

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<sup>209</sup> In addition to knowing what has been revealed to Abraham in Gen 18:17-21, since Gen 13:10-13, the reader has been informed by the narrator of the moral state and ultimate fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

<sup>210</sup> Subsequent examples in which the righteous servants of Yahweh are selectively spared while the wicked surrounding them are destroyed include the plagues inflicted on Egypt (Exod 8:22-23; 9:4-7; 9:26; 10:23; 11:4-7), Rahab and her family during the conquest of Jericho (Jos 2:15; 6:20-25); Daniel and his companions (Dan 3:19-27; 6:23-24).

Yahweh spare the wicked who merit judgment on account of the righteous in their midst. By so doing, Abraham appeals to Yahweh to go beyond acting justly and to act mercifully. It is ironic that in the context of judgment, Abraham asks that Yahweh act justly and not treat the righteous and the wicked alike by punishing the righteous with the wicked. However, in the context of mercy, Abraham requests that Yahweh does treat the righteous and the wicked alike and spare the wicked with the righteous.

The text does not overtly provide the reasons why Abraham did not request that Yahweh selectively spare the righteous from the judgment of the wicked. Some have suggested that Abraham doubted Yahweh's ability to execute divine judgment in such a discriminating manner.<sup>211</sup> Abraham's doubt that Yahweh could discriminate in death would then mirror Sarah's doubt in Gen 18:12-15 that Yahweh could cause an elderly couple to conceive, carry a pregnancy to term, and give birth, specifically, to a son. As the plot subsequently unfolds in Genesis 19, the removal and sparing of the righteous from the judgment of the wicked is indeed what transpires. Yahweh's rhetorical question posed in Gen 18:14 would appear to speak to any doubts concerning His power over the blessing of life or the judgment of death.

At this juncture, as a counterpoint, a diachronic reading strategy is helpful in providing insight into the historical significance of Abraham's request. When placed within the context of the religious thought of Abraham's day and age, it becomes apparent that Abraham's request that the wicked be spared on account of the righteous represented a paradigm shift. As was discussed above in the preceding section on "Setting", early Ancient Israel believed and lived under the concept of communal or collective guilt.<sup>212</sup> No one lived

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<sup>211</sup> Ben Zvi, "Dialogue Between Abraham and YHWH," 40-45.

<sup>212</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 212; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 170-173.

or acted in isolation. The consequences of an individual's actions affected the community and individuals were included in the fate of their community as well (Gen 20:9; Josh 7:1, 10-15, 24-26; Deut 21:1-9).<sup>213</sup> In the late seventh and early sixth centuries (B.C.E.), there was a transition from this communal perspective to individualism and a shift from corporate to individual responsibility for sin guilt (Deut 24:16; 2 Kgs 14:6; Jer 31:29-30; Ezek 14:12-23; 18:1-4).<sup>214</sup>

The issue of individual versus collective communal guilt is in view when Abraham questions Yahweh in Gen 18:23-25.<sup>215</sup> Abraham's questions arise from his consideration of what Yahweh may find when He visits Sodom and Gomorrah. If all the inhabitants are found to be wicked, then there will be no doubt that the cities are deserving of judgment. However, what will happen if the results of Yahweh's inquiry are not unanimous but rather equivocal, with a minority of righteous individuals found among the wicked majority? Would the righteous few suffer the same judgment as the wicked around them?<sup>216</sup> What standard is employed by Yahweh to determine the fate of a community with a heterogeneous moral composition? Is it the righteous, the wicked, or another standard of determination?

Proponents of a late date of authorship see evidence of an individualistic perspective in Abraham's reasoning and questions. However, unlike other proponents of late authorship, von Rad cautions that he does not believe Gen 18:16-33 is an expression of the transition from a communal to an individual perspective. Rather, he argues that Abraham remains communal in his perspective and is questioning which moral element within a community

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<sup>213</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1962-1965), 1:264-269, 1:380-383, 1:389, 1:392-399, 1:412-414, 1:443, 2:232.

<sup>214</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 213.

<sup>215</sup> In addition to von Rad, Blenkinsopp also provides a thoughtful and reasoned discussion of this issue in Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," 124-132.

<sup>216</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 212; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 25; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 170-173.

determines the community's fate. "What determines Yahweh's judgment on Sodom, the wickedness of the many or the innocence of the few?"<sup>217</sup> Can a minority of righteous individuals determine the fate of their community because the righteous, no matter how few, are (more) important to Yahweh? In his dialogue with Yahweh, Abraham is exploring the possibility that the righteous are so precious to Yahweh that on their account He would pardon the larger community who would otherwise receive merited judgment.<sup>218</sup> At the conclusion of his negotiations with Yahweh, Abraham discovers that in the case of Sodom, in Yahweh's determination, ten righteous individuals would be enough to redeem the entire city from judgment.<sup>219</sup>

Abraham initially asks that the righteous few be spared the fate of the wicked in Sodom. On the surface, it appears that he is thinking individualistically and not collectively. However, as he presses his case before Yahweh, he requests that the entire city be spared on account of the righteous minority. This would suggest a communal perspective. However, this is a new communal perspective in which the fate of the community would be determined by the righteous citizens.

In Ancient Israel, righteousness was not defined by merely successful adherence to an absolute set of rules. Rather, it was understood as living rightly in community, in relationships which had been "predetermined according to some form."<sup>220</sup> With this context in mind, in Gen 18:23-25, Abraham is challenging Yahweh's righteous relationship with the

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<sup>217</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 213.

<sup>218</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 212-213; idem., *Old Testament Theology*, 1:392-399; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 25; Sarna, *Genesis*, 133; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 170-173.

<sup>219</sup> One could postulate that Abraham's discovery of this aspect of the way of Yahweh opens the door to the substitutionary atonement of the Levitical sacrificial system and ultimately to Jesus Christ, one righteous and sinless Son of God who would redeem all of humanity.

<sup>220</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 213. See also Reimer, *NIDOTTE* 3:744-769; Ringgren and Johnson, *TDOT* 12:239-264.

community of Sodom. In the context of this righteous relationship, Abraham poses the question, “Must Yahweh’s judgment and action in every case be determined solely by the wickedness of the many? Could Yahweh not forgive the whole because of his regard for the guiltless minority?”<sup>221</sup> As their negotiations unfold, Yahweh agrees with Abraham that even if the number of righteous were “utterly disproportionate to that of the guilty, ‘for their sake’, Yahweh would forgive the city.”<sup>222</sup>

Ross shares von Rad’s position and observes that “the biblical teaching on the remnant of the righteous first surfaces here. A nation may be preserved because of a righteous remnant ... for Yahweh is willing to spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous.”<sup>223</sup>

As events unfold in chapter 19, there are not even ten righteous individuals in Sodom and Yahweh proceeds to destroy the city in accordance with the terms of his agreement with Abraham. However, Lot and his two daughters are spared, not because of any merit they themselves possess but on account of Abraham (Gen 19:29). Several questions of theodicy which had loomed over the narrative are addressed by the conclusion of the plot events of Gen 18-19. First, Yahweh is just. He has not treated the righteous and the wicked alike and did not destroy the righteous with the wicked. The wicked were punished when Abraham’s standard failed to be met. Second, Yahweh is merciful. He was willing to extend mercy to the wicked on account of the righteous who were in their midst. The extent of Yahweh’s mercy is evidenced by the disproportionate number of righteous citizens required to save the entire city of Sodom. Further, even when the standard of ten righteous individuals was not

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<sup>221</sup> von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:395.

<sup>222</sup> von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:395.

<sup>223</sup> Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 348. See also Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1974), 147-152.

met, Yahweh did not destroy everyone. Lot and his two daughters were spared on account of Abraham (Gen 19:29). Under the terms agreed upon, Yahweh was under no obligation to do so. Third, Yahweh is omnipotent. He was able to selectively remove Lot and his daughters and spare them from the judgment executed on the remaining inhabitants of the two cities. By so doing, Yahweh answers the rhetorical question posed in Gen 18:14, demonstrates His power over life and death, and authenticates His role as the Judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25).

One remaining question of theodicy looms over the entire account. Abraham has pointed out that Yahweh cannot remain just if in judgment He treats the righteous and the wicked in the same manner. Abraham then proceeds to ask Yahweh to extend mercy to the wicked and spare them on account of the righteous. Is Yahweh also just if in mercy He treats the righteous and the wicked alike?<sup>224</sup> How does Yahweh find the perfect point of balance in the tension between mercy and justice? The solution lies in von Rad's observation that in Gen 18:16-33, Abraham discovers that the righteous are so precious to Yahweh that no matter how few they may be, a minority of them can determine the fate of the larger community to which they belong.<sup>225</sup> In the account of Sodom and Gomorrah, Yahweh invites and allows Abraham to influence the position of the fulcrum of the balance between mercy and justice. Fulfilling the role of a prophet, Abraham is invited to participate in the divine decision making process.<sup>226</sup> It is Abraham who proposes the number of righteous required to

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<sup>224</sup> For a discussion on this particular tension in theodicy as it pertains to Gen 18:16-33, see Ed Noort, "For the Sake of Righteousness. Abraham's Negotiations with YHWH as Prologue to the Sodom Narrative: Genesis 18:16-33," in *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18-19 and Its Interpretations* (eds. Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 3-15.

<sup>225</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 213.

<sup>226</sup> For a discussion on the prophetic role of intercession and the prophet's invitation to participate in divine decision making, see John Goldingay, "The Logic of Intercession," *Theology* 101 (1998): 262-270.

redeem Sodom from judgment. In the end, Abraham and Yahweh agree that an entire city of wicked would be equivalent to ten righteous individuals and that the presence of the ten would redeem the entire city.

#### 4.4.5.3 *Particular numbers established (18:26-32)*

In negotiating with Yahweh, Abraham is faced with the challenge of spanning the distance that separates himself and Yahweh. Once again, Abraham employs various rhetorical techniques to gain Yahweh's attention and secure a favourable response. In pleading Sodom's case, Alter observes that Abraham employs "a whole panoply of the abundant rhetorical devices of ancient Hebrew for expressing self-abasement before a powerful figure."<sup>227</sup> In the determination of the number of righteous required to spare Sodom in Gen 18:26-32, Abraham uses various terms and rhetorical structures to emphasize his humility and dependency and Yahweh's exalted status. However, Abraham's quiet, restrained, and almost hesitant, self-abasement in these verses stands in marked contrast to the boldness and forcefulness with which he presented his arguments in the immediately preceding verses of Gen 18:23-25.<sup>228</sup>

First, Abraham refers to himself and Yahweh using metaphorical terms which emphasize to the point of exaggeration, the gulf between himself and Yahweh. Abraham refers to himself as "dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27)<sup>229</sup> while Yahweh is honoured as the "judge of all the earth" (Gen 18:25).

Second, in presenting his revised proposals on the number of righteous required to save Sodom, Abraham conveys his humble dependency by repeatedly including the particle

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<sup>227</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 82. Unfortunately, Alter does not identify or comment on the specific rhetorical devices which he observes as being employed by Abraham.

<sup>228</sup> One could speculate that the change in Abraham's tone in Gen 18:27-32 from bold forcefulness to humble deference may be due to his success in securing his prime objectives in Gen 18:23-26. He was satisfied that Yahweh had agreed to not treat the righteous and wicked alike and that a righteous minority could save an entire city of wicked inhabitants. Any further concessions won concerning the number of righteous would be secondary gains.

<sup>229</sup> A similar self-reference is made by Job in Job 30:19; 42:6.

of entreaty, אָנִי, with his requests (Gen 18:27, 30, 31).<sup>230</sup>

Third, on two occasions, Abraham prefaces his proposals by asking Yahweh not to be angry with him (Gen 18:30, 32). His apologetic tone, requesting pardon and forgiveness for troubling Yahweh with his intercessory requests, continues the attitude of humility, deference, and dependency.

Lastly, as observed above, the quiet, restrained, and humble tone adopted by Abraham in Gen 18:26-32 stands in marked contrast with his audacity and forcefulness in Gen 18:23-25. Abraham introduces two of his proposals with the phrase, “since I have ventured to speak (הוֹאֲלָתִי לַדְּבַר) to my Lord.” (Gen 18:27, 31) This phrase conveys an uncertainty, a hesitancy, and a lack of confidence on the part of Abraham as he approaches Yahweh with yet another downward revision of the number of righteous individuals.

The six rounds of negotiations which occur between Yahweh and Abraham in Gen 18:26-32 are quite unconventional. Yahweh acquiesces to each proposed downward revision by Abraham of the number of righteous required to spare Sodom and Gomorrah. He never presents a counter-offer or challenge to any of Abraham’s proposals. Further, the brevity and abruptness of Yahweh’s responses stand in sharp contrast with the formality, eloquence, and even verbosity of Abraham’s persuasive rhetoric. There is no hesitation on Yahweh’s part as he immediately agrees to the latest proposal from Abraham. As a result, Abraham’s elaborate rhetoric stands as a foil to Yahweh who is characterized as standing ready, almost with eagerness, to unhesitatingly agree to whatever number of righteous individuals is proposed by Abraham. The theological message is that Yahweh’s desire is to show mercy and the execution of judgment is a reluctant act on his part.

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<sup>230</sup> Stephen A. Kaufman, “An Emphatic Plea for Please,” *Maarav* 7 (1991): 195-198. For the syntactical range of the particle אָנִי, see Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*, 578-579; Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 170-171; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 322-323.

Yahweh's readiness and desire to extend mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah is also conveyed by another literary feature present in Gen 18:28, 30. In these two verses, Yahweh's responses to Abraham are expressed in the form of two conditional statements. However, the usual logical order of a conditional statement in Biblical Hebrew is inverted. Instead of the conventional order in which the protasis with its more important content is followed by the apodosis, in these two verses, the apodosis comes first. The inversion indicates that the more important content is now contained in the apodosis.<sup>231</sup> In the case of these two verses, the inversion emphasizes that Yahweh's primary desire is to not destroy the two cities but to extend mercy to them.

In the history of the interpretation of Gen 18:16-33, one question that continues to perplex scholars is why Abraham stopped at ten righteous individuals.<sup>232</sup> This is particularly puzzling in the face of the above literary elements and features which indicate Yahweh's readiness to extend mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah. Many theories have been advanced but none have proven to be satisfactory. Some commentators have suggested that once the principles were agreed upon and established in Gen 18:23-26, the actual number of righteous was a secondary issue.<sup>233</sup> Unfortunately, the text provides no further clues concerning the reasons why Abraham stopped at ten.<sup>234</sup> There is also no further comment provided by other Biblical texts. This question remains a matter of speculation, debate, and study.

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<sup>231</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 38; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 595.

<sup>232</sup> For other examples of sentence structure similar to Gen 18:32, see Exod 10:17 and Judg 6:39.

<sup>233</sup> For a review of proposed theories as to why Abraham stopped at ten righteous individuals, see Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology," 410; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 172; Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," 123; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 271; Sarna, *Genesis*, 134; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 52-53; Westermann, *Genesis 12-26*, 292; Jacob, *Genesis*, 123; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 214.

<sup>234</sup> The events of Gen 19 reveal that the population of Sodom does not contain even ten righteous individuals. The failure to meet such a low moral standard for judgment underscores the wickedness of the city. Coats argues that the literary function of Gen 18:16-33 is to emphasize the utter wickedness and irredeemable state of Sodom and Gomorrah. See Coats, *Genesis*, 142.

*Table 3 - Literary Features of the Negotiation Dialogue Between God and Abraham*

Literary Feature	Round 1 18:23-26	Round 2 18:27-28	Round 3 18:29	Round 4 18:30	Round 5 18:31	Round 6 18:32
Hypothetical Question "suppose"	אולי (24)	אולי (28)	אולי	אולי	אולי	אולי
Conditional Statement "if ..... then ...."	אם (protasis) ו (apodosis) [18:26]	לא (apodosis) אם (protasis) [18:28]		לא (apodosis) אם (protasis)		
Causality "for the sake of" "on account of" "because of"	למען (24) בעבורם (26)	ב (28)	בעבור		בעבור	בעבור
Particles: Demonstrative Entreaty		הנה (28) נא (28)		נא	הנה נא	
Finding the Righteous (מצא)	אמצא (26) (Qal Impf 1cs) Yahweh	אמצא (28) (Qal Impf 1cs) Yahweh	ימצאון (Nif Impf 3mp) Abraham	ימצאון אמצא	ימצאון	ימצאון
Terms for Destruction ספה <sup>235</sup> מות שחת עשה	ספה (23, 24) מות (25)	שחת (28x2)	עשה	עשה	שחת	שחת
Abraham Speaking		הואלתי לדבר	ויסף עוד לדבר	ואדברה	הואלתי לדבר	ואדברה אךהפעם
Request That Yahweh Not Be Angry				אלנא יחר		אלנא יחר
Expressions of Incredulity, Disbelief, and Amazement Disbelief	האף (23, 24) חללה לך (25x2)					

<sup>235</sup> ספה also found in Gen 19:15, 17; 1 Sam 12:25;26:10; 27:1; Num 16:26; 32:14; Isa 30:1; 7:20; Psa 40:15; Jer 12:4; Amos 3:15.

#### 4.4.6 *Transition and Conclusion: Yahweh Departs and Abraham Returns Home (18:33)*

This is the third of three descriptions of movement by the characters in the narrative which serve to frame and separate the units of direct speech in Gen 18:16-33. In this concluding verse, Yahweh terminates the dialogue with Abraham by departing after responding to what Abraham had indicated was his final proposal on the number of righteous individuals required to redeem Sodom. With Yahweh's departure, Abraham is now alone on the stage of the narrative and returns to his tents. A similar description of Yahweh terminating a dialogue and departing from Abraham is found in Genesis 17:22.

There are two syntactical features present in this verse which are noteworthy. First, there is an unusual verbal construction employed by the author in which an initial *waw* consecutive + imperfect is followed by two verbs in the perfect tense. This verbal construction is employed by the author to draw the reader's attention to the literary function of this verse in indicating the termination of the negotiation dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham and the conclusion of the narrative.

In a narrative sequence, when the expected *waw* consecutive + imperfect verbal form is replaced with the perfect verbal form, it signifies that it is the author's deliberate intention to avoid succession or consecution, either temporally or logically.<sup>235</sup> Jouon and Muraoka have noted six contexts and circumstances in which such a verbal construction is employed in Biblical Hebrew.<sup>236</sup> Of these six circumstances, the context of Gen 18:33 indicates that it

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<sup>235</sup> Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 362.

<sup>236</sup> The six circumstances noted by Jouon and Muraoka in which the *waw* + imperfect form is replaced by a perfect are: [1] the second action comes before the first such that the pluperfect or past perfect tense is in view (1 Sam 28:3; 1 Kgs 22:29-33, 31; 2 Kgs 4:31; 25:5), [2] a new development or plot event in the narrative, the introduction of a new character (Gen 2:25-3:1), or the provision of background information (Gen 37:3), [3] action is temporally or logically subsequent but is not represented as such by the characters or the narrator. Most commonly, actions are presented in opposition/contrast to each other in order to compare the nature, significance, result or purpose associated with the actions (Exod 9:23; 10:13;

is the creation of contrast or opposition between Yahweh and Abraham that is the intent of the author in employing this verbal construction in this concluding verse. The contrast is drawn between Yahweh the benefactor who departs to an unspecified destination while Abraham the intercessor returns home.<sup>237</sup>

With negotiations at an end, the parties go their separate ways. However, the contrast created by the author is more than just between the descriptions of them parting company. It is ultimately between the two individuals who were party to the negotiations over Sodom and Gomorrah. This contrast reprises all the roles assumed by Yahweh and Abraham during the course of the narrative: benefactor and intercessor, deity and prophet, judge of all the earth and one who is but “dust and ashes”.

The second syntactical feature of this verse affirms the concluding nature of the verse. The perfect verbal sequence contributes a sense of finality to the encounter as the perfect verbal aspect denotes completed action. In addition, semantically, the author also indicates cessation and the concluding nature of this verse through the presence of the verb *כלה* which means “to stop”. The negotiations concerning the basis for the determination of the judgment and fate of the inhabitants of Sodom are completed. The narrative now proceeds to the implementation of the results of the negotiations. The events of the broader narrative spanning Genesis 18 and 19 now move ahead towards the climax of the plot and the final fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

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2 Sam 10:14; 1 Kgs 2:8; 19:3-4; 2 Kgs 5:24-25), [4] the second action is simultaneous rather than subsequent or represented as such (Gen 1:5), [5] opposition or contrast, particularly when two individuals part company (Gen 11:3; Judg 6:40; Ruth 1:14; 1 Sam 15:34), [6] in the case of repetition where action is not and cannot be represented as subsequent and *waw* + imperfect (*wayyiqtol*) cannot be used. Most commonly, the repetition is for rhetorical effect and not for narratologic reasons (2 Sam 3:22, 23; 1 Kgs 20:17, 19; Ezek 3:12, 14). See Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 362-363.

<sup>237</sup> Gen 18:33b is an episode final circumstantial clause introduced by a *waw* adversative and exhibiting the *subject-verb-object* word order which is characteristic of circumstantial clauses. See Andersen, *Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 81-82; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 38.

## *Chapter 5 - Characterization in the Triangle of Intercession*

### *5.1 Introduction*

In the Biblical record, mediation and intercession find their origins in the Hebrew Scriptures as these roles were first entrusted to the ancestors and founding families,<sup>1</sup> to the nation of Israel,<sup>2</sup> to the prophets,<sup>3</sup> and subsequently to the New Testament Church. The Hebrew Bible contains numerous narratives describing intercessory activity. In these narratives, intercession was made on behalf of a third party to either another individual or to Yahweh.<sup>4</sup> However, the majority of these accounts record intercession made on behalf of family members or on behalf of the nation of Israel. There are only a handful of accounts which describe intercession on behalf of those who stood outside the community of Israel. Genesis 18:16-33 is not only the first account of intercession in the Hebrew Bible but it is also one of the few accounts in which intercession is made on behalf of foreigners who are not family members, friends, or fellow citizens.

If intercession is defined as petitionary prayer on behalf of another, then three parties are drawn into a relationship triangle by the process of intercession. These three

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 12:3; 18:18-33; 20:17; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

<sup>2</sup> Exod 12:43-51; 19:4-6; Deut 14:29; 24:14-22; Ps 67:1-6.

<sup>3</sup> Exod 32-34; Jeremiah 14:7-9, 13; 15:1; Amos 7:1-9; 1 Sam 12:23

<sup>4</sup> Examples of intercession in the Hebrew scriptures include: Abraham for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16-33); Isaac for Rebekah (Gen 25:21); Joseph requesting intercession on his behalf from the cupbearer to pharaoh (Gen 40:14); Moses for Israel (Exod 32:11-14, 31-35; 33:12-23; 34:9; Num 12:11-13; 14:13-19; Deut 9:16-29; Psa 106:23); Phinehas for Israel (Num 25:7-13; Psa 106:30-31); Samuel for Israel (1 Sam 7:5-11; 12:7, 23); David for his son (2 Sam 12:16-23); Elijah (1 Kgs 17:17-23), Elisha (2 Kgs 4:33; 6:15-20), Job (Job 42:7-9); Hezekiah for Jerusalem and Judah (2 Kgs 19:1-37; 2 Chron 32:1-23); Moses and Samuel cited as examples of intercessors (Jer 15:1); Jeremiah commanded not to intercede for Israel (Jer 7:16, 11:14, 14:11); Amos (Amos 7:1-6); Ezekiel 22:30; Daniel interceding in the context of spiritual warfare (Dan 10:12).

parties are: the beneficiary for whom intercession is made, the intercessor who champions the cause of and advocates for the beneficiary, and the benefactor or patron to whom intercession is made.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this study is to examine how the parties drawn into the triangle of intercession are characterized in the narrative of Gen 18:16-33.<sup>6</sup> How is each party linked by the process of intercession portrayed? What are the dynamics in the relationships among the parties? What are the rhetorical purpose and theological message conveyed by the characterizations?

As discussed previously, prior to the narrative of Gen 18:16-33, the narrator has already provided the reader with anticipatory information in Gen 13:10-13 concerning the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah and that the cities were indeed destroyed by Yahweh as an act of divine judgment. If this is the case, then what would be the literary and theological purposes for the inclusion in the Abraham Cycle of this narrative describing a futile and failed attempt at intercession? This study proposes that the primary literary and theological purpose of the narrative of Gen 18:16-33 is the presentation of the characterization of the parties drawn together in the triangle of intercession. Through the characterization of the benefactor, intercessor, and beneficiary, the theological concepts which form the basis for intercession are demonstrated and illustrated.

In the following discussion, the characterization of each party in the triangle of

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<sup>5</sup> As noted previously, the terms beneficiary, intercessor, and benefactor/patron are not technical terms but have been designated and assigned by the author for the purposes of clarity in this study.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on the technique of characterization in poetics and literary criticism, see Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 114-130; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 321-364; Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 55-72; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 47-92; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Literature*, 23-42.

intercession will be examined in turn with reference to the findings from the earlier study of ANE intercessory texts. Comparisons will be made with the characterization of the members of the triangle of intercession from the literature and religions of the these ANE cultures contemporaneous with ancient Israel.

## 5.2 *The Beneficiaries: Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot*

Abraham's interaction with Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 and 19 represents the second occasion in which he has intervened on behalf of these two cities. In Genesis 14, Abraham delivers the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah as well as his nephew Lot from political and military danger. In Genesis 18, he attempts to have the cities spared from divine judgment. Throughout the Abraham Cycle and prior to the climactic events of Genesis 19,<sup>7</sup> anticipatory information concerning Sodom and Gomorrah is provided to the reader by the author.<sup>8</sup> This anticipatory information consists of commentary and opinions concerning the moral state of the two cities and is provided by three different characters, each with their own perspective. However, the motif common to all these perspectives is the utter wickedness of the cities with the result that they are deserving of divine judgment.

The reader is first introduced to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah through the commentary provided by the narrator. In Gen 13:10-13, the narrator provides the opinion that the inhabitants of the two cities were "exceedingly wicked" (רעים מאד) and "sinners against Yahweh" (חטאים ליהוה). The adverb מאד is added to emphasize the magnitude of their immorality and transgression against Yahweh. In addition to their moral state, the narrator also reveals the ultimate fate of their destruction. The anticipatory information thus provided to the reader creates a context for the subsequent events of Genesis 14, 18 and 19.

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<sup>7</sup> For discussions of how the events of Gen 13:10-13 and Gen 14 serve an anticipatory function and set the stage for the unfolding of the plot in Gen 18 and 19, see Elgavish, *The Encounter of Abram and Melchizedek*, 503-508; Brodie, *Genesis*, 219-227; Hamilton, *Genesis: 1-17*, 396-414.

<sup>8</sup> For the rhetorical function of anticipatory information, see Nahum M. Sarna, "The Anticipatory Use of Information as a Literary Feature of the Genesis Narratives," in *The Creation of Sacred Literature: Composition and Redaction of the Biblical Text* (ed. Richard E. Friedman; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 76-82.

The second anticipatory account involving Sodom and Gomorrah is the more detailed description of their failed rebellion, desperate flight, capture, and eventual rescue by Abraham. Pertinent to this study is Abraham's deliberate rejection of the king of Sodom's overtures and his avoidance of any association with him and his city at the conclusion of the account (Gen 14:21-24). The anticipatory information provided through Abraham's actions prompts the reader to contemplate why Abraham, a new arrival to the region, would choose not to take advantage of the situation, form alliances, and gain regional allies. Abraham's decision to distance himself corroborates the narrator's opinion concerning the wickedness and immorality of the two cities.

The third unit of anticipatory information is provided by Yahweh himself in Gen 18:20-21. The preceding chapter (section 4.4.3.1) has discussed how the narrator's evaluation of Sodom and Gomorrah's moral state is intensified by the emphatic terms and structures employed by Yahweh to convey the extent and severity of the wickedness of the two cities.

Fourth, in Gen 19:1-13, the narrator provides objective evidence of the immorality and wickedness of the inhabitants of the two cities in the description of the attempted homosexual gang rape of the two visitors to Lot's home.<sup>9</sup> This shocking treatment of the visitors to Sodom and Gomorrah violated ANE cultural customs concerning hospitality and underscored the evil state of the two cities.<sup>10</sup> The abhorrent

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<sup>9</sup> For a literary and anthropological study on this issue, see Ken Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?" *JSOT* 67 (1995): 87-107. For a study of homosexuality in the literature and cultures of the ANE and in the Hebrew Bible, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 133-170.

<sup>10</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 10; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 276; von Rad, *Genesis*, 218; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 55.

nature and widespread complicity (Gen 19:4)<sup>11</sup> of this crime provide emphatic corroboration of the opinions from the narrator, Abraham, and Yahweh that Sodom and Gomorrah are deserving of divine judgment.

The literary structures employed by the author to convey the above anticipatory information appear to imply that the moral disrepute of Sodom and Gomorrah was common knowledge to all living in the region. This is suggested by the circumstantial clause which contains the narrator's assessment of the two cities in Gen 13:13. In Gen 18:22-32, Abraham responds to the revelation of Yahweh's intention to visit Sodom and verify its moral state by interceding on the city's behalf prior to Yahweh's departure for Sodom. Abraham's immediate intervention may suggest that he fully knew that Yahweh would find the cities deserving of judgment and that this was common knowledge. Lastly, the use of the term  $\text{רָעָה}$  implies that it was not whispers or rumours of wickedness, but a loud cry that had reached the heavens.

Historically, there has been much speculation and debate concerning the nature of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of the events of Gen 19:1-13, sexual immorality (Jude 7) has been a central issue in the discussions. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel provide additional insights into the nature of the sin of these two cities (Jer

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<sup>11</sup> The fourfold repetition present in Gen 19:4 emphasizes the universal complicity of the citizens of Sodom. The four synonymous descriptions with an emphatic and inclusive final summation (the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people from every quarter) echoes the literary technique also found in Gen 12:1 and 22:2.

<sup>12</sup> For a review of this debate, see Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 55; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 33-35; Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 145-149; Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar, eds., *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18-19 and its Interpretations* (Themes in Biblical Narrative 7; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1-193. Of particular usefulness is the comprehensive bibliography provided by Annemieke Ter Brugge, "Bibliography of Genesis 18-19 and Judges 19 Since 1990," in *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18-19 and its Interpretations* (eds Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar; Themes in Biblical Narrative 7; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 189-193.

23:14; Ezek 16:46-55).<sup>13</sup> Sarna observes that Sodom and Gomorrah's sins were "entirely in the moral realm; there is no hint of cultic offense, no whisper of idolatry."<sup>14</sup> In the end, regardless of the details, the opinions of the narrator, Abraham, and Yahweh, combined with the events of Gen 19:1-13 are presented by the author to the reader as evidence that the cities were deserving of judgment.

In contrast to Sodom and Gomorrah, the characterization of Lot in the Abraham Cycle is a much more complex issue, particularly with respect to his moral standing. As the events of Genesis 12-19 unfold, Lot provides examples of both righteous action and also shocking demonstrations of flaws in character and judgment.<sup>15</sup> In truth, he is a tragic figure who has sincere intentions but repeatedly fails to accomplish them due to compromise and indecisiveness and "whose decisions and acts are only half formed."<sup>16</sup> In support of this depiction, Turner has described Lot as a "Jekyll and Hyde" character type.<sup>17</sup>

The reader encounters Lot's first recorded independent decision when enticed by the excitement and activity of the cities in the Jordan Valley, he chooses to settle near Sodom (Gen 13:12). He soon moves inside the city (Gen 14:12; 19:29) and when the two visitors arrive, he is found sitting at the gates of Sodom where business was

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<sup>13</sup> Ezek 16:46-55 – arrogance, gluttony, and indifference to the poor and needy; Jer 23:14 – adultery, encouragement of evildoers, lying. Also Isaiah 1:9-10; 3:9.

<sup>14</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> For detailed studies of the characterization of Lot, see Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 86-91; idem., "Lot as Jekyll and Hyde: A Reading of Genesis 18-19," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (eds David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter; JSOTSup 87; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 85-101; T. Desmond Alexander, "Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness," *JBL* 104 (1985): 289-91; Sharon Pace Jeanson, "The Characterization of Lot in Genesis," *BTB* 18 (1988): 123-129.

<sup>16</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 219.

<sup>17</sup> Turner, "Lot as Jekyll and Hyde," 90-101.

transacted and elders ruled on civil and criminal matters (Gen 19:1).<sup>18</sup> At worst, he is now an elder of the city.<sup>19</sup> At best, he continues to be an outsider (Gen 19:9) but is fully engaged in the affairs of the city to the point of having betrothed his daughters to men of the city (Gen 19:12-14).

The hospitality Lot extends to the two visitors has been cited both in support of his righteousness and in condemnation of his character. Studies have favourably compared the extravagance of Lot's hospitality to that exhibited by his uncle earlier in the day.<sup>20</sup> Other studies have been less generous in their evaluation of his hospitality<sup>21</sup> and attempt to cast Lot as a foil to his uncle Abraham.<sup>22</sup> To his credit, Lot does attempt to fulfill his commitment and obligation according to ANE custom to guarantee the safety and well-being of his guests. In Gen 19:6, he goes out to mollify the angry mob and closes the door behind him. Wenham observes that by so doing, "he cut off his own escape and hoped to protect those inside."<sup>23</sup>

However, when the crowd becomes more unruly, in an effort to appease them, Lot offers his virgin daughters to the mob as substitutes for the two visitors. By his offer, Lot demonstrates the extent of his commitment to protect his guests as per ANE custom. However, instead of offering himself, he offers his family members and exhibits the same behaviour of self preservation at the expense of a loved one that was

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<sup>18</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 217; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 32; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 54. See also Deut 21:19; Josh 20:4; 2 Sam 15:2; 18:24; Ruth 4:1-12

<sup>19</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 134; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 273.

<sup>20</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 54-55; Alexander, "Lot's Hospitality," 289-91; Turner, "Lot as Jekyll and Hyde," 90-94.

<sup>21</sup> Jeansonne, "Characterization of Lot in Genesis," 123-129.

<sup>22</sup> Turner provides a thoughtful assessment of each of the opposing interpretive positions regarding Lot. See Turner, "Lot as Jekyll and Hyde," 91-95.

<sup>23</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 55.

shown by his uncle (Gen 12:10-20). In the end, Lot suffers the same ironic fate as his uncle. Abraham gave away his wife Sarah to the pharaoh of Egypt and was in turn given by Sarah to her Egyptian slave girl (Gen 16:1-2). Lot sought to sacrifice his daughters for self-preservation and was in turn seduced by them to achieve their goal of preserving the family line (Gen 19:31-38).

The characterization of Lot as a tragic figure with sincere intentions but flawed execution is further reinforced by the comedic nature of his actions. He intends to protect his guests but is in turn rescued by them (Gen 19:6-11). He attempts to be the leader of his household but is derisively dismissed by his future sons-in-law (Gen 19:14). He dithers and procrastinates all night long until finally the two visitors forcibly remove him and his family from the city (Gen 19:16). Citing a fear of the mountains, Lot requests that he be allowed to escape to Zoar (Gen 19:19-20). However, he subsequently seeks refuge in the mountains because he is afraid to remain in Zoar (Gen 19:30).<sup>24</sup>

Lot is delivered from Sodom prior to the city's destruction but his salvation was not the result of any merit or righteousness on his part. The narrator notes in Gen 19:29 that Lot was spared on account of Abraham's standing before Yahweh.<sup>25</sup> According to the outcome of the negotiations agreed upon by Yahweh and Abraham, Yahweh was

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<sup>24</sup> Coats agrees with Turner that the characterization of Lot in Gen 19 is complex in nature. However, instead of also proposing that Lot exhibits both righteousness and sinfulness, Coats suggests that Lot is morally ambiguous as he fails to display either the wickedness of Sodom's citizens or the righteousness of his uncle. Instead, Coats proposes that Gen 19 characterizes Lot as a buffoon and stresses the comedic nature of his actions rather than their moral significance. Coats, *Genesis*, 143-146. See also Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 274;

<sup>25</sup> The structure of Gen 19:29 is noteworthy. Subordinate clauses describing Yahweh's destruction of the two cities open and close the verse thereby forming an *inclusio* which frames the central contents of the verse. At the centre of the verse are found the three members of the triangle of intercession: Yahweh the benefactor, Abraham the intercessor, and Lot the beneficiary. Genesis 7:24-8:1 and 30:22 contain similar descriptions of a reversal of circumstances initiated by Yahweh remembering (רָצַח) an individual.

under no obligation to spare Lot and his family. However, Yahweh demonstrated his mercy by sparing Lot on the basis of his uncle's standing before Yahweh just as he was willing to spare the entire city of Sodom on the basis of ten righteous individuals.

The relationship between Abraham and Lot is quite complex. Turner proposes that Abraham suspects that his nephew is not righteous having been corrupted by the influence of Sodom and Gomorrah. Turner goes on to suggest that in his negotiations with Yahweh, Abraham's thinking is that as long as there are ten righteous individuals within Sodom, even if one of those ten is not Lot, he will still be saved along with the rest of the city.<sup>26</sup> Turner argues that Abraham is motivated to secure Lot's survival by a continuing belief that Lot was a potential heir alongside Ishmael.<sup>27</sup>

This study disagrees with Turner's position. Instead, this study proposes that following the events of Genesis 13, Abraham accepts that Lot is not his heir and resolutely lives accordingly. First, after rescuing Lot from captivity in Genesis 14, the Abraham Cycle does not record any further interaction between uncle and nephew even though they live in the same region as neighbours. Second, Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah but does not mention Lot even once in his dialogue with Yahweh. Third, following the destruction of the cities, Abraham limits himself to looking down onto the Jordan Valley (Gen 19:27-28). He appears to be a dispassionate observer. He does not venture forth to confirm Lot's survival, to bring him food and clothing, or to invite his nephew to stay with him until he has recovered from the trauma of the incident. Fourth, in like manner, Lot does not seek out his uncle for assistance and shelter. Instead, he chooses to head east, in the opposite direction to his uncle's tents,

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<sup>26</sup> Turner, *Genesis*, 86; Turner, "Lot as Jekyll and Hyde," 89-90.

<sup>27</sup> Turner, *Genesis*, 85-86.

and finds refuge in a mountain cave.<sup>28</sup> Fifth, there is no record of Lot participating in the burial of Sarah (Gen 23:1-20) or Abraham (Gen 25:8-10) even though he lived in the region. Ishmael returns to bury his father with Isaac but no mention is made of Lot.

The characterization of Lot as a morally complex figure has theological implications as well. In his negotiations with Yahweh, Abraham assumes that moral status is binary and that the inhabitants of Sodom are either righteous or wicked. The complexity of the tragic figure of Lot demonstrates that morality is much more complicated than Abraham's presumptions. Good and evil, righteousness and sin, are all present in Lot at various times and even concurrently. Turner's depiction of Lot as a "Jekyll and Hyde" moral character is most apt.<sup>29</sup>

The above characterization of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot as beneficiaries in the triangle of intercession shares many points of similarity with the characterization present in the ANE intercessory texts examined in the preceding chapter.

First, the beneficiary in the ANE intercessory texts was characterized as being in a state of need. This state could be undeserved and secondary to circumstances such as oppression, victimization, or misfortune. Alternatively, the beneficiary may merit the state of need as a result of disobedience, moral transgression, disloyalty, questionable decision making, poor planning, etc. As a result, the beneficiary may or may not merit intercession and the favour of deliverance, protection, or provision from the benefactor. In the case of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot, all three are in a state of need and facing Yahweh's judgment of destruction. The two cities are characterized as unequivocally meriting divine judgment and undeserving of Abraham's intercession and Yahweh's

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<sup>28</sup> Abraham's tents were located near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron (Gen 13:18; 18:1). Zoar is believed to have been situated at the southern end of the Dead Sea and southeast of Hebron.

<sup>29</sup> Turner, "Lot as Jekyll and Hyde," 90-101.

mercy. Lot is a much more complex character. However, in the end, it is not his righteousness which results in his salvation but the righteous standing of his uncle (Gen 19:29).<sup>30</sup>

Second, in the ANE intercessory texts studied, the beneficiary is characterized as a passive, often silent character who recedes into the background as the stage is taken by the benefactor and the intercessor. In addition, the beneficiary is frequently characterized as a weak individual with moral, physical, or character flaws, a victim of oppression or misfortune, alone without an advocate, or one whose resources have been overwhelmed. In contrast, the intercessor is characterized as a heroic figure who advocates on behalf of the beneficiary. This characterization is true in the case of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot. All three are passive and silent characters in the negotiation narrative of Gen 18:16-33. Lot is not even mentioned in the account. As previously discussed, Sodom and Gomorrah are emphatically characterized as exceedingly morally flawed and deserving of divine judgment. The numerous tragic flaws in Lot's character have been examined above.

Third, a beneficiary may require the intervention of an intercessor for several reasons. The beneficiary may lack the resources to overcome a particular need, obstacle, opposition, or oppression. The beneficiary's own petitions to the benefactor may be ineffective and the intercessor's efforts represent a new and stronger attempt at securing the desired response. The intercessor may bolster the beneficiary's case before the benefactor and increase the likelihood of a favourable response. The beneficiary may lack the means or meritorious standing to directly approach the benefactor. This

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<sup>30</sup> Gen 19:29 echoes Gen 8:1 from the Flood narrative. See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 42-43 for a discussion on the parallels between the Flood narrative and the account of Sodom and Gomorrah.

obstacle is overcome by utilizing the intercessor's standing and influence with the benefactor. The beneficiary may be completely oblivious or indifferent to the danger or need he or she is facing. However, the intercessor may become aware of the danger or need as a result of the social, economic, political, or religious position held by the intercessor. In response to this knowledge, the intercessor may take the initiative to intercede on behalf of the beneficiary, even without the beneficiary's knowledge or request to do so.

In the Genesis record, Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot are characterized as being completely oblivious to Yahweh's impending judgment of destruction. Lot is consumed with being a gracious and generous host to visitors who have come to announce Yahweh's judgment and spare him from it. The citizens of Sodom continue their debauchery and immorality, unaware that morning would bring death and destruction.

### 5.3 *The Intercessor: Abraham*

The intercessor is the pivotal member of the triangle of intercession as it is he or she who connects the beneficiary who is in need with the benefactor/patron who possesses the resources to meet that need. Therefore, the qualities, abilities, resources, and standing of the intercessor play a significant role in the outcome of intercession. The characterization of Abraham as intercessor in Gen 18:16-33 requires careful examination given the critical nature of his role in the triangle of intercession and the status of Gen 18:16-33 as the first intercessory text in the Pentateuch. It is not the intention of this study to undertake a comprehensive examination of the character of Abraham in Gen 18-19. Rather, this study will focus on those elements of his characterization which are pertinent to the current discussion regarding intercession.

The preceding examination of selected ANE intercessory texts concluded that the intercessor functions as an advocate who champions the cause of the beneficiary, brings forward a request on his/her behalf, and secures favour, mercy and forgiveness. In the case of the latter function, the intercessor may stand between a beneficiary who is guilty of an offence and the judgment and wrath of the benefactor/patron. Interposed between the two, the intercessor quells the benefactor's anger and turns judgment and punishment away from the beneficiary.<sup>31</sup>

The characterization of Abraham in Gen 18:16-33 is consistent with the above description of the intercessor found in the selected ANE intercessory texts. Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot stand under imminent divine judgment and destruction but are completely oblivious to the fate that awaits them. There is not even one citizen who will

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<sup>31</sup> For ANE examples of intercessors turning away divine judgment, see "Gratitude for a Yahweh's Mercy" (*ANET* 380-381); "A Vision of the Nether World" (*ANET* 109-110). The image of the intercessor "standing in the gap" is also a prevalent theme in Biblical intercessory texts. See Ezek 22:30; Num 16:48; Psa 106:23,30; Isa 58:12; 59:16; Jer 15:1.

intercede on behalf of the cities or request that Abraham intercede on their behalf. However, Abraham is aware of the evil and immorality associated with the two cities. In light of this personal knowledge, upon hearing Yahweh's revelation of his awareness of Sodom's wickedness and his intention to verify the moral state of the cities, Abraham is prompted to intercede on their behalf. As Abraham stands physically before Yahweh and negotiates for the cities in Gen 18:22-32, he is also standing figuratively between Sodom and Gomorrah and Yahweh's judgment. Abraham attempts to secure divine mercy and avert Yahweh's wrath. These elements in the characterization of Abraham in Gen 18:16-33 are consistent with those present in the characterization of the intercessor in the selected ANE intercessory texts.

The selected ANE intercessory texts suggested that the character and standing of the intercessor appear to play a crucial role in the outcome of an intercessory petition. Successful intercession required boldness, audacity, and a stubborn persistence on the part of the intercessor. More importantly, the standing and reputation of the intercessor before the benefactor/patron appeared to play a pivotal role. In the ANE texts surveyed, the intercessor was on occasion a lay person of no particular status or distinction. However, frequently, the intercessor was characterized as a heroic protagonist who possessed standing and approval before the benefactor/patron on the basis of moral character, wisdom, physical strength, office, family lineage, or being a member of the divine pantheon.<sup>32</sup> The favourable or high standing of the intercessor strengthened the

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<sup>32</sup> For examples of intercessors who were held in high regard, see "The Legend of King Keret" (*ANET* 142-149); "A Vision of the Nether World" (*ANET* 109-110); "The Legend of the Possessed Princess ('Bentresh Stela')" (*COS* 1.54:134-136) and "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*ANET*, 29-31); "Atrahasis" (*ANET*, 104-106); "Atrahasis - Additional Texts" (*ANET* 512-514); "Atra-hasis" (*COS* 1.130:450-452);

petition and augmented the likelihood of a successful outcome.<sup>33</sup>

The high standing of Abraham before Yahweh is a major component of his characterization in Gen 18-19. Abraham is depicted as a heroic figure who possesses the qualities, abilities, resources, special knowledge, and most importantly, the favour of Yahweh, which enable him to advocate on behalf of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot. His high standing before Yahweh is critical to the process of intercession as Yahweh responds favourably, not as a result of any merit possessed by the two cities or Lot (Gen 19:29), but because of his high regard for Abraham.<sup>34</sup>

Abraham's high standing is immediately established at the outset of the narrative in Gen 18:16-33. His heroic status is emphatically affirmed not by another character's testimony nor even by the narrator. Instead, it is Yahweh himself speaking in a soliloquy who testifies to Abraham's exalted position. The author's use of the literary device of a soliloquy underscores the veracity and authenticity of Yahweh's opinion. By convention a soliloquy is understood to always be truthful as the speaker's thoughts are the very words of the soliloquy and one cannot lie to oneself. "This indeed is the value conventionally ascribed to the monologue: it imprints on a speech the mark of utmost sincerity and of absolute truthfulness."<sup>35</sup>

Yahweh's soliloquy in Gen 18:17-19 provides the evidence corroborating Abraham's high standing before Yahweh. First, Yahweh utilizes the verb  $\text{יָטַב}$  in a special, technical sense to indicate his recognition, selection or bestowal of special

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<sup>33</sup> Biblical examples include Abraham (Gen 18:18,19,22), Moses (Exod 32:11-14; 31-35; 33:12-23), Daniel (Dan 10:11,12,19) and texts such as Jas 5:13-17.

<sup>34</sup> The critical role in prayer of the high standing of the intercessor before Yahweh is captured in Jas 5:16.

<sup>35</sup> Roger Lapointe, "The Divine Monologue as a Channel of Revelation," *CBQ* 32 (1970), 180.

status on Abraham.<sup>36</sup> Sarna translates  $\text{ׁוּבְרָא}$  in Gen 18:19 as “I have singled him out” or, “I have entered into a special relationship with you”<sup>37</sup> with the result that Abraham enjoys a “special degree of intimacy with Yahweh.”<sup>38</sup> Second, the benefits of being chosen by Yahweh to participate in a unique relationship with him include the bestowal of promises (Gen 18:18). The reiteration of the promises first given to Abraham in Gen 12:2-3 elevate “Abraham to a level of importance and honor such that he is deemed worthy to share in God’s plan.”<sup>39</sup> Third, Abraham was designated by Yahweh as a mediator of blessing to the other nations. Fourth, Abraham’s selection by Yahweh was not intended to be an end in itself. Rather, he was chosen for the purpose of creating a nation that would observe the righteousness and justice which characterized the way of Yahweh. The fulfilment of Yahweh’s the promises was conditional on the obedience of Abraham and his descendants. The divine soliloquy of Gen 18:17-19 contributes to the characterization of Abraham as intercessor by providing “an extravagant credentialing of Abraham, perhaps the most extravagant of all of scripture.”<sup>40</sup>

Abraham’s high standing is the reason why Yahweh chooses to confide in him and to reveal to Abraham his intentions concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. Yahweh answers his own rhetorical question in his soliloquy endorsing Abraham’s merit and

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<sup>36</sup> Bergman and Botterweck, *TDOT* 5:448-481; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 18-19; Huffmon, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yada*,” 31-37; Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:290-94; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 209-210; Sarna, *Genesis*, 31, 131; Westermann, *Genesis*, 288; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 96, 269; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 350; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 50. Examples of other texts in which  $\text{ׁוּבְרָא}$  has a similar nuance of selection, choosing, or election include Amos 3:2-7; Exod 33:12, 17; Deut 9:24; 34:10; 2 Sam 7:20; 1 Chron 17:18; Jer 1:5; 12:3; Hos 13:5.

<sup>37</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 31. See also Speiser, *Genesis*, 132-133; Coats, *Genesis*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 131.

<sup>39</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 288.

<sup>40</sup> Brueggemann, “Shape for Old Testament Theology,” 409.

favoured status. In His monologue of Gen 18:20-21, Yahweh announces that he is aware of the sordid reputation of Sodom and Gomorrah, that he intends to establish the veracity of the charges against the cities, and hints that his judgment was not yet finalized. With this suggestion that divine judgment may yet be averted, the door is left open for Abraham to respond to Yahweh's revelation and to intervene on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The invitation to intercede is an invitation to undertake the prophetic role of participating in the divine decision making process.<sup>41</sup> The intercessor stands “in the gap” (Ezek 22:30; Psa 106:23) between Yahweh and humanity, possessing knowledge of human need, divine intentions, and the invitation to participate in the divine decision making process and shape the fulfilment of the divine intentions (Amos 3:7; Jer 23:18). Westermann notes that “Yahweh's reflection in vv. 17-19 is therefore to be understood in the following way: because Abraham enjoys such esteem, I will make him privy to my plans. Yahweh's esteem for his servants, the prophets, is such that he does nothing without having revealed his plan to them.”<sup>42</sup>

On this point, Goldingay writes that “Abraham plays a role Yahweh intends for him, taking a share in the process whereby decisions are taken and implemented in the

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<sup>41</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the nature of the prophetic office in the Hebrew Bible. However, with respect to Gen 18:16-33, Wenham observes that intercession is “fulfilling the role particularly associated with prophets.” The prophetic motif is conveyed by the presence of similar terms and structures in both the accounts of Abraham's intercession in Gen 18:16-33 and the intercession of Moses in Exod 32-34. These terms include יָדַע (Gen 18:19; Exod 33:12), נָשָׂא (Gen 18:24, 26; Exod 32:32; 34:6,7), שָׁחַת (Gen 18:28, 31, 32; Exod 32:7), אֶל־יְהוָה יָחֹר לִאֲדֹי (Gen 18:30, 32; Exod 32:22). However, unlike Jeremiah (14:7-9, 13; 15:1), Amos (7:1-9), and Samuel (1 Sam 12:23), Abraham does not intercede on behalf of his own people but for Sodom. There is no mention of Lot in his dialogue with God. See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 53. For a discussion of intercession in Exod 32-34, see Michael Widner, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer* (FAT 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Karla R. Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue: Exodus 32-34 in PostBiblical Literature* (Studies in Biblical Literature 61; New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 290.

world. For some reason Yahweh does not do that alone but involves Abraham; what we call intercessory prayer is the way Abraham fulfills this calling.”<sup>43</sup> Yahweh invites the intercessor to join his decision making cabinet and be part of the discussion, including questioning whether Yahweh’s intentions should be implemented.<sup>44</sup> At times, Yahweh chooses to make decisions by group consensus and allow intercessors to participate in decisions. At other times, He chooses to act alone.<sup>45</sup>

In responding to Yahweh’s revelation by interceding on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham undertakes a ministry and a “role particularly associated with the prophets.”<sup>46</sup> The narrative of Gen 18:16-33 characterizes Abraham as Yahweh’s prophet and as discussed in chapter 4, the *Yahweh-prophet* form is the primary traditional and literary form of the pericope. This characterization is consistent with Yahweh’s endorsement of Abraham’s high and favoured standing and the intimacy, trust, and privileged access which mark their relationship.

The characterization of Abraham as Yahweh’s prophet<sup>47</sup> is supported by several literary elements present within the narrative. First, the opening rhetorical question along with its answer in the monologue of Gen 18:20-21 provide evidence that Yahweh confides in Abraham and reveals his intentions to him in a manner associated with the prophets (Amos 3:7; Jer 23:18, 22; John 15:15).

Second, Abraham responds to the revelation of divine intent by interceding on behalf of those who were the subject of Yahweh’s deliberations. Intercession is a

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<sup>43</sup> Goldingay, “Logic of Intercession”, 263.

<sup>44</sup> Goldingay, “Logic of Intercession”, 265-266

<sup>45</sup> Balentine, “Prayers for Justice”, 605.

<sup>46</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 53.

<sup>47</sup> In Gen 20:7, Yahweh explicitly identifies Abraham’s status as a prophet.

function particularly associated with the prophetic office.<sup>48</sup>

Third, as presented in the preceding discussion, the term  $\text{יָדָע}$  in Gen 18:19 is employed with a nuance of meaning which describes a special relationship between Abraham and Yahweh marked by intimacy, trust, status, and privilege which is characteristic of the *Yahweh-prophet* relationship. In addition, the term  $\text{יָדָע}$  is also found in parallel passages in which Yahweh appoints and endorses his prophets in a manner similar to that accomplished by the soliloquy of Gen 18:17-19.<sup>49</sup>

Fourth, in addition to  $\text{יָדָע}$ , Gen 18:16-33 contains terms and structures which are also present in other prophetic intercessory texts.<sup>50</sup>

Fifth, in Gen 18:22, Abraham is described as “standing” ( $\text{תָּמַד}$ ) before Yahweh. Hamilton has noted that the term  $\text{תָּמַד}$  may refer to an act of worship (Jer 7:10), to entering into someone’s presence (Deut 19:17; 29:14), to the service of Yahweh (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kgs 3:14; 5:16), or, to a special use of the term to describe the intercessory ministry of a prophet of Yahweh (Jer 15:1, 9).<sup>51</sup> In the context of the negotiation dialogue which follows in Gen 18:23-32, it would appear that in Gen 18:22, this final technical meaning of prophetic intercessory ministry is employed<sup>52</sup> which

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<sup>48</sup> Moses in Exod 32-34; Num 12:11-13; 14:13-19; Deut 9:16-29; Samuel in 1 Sam 7:5-9; 12:19-25; Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:17-23; Elisha in 2 Kgs 4:33; 6:15-20; Jer 14:7-9, 13; 15:1; Amos 7:1-6.

<sup>49</sup> The term  $\text{יָדָע}$  is used to in the appointment and endorsement of Moses (Exod 33:12, 17) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:5) as Yahweh’s prophets.

<sup>50</sup> Wenham has observed that the prophetic motif is conveyed by the presence of similar terms and structures in both the accounts of Abraham’s intercession in Gen 18:16-33 and the intercession of Moses in Exod 32-34. These terms include  $\text{יָדָע}$  (Gen 18:19; Exod 33:12),  $\text{נָשָׂא}$  (Gen 18:24, 26; Exod 32:32; 34:6,7),  $\text{שָׁחַת}$  (Gen 18:28, 31, 32; Exod 32:7),  $\text{יָחַר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה}$  (Gen 18:30, 32; Exod 32:22). See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 53. For a discussion of intercession in Exod 32-34, see Michael Widner, *Moses, Yahweh, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer* (FAT 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Karla R. Suomala, *Moses and Yahweh in Dialogue: Exodus 32-34 in PostBiblical Literature* (Studies in Biblical Literature 61; New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 24.

supports Abraham's characterization as Yahweh's prophet.

Sixth, Abraham is charged with the responsibility of teaching his family the righteousness and justice that mark the way of Yahweh. The responsibility of instructing Ancient Israel in the moral conduct expected of them by Yahweh was a function of the prophets.<sup>53</sup>

Lastly, in his dialogue with Yahweh, Abraham searches for answers to questions of theodicy, questions concerning the dynamics of the relationship between Yahweh's mercy and righteousness, and exhibits a desire to gain a deeper understanding of Yahweh's character. In so doing, Abraham demonstrates a boldness and a persistence that is striking. This bold spirit of theological inquiry is also associated with the prophets.<sup>54</sup>

In summary, in Gen 18:16-33, Abraham functions as the precursor of the later prophets and foreshadows their future ministry, qualifications, requisite character.

Presented with the knowledge of Yahweh's intentions and the opportunity to participate in the shaping of the fulfilment of those purposes, Abraham elects to intercede on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah and takes up the opportunity to influence the outcome of Yahweh's deliberations. However, the narrator, Abraham, and Yahweh have all independently affirmed that the cities merit the judgment of destruction. What would motivate Abraham to make the effort to intercede on behalf of these two cities who deserve judgment?

With respect to this question of motivation for intercession, in several of the

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<sup>53</sup> Lev 10:11; Deut 4:14; 6:1; 18:15-22; 1 Sam 12:20-25; 2 Chron 24:19; Isa 58:1; Ezek 22:2; 43:10; Hos 12:10; Mic 3:8.

<sup>54</sup> Moses is an example of another prophet who exhibited a similar boldness and persistence in his theological inquiry and dialogue with Yahweh (Exod 32:11:15; 31-35; 33:12-23; 34:9).

ANE intercessory texts, intercession required effort, personal sacrifice, and even suffering and persecution on the part of the intercessor.<sup>55</sup> In light of the obstacles and personal costs that could be encountered, the incentive which motivates an intercessor to become involved in the plight of another and to advocate on their behalf is worthy of examination. First, the opportunity for personal gain or advancement may be an incentive and motivation for intercession. In cases of intercessory prayer for the healing of a loved one, for the forgiveness of their transgression and cancellation of judgment, or for their financial success, the intercessor may stand to gain personally from a successful outcome.<sup>56</sup> Second, a monarch, government official, master or employer may be obligated to intervene on behalf of a vassal, subject or servant because of the terms of the relationship between them.<sup>57</sup> This particular line of reasoning is employed in the *Atrahasis* epic in which the hero argues that because the gods were responsible for the creation of all life, they were also obliged to protect, provide for, and preserve creation. The chief god Enlil's plan to destroy humanity would be a violation of that relationship between creator and creation.<sup>58</sup> Lastly, intercession could also occur when the intercessor was under no obligation to the beneficiary and stood to receive no personal gain from a successful outcome. In these circumstances, intercession appeared to be motivated by a desire to uphold justice and social order or, by the qualities of

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<sup>55</sup> "The Eloquent Peasant" (*COS* 1.43:98-104).

<sup>56</sup> "Gratitude for a Yahweh's Mercy" (*ANET* 380-381; "The Kirta Epic" (*COS* 1.102:333-343); "The Legend of the Possessed Princess ('Bentresh Stela')" (*COS* 1.54:134-136); "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*ANET*, 29-30); "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World" (*ANET* 52-57).

<sup>57</sup> "The Legend of the Possessed Princess ('Bentresh Stela')" (*COS* 1.54:134-136); "The Legend of the Possessed Princess" (*ANET*, 29-31).

<sup>58</sup> "Atrahasis" (*ANET*, 104-106); "Atra-hasis" (*COS* 1.130:450-452).

compassion and altruism.<sup>59</sup>

In the characterization of Abraham in Gen 18:16-33, there was no possibility of personal gain from his intercessory efforts on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham had deliberately distanced himself from the two cities and had also previously demonstrated that he would not have any material or monetary dealings with them. In Genesis 14, after recovering the people and plunder from the two cities, Abraham chose to return both to the king of Sodom even though they were rightfully his as the victor in battle. Therefore, the opportunity for personal gain was not an incentive for Abraham to intercede on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Having no interactions with Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham was also under no obligation to intercede for them. He did not conduct business transactions with the inhabitants of the cities. He was not a citizen and unlike his nephew, was not related to any of the cities's inhabitants by marriage. It is possible that Abraham may have felt a secondary obligation to intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah on account of his nephew Lot who resided in Sodom. However, even this is speculative in light of the complexity of the relationship between Abraham and Lot. As was discussed in the preceding section, following Lot's rescue in Gen 14, there is no record of any further interaction between uncle and nephew even though they are neighbours and live in the same region. Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah but does not mention Lot even once in his dialogue with Yahweh. Following the destruction of the cities, Abraham is described as looking down on the destruction but does not venture down into the ruined valley to confirm Lot's survival, to bring him food and clothing, or to invite his nephew to stay

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<sup>59</sup> "A Vision of the Nether World" (*ANET* 109-110); "The Creation by Atum" (*ANET*, 3); "The Eloquent Peasant" (*COS* 1.43:98-104).

with him (Gen 19:27-28). In a corresponding manner, Lot does not seek out his uncle for aid but sets out in a direction that takes him away from his uncle and finds shelter in a mountain cave. Lastly, Lot is absent when Sarah (Gen 23:1-20) and Abraham (Gen 25:8-10) are both buried.

The characterization of Abraham in Gen 18:16-33 suggests that his intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah may have been primarily motivated by his sense of justice (or injustice). His understanding of justice prompted him to speak out when it appeared that the righteous in Sodom would suffer the same fate as the wicked. The city may have had a heterogeneous moral composition with a righteous minority present among the wicked majority. The possibility that Yahweh would treat the righteous and the wicked alike in judgment conflicted with Abraham's understanding of the justice and righteousness that characterized the way of Yahweh (יהוה צדק). As a result, Abraham boldly held Yahweh to account and challenged Yahweh to act in a manner consistent with the character and reputation that he had revealed and proclaimed himself to be. In order for Abraham to teach his family the righteousness and justice which mark the way of Yahweh, he needed to know from experience that Yahweh was righteous and just.

However, after securing agreement from Yahweh that the righteous would not be treated in the same manner as the wicked, Abraham does not cease in the pursuit of his theological inquiry concerning theodicy and the relationship between divine righteousness and mercy. Abraham proposes that a community's fate be determined by the righteous members and not by the wicked members. The underlying principle would be that the righteous, no matter how few, are more precious to Yahweh and their presence would determine the fate of a community. Yahweh agrees to Abraham's

proposal.

As was discussed in chapter four (4.4.5.2.1), Abraham boldly and audaciously approaches Yahweh in Gen 18:23-32 with the above requests. In so doing, he demonstrates his perseverance by pursuing Yahweh through six rounds of negotiations. His persistence, boldness and audacity are consistent with the characterization of the intercessor found in the selected ANE texts of intercession.

#### 5.4 *The Benefactor or Patron: Yahweh*

The preceding study of selected ANE texts of intercession found that the benefactor in the triangle of intercession was usually characterized as a wise, powerful, benevolent, generous, and just individual who possessed the resources required to meet the need of the beneficiary. The benefactor was superior in rank, authority, and capability than both the intercessor and the beneficiary. Examples of benefactors included a deity, monarch, master or employer, commanding military officer, government official, and an older family relative.

The characterization of Yahweh as benefactor in Gen 18:16-33 follows the characterization present in the selected ANE intercessory texts. The subsequent discussion is not an exhaustive examination of the characterization of Yahweh in Gen 18:16-33. Instead, it will focus on those elements of his characterization which are relevant to the study subject of intercession.

The protagonist of the narrative spanning Gen 18-19 is neither Abraham nor Lot. It is Yahweh. He is either physically present or his power is evident in each stage of the narrative. With respect to Gen 18:16-33, the narrative presents Yahweh as the one who orchestrates the intercessory dialogue with Abraham. Abraham's intercession is in response to Yahweh's initiative. Yahweh places Abraham in the role of a prophet by informing him of his intentions and inviting him to participate in the divine decision making process and influence the fulfilment of those intentions. The narrative also suggests a second reason for Yahweh's involvement of Abraham in his plans for Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham and the reader need to know and understand that Yahweh was just and merciful in arriving at his judicial decision concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 18:16-33 is a vindication of divine justice and answers questions of theodicy

with respect to Yahweh's judgment of the two cities. In order for Abraham to instruct his family to practice the justice and righteousness of the way of Yahweh, he first had to know that Yahweh was just and righteous.

Genesis 18:16-33 characterizes Yahweh as the omnipotent, just, and merciful judge of all the earth. Each of these three elements in the characterization of Yahweh as benefactor will be examined in turn.

The echoes of Yahweh's rhetorical question in Gen 18:14 are still audible when the scene and subject shifts in Gen 18:16 from the birth announcement to Abraham and Sarah to the announcement of judgment and death to Sodom and Gomorrah. As the events of Gen 18-19 unfold, Yahweh provides the answer to his rhetorical question posed in Gen 18:14. Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed as He had pronounced. In the midst of the destruction of the cities, Yahweh selectively removes and spares Lot and his two daughters from his judgment. Further, in answer to Lot's desperate plea, Yahweh spares the town of Zoar even as the surrounding cities are annihilated with fire. The preservation of Lot and Zoar in the midst of the overwhelming destruction that was all around them showed the controlled and discriminating nature of Yahweh's power.<sup>60</sup> In Gen 18-19, Yahweh is characterized as the omnipotent judge of all the earth who holds absolute power over life and death and who is capable of accomplishing his purposes.

The narrative provides three examples which demonstrate that Yahweh is just in arriving at his judicial decisions and does not act capriciously or arbitrarily. First, in Gen 18:20-21, using anthropomorphic language, Yahweh reveals to Abraham his awareness

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<sup>60</sup> Subsequent examples in which the righteous servants of Yahweh are selectively spared while the wicked around them are destroyed include the plagues inflicted on Egypt (Exod 8:22-23; 9:4-7; 9:26; 10:23; 11:4-7), Rahab and her family during the conquest of Jericho (Jos 2:15; 6:20-25), and Daniel and his companions (Dan 3:19-27; 6:23-24).

of the reputation of Sodom and Gomorrah's wickedness and his intention to substantiate the veracity of that reputation prior to finalizing his judgement of the two cities. The anthropomorphic language and announcement are for the benefit of Abraham and the reader as Gen 18:17 implies that Yahweh has already reached a final decision. Abraham and the audience need to know that Yahweh followed due process and gathered evidence to substantiate the charges against the two cities prior to arriving at a judicial decision. Second, Yahweh agrees the righteous should not be treated in the same manner as the wicked and that the righteous should be spared from the judgment of the wicked. Third, the wicked are punished when the agreed upon standard of ten righteous individuals was not satisfied.

*The characterization of Yahweh as just is a critical element in the theological message of Gen 18-19. It serves to vindicate Yahweh's judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah and answer questions of theodicy in the minds of Abraham and the reader. The narrative communicates to the reader that Yahweh followed due process and was not capricious in his judgment of the two cities, that the wicked would be punished, and that the wicked and the righteous would not be treated alike in divine judgement. The knowledge from personal experience that Yahweh is just was essential if Abraham was to instruct his family to observe the justice and righteousness of the way of Yahweh. The narrative of Genesis 18:16-33 provides theological balance and background to the events that will unfold in Gen 19. On this point, Waltke writes, "It is now established that the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, the paradigm for Yahweh's future judgments, is just. The Lord investigates the accusations thoroughly, ensures two objective witnesses, involves the faithful in his judgment, displays active compassion for the suffering, and prioritizes divine mercy over indignant wrath (i.e., not to be*

destroyed if even ten are righteous).”<sup>61</sup> By addressing the issue of theodicy, Gen 6-8 and Gen 18-19 establish the theological foundation for the conquest narratives.

In addition to depicting him as the omnipotent and just benefactor and judge of all the earth, the characterization of Yahweh in Genesis 18:16-33 also portrays him as merciful. In his dialogue with Yahweh, Abraham discovers that the way of Yahweh is not only righteousness and justice but also mercy.<sup>62</sup> The narrative of Gen 18:16-33 contains numerous plot elements and literary devices which convey and emphasize the message that Yahweh’s desire is mercy and judgment is his reluctant act.

First, the construction of the concluding conditional clause in Yahweh’s monologue in Gen 18:21 is indicative of Yahweh’s desire to show mercy instead of executing judgement. The protasis is stated in the negative (“if not ...”) rather than in the positive (“if so ...”). This is significant for two reasons. The negative construction of the protasis suggests a divine bias in favour of the cities not being as evil as the outcry would portray them. It appears that Yahweh is hoping that the charges would be proven false and that he would not have to destroy the cities. This is a subtle point of syntax but this study believes that the choice of stating the protasis in the negative was a deliberate one on the part of the author in order to convey Yahweh’s desire to show mercy and not judgment.

The negative construction of the protasis conveys a sense of hope, albeit faint, that Yahweh’s decision may not be final and that the possibility existed that it could be postponed, attenuated, or reversed. This possibility represents hope which serves to motivate Abraham to enter into an intercessory dialogue with Yahweh on behalf of

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<sup>61</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 271.

<sup>62</sup> See Exod 34:6-7; Ezek 18:19-32; Psa 103:8-18; Jonah 4:2.

Sodom and Gomorrah.

Second, the negotiations between Yahweh and Abraham are most unusual and unconventional. Without hesitation, Yahweh acquiesces to each of Abraham's downward revisions in the number of righteous individuals required to spare Sodom. There are no objections, challenges, or counter-proposals from Yahweh. Further, the curtness and simplicity of Yahweh's responses stand in contrast with the formality, deference, and eloquence of Abraham's presentations. The net result is the characterization of Yahweh as standing ready, almost eager, to agree to Abraham's next proposed number of righteous. The unusual and prompt manner in which responds to Abraham during their negotiations is further evidence of Yahweh's desire to extend mercy and not enact judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah.

Third, closely related to the above point is Yahweh's patience in allowing Abraham to determine the length of the negotiations. Abraham presents six proposals with Yahweh agreeing to each one. In the end, it is Abraham who signals the close of negotiations and not Yahweh. Yahweh's patience stems from his desire to be merciful and to not execute judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah if at all possible.

Fourth, Yahweh's readiness and desire to extend mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah is also conveyed by a syntactical feature present in Gen 18:28, 30. In these two verses, Yahweh's responses to Abraham are expressed in the form of two conditional statements. However, the usual logical order of a conditional statement in Biblical Hebrew is inverted. Instead of the conventional order in which the protasis is followed by the apodosis, in these two verses, the apodosis comes first. The inversion indicates that the more important content is contained in the apodosis.<sup>63</sup> In the case of these two

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<sup>63</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 38; Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 595.

verses, the inversion emphasizes that Yahweh's primary desire is to not destroy the two cities but to extend mercy to them.

Fifth, at the conclusion of their negotiations, Yahweh and Abraham reach an agreement that the presence of ten righteous individuals would result in Sodom being spared. Abraham inquires if the fate of the city would be determined by the righteous minority or the wicked majority. Yahweh decides that it would be the righteous who would be determinative in judgment. In essence, the righteous would be granted disproportionate influence and moral weight in judgment. The final agreement that ten righteous individuals would redeem an entire city of wicked citizens is so disproportionate that it emphasizes the extent and depth of Yahweh's desire to show mercy to Sodom.

Lastly, even though the standard of ten righteous individuals is not met, Yahweh does not destroy the entire city. Lot and his two daughters are spared even though under the terms of the negotiations, Yahweh was under no obligation to do so (Gen 19:29). By so doing, Yahweh is characterized as being kind, generous, and merciful. However, Lot's deliverance from Sodom was not the result of any merit or righteousness on his part. The narrator notes in Gen 19:29 that Lot was spared on account of Abraham's standing before Yahweh. Yahweh was under no obligation to spare Lot and his family. However, he demonstrated his mercy by sparing Lot on the basis of his uncle's standing before him, just as he was willing to spare the entire city of Sodom on the basis of ten righteous individuals.

Genesis 19:29<sup>64</sup> is the salvific turning point in the narrative of Sodom and

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<sup>64</sup> The structure of Gen 19:29 is noteworthy. Subordinate clauses describing Yahweh's destruction of the two cities open and close the verse thereby forming an *inclusio* which frames the central contents of the verse. At the centre of the verse are found the three members of the triangle of intercession: Yahweh the benefactor, Abraham the intercessor, and Lot the beneficiary. Genesis 7:24-8:1 and 30:22 contain similar

Gomorrah in Gen 18-19 and parallels a similar turning point, Gen 8:1, in the Flood narrative. In both of these verses, Yahweh remembers (זָכַר) a righteous individual who holds high standing before him and as a result, life is preserved out of the midst of judgment.<sup>65</sup> An exact parallel would read, “And God remembered Lot” since Noah and Lot were the two individuals preserved out of judgments of destruction. However, the substitution of Abraham for Lot in Gen 19:29 underscores the theological point that in contrast with Noah, Lot was not saved on account of any merit he himself possessed but on the basis of his uncle’s righteousness and high standing before Yahweh.<sup>66</sup> The preservation of Lot provides evidence of Yahweh’s agreement with Abraham’s proposal that the righteous would have a salvific effect on the wicked. Hamilton suggests that “Abraham is to Lot what the hypothetical righteous remnant would have been to Sodom.”<sup>67</sup>

Mercy is an essential element in the process of intercession. Abraham’s mercy and compassion prompt him to make the effort to intercede for those who deserve judgment, for those whom he disapproves of, and for those whom he has distanced himself from because of their wickedness. Ultimately, it is Yahweh’s desire to show mercy and not Abraham’s eloquence and persuasive rhetoric which makes intercession possible.

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descriptions of a reversal of circumstances initiated by Yahweh remembering (זָכַר) an individual.

<sup>65</sup> The parallels between the Flood narrative and the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 18-19 have been pointed out in chapter 4.2 *Structure*. See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 42-43.

<sup>66</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 59-60.

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 49.

## *Chapter 6 - Summary and Conclusion*

The narrative of Gen 18:16-33 makes a significant contribution to the literary composition and theological message of the Abraham Cycle and of the book of Genesis. Its omission from the Genesis account would result in the loss of key rhetorical components and leave gaps in the literary structure and message of Genesis. This is due not only to its content but also to its placement at the threshold of the climactic conclusion of the Abraham Cycle. Genesis 18:16-33 functions as a prelude to the concluding chapters in which the various plot lines, conflicts, and elements of dramatic suspense are brought together and resolved. These include the plot elements concerning Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19), Lot (Gen 19), Ishmael (Gen 21), and Isaac (Gen 21-22).

Genesis 18:16-33 serves to introduce, establish, and affirm several key theological elements prior to the conclusion of the Abraham Cycle. First, Abraham's high standing before Yahweh is validated (Gen 18:17-19). Using the literary device of a soliloquy which by convention is always truthful, Yahweh himself endorses Abraham as his select servant and affirms the authenticity of the covenant treaty promises. The soliloquy also reveals that the selection of Abraham and his descendants was not an end in itself but for the purpose of mediating blessing from Yahweh to all the nations of the earth as they practised the righteousness and justice of the way of Yahweh.

Second, Gen 18:16-33 is the first account of intercession in the Pentateuch. As such, this narrative introduces the nature, components, requirements, and participants of the intercessory process. In the narrative, Yahweh informs Abraham that he is aware of the reputation of Sodom and Gomorrah, implies that judgment awaits them, and reveals

his intention to personally substantiate the veracity of their reputation. Yahweh places Abraham in the role of an intercessory prophet by informing him of his intentions and inviting him to participate in the divine decision making process and influence the fulfilment of those intentions. As Abraham accepts Yahweh's invitation, he is provided with the opportunity to help decide the number of righteous individuals that would be required to redeem an entire city of wicked citizens. Abraham's intervention on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 18:16-33 foreshadows the future intercessory ministry of the prophets.

Third, Gen 18:16-33 demonstrates Yahweh's character and the way of Yahweh (Gen 18:19, דרך יהוה). The dialogue between Yahweh and Abraham answers questions of theodicy concerning Yahweh's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. The narrative affirms that Yahweh was just and followed due process in arriving at his judicial decision regarding the two cities. Thus, Gen 18:16-33 vindicates Yahweh's justice and provides critical theological balance and background to the events of Gen 19. However, Yahweh was not only just in his actions towards Sodom and Gomorrah, he was also merciful. As was previously presented in *chapter 5.4*, the narrative of Gen 18:16-33 strongly emphasizes that Yahweh is merciful in its characterization of him. *Judgment is Yahweh's reluctant act. Through the events of the narrative, Abraham and the reader come to understand that the way of Yahweh is characterized by justice, righteousness and mercy because Yahweh is just, righteous, and merciful. This understanding is critical for Abraham as he is charged with the responsibility of teaching his family to observe the way of Yahweh. By so doing, they will realize the fulfilment of Yahweh's covenant promises and mediate blessing to all the nations of the earth.*

Fourth, Gen 18:16-33 reveals insights into the nature of the tension and dynamic between divine mercy and divine justice. As Abraham presses Yahweh in their negotiations, Yahweh establishes that the fate of the city of Sodom would not be determined by the wicked majority but by the righteous minority. The righteous are more precious to Yahweh and in judgment, He will grant them a disproportionate amount of influence. In the specific context of Gen 18:16-33, Yahweh grants Abraham the privilege of determining the exact degree of disproportionate influence. In the end, it is determined that ten righteous individuals would redeem the entire city from judgment. The theological motif of a righteous remnant finds its origins in the negotiation narrative of Gen 18:16-33.

Fifth, Gen 18:16-33 sheds light on characterization and relational dynamics among the three parties drawn together in the triangle of intercession. What is revealed is consistent with the characterization found in the selected ANE intercessory texts which were studied. The beneficiaries, Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot, play a silent and passive role in the process of intercession. Further, all three parties were oblivious to the judgment of destruction that was about to come upon them.

The characterization of Abraham as intercessor emphasizes the crucial role of his high and favoured standing before Yahweh. His favoured standing and covenant relationship with Yahweh prompt Yahweh to inform Abraham of the fate about to befall Sodom and Gomorrah and to invite him to intercede and participate in the shaping of the divine judgment on the two cities. Secondary elements in the characterization of Abraham as intercessor include compassion, a strong sense of justice, boldness, and perseverance.

The study of selected ANE intercessory texts revealed that the benefactor was

usually characterized as a wise, powerful, benevolent, generous, and just individual who possessed the resources required to meet the need of the beneficiary. The benefactor was superior in rank, authority, and capability than both the intercessor and the beneficiary. The characterization of Yahweh as benefactor in Gen 18:16-33 follows the characterization which was found in the ANE intercessory texts that were examined. Genesis 18:16-33 characterizes Yahweh as the omnipotent, just, and merciful Judge of all the earth. The narrative contains numerous plot elements and literary devices which convey and emphasize the message that Yahweh's desire is mercy and judgment is his reluctant act.

The theological message of Gen 18:16-33 is relevant and applicable to the present day believing community. Intercession is the act of asking Yahweh to extend his mercy and favour to another. The intercessor mediates blessing from Yahweh to those around him or her. Intercession begins when Yahweh informs his servants about his intentions and about the needs of a beneficiary. Intrinsic to the provision of this information is an invitation to respond by interceding and participating in Yahweh's decision making process. The intercessor is given the opportunity to play a role in shaping the fulfilment of Yahweh's intentions for the beneficiary. The information and invitation are given to Yahweh's servants because of their high standing before Yahweh. This high standing is on the basis of the grace and righteousness bestowed on each believer through the finished work of Jesus Christ. It is this righteous standing before Yahweh which results in effective intercession (Jas 5:16). As a result, when the believer intercedes for another, he or she undertakes that aspect of the Old Testament prophetic ministry and like Abraham, mediates blessing to another.

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