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Abraham, Blessing and the Nations

A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context

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Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context

The meaning of Genesis 12:3 is much controverted. This study, considering the final form of Genesis, argues that it is in the first place a promise of security and greatness to Abraham and Israel, but that in its context, following Genesis 1-11, it also indicates a divine plan to extend blessing to all the earth's peoples. In receiving God's blessing, Abraham/ Israel act as models and/ or pioneers of blessing for others. God's actions remain free, but also invite appropriate human response.

Examination of the near-parallels to Genesis 12:3a in Genesis 27:29b and Numbers 24:9b shows that they are concerned more with the security of the person blessed than with the possibility of others gaining blessing.

Detailed discussion of the Hebrew niphal concludes that it normally has either passive or 'middle' force (and is very rarely reflexive). No 'middle' sense found elsewhere for the niphal plausibly fits √ברך, and hence the niphal in Genesis 12:3 (and 18:18 and 28:14) is passive: analysis of these passages in their contexts supports this grammatical conclusion. The hithpael in general this study argues to be usually 'middle' in force, though sometimes passive and occasionally reflexive. The hithpael of √ברך when used outside Genesis is probably a 'speech action middle', meaning 'utter blessing', and this sense fits Genesis 22:18 and 26:4: this is argued to be compatible with understanding the niphal as a passive.

The semantics of √ברך are also discussed. 'Blessing' in the Old Testament essentially relates to divine bestowal of prosperity onto humans, though God grants humans in certain circumstances the privilege of invoking his blessing on others. (The sense of √ברך also extends to, for example, greeting and to praising God.)

Abraham, Blessing and the Nations

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Keith Nigel Grüneberg

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Acknowledgements

Declaration

No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in any university. Material derived from the work of others has been acknowledged.

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Abbreviations used in the body of the thesis

Biblical Books

i) Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Ex	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
1Sam	1 Samuel
2Sam	2 Samuel
1Ki	1 Kings
2Ki	2 Kings
1Chr	1 Chronicles
2Chr	2 Chronicles
Neh	Nehemiah
Ps	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Solomon
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

ii) New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Rom	Romans
Gal	Galatians
2Thess	2 Thessalonians

iii) Apocrypha

Sir	Sirach

Hebrew and Greek Grammars and Dictionaries

BDB   A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament   F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs. 1908: Oxford, Clarendon Press

BDF   A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and revised by R. W. Funk. 1961: Chicago/ London, University of Chicago Press

GKC   Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, edited and enlarged by E. Kautzsch, second English edition by A. E. Cowley. 1910: Oxford, Clarendon Press

JM   A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew P. Joüon, S.J., and T. Muraoka. 2 volumes. Subsidia biblica 14/I-II. 1991: Rome, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico

KBS   The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, revised by W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm, translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson *et al.* 5 volumes. 1994-2000: Leiden, E.J. Brill

TDNT   Theological Dictionary of the New Testament edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, translated by G. W. Bromiley with an index by R. E. Pitkin. 10 volumes. 1964-1976: Grand Rapids, Eerdmans

W/O'C   An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Third, corrected, printing. 1990: Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns

Bible Translations

JB	Jerusalem Bible
JPSV	Jewish Publication Society Version
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version

Other

BHS	<u>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</u>
KTU	<u>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit I</u> M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24. 1976: Kevalaer/ Neukirchen-Vluyn, Butzon & Bercker/ Neukirchener Verlag
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Mas(s)oretic Text
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
Dt	-*t*- infixed form of the *Doppelstamm* (i.e. with the middle radical doubled)
tD	*t*- prefixed form of the *Doppelstamm*
tG	*t*- prefixed form of the *Grundstamm*

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale for this study

The importance of Gen 12:1-3 – and especially v3 – was classically asserted by Gerhard von Rad.[1] For him, 12:1-3 is a free composition of the Yahwist, and therefore most clearly expresses the latter's theology (elsewhere the theology is more implicit in the arrangement of the material than explicit[2]). The passage forms a bridge between the 'primeval history' and the story of the patriarchs, consequently linking Israel's history (which for von Rad is *Heilsgeschichte*, the history of God's salvation) with the story of all humanity.

> [B]ecause of this welding of primeval history and saving history, the whole
> of Israel's saving history is properly to be understood with reference to the
> unsolved problem of Jahweh's relationship to the nations. To speak of
> Israel, and of the meaning of her election, means beginning with the
> creation of the world and trying to understand it in the universality of all
> nations.[3]

Thus v3b is marked out as climactic, revealing the goal of Israel's existence as it states that all the families of the earth shall be blessed:

> the ultimate purpose of the redemption which God will bring about in Israel
> is that of bridging the gulf between God and the entire human race.[4]

Yet this point where

> primeval history and sacred history dovetail

is

> one of the most important places in the entire Old Testament.[5]

Hence it is perhaps the Yahwist's major contribution to an understanding of *Heilsgeschichte*:

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[1] Cf. especially von Rad (1966) pp63-7, von Rad (1962) pp161-5, von Rad (1972) pp152-5, 159-161, all asserting similar positions.

[2] von Rad (1966) p67.

[3] von Rad (1962) p164.

[4] von Rad (1966) p66; cf. also n107.

[5] von Rad (1972) p153.

Truly flesh and blood did not inspire this view beyond Israel and its saving relation to God![6]

Hans Walter Wolff[7] likewise asserts the significance of Gen 12:1-3, within which v3b is climactic (pp138-140), for the theology of the Yahwist, whose work

has determined to a great extent the outline and theme of the present-day Pentateuch, the Torah, as the basic Canon. (p132)

(From a Christian perspective it is thus vital to an understanding of Jesus, since it is a basic assertion of the New Testament that the Old Testament bears witness to him [pp131-2].) Wolff agrees with von Rad that 12:1-3 is a composition of the Yahwist, linking primeval and patriarchal stories (pp136-7); hence it may well be central to the message the Yahwist wishes to proclaim to his contemporaries, during the reign of Solomon (pp134-6). That message is that Israel's greatness must culminate in all the families of the earth gaining blessing: Israel's task is to bring blessing to others (p155). Wolff finds this coming to expression again in further Yahwistic texts, notably Gen 18-19; 26; 30:27, 30; 39:5; 41:49, 57; Ex 12:32; Num 24:9 (pp147-155). It is also echoed by subsequent Old Testament texts: cf. Ps 47:10[9]; Isa 19:23-5; Jer 4:1-2; Zech 8:13, 23 (pp155-7).

In basic agreement with von Rad and Wolff are a variety of writers who see Gen 12:1-3 as giving Israel a role as mediator of blessing to the world:[8] we might also note the verse's New Testament appropriations (Acts 3:25;[9] Gal 3:8) which regard it as a promise of all nations gaining blessing, though stressing Christ's role in this.[10] However a different interpretation of the text is also current, which has recently been reasserted in a carefully nuanced form by Moberly. He argues – following Rashi, amongst others[11] – that v3b refers to the nations using Abraham's name in blessing ('May you be blessed like Abraham'), and

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[6] von Rad (1972) p154.

[7] Wolff (1966).

[8] Cf. e.g. Mitchell (1987) pp29-36; Sarna (1989) p89; Turner (1990a) pp53-61; Brueggemann (1997) pp431-4. Amongst earlier writers, cf. e.g. Procksch (1924) pp96-7.

[9] Though this is perhaps closer to Gen 22:18.

[10] Acts 3:25 probably deliberately plays on the ambiguity of σπέρμα: it refers to both all Abraham's faithful descendants and Christ in particular.

[11] Rashi (1972a) p49; cf. also e.g. Gunkel (1997) pp165-6; Albrektson (1967) pp78-81; Blum (1984) pp350-2.

> [w]hen this idiom is connected with the context of Abraham's story, the
> purpose of the divine promise is clear: assurance to Abraham.[12]

The promise is for Abraham, not for the nations.

> In the context of a hostile or indifferent world, that is, despite the nations,
> Abraham is promised that his walk with God will not lead to oblivion; it
> will lead to a people whose walk with God can receive the respect of others
> and a desire for emulation. The concern is not to 'save' or 'reconcile' other
> nations. It is to establish Israel in their midst, a people where the reality of
> God's presence may be acknowledged by others.[13]

Thus Gen 12:3 is a significant and not uncontroversial text (a range of positions intermediate between Wolff and von Rad on the one hand and Moberly on the other is also available: Westermann, for example, accepts that v3b refers to the use of Abraham's name in blessing, but also argues that this shows the ultimate divine goal to be the blessing of all the families of the earth[14]). A primary issue is the force of the niphal ונברכו: is it a passive ('be blessed'; so von Rad), middle ('gain blessing', so Wolff) or reflexive ('bless themselves', so Moberly)? What is the relationship between the two halves of 12:3? What context is established for 12:3 by its immediate surroundings (the promise to Abraham) and by what precedes in Genesis? Do parallels later in Genesis, and Num 24:9, shed light on its meaning? (This study will differ from those of von Rad and Wolff in considering the place of Gen 12:3 in the final form of Genesis, not in the work of the Yahwist; see below ch1.2.) These questions set the agenda for the detailed discussion which follows. Desirable would be also discussion of how the themes discerned in 12:3 work out in the rest of Genesis, and whether they are paralleled elsewhere in the Old Testament; however for reasons of space these issues will not be addressed in detail. Nor will we be able to discuss the potential theological significance of our understanding of the text.

1.2 Method

This study seeks to interpret the final form of the text. This is not to deny that the text has a prehistory, enquiry into which is legitimate: it is a valid, perhaps even an important, historical question whether parts of Genesis were originally addressed to the

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[12] Moberly (2000) p123.

[13] Moberly (2000) pp125-6.

[14] Westermann (1985) pp151-2.

tenth century B.C., for example, even though the final form is clearly much later. Nor is it ahistorical, inasmuch as it seeks to establish the meaning of the final form as an ancient Israelite text. A *synchronic* reading is not thereby *achronic*,[15] if it acknowledges the text's rootedness in its original context (and indeed the context in/ for which the interpretation is being produced).

There are three motivations for attempting such a reading. First, the meaning of the final form is surely an important historical question. Second, the final form is a literary product, worthy of attention in its own right.[16] Third, the final form of the text forms part of the canonical Scriptures of Jews and Christians, and therefore is of theological significance within any orthodox theology:[17] it is, for better or worse, this text that has been canonised, not any of its predecessors (though, at least in some branches of Christianity, a case could also be made for the canonisation of the Septuagint, with its differences from the Hebrew text). That is not, of course, to demonstrate that earlier stages of the text lack theological significance, but it surely does imply that at least primary weight should be laid on the final form.[18]

Final form criticism must be distinguished from redaction criticism, even though the latter may concern itself with the text's final form. For redaction criticism asks after the redactor's purpose in composing the text from its various elements, while final form criticism focuses attention more on the text itself. Yet the meaning of a text is not determined by its author's intention, except insofar as that intention is mediated by the text to the reader.[19] Nor is this a matter simply of the evidence being in the text, as a redaction

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[15] 'Da Synchronie nicht Achronie bedeutet...' (Frettlöh (1998) p275n14).

[16] In what follows I do not consider in any detail what it might mean to see the text specifically as a literary artefact, simply assuming that the text is not devoid of literary merit.

[17] However it has been noted (though I cannot now trace the reference) that classic Jewish exegesis generally pays attention to scripture as a whole and to the smallest details of the text, but not to the intermediate units – e.g. books – with which final form readings, including this study, are normally concerned. This study thus accepts that scripture is not straightforwardly homogeneous.

[18] To give an extreme example, were Ps 29 adapted from a Baal psalm (my argument here is one of principle, and thus independent of whether or not this claim is true) that presumably does not legitimate those aspects of the original that have been altered in making the psalm appropriate for worship of Yhwh. The theological importance of the earlier stages in the text's history is asserted by e.g. von Rad (cf. especially von Rad (1962) Part Two); Childs (with emphasis on final form); Barr (1999) ch13.

[19] Cf. the brief nuanced discussion of the 'intentional fallacy' in Barton (1996) pp147-151; also Thiselton (1992) pp559-562.

critic might claim that (s)he made little use of extratextual evidence. Rather only that part of the author's intention which is conveyed as part of the normal reading process can shape the text's meaning; and that process surely does not include an attempt to reconstruct the text's prehistory. An exception might be if the reader recognises traditional materials and thus does compare the text with an alternative version of the same basic material. While we must acknowledge this to be possible in the case of Genesis, it is perhaps less likely that the original audience would have known the precise sources with which the redactor was working than that they would have known some version(s) of (some of) the various stories.[20] Thus the original readers' experience was not shaped by the text's redaction history, but by the text itself.[21] Redaction criticism may indeed help a final form reading: authors usually succeed in making texts mean (more or less) what they intend them to mean, so evidence for a particular redactional purpose makes it at least a plausible hypothesis that the text has that meaning; certainly it shows that what one sees in the text is not anachronistic. However in principle a final form reading is independent of any redactional hypothesis.

We therefore attempt to focus on the text, not the author.[22] We focus also on the text rather than the reader, asking 'What does this mean as an ancient Israelite text?' not 'What did this mean to an ancient Israelite reader?'. Yet we only begin to answer the question, since the purpose of phrasing it thus is to allow that the text's meaning is not restricted to some function of its interplay with its original context: the text may also have meaning for a reader in some other context as, in part, a function of that new context. An interpreter may attempt to interrelate the two horizons of the text and his/ her own situation.[23] In this study we shall not discuss what the text might mean for a contemporary interpreter (first-world or two-thirds world, Christian or Jewish or adherent of some other religion or atheist or agnostic, etc.), but seek instead to give a preliminary analysis of the

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[20] To say this is of course to make various assumptions: e.g. that the text was formed by a redaction based on particular sources, not on traditional oral stories which could be realised in various ways.

[21] Boorer (1989) pp204-5n16 argues for the importance of a diachronic approach since '[t]he interpreter will be different, when approaching the interpretation of the present text after moving diachronically through the text and being formed by each level, from an interpreter approaching the final text directly'. However is this not precisely the problem with the diachronic approach, that it tends to make the modern reader even more different from the ancient reader?

[22] Cf. the distinction of Schökel (1998) ch3 between 'text-hermeneutics' and 'author-hermeneutics'.

[23] Cf. Thiselton (1980) *passim*, especially pp307-310 on Gadamer.

text's horizon, that the dialogue between reader and text may begin.[24] The text's rootedness in its original context must be acknowledged, if we are to let it be a full partner in the dialogue, not just a tool of our interests. Linguistically we must respect the conventions of the period of the text's production: any good interpretation of Abraham's 'fear of God' (22:12) must grant that it denotes reverence not fright;[25] the meaning of ונברכו (12:3) is constrained by the possibilities for the function of the niphal, the force of ו + perfect after a cohortative and the semantics of √ברך in classical Hebrew.[26] But since language is enmeshed in life (as Wittgenstein in particular insisted), and discourse generally leaves unsaid much of what is necessary for its understanding,[27] we must equally acknowledge other social conventions and shared assumptions on which the text depends: Gen 15:7ff doubtless presumes at least some understanding of the ritual of the pieces (one of the difficulties of interpretation is that we have little evidence to judge what an ancient reader would have made of it); Gen 22:1-19 assumes that child sacrifice was at least a thinkable option. Some knowledge is thus necessary for the reader to interpret the text competently.[28] However the knowledge necessary for competent reading is not all that which was shared by author and original audience and influenced the latter's interpretation: that is to tie the text too closely to its original context, not to allow it to speak in a distinctly different situation (and a narrative such as Genesis might well have been composed as a story which might inform many situations, not to address a particular contemporary need; in this it contrasts with e.g. a Pauline letter). One understands the promise of blessing for Abraham/ Israel (12:2) without needing to know whether the original audience heard it as a promise that

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[24] For the image of dialogue, cf. e.g. Schökel (1998) pp66-70. This study is of course not entirely neutral, since it has inevitably been shaped by the preunderstandings and interests of the interpreter; in the continuation of the dialogue some of these may be exposed and challenged.

[25] Cf. below pp236-237. While we may derive our understanding of 'fear of God' primarily by comparison with other biblical texts, this is simply because they provide the evidence of linguistic usage.

[26] Cf. below chs3, 5-6. However we must acknowledge that, for example, our understanding of √ברך will inevitably be influenced by *our* conceptions of the world, and we may legitimately ask whether an expanded understanding of blessing distorts the text or rather enhances its meaning.

[27] Turner (2000b) p48 instances a driver opening his window and saying to a passer-by 'Excuse me, I'm right on empty', clearly a request to be told the location of the nearest petrol-station, but which presupposes, e.g., shared understanding of the importance of petrol for driving and of the nature of petrol gauges, a convention of not informing strangers of personal information without some purpose in so doing etc.

[28] Barton (1996) ch1 stresses the idea of competence, particularly with respect to understanding the genre of a text. We need to know, for example, whether to approach Genesis as a serious text or as a *jeu d'esprit* (for the latter, implausible, option, cf. e.g. Brisman (1990)).

their current predicament would be transcended or as reassurance that their current prosperity was divinely ordained.

A recent careful attempt to establish the importance of diachronic analysis in reading the final form of Genesis is that of David Carr.[29] He proposes that

> the most important specific contribution a diachronic approach can make to the investigation of the interpretive potential of the present biblical text [is] helping a reader *hold on* to the fractures of multiauthored texts like Genesis,[30]

a fracture being a tension between two parts of the text. Such fractures, in Carr's view, should not be glossed over, but both sides of the tension should be given full weight. So in Gen 2-3,

> [t]he text's fractures are an invitation to readers to interpret the fractures of their own world, challenging them to account for both the sovereign divine order of the Priestly account and the more contingent, cyclical narrative world of the non-Priestly account.[31]

Likewise in what follows there is a tension

> between the orderly world of P's carefully structured genealogies and the often unpredictable narrative world of the non-P narratives.[32]

However it is unclear to me why diachronic analysis is *necessary*: if the fracture is present in the text, the reader should be able to maintain it[33] without the need for hypothesis about its origin. Indeed the tension must first be established by synchronic analysis:

> careful synchronic study of a text's present form is an essential prelude to methodologically controlled reflection on how that form was produced.[34]

And not every fracture results from source-combination:

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[29] Carr (1996), esp. chs1 (including a useful overview of some previous proposals on the relation of diachronic and synchronic study, pp4-15) and 12.

[30] Carr (1996) p13 (his italics).

[31] Carr (1996) p319.

[32] Carr (1996) p320.

[33] Cf. the quote from p13 above; also p320 '[a] diachronic analysis *merely* helps us to hold on to the tensions between the P and non-P voices at this point, and to recognise the options presented to the reader here' (italics added).

[34] Carr (1996) p.viii; cf. Moberly (1983) pp22-7.

[t]here are many fractures in Genesis that are not diachronically based, just as in any text that tries to bridge the fractures of a world with narrative.[35]

For indeed

as deconstructive critics particularly remind us, all texts are somehow fractured.[36]

And in fact Carr suggests that there was no sharp divide between authors and redactors in the Ancient Near East, since

Ancient Near Eastern authors built on earlier materials yet often intervened in those materials to make them into a more or less new whole,[37]

though the combining of P and non-P material in Genesis was perhaps exceptional for its concern to preserve as much as possible of its predecessors and to add as little as possible.[38]

Thus Carr's work, rather than establishing the need for diachronic analysis, instead directs us to the question of what sort of unity one should expect in Genesis. Perhaps the biblical writers

had certain notions of unity rather different from our own, and... the fullness of statement they aspired to achieve as writers in fact led them at times to violate what a later age and culture would be disposed to think of as canons of unity and logical coherence. The biblical text may not be the whole cloth imagined by pre-modern Judeo-Christian tradition, but the confused textual patchwork that scholarship has often found to displace such earlier views may prove upon further scrutiny to be a purposeful pattern.[39]

We should not deny that the text is composed of material which a single author would be unlikely to create *de novo*,[40] but we cannot stop there. We might instance the identity of Abraham's visitors in Gen 18-19. V1a announces the appearance of Yhwh to Abraham;

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[35] Carr (1996) p334.

[36] Carr (1996) p15. Obviously for my argument it is unimportant whether this is unqualifiedly true, or whether only many – or indeed some – texts have such tensions.

[37] Carr (1996) pp21-2.

[38] Carr (1996) pp314-6.

[39] Alter (1981) p133; cf. his ch7 as a whole.

[40] Barton (1996) pp21-2 helpfully stresses that while arguably some source critics assume the text is a patchwork and use the minutest differences to divide it up, the method originated because scholars with no vested interest in seeing the text as a disunity observed clear tensions in it.

vv2-9 talk of three men, except v3 which is in the singular. Vv10-15 employ the singular with no indication that it is simply one of the three men speaking, though v13 explicitly identifies the speaker as Yhwh. In v16 the men, presumably all three, depart; in vv17-21 Yhwh speaks. In vv22ff the men go to Sodom, while Yhwh remains with Abraham, departing in v33. In 19:1ff two men, explicitly called מלאכים, reach Sodom; the plural is maintained until v16, returns in v18, and then vv19ff continue in the singular. It has long been recognised that a likely (at least partial) explanation for the variation is use of a story in which several men visit in a framework where it is important to stress at points that the action is that of Yhwh.[41] For even if the predominant conclusion one would reach by careful examination of the text is that there are three men, one of whom is Yhwh, this may be to smooth things out too much – at times the three men (or two men in ch19) *together* seem to represent Yhwh, most clearly in 18:2-9 and 19:17ff,[42] but perhaps also in 18:16-21. Yet equally it may be that careful dissection of the text is an inappropriate way to read it, and that it may rather suggest that divine/ human interaction is complex: while sometimes one may have a clear encounter with God (e.g. 18:22b-33), one may also meet God in the ordinary and in people (18:1-9).[43] To give a slightly different example, in ch42 Joseph's brothers appear twice to discover their money returned to their sacks (vv27-8, 35-6). While we can perhaps read the second as an awkwardly phrased opening of the sacks in Jacob's presence, provoking renewed anxiety, the author's concern seems more to emphasize the divine purposes (vv27-8) and the familial suspicion (vv35-6) than to produce a text without loose ends.[44]

For Genesis is clearly more than a collection of diverse elements.[45] The Abraham cycle focuses primarily on the question of whether and how Abraham will have descendants. While this theme certainly does not include everything in the cycle (e.g. ch19), there is a plot to the whole: crudely, descendants are promised (12:1-3); the promise is subsequently explicitly linked to Abraham's having a son of his own (15:1-6); Abraham

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[41] Cf. e.g. Gunkel (1997) pp193-4 on 18:1-16.

[42] Especially v21 where the speaker has authority to spare a city at Lot's request (cf. von Rad (1972) p217).

[43] Cf. von Rad (1972) p205; Alston (1988) p398. Tsevat (1980) p65 suggests that '[m]essengers, natural or supernatural, in whom God is concealed and from whom He emerges are the narrative's way of expressing man's uncertainty about the divine at a given moment, indeed the elusive nature of the divine in the encounter with him'.

[44] Cf. Alter (1981) pp137-40.

[45] Cf. e.g. Fokkelman (1987) or Fox (1989) (though by no means all his arguments are convincing).

and Sarah attempt to achieve this through Hagar (ch16), but God specifies that the descendants will also be Sarah's; Abraham and Sarah's marriage is put at risk, but protected by God (ch20); after Isaac's birth and Ishmael's banishment (ch21), God tests Abraham by requiring him to sacrifice Isaac (22:1-18); in ch24 a wife is found for Isaac, that he too may have children. The Jacob cycle is different, but equally has its themes, notably that of family conflict, of how God's choice of Jacob affects him, Isaac, Esau and Laban. (However we can hardly call this difference a *tension*: in narrative terms there is no reason why the same issue should be repeated in different generations; the themes are complementary, not in any way contradictory.) Moreover the theme of promise unites both cycles (12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 17:16; 28:13-16; 35:11-12 etc.): the text invites the reader to make associations across it.[46] Genesis as a whole has at least a loose structure provided by the repeated formula אלה תולדות at 2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2 (זה ספר תולדת in 5:1 apparently has the same function, though the reason for the variation is obscure[47]). It is a significant pointer to the book's unity that the תולדות-series does not continue further into the Pentateuch: the break in genealogical continuity between Jacob's sons and Moses must stop us seeing the formula's recurrence in Num 3:1 as a continuation of the Genesis series. Genesis presents itself as a connected story of origins, not an anthology of independent traditions.

Thus this study proceeds on the hypothesis that the final form of Genesis can be read as a unity, without denying the presence of tensions and differences, both those which modern authors would almost certainly aim to avoid and those which may be at least in part artful presentation of two complementary perspectives. Diachronic study, as I have been arguing, is not necessary for a reading of the text. Moreover it may distract attention from the final form when the redactional process has altered the text's meaning. For example, if 22:15-18 is an addition to an original vv1-14[48] the latter's ending would have emphasised the themes of God's provision, and the story's aetiological aspects, whereas vv15-18 place the stress firmly on Abraham's obedience (the last words of v18 are עקב אשר שמעת בקלי)

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[46] Cf. Clines (1997) who suggests that promise might be key to the Pentateuch as a whole. One may, of course, legitimately ask questions such as how fundamental the theme of promise actually is in the Jacob stories (cf. e.g. Coats (1980b); Carr (1996) pp309-10): my point is merely that the reader is encouraged to find (at least a measure of) coherence.

[47] 5:1's wording may be preserved from a source; it seems unlikely that the material in ch5 is 'merely a genealogy' while elsewhere 'the title תולדות refers to narratives' (Westermann (1984) p355, following Eissfeldt and others), since 11:10-26 contains no narrative element.

[48] Cf. e.g. Moberly (1988b) pp304-311. For present purposes the principle of how such a diachronic analysis would effect a synchronic reading is more important than whether the analysis is correct.

and on God's promises of future blessing. Jacob's leaving Canaan after deceiving Isaac and thus taking Esau's blessing is in the final form of the text given two complementary motivations, fear of Esau (27:41-5) and his need to find a suitable wife (27:46-28:5). That these motifs may once have been separate hardly shows that the sections are incompatible, or should be viewed in isolation: rather Rebekah perhaps does not mention to Jacob the issue of a wife since Jacob is unconcerned with avoiding marriage to a Canaanite; Rebekah sees no need to remind Isaac of Esau's hatred (which would only bring Jacob's deceit back to the forefront of Isaac's mind); Isaac can either rage ineffectively about what has happened, or make the best of the situation without raking up the memories in conversation. Diachronic study may simply draw attention to what the text now does *not* mean: while this may reinforce what it does mean, often it may introduce into the discussion something which is a non-issue in the text's present form or make a straightforward feature of the text seem problematic.[49] Finally, diachronic analysis of Genesis is just difficult, often hypothetical and rarely commands general agreement. While a broad distinction between 'P' and 'non-P' material can be made with a degree of confidence, and does enjoy a measure of general assent in the academic community,[50] the details are often unclear and there is no consensus on how the distinction should be interpreted: which came first? was the second a supplement or a separate document? Within 'non-P' distinctions are often more questionable, and the dating of different layers even more fraught.[51] Conclusions based on diachronic hypothesis (cf. e.g. p14 above for the possible value of redaction criticism for final form reading) are only as secure as the hypothesis: if such hypotheses respecting Genesis are often exceedingly insecure, they will hardly provide much support for arguments concerning the meaning of the final form.

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[49] Cf. also p14n21 above.

[50] Though many theologically conservative Jews and Christians remain unconvinced, including some within the academic community; Whybray (1987) also sees little need to draw the distinction.

[51] A brief survey of some of the issues and discussion with regard to sources and redaction is found in Van Seters (1999) chs3-4; more detailed discussion – though arguing its own case – in Nicholson (1998). To give a flavour of the debate: Van Seters (e.g. Van Seters (1975); Van Seters (1992); Van Seters (1994); Van Seters (1999)) argues that the Yahwist was a historian akin to the Greek historians, writing in the exilic period, while P supplements and responds to his predecessors in around 400BC; Blum that P reworked an immediately post-exilic 'D-Komposition', which itself incorporated an exilic edition of Gen 12-50* and a 'Life of Moses' of around the seventh century (Blum (1984); Blum (1990)); Rendtorff (1990) that various priestly texts, not from a continuous source, have been incorporated into a work formed by the concatenation of separate tradition blocks (primeval history, Abraham cycle, Sinai pericope etc.); Whybray (1987) that one author composed the Pentateuch employing a range of diverse small-scale sources; Nicholson (1998) that '[t]he work of Wellhausen, for all that it needs revision and development in detail, remains the securest basis for understanding the Pentateuch' (p.x).

This study will therefore generally not include diachronic analysis of the texts discussed. An exception will be made for 11:27-12:9: since this text is at the heart of the study it seems important to consider explicitly whether it can be read as a unity and whether diachronic analysis might contribute to its understanding. Elsewhere, though explicit reflection may be lacking, the hypothesis that Genesis can be read as a unity is implicitly tested as we try to read the text as such: space precludes detailed analysis of each instance.

Two further methodological points need brief mention. First, I assume that the final form of Genesis dates from some point between the end of the Exile and the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Though some theological conservatives would date it considerably earlier,[52] such dating seems relatively secure.[53] It is unclear that we can be much more precise – though one might perhaps exclude the period immediately after the Exile – or what help such precision would be in understanding the text given our meagre knowledge about life in Israel/ Judah in this period. Second, this study aims to establish what the text is saying, without asking how that might or might not reflect the experience of the people Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Balaam etc., if such existed. Such questions are not illegitimate, but however they are answered the question of what the text says about the characters remains. Further, if the text is not in every respect historically accurate – which hardly needs doubting – we must either simply reject inaccurate details, or ascribe to the text some value independent of such accuracy; if we adopt the latter course, whether for literary or for theological reasons, we have at least relativized the question of historicity. Thus in what follows I shall refer to 'Abraham',[54] 'Isaac' etc., meaning the character Abraham in the text, neither denying nor affirming that this might relate to a person Abraham who once existed.

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[52] Cf. e.g. Wenham (1987) pp.xxvii-xlv.

[53] So e.g. all the authors noted in n51 (though Whybray would allow an exilic dating).

[54] For convenience I shall generally refer to 'Abraham' even when discussing Gen 11:26-17:5 in which he is consistently called אברם 'Abram'; similarly I speak of 'Sarah', not 'Sarai'.

Chapter 2

Parallels to Genesis 12:3a

2.1 Introduction

Gen 12:3a finds two close parallels in the Old Testament, Gen 27:29b and Num 24:9b. In this chapter we seek to clarify the force of these latter, in order to illuminate the text in which this study is primarily interested (discussion of which will be left to ch6). In each case we shall sketch in the narrative context as well as considering the lines in which we are primarily interested. This will contribute both to our exegesis of the particular verses and to our discussion of wider themes, notably that of blessing.

2.2 Genesis 27:29b

2.2.1 The context

Genesis 27 tells of God's plan being worked out despite -- if not sometimes, through -- human imperfections. No character emerges with great credit, but Yhwh's purpose is not frustrated.

That purpose has been revealed by the oracle of 25:23. The oracle is more concerned with Israel and Edom than with Jacob and Esau, since it speaks of גוים and לאמים, not individuals. Subsequently the narrative stresses that Esau is the ancestor of the Edomites who live in Seir (cf. vv25, 30). However equally clearly not every detail in the story is allegorical. We should hardly consider Isaac's preference for Esau incipient favouritism for Edom. Moreover ch27 stresses the relationship between the parents and the children, not that between the brothers:[1] it is concerned with Jacob and Esau in their relationship to Isaac and Rebekah more than with Israel and Edom and their relationship to one another. Everything narrated is entirely credible in terms of the characters of the individuals involved; yet knowledge that these individuals are the ancestors of Israel and of Edom adds a further dimension to the reading of the text.[2] Conversely we expect to see the oracle being worked out in the lives of Jacob and Esau. (We must also note here that,

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[1] בן occurs 25x, אב 24x, אם 5x, אח only 13x (including one reference to Laban).

[2] Cf. Thompson (1979); also suggesting that the story is meant as a description of how things are between Israel and Edom, not a historical account explaining the origin of the relationship. Also Clifford (1991) pp397-8

whatever the text's origin,[3] it is most implausible that at the time of its final redaction it would have been perceived as describing a tension between hunters and agriculturalists.)

For the reader the oracle situates the story within a broader divine plan. However the oracle's function for the characters in the text need not be identical. Indeed for Rebekah its basic function is to explain why she must endure the discomfort of her pregnancy. The divine announcements to Hagar before Ishmael's birth (16:11-12) and to Samson's mother (Judg 13:3-5), though both describing the future destiny of the child, primarily serve more immediate purposes, explaining respectively why Hagar should return to Sarah and why Samson should become a Nazirite. Nor is there any sign of these oracles subsequently affecting the mother's behaviour, or even of the mother recalling them. Genesis likewise nowhere suggests that Rebekah subsequently recalls or acts upon this oracle: that the oracle relates more to Israel and Edom than specifically to Jacob and Esau means it is hardly clear directions about how to treat her sons, and moreover within Genesis there is no evidence of Esau serving Jacob. (Similarly no-one in the story seems to consider Joseph's dreams of Gen 37:5ff orders which his family must seek to fulfil.[4]) Furthermore, Genesis does not suggest that anyone else even knows about the oracle: it does not relate Rebekah's telling anyone of it,[5] nor do any words or actions obviously echo it. If the oracle's primary function is to explain Rebekah's present discomfort it is certainly credible that she should not need to tell anyone; similarly Samson's mother does not relay to her husband the words about Samson's becoming a great deliverer, since their primary function is to explain to her why she received an angelic visitation.[6] Thus, in sum, it is unlikely that any of the human characters in ch27 is working to fulfil or hinder the fulfilment of the oracle: Rebekah, for example, is seeking to procure blessing for her favourite, not to further Yhwh's purpose.

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[3] Cf. e.g. Gunkel (1997) p291, von Rad (1972) pp265-6.

[4] Though Turner (1990a) pp159-169 suggests (implausibly) that Joseph in chs42-4 seeks to have them fulfilled.

[5] Most commentators assume she told at least Isaac. But cf. Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980b) p1054; Evans (1986) p34; Clifford (1991) p399; Steinberg (1993) p91; Walton (1998) pp12-14.

[6] Many commentators appear not to notice this omission: cf. e.g. Moore (1895) p318; Crenshaw (1974) p476; Crenshaw (1979) p21. However Boling (1975) p221 suggests that when she addresses her husband 'the narrative skilfully concentrates on what the announcement means to her...', i.e. in terms of her future actions.

Isaac's desire is likewise to bless his favourite. For it is not clear why he sees the need to bless Esau now. Death-bed blessings are a common motif in the Old Testament.[7] Such scenes do not neatly conform to one pattern:[8] some have all male descendants present (Gen 49; also Tobit 14), others only some (Gen 27; Gen 48); Gen 27 is the only such scene to involve a meal; 'I grow old' at the beginning of the blessing occurs in the Nuzi texts as Gen 27:2, but not elsewhere in the Old Testament. However there is a clear family resemblance, into which Gen 27 fits with one significant exception. In general in the Old Testament people expected to know when they were going to die, and would give a charge to their descendants only when death was imminent (e.g. Gen 49:29; Josh 23:14; 1Ki 2:1ff; also Tobit 14:3).[9] Isaac is indeed old and blind (vouched for by the narrator in v1),[10] but will survive for many years yet (cf. 35:27-9).[11] While death-bed blessing scenes vary greatly, explicit reversal of an element found elsewhere is surely noteworthy: Isaac is not compelled by imminent death to pass on his blessing to one of his sons, but instead is led by his personal partiality to want to prosper his favourite. Moreover the basis of that preference is his fondness for the game Esau provides (25:28, picked up in his request for the meal in ch27) – hardly a profound reason for such favouritism.

However this bias hardly justifies the deceit practised by Jacob at Rebekah's urging. The text seems to invite moral evaluation of Jacob. For example, Jacob fears that his father may think him a 'mocker' (v12):[12] the reader must surely think that this is a not inaccurate description, and that such treatment of a parent is unacceptable. The reader also must agree with Isaac's description of Jacob's behaviour as an instance of מרמה (v35), a word

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[7] Westermann (1985) p435 and Ackerman (1991) p93, e.g., believe the motif's origin is in life; contra e.g. Heller (1926) p320; Alter (1981) p48.

[8] Though e.g. Westermann (1985) p435 and Keukens (1982) pp43-4 attempt to reconstruct an ideal type.

[9] Keukens (1982) pp48-9 observes that Speiser's article 'I Know Not the Day of My Death' (Speiser (1955b)), in providing parallels to various aspects of Gen 27, fails to notice that it offers no parallel to the negative in its title.

[10] Thus he is most probably genuinely deceived by Jacob (contra Bledstein (1993); Williams (1991) judges the story ambiguous; Plaut (1981) considers that subconsciously Isaac wants Jacob to gain the blessing).

[11] There may be some tension here between 'J' narrative and 'P' chronology: just how frail is Isaac in ch27? But ch27 still does not present Isaac as on the immediate verge of death.

[12] √תעע occurs only here and at 2Chr 36:16; its precise force is thus unclear, but Chronicles suggests its meaning is similar to √לעב and √בזה. To Wenham (1994) p207 the word 'seems a very strong one'.

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generally employed in the Old Testament with negative connotations (e.g. 2Ki 9:23; Job 15:35; Amos 8:5; though condemnatory nuance is not clear at Gen 34:13[13]). Similarly, though the text does nothing to particularly highlight this issue, Israelite readers would presumably have considered misleading the blind problematic.[14] Nor would they have considered that the end justifies the means, that if God wanted Jacob blessed and brought it about thus moral questions do not arise; for the Joseph story shows God getting Joseph to Egypt by means of clearly wrong actions of his brothers.[15] Indeed Jacob's very name may have pointed to his dubious moral character, since at least at Jer 9:3[4] √עקב 'supplant' seems to have intrinsic connotations of moral disapproval.[16] Hence Esau may suggest (Gen 27:36) not simply that Jacob's nature is to succeed, but that it is to push others out from what is rightly theirs. It is an interesting question – though we need not discuss it here – whether Jacob, and Rebekah, are punished for their actions,[17] since mother and son never see each other again, and Laban gives Jacob a taste of his own medicine in deceitfully asserting the rights of his firstborn daughter (29:21ff).

Equally, Esau is hardly perfect. In 25:29-34 his attitude to his birthright is utterly cavalier. While he is doubtless extremely hungry after his hunting, he is not literally starving: at Judg 8:4-5 √עוף denotes hunger caused by a day's strenuous exertion, which is thus significant but not life-threatening. That Esau's hunger makes him overlook the value of the birthright (v34) thus shows him to be unable to look beyond the moment. His marriages perhaps also betray a failure to see a bigger picture. For while the patriarchal narratives, unlike the rest of the Old Testament, do not appear critical of Canaanites and their religion,[18] they nevertheless at least sometimes suggest that marriage is best kept

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[13] Cf. e.g. Sarna (1989) p236: '[n]o moral judgment is intended, and would, in fact, be gratuitous. The victim of the assault is still being held by the perpetrator (vv. 17,26), who has not even admitted to a crime, let alone expressed regret. There is no way that Dinah can be liberated by a tiny minority in the face of overwhelming odds – except by the exercise of cunning'.

[14] Smart (1980) p164 suggests there was 'a serious social prohibition, later to become law, about not misleading a blind man on his way (Lev 19:14; Dt 27;18)'; cf. also Wenham (1994) p207.

[15] And, as argued by Miscall (1978) *passim*, there seem many parallels between the Jacob cycle and the Joseph cycle, encouraging us to read each in the light of the other.

[16] At Hos 12:4 the nuance of criticism may be present in the verb, or the verb may neutrally mean 'catch up with', the context supplying the evaluation.

[17] Cf. e.g. Keil and Delitzsch (1864) pp277-8; Driver (1916) p255; Luke (1968) p41; Gammie (1979) pp118-9, 128; Plaut (1981) p176; Wenham (1994) p216.

[18] Cf. Moberly (1992b) pp90-1, noting the opposition to intermarriage in e.g. Judg 3:6; 1Ki 11:1-10; Ezra 9-10.

within the family (24:1ff; 27:46-28:9). That his wives made life bitter for his parents at any rate must throw his judgment into question.

The text assumes that the transfer of the birthright is valid, that Jacob now possesses it. Some have sought to adduce parallels from elsewhere in the Ancient Near East;[19] but the parallels are very loose (there is no example of first-born status being sold, for example)[20] and evidence from mid second-millennium Nuzi is not obviously relevant to understanding the mid first-millennium final form of the Pentateuch.[21] The reader can surely take the text with imaginative seriousness, as an example of something that *could* have happened, without worrying whether or not it ever did, provided it was not implausible.

2.2.2 The blessing

Ch27 does not suggest that Jacob's acquisition of the birthright entitles him to Isaac's blessing; the plan to deceive Isaac would have been unnecessary if Jacob could now have openly requested the blessing as his by right. The birthright might simply refer to a double share in the property after Isaac's death, and hence it would be irrelevant what Isaac may choose to pray for Esau, so long as the distribution of the inheritance is left intact. However the birthright probably includes other privileges, especially that of becoming head of the family; it is unlikely that all Jacob gains in ch25 is more property, since inheritance of property is not a major theme in the patriarchal narratives; moreover the close similarity in the words בכרה and ברכה, juxtaposed here, encourages the reader to regard the two as linked. A preferable option is that the death-bed blessing does not quite have testamentary character in the modern sense, i.e. it does not make dispositions for the future. This coheres well with much of the Old Testament evidence: death-bed blessings consist of final requests (Gen 49:29ff; 1Ki 2:5ff), charges to obedience (Deut 31ff; 1Ki 2:2-4), blessings of prosperity (Gen 48:16, 20) and prophecies of the future (Gen 49; Deut 33). Gen 48:1-7 appears an exception, where on his death-bed Jacob adopts Ephraim and Manasseh as his sons; Genesis 49:3-4 mentions Reuben's status as firstborn, but not so much to confirm it as to contrast it with the statement that he will not be pre-eminent, which by analogy with the rest of the chapter seems more a prayer or prediction than a binding decision. Thus death-bed speeches, unlike modern wills, often do not confirm what is already expected. In

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[19] Cf. e.g. Speiser (1955b); Mendelsohn (1959).

[20] E.g. Thompson (1974) pp280-5.

[21] Speiser (1955b) pp254-6 is aware that his evidence would illuminate what he regards as the patriarchal period, and not the period of the texts' composition.

Genesis 27 there is no reason to think that Isaac will specifically hand to Esau the rights of the firstborn; he might prophesy eventual pre-eminence for him, or ask God to give him pre-eminence (as of course does happen), but these are not necessarily incompatible with Jacob's having the birthright, which brings pre-eminence on the father's death, but not necessarily lasting superiority.[22] The blessing is worth more than the birthright – and hence Genesis spends more time describing how Jacob acquired the former than the latter – though possession of the birthright is a good start towards acquiring what one hopes to receive as a result of the blessing.

The speech of blessing (27:27-9) is triggered by the smell of Esau's clothes, which Jacob is wearing. The blessing has three significant parallels to Balaam's third oracle (Num 24:3-9).[23] Balaam begins by admiring what he sees of Israel's encampment, paralleling Isaac's comment on the smell of Esau's clothes. Balaam proclaims that Israel's king shall be higher than Agag, and that Israel will 'devour the nations his enemies', paralleling Isaac's proclamation that his son will be served by peoples and nations. Finally, both speeches close with the same announcement, that those who curse Israel/ Jacob will themselves be cursed, while those who bless them will be blessed. The order of the elements in this announcement is different in the two texts: in Numbers the blessing comes first, in Genesis the cursing. The different contexts probably explain this. Since in Numbers Balak is seeking to curse Israel, it is a fitting climax to the oracle to announce that such as he will themselves suffer; conversely in Genesis where the stress is on the blessing that Jacob is receiving, that is the more suitable climax. Both texts clearly draw on some common form (we note further that both employ plural active participles [מְבָרֲכֶיךָ / אֹרְרֶיךָ] and singular passive participles [אָרוּר / בָּרוּךְ]); yet the substantial other differences between the speeches make it highly unlikely that either is modelled on the other. Thus nothing in the form of what Isaac says should make us think it other than a normal blessing that any person might give, asking God to grant prosperity, power and good relations with others – or vengeance on any who seek to do harm. We return to the importance of this below.

It has been suggested that this blessing would have been inappropriate to Esau, since it seems to relate to a settled agricultural life more than to the life of a hunter.[24]

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[22] As Jacob may gain a double share in the inheritance, but ten years later Esau may have prospered more than him, so there is no guarantee that initial supremacy must continue.

[23] Cf. Westermann (1985) pp440-1.

[24] Cf. e.g. Bledstein (1993).

However it begins with a reference to the שדה, a word the story associates with Esau (25:27, 29; 27:3, 5). Moreover there is no particular reason to associate Jacob with agriculture: though v28 might seem to relate better to his lifestyle than Esau's, it is unclear that a reader, particularly one used to hearing similar prayers for fertility, would question whether this could have been said to Esau. And even if there is a slight discrepancy with Esau's hunting, might it not be supposed that Isaac wanted his son to adopt a more settled lifestyle? For the blessing looks forward to Esau's descendants, to a time when nations might be subject to him, and when his brothers might bow before him.[25] The blessing is not inappropriate to the individual in the story, as if here the text forgets that it is talking about characters and sees only their significance in prefiguring Edom and Israel; rather, as Abraham is blessed with the promise of posterity, so for Esau or Jacob the welfare of their descendants would have been a major element in their own prosperity.

The blessing bears no particular resemblance to any of the divine promises to the patriarchs, apart from v29b which clearly recalls 12:3a. However if one person receives this blessing, there would seem no room for anyone else to inherit those promises.[26] The promise of fertility would surely have suggested to the reader that Isaac is thinking of the land of Israel, though doubtless Esau might conceivably find prosperity elsewhere. Yet if Israel is to become a great nation and to have a great name (cf. 12:2), it can hardly serve any other nation – as it would have had to do had Esau received the promise of v29. Moreover the reader will see that Isaac's words echo the birth oracle concerning Jacob in 25:23,[27] confirming that it is important for the divine plan that *Jacob* should receive this blessing. However, as we have argued, Isaac may well not have known the oracle, and hence is not deliberately working against it. Rather he is offering to his favourite son the sort of blessing any father would wish to give his favourite. It is in this light that we should read v29b: Isaac is in no way concerned with passing on the promises given to Abraham (though of course the reader will notice that Isaac here unwittingly promotes another part of the divine plan). In favour of this suggestion that the Abrahamic promises are not an issue here is the fact that the oracle of 25:23 in which there seems absolutely no reason for concealment

[25] Turner (1990a) pp118-9 rightly notes that the phrases should not be taken as wooden, literal expressions (cf. Judges 8:19). However 'be lord over your brothers' suggests something larger than the patriarchal family at this point.

[26] Contra Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980b) pp1020-1 and Bledstein (1993) pp289-90, suggesting that Isaac deliberately does not convey to Esau the specifically Abrahamic blessings.

[27] The word לאם is found only in these two instances outside the prophetic and wisdom literature, though in ch25 it is parallel to גוי, while in ch27 עם is used.

likewise seems completely to ignore them.[28] Hence we should not think that Isaac intends this blessing to be for the benefit of other peoples (though in the light of our arguments in ch6 below we might suggest that the reader would equally note how here the divine plan stated in 12:2-3 which does include benefiting others through Abraham's descendants is unwittingly furthered). Rather the sequence of thought continues from v29a. Others are to serve Isaac's son, that he might be great. If they seek to curse him, this will lead to their own harm (אֹרְרֶיךָ אָרוּר); on the other hand, they have every incentive to acquiesce in subservience, since if they do so, blessing their lord, it will bring blessing to them (מְבָרֲכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ).[29] Isaac's concern is his son's security, not the welfare of the nations.

The blessing is followed by a scene full of pathos in which Esau begs his father to grant him a blessing.[30] The essential sympathy between father and son is brought out in vv33-4: both Isaac's trembling and Esau's cry are depicted by means of a verb with cognate object; that object is described as גדלה;[31] and the phrase עד־מאד is applied to it. Isaac still would prefer Esau to have the blessing he has just given Jacob – for him it is still rightly Esau's (v35). However neither he nor Esau thinks the blessing can be undone: Esau asks for another blessing, not for what has been done to be changed. This irreversibility of the blessing was presumably at least found plausible by the original readers, and thus though it need not be an inevitable consequence of the Hebrew concept of blessing it cannot simply be a requirement of the plot. Thiselton suggests that the reason for this is that while there were conventions of blessing, no convention allowed the withdrawal of blessing:[32] Gen 27 describes a (version of a) father's death-bed blessing on his family, a particular institution in the context of which subsequent changes of mind would not normally occur. (We might note as a parallel that in ch29 there is no suggestion that Jacob's marriage to Leah is invalidated because he thought he was marrying Rachel; rather, following the wedding, he is

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[28] Noted by von Rad (1972) p265.

[29] Cf. Mitchell (1987) pp35-6: 'a stereotyped blessing formula which declares the dominion of the addressee over his adversaries' (though Mitchell equally suggests this deliberately echoes 12:3 where the formula implies that Abraham has a role as mediator of blessing to the nations).

[30] Cf. Brueggemann (1982a) p234; Levenson (1993) p62. That the scene also stresses the importance of the blessing does not deny that it deliberately evokes our sympathies (contra Gunkel (1997) p210).

[31] With ומרה added in Esau's case. This *might* bring to mind the bitterness his marriages caused his parents (26:35), and thus in the midst of our sympathy we would recall that there are reasons why Esau would not be a good bearer of the divine blessing; but the allusion is certainly not prominent.

[32] Thiselton (1974) pp293-6. Scharbert (1975) pp303-4 suggests that Isaac could have reversed the blessing only by cursing Jacob, which he was not prepared to do.

married to her, and this cannot be undone.) Thus the apparent irrevocability of the blessing need not show that blessing involves a force which, once loosed, in principle cannot be controlled.[33] Rather it may be simply that one did not rescind a death-bed blessing. There may be no particular reason why in principle one could not call on Yhwh to show favour to someone else instead, except that one has just formally requested him to do the opposite in a culturally and religiously sanctioned practice.[34]

Thus all Isaac can offer Esau is a half-blessing (vv39-40), an unattractive life, but nevertheless continued life with the expectation that eventually he will shake off his brother's yoke. (As with Jacob's blessing, so here the words clearly look beyond the lifetime of the individual to his descendants.) However Isaac gives Jacob a further blessing (28:3-4).[35] This clearly picks up the previous divine promises to the patriarchs: v3 echoes the promise of a multitude of descendants; v4 explicitly mentions the blessing of Abraham, and evokes the theme of the land. Since Isaac has just been reminded about the importance of marriage within the family, it is perhaps not surprising that now at last the particular blessings of the family come to his mind. Thus after Jacob has gained by deceit a blessing from someone who at the time was not thinking about the specific commitments from God of which he was the bearer, his father now consciously and explicitly seeks to pass on those divine promises to him.

2.2.3 Conclusion

Genesis 27 tells a very human story, of favouritism, self-interest and deceit. Jacob initially gains a blessing he does not deserve from a father who just wants to have his favourite son prosper, and is oblivious to any greater purposes. Yet all this is set in the wider context of the divine plan to exalt Jacob and his descendants above Esau and his. V29b – of particular importance to our study – is part of the prosperity Isaac wants for his son: others will have to favour him, since in so doing they will gain blessing, whereas opposition to him will lead to their harm.

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[33] Contra e.g. Westermann (1985) p442.

[34] One might perhaps compare a priest going home after blessing the people in the temple and asking Yhwh instead to show no favour to one of the worshippers.

[35] Cf. above p20 on how this scene relates to what has preceded.

2.3 Numbers 24:9b

2.3.1 Narrative context

The nature of 'blessing' and 'cursing' in the Balaam story, as elsewhere in the Old Testament, has been the subject of much discussion (cf. further below ch5); we shall focus here on what it means for a human to bless, since the precise nuance of divine blessing (declaring favoured, or actually giving benefits) makes less difference to the overall interpretation of the story. I speak of 'cursing' as the antonym to blessing though the Hebrew uses the three roots √ארר, √קבב and √זעם, since these appear to be (at least near-) synonyms: Balak's summons to Balaam is expressed by √ארר (22:6), √קבב (22:11) and √זעם (23:7); 23:7 parallels √זעם and √ארר, and 23:8 parallels √זעם and √קבב.[36] Three lines of understanding require consideration:

a) It has been suggested that 'blessing' can refer to friendly relations between two people or groups, and favourable treatment shown from one to the other (and conversely, 'curse' to hostile relations – for the rest of this discussion I shall generally discuss only blessing, leaving the understanding of curse implicit as the converse). Mitchell translates 24:9 as 'those on good terms with you will be blessed, while those hostile to you will be cursed'.[37] However most uses of 'bless' with human subjects in this story clearly refer to invocation of blessing; 24:9 seems most naturally to warn Balak that if he wants to enjoy blessing he must seek to have Israel blessed, not cursed. In context it therefore seems extremely unlikely that a more general meaning would be discerned here.

b) Perhaps when Balaam blesses he is stating that Israel is the recipient of divine favour:

> God merely gives him a glimpse into the past or future of Israel. Here, therefore, in reality 'to bless' means 'to announce good fortune'.[38]

Balaam, like a diviner or a prophet, has the role of discerning and declaring what will be. However Balak seems to think that Balaam's words may make a difference: he summons Balaam not to find out what will happen – whether, for example, military action against Israel would be successful – but to weaken Israel (22:6). If Balaam simply declares what is already determined, Balak has no reason to expect him to say things that will please his paymaster. Nor can we suggest that Balak misunderstands the nature of blessing and curse,

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[36] Cf. Rouillard (1985) p85; Mitchell (1987) p92; Davies (1995) pp256-7.

[37] Mitchell (1987) p93.

[38] Scharbert (1975) p290; cf. also Mitchell (1987) pp90-2.

that the pagan king believes humans can manipulate the divine, while Balaam knows that since the will of Yhwh is fixed and supreme, proclamation of that will is the only sensible course.[39] For while Balak clearly does not understand that Balaam cannot say whatever he chooses, and that Yhwh will not change his mind merely because another oracle is sought from a different place, he regards what Balaam is doing as blessing (23:11; 24:10): Balaam is doing the converse of what he has been hired for, not failing to fulfil Balak's will, and doing something completely different instead. Moreover if Balaam's words are meant to be informative but no more, it would hardly be greatly significant whether or not he was obedient to Yhwh; he might mislead Moab and incur divine displeasure himself if his words spoke of Israel's downfall, but this would not actually affect Israel. On the other hand, if words of blessing or curse do make a difference, the story is full of tension: at its heart is Israel and whether or not Yhwh will protect her,[40] not the character of a foreign seer.

c) Thus we should favour the third possible interpretation, that in blessing humans may effect something by their words, not just declare what will happen anyway. This then raises the question of the relationship between such human blessing and the bestowal of divine favour. In Num 23-4 the effects of Balaam's blessing are clearly not independent of Yhwh. Yhwh also evidently wishes Israel to be blessed (22:12; 23:8 etc.), and will ensure that his plan is fulfilled (23:19). We should probably accept a tension here: it is the case both that God is in control – and the powers of blessing depend on him – and that human words of blessing have effectiveness.[41] Hence the need for Yhwh to prepare Balaam through the ass episode to be faithful later, to seek Yhwh's will and bless in accordance with that, not to say what Balak would like to hear. Gen 27 also illustrates this tension, though in a different way: the importance and irrevocability of Isaac's blessing is stressed (vv33ff) while it is equally clear that Yhwh's purposes (cf. 25:23), not Isaac's, will prevail.[42] The priestly blessing of Num 6:22-7 affirms that blessing comes from Yhwh, while insisting that the priests' words have an important function in Israel's receiving that blessing: Yhwh blesses the people when the priests utter Yhwh's name over them (v27).[43] (Even if this belongs to a

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[39] Cf. Alter (1981) pp106-7.

[40] Cf. von Rad (1962) p288, cited below p35.

[41] This effectiveness is not a matter of words having magical power, but of the possibility of 'performative' use, as much a feature of modern languages; so, for example, in appropriate circumstances, to say 'I will' is to marry. Cf. Thiselton (1974); also below ch5 pp117-118.

[42] Cf. Guillet (1969) p164.

[43] Cf. Sturdy (1976) p54: it is one of the functions of the priests 'effectively to ensure' God's favour by blessing.

different layer in the book of Numbers (P), and hence might not have precisely the same understanding of blessing, in the present form of the book, 6:22-7 does form some of the context within which chs22-4 will be read.) Within chs22-4 there is evidence of the divine plan interacting with the human activity. For as Balak persists in trying to have Israel cursed, he succeeds simply in having further blessings given to Israel, which thus becomes an ever greater threat to Moab (cf. below pp37-39 on the development over the oracles); his attempt to disengage from the whole process – no longer actively seeking a curse, but not joining in blessing – backfires even more, as it produces an explicit word about Moab which he would hardly have wanted (24:17).[44]

However we have still not explained how these words are an effective utterance; *prima facie* they just state what God will do. Unlike Num 6:23-6, they are not a prayer inviting Yhwh to do something. Nor, still more clearly, are they invocations of any power beyond Yhwh. Rather they are a statement of the divine will which thenceforth binds Yhwh (cf. 23:19). (We should add that, as we have seen, the effectiveness of Balaam's words is not necessarily dependent on their being a faithful statement of Yhwh's will; it seems that it would have mattered had he uttered a curse.[45] Perhaps Balaam has been given such authority that his words have effect because they are his, not only inasmuch as they are faithful to Yhwh.[46] However since the possibility of unfaithfulness remains hypothetical we should probably not push the text for detailed explanation of what the results of disobedience would have been.) Once Balaam has proclaimed these things, they then must happen; options which Yhwh had previously left open to himself become closed down; Balak's persistence ensures that Moab will suffer (cf. previous paragraph).[47] A similar understanding of blessing appears in Gen 49, Jacob's final words to his sons. The introduction to his words does not specify them as blessings, and many items within them are hardly favourable to the recipients (e.g. vv3-7). However the conclusion (v28b) explicitly calls them blessings.[48] Moreover the 'death-bed blessing' is a common motif;[49] an

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[44] Cf. Ashley (1993) p436.

[45] Josh 24:10 presupposes a different story.

[46] Cf. perhaps Wolterstorff (1995), especially ch3, on how one person can give authority to another to make speech acts on his behalf without having to specify exactly what those speech acts shall be.

[47] Cf. Olson (1996) p149.

[48] Whatever the tradition history (cf. e.g. von Rad (1972) p424; Westermann (1987) p198) v28b states the function of the words in the final form of the text.

[49] Cf. above p24.

ancient reader would expect to find in Jacob's words his final gift of blessing to his sons. Gen 27:33-40 shows that the father did not have unlimited amounts of blessing to bestow; blessings are not pious wishes but respond to the realities of the world and of people (hence the less favourable words alongside the more favourable in Gen 49).[50] Thus we may reasonably conclude that Gen 49 is not just a prediction of what will be, but a performative utterance, seeking to establish it.[51] We should also note that Balaam's third oracle is similar in form to the blessing of Jacob in Gen 27:27-9 (cf. above p27);[52] this suggests that we are again dealing with a blessing, not a prediction.

Balaam's oracles in parts reaffirm the patriarchal promises: presumably we are not meant to think that Balaam knew of those promises, but that under divine inspiration his words echo them. The dust imagery of Num 23:10 clearly recalls Gen 13:16 and 28:14. Num 23:24 and 24:9a allude to Gen 49:9b. Num 24:9b echoes Gen 12:3a[53] and even more closely Gen 27:29b. Num 24:17b picks up Gen 49:10a. Once these links have been established, we may appropriately notice other connections. Thus, for example, references to kings need not be particular allusions to the patriarchal narratives, but those narratives do contain promises that Abraham will be the ancestor of kings (Gen 17:6, 16). Israel's receiving blessing in itself fulfils Gen 12:2. The oracles hardly make systematic use of the patriarchal narratives' main themes: nothing is said about Israel's possession of a land, even if it is doubtless implicit in e.g. 23:9, 24:5-7 or 24:17c-18. However the relationship is close enough to establish the continuity in the ongoing story of Israel and God's purposes: what Balaam sees and proclaims is the (partial) fulfilment of what has already been foretold and promised.

By contrast, Balak's design is to have the patriarchal promises reversed. Of course he too is unaware of the promises; but knowing Israel's power and recent history he concludes that only by invoking the power of curse can he hope to prevail (22:2-6). When requesting curses from Balaam he takes him to cult sites (22:41 – Bamoth Baal was presumably named after cult activity; 23:14, 28 – Pisgah and Peor are also the names of

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[50] Cf. Clements (1986) pp36-7.

[51] Coats (1983) p311. Clements (1986) p33 suggests with regard to Gen 49 that '[t]he dividing line between prayer and prophecy was a very fine one'.

[52] Marx (1987) argues that Balaam's fourth oracle also alludes to Gen 27.

[53] Budd (1984) p271 suggests that Gen 12:1-3 may be 'in some measure a commentary on the oracles', though this suggestion has, probably rightly, not won wide support (and, of course, in reading the final form of the Pentateuch the promises, not the oracles, are primary).

deities);[54] this surely gives the maximum possible opportunity to any powers opposed to Yhwh. The Balaam pericope

> is certainly to be taken as the acme of menace for the people of God, for the fact that all the powers of the curse are now solemnly evoked against Israel overtopped all that the people of God had had to overcome hitherto, and all that Jahweh had had to repel in their defence.[55]

For Balaam could call on other deities at their cult sites; or even while still acknowledging only Yhwh, could call upon him in cursing (and that previously Yhwh has punished his people must prevent the facile assumption that he could not in any way respond to such a curse, even if he has already enunciated the principle that Israel is fundamentally blessed [22:12][56]). Moreover Balaam's reputation is of being effective: when he curses, the object of his words cannot escape (22:6).

Thus Balaam's words are significant. Hence the first two oracles are described as words that Yhwh put into Balaam's mouth (23:5, 16), and 24:2 states that the רוח אלהים came upon Balaam (cf. e.g. Num 11:17, 25-30 where it empowers elders and inspires prophecy). Indeed one might suggest that the function of having a foreign seer pronounce these oracles over Israel without Israel hearing them is precisely to allow idealised description, combining what Israel is in practice at the present and what Israel is meant to be and by God's grace can be.[57] The tension is between present empirical reality and God's will or plan, between what is obvious to any beholder and what may be present *in nuce*. As the original generation who went into the wilderness – and sinned at Sinai – have nearly all died out (cf. 26:64-5), God can reaffirm his commitment to Israel and his plans for them as they approach the promised land.[58]

Nor does Yhwh work in spite of Balaam. There is no sign that Balaam is particularly malevolent against Israel: he would be happy to carry out Balak's wishes and curse, but that is his job; he shows no reluctance to bless when it becomes apparent that that

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[54] Cf. Gray (1903) pp341-2; Rouillard (1985) pp151ff; Greene (1992) pp25-6.

[55] von Rad (1962) p288.

[56] Cf. Ashley (1993) p451.

[57] Ashley (1993) p479. Cf. also Moberly (1998a) p22.

[58] Ashley (1993) p479; Olson (1996) p140.

is Yhwh's will.[59] (Taking a fee for the rendering of such a service is not intrinsically problematic, either; cf. e.g. 1Sam 9:8, 1Ki 14:3; 2Ki 5:5-6; 8:8-9[60]). The language of compulsion (23:8) need not imply a strong desire to do otherwise (cf. Jer 20:7ff; Acts 4:19-20);[61] nor is there any suggestion that Balaam tries to utter words of curse but words of blessing come out, since from the outset he has stressed that he must listen to Yhwh, then declare what has been revealed to him (Num 22:8, 18-20; 23:3, 12 etc.). Other references to Balaam in the Old Testament and beyond may imply different versions of the story, with Balaam an enemy of Israel (cf. e.g. Deut 23:6[5]; Josh 24:9-10, especially LXX; Josephus *AJ* IV 105, 120-3), but these should not be read into Num 22-4.[62] Nor need the ass episode show that Balaam is acting against the divine will, for (at the risk of explaining *obscurum per obscurius*) we might compare Ex 4:24-6.[63] There Moses is clearly undertaking a journey at God's command: the most probable reason for the attack on him is that the uncircumcision of his son (or of Moses himself) renders him unfit for the commission on which he has been sent.[64] Balaam is about to stand before Israel to bless or curse; God therefore needs to make sure that his discernment is functioning at its best. He has a difficult path to tread (v32[65]) and must resist both Balak's blandishments and his threats. But, despite his willingness to turn back, Yhwh wants him to go on. For though, as Balaam admits, he erred in failing to discern the angel (v34), his mission is undertaken at God's behest.

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[59] Cf. Frankel (1996) p31.

[60] Gray (1903) p329 notes these and other references. Micah 3:5, 11 charges contemporary prophets (as Israel's other leaders) with saying whatever their paymaster wanted, but is no evidence for a doctrine that true prophets would never accept money (contra Margaliot (1977) p287, whose other references make no mention of the taking of fees).

[61] Ashley (1993) p470.

[62] The Balaam text from Tell Deir-ʿAlla equally contributes little to a reading of Num 22-4: while it (at least Combination I) clearly is a story about the same figure as the biblical account, who receives visions by night and so forth, and thus may certainly aid understanding of the traditions behind the story, there is no close relationship between the two and nowhere that the biblical text is clarified by the inscription. On the Deir ʿAlla Text, see especially Müller (1982); Hoftijzer and van der Kooij (1991); Dijkstra (1995b).

[63] Cf. e.g. Olson (1996) p144, noting also Gen 32:22ff and Josh 5:13ff. Strangely, most commentators on Numbers do not note the possible parallel, though commentators on Ex 4:24-6 note Num 22: e.g. Robinson (1986a) p454 (citing Cassuto, but suggesting the passages are more dissimilar than similar); Propp (1993) pp499-500.

[64] Cf. e.g. Childs (1974) pp95-101; Durham (1987) pp57-9; Ashby (1995) pp203-4; contra Propp (1993); Robinson (1986a).

[65] ירט probably means something akin to 'steep', 'precipitate' (Budd (1984) p254; Davies (1995) p251; Moberly (1999b) p13n27). It thus expresses the care necessary, not the intrinsic wrongfulness of the course.

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2.3.2 The oracles

Balaam's four oracles form a crescendo, each offering more to Israel. One might compare the ass episode: as there each evasion of the angel produces a more difficult situation, so here Balak's failing to learn the lesson of one oracle generates further trouble. The first oracle ascribes to Israel great numbers (23:10),[66] and a dwelling-place removed from the turmoil of international affairs (v9b).[67] The second has more to say: there is no אָוֶן or עָמָל amongst them (v21);[68] God is with them (vv21b-2); they are like a lion which will not be content until it has finished off its prey (v24).[69] This last element begins to sound a warning to Balak that attempting to dispose of Israel may be a dangerous occupation.[70] Or perhaps it makes explicit what may be implicit in v22. For the mention of the Exodus there may hint that God took all necessary measures to ensure his people's freedom – including in the event the killing of the first-born and the destruction of Egypt's army; the participle מוֹצִיאָם suggests that the activity is ongoing, and God is still delivering his people.[71]

The third oracle adds to what has preceded imagery of fertile gardens (24:5-7a) – presumably suggesting that Israel will inhabit a good land, a place of both agricultural fertility and general well-being. For garden imagery often depicts what is best represented by the English word Paradise, an ideal place and mode of life which perhaps once existed, and perhaps may exist in the future, but certainly is not straightforwardly within reach now

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[66] The similarity to the patriarchal promises (cf. above p34) suggests that this refers to Israel's numbers, not to immunity to a magical practice involving counting the dust of a person (Budd (1984) p267; contra Gevirtz (1963) p64, Powell (1981) pp103-5).

[67] In Deut 33:28, Jer 49:31 and ?Ps 4:9[8] בֶּטַח parallels בָּדָד. There may also be reference to Israel being a people set apart for Yhwh. Cf. Davies (1995) p257.

[68] For our purposes it is unimportant whether the words refer to evildoing (cf. e.g. NEB; Budd (1984) pp267-8) or suffering calamity (LXX; Gray (1903) p353; Milgrom (1989) p199; Davies (1995) p262); absence of either is a significant boon.

[69] Further, while v8 has said only that Yhwh has not cursed the people, v20 proclaims Yhwh's blessing of Israel (retaining MT's וּבָרֵךְ with e.g. Davies (1995) pp261-2, against LXX and SP, followed by e.g. Gray (1903) p352; NEB; JB). V23a may express the futility of attempting to attack Israel with קֶסֶם and נַחַשׁ (so e.g. Budd (1984) p268; Ashley (1993) p481); however both קֶסֶם and נַחַשׁ normally denote attempts to divine the future, rather than actions that would naturally be directed against someone (cf. e.g. Gray (1903) pp355-6; Milgrom (1989) pp200, 321; Davies (1995) p264).

[70] Cf. Sturdy (1976) p173. Powell (1981) p169 suggests that v23b 'is an exclamation of awe, but at the same time, a pronouncement of fear. This distich forms the transition from Israel the protected, passive people of the First Oracle and through verse 23a of the Second to Israel the aggressor in verse 24'.

[71] Gray (1903) p354, taken up by Milgrom (1989) p200 and Ashley (1993) p479.

(cf. Gen 2-3; Isa 51:3; 58:11; Jer 31:12; Ezek 28:13; 31:8-9; 36:35).[72] V7a in particular reaffirms the number of Israel's descendants, זרע pointing to both agricultural and human fertility.[73] The oracle suggests Israel will have a king, and her king will be internationally significant (v7b[74]); in the previous oracles only divine kingship has been mentioned (23:21[75]). It adds to the warnings to other nations which began to be sounded in the second oracle. After repeating the reference to the Exodus, and to God's providing strength to Israel (v8a; cf. 23:22) there is explicit statement that Israel will defeat her enemies.[76] The comparison with a lion is again employed (v9a): this time the lion imagery stresses the lion's strength and confidence in reclining after disposing of the prey, whereas previously the comparison was with a lion arising and dealing thoroughly with its victim. The oracle climaxes with the strongest warning yet to Balak – and equally a significant new reassurance to Israel – explicitly stating that to curse Israel is to incur God's curse. If the first oracle said only that Israel was not cursed, and the second affirmed the irrevocability of blessing (23:19-20), the third now adds protection to that; the person who seeks to add to Israel's blessing will gain blessing, while anyone seeking to detract from it will suffer.[77]

The fourth oracle has more to say about the role of Israel's king (24:17). It suggests that Israel will gain the lands of its enemies (vv17-18). However its focus is on what will happen to non-Israelites more than on Israel's greatness: this is signalled by Balaam's introduction to the oracle (v14), is apparent from the references to Moab, the בני־שת,[78]

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[72] Cf. Rouillard (1985) p358; also Riggans (1983) p183; Sauran (1994) p41; Schmitt (1994) pp188-9.

[73] Cf. Budd (1984) p269. Repointing to זרעו (cf. e.g. BHS) requires further modifications to the text and seems unjustifiable: LXX's highly interpretative rendering still includes a reference to 'seed'.

[74] The only attested king named Agag is that of 1Sam 15 who does not appear of particular significance – even if the oracle dates to the very early monarchy, Agag is not an obvious symbol of world power (Gray (1903) p366). However emendation to גוג (cf. SP; LXX), though attractive, both offends against the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* and requires a very late date for the oracle. Cf. e.g. Davies (1995) p270.

[75] תרועה may denote a general shout offered in praise of God (e.g. Ps 27:6; 33:3; 1Sam 4:5-6); in the context of Num 23:21 nothing suggests the reference is to other than the whole people's relationship to Yhwh.

[76] The precise text and meaning of the last clause of v8 is uncertain, but its general import is clear.

[77] Milgrom (1989) p202; on 23:20 see p37n69 above; on 24:9 see further below pp39-41. On the order of the clauses in 24:9b, cf. above p27: here the element of warning is primary, while in Gen the stress is on receiving blessing. (And cf. Beentjes (1982) for the suggestion that inversion of a quotation was a known stylistic device.)

[78] Context and versions suggest this is a tribal name. 'Sons of S(h)eth' seems too broad a group; an original reference to the Sutu, apparently a nomadic people in early second millennium Canaan (cf.

Edom and Seir (vv17-18), and is confirmed by the following brief oracles which speak of the travails of Amalek, Kain, Asshur and Eber, but have no obvious connection to Israel. We might suggest that Israel's greatness can be established without the need for specific other nations to suffer (so the first oracles); however if other nations refuse to respond appropriately to God's favour towards Israel, they will find themselves in trouble.[79] (Elsewhere in the Old Testament the Kenites are regarded as friendly towards Israel – cf. Judg 5:24; 1Sam 15:6; 30:29 – so it is unclear why they should be singled out here as deserving destruction.[80])

2.3.3 Numbers 24:9

V9a clearly alludes to Gen 49:9b, with minor differences unimportant to the meaning: כארי replaces כאריה, and שכב replaces רבץ. In both these respects Num 24:9 corresponds to 23:24, though 23:24 otherwise is less close to Gen 49:9 (it seems also to allude to Gen 49:27).[81] 24:9 thus picks up the imagery of the previous oracle and also directs the reader to Jacob's blessing of Judah. The use of the imagery in the two oracles differs slightly (above p38): the second oracle depicts the lion rising to deal thoroughly with its prey, ending with the lion still standing and eating; in the third the lion has already dealt with its foes and eaten (v8bα), and hence the stress is on its being undisturbed. Thus 24:9a is more a reassurance to Israel than a threat to her enemies, though the previous verse and the allusion to 23:24 contain quite enough threat, and other nations would not want to hear that whatever they do they cannot trouble Israel. The allusion to Gen 49:9 makes two points. The first is simply that God will fulfil what has previously been promised; Israel may not yet be as secure as a sated lion, but will be; what Balaam now proclaims is continuous with what Israel's own spokespersons have declared. But the second is that the

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e.g. Albright (1944) p220n89; Budd (1984) p256; Milgrom (1989) p208), is possible, but it is unclear whether such a reference would have been understood when the Pentateuch reached its final form (cf. LXX Σηθ for a third century B.C. understanding).

[79] Powell (1981) p281 suggests that in 24:8 'Israel is depicted as the reactor, a people who strikes back in self defense. Only those who oppose her are subject to her wrath'. Moberly (1998b) p121 suggests that 1Sam 15:29 raises the issue of how one should live if one is not chosen; Balaam's oracles (with their parallel to 1Sam 15:29 in 23:19) perhaps raise the same question.

[80] Davies (1995) p277. Rouillard (1985) pp455-6 considers that the point is precisely that all nations, whether or not hostile to Israel, will be destroyed; however this interpretation requires Rouillard's general assumption that a later layer may well not cohere with what precedes.

[81] Contra Orlinsky (1944), שכב seems unobjectionable in Num 24:9: though √רבץ is the normal word for an animal's lying down, might not √שכב be employed to stress that the imagery is being applied to humans (in Ps 23:2 – as Orlinsky notes [p174] – √רבץ is used with a human subject when the context suggests an animal metaphor)? Cf. Ashley (1993) p494.

past blessing can be amplified. For Gen 49:9 applies only to Judah, while Num 24:9 likens all Israel to the lion.[82] Balaam does not only restate what was sure anyway, but through him God offers his people further security.

V9b continues the theme of Israel's security and the danger for anyone trying to oppose her. Those wishing for Israel's good will themselves receive God's blessing; those seeking to curse her will find that the curse affects them instead. In context the warning seems more significant than the offer of blessing, since that has been the note sounded since the second half of v7; indeed as Balak is specifically seeking to have Israel cursed this is the most explicit threat yet to him.[83] The subsequent oracle which specifically refers to the downfall of Moab (v17) confirms this. Of course the offer of blessing is equally real; the words are those of Balaam as he blesses Israel, and 23:10 shows him finishing another oracle by praying to share Israel's blessedness.[84] Balaam's failure to enjoy the blessing he would otherwise gain from his actions here is, Numbers suggests, due to his own subsequent failure to remain faithful to Yhwh (31:8, 16); it does not suggest that this principle never applied to him. However that in practice no-one in Numbers obviously benefits from blessing Israel adds to our argument that the warning here receives more stress than the offer of blessing. Yet one might well ask whether the warning is the primary thrust of the text, or whether even that is subordinate to the blessing this is for Israel. The first three oracles are basically about Israel and God's relationship with her; their concern with other nations is to stress that opposition from them to Israel will prove futile and dangerous only to themselves. We have noted that 24:9a is making a point about Israel's security vis-à-vis others more than about what she might to do them. Thus it seems likely that the central point of v9b is equally about Israel, that she is secure since others will find blessing her advantageous, and cursing her to their own discomfort.

Numbers 24:9b obviously echoes Gen 12:3a and 27:29b. In the final form of the text there is this clear relationship between them, whether or not we think that in origin they

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[82] Cf. Marx (1987) p104. Marx's alternative proposal, that the oracle suggests Judah to be the true Israel, seems less likely.

[83] And cf. above p38n77 and p27, noting that v9b climaxes with the threat of cursing.

[84] אחרית probably refers to Balaam's posterity, as in Ps 109:13 and a seventh-century Aramaic inscription similar in form to Num 23:10 (Cooke (1903) p190 no.65 ll9-10; Binns (1927) p162; Ashley (1993) pp468-9); alternatively reference to the later part of his life is possible (cf. perhaps 24:20; also e.g. Job 8:7; 42:12; Prov 5:11; Gray (1903) p348; Davies (1995) p259). אחרית never denotes death (Rouillard (1985) p235).

were independent uses of a saying current in Israel,[85] or even if we hold that one or both Genesis passages is dependent on Balaam's oracles.[86] It has been suggested that Balak's statement at 22:6 with its equally balanced statement on how blessing and curse can come about, opens up a tension with these patriarchal promises of security for Israel (on Gen 27:29 see above ch2.2.2; on Gen 12:3a see below ch6.3.8): how will Israel fare when faced with one such as Balaam with the effectiveness of his words?[87] As we have seen, the principle of 22:6 is correct since Balaam's words do have this power; Balaam's obedience and the steps taken by Yhwh to ensure it, including eventually the enunciation of 24:9 with its statement that a curse on Israel (we might add, whether or not it would have any effect) would rebound on the curser, show that Yhwh will maintain his prior commitments. Of course presence of an allusion at 22:6 is debatable: though it is a balanced statement about blessing and curse, its content is somewhat different. Thus it is uncertain whether 22:6 should make the reader think of the Genesis promises – though perhaps 24:9 would throw a new light on it which would not have been apparent on a first reading – but since we have already argued that the tension such an allusion would create is present elsewhere in the story, if not so sharply focused, we need not make a firm decision. The allusion at 24:9b, however, is clear: thus the third oracle, the last focusing specifically on Israel and not on the nations, the last warning for Balak before he rejects altogether the need to listen to Balaam, ends with a restatement of one of God's commitments when he first called Abraham and thus began his dealings with Israel as a people. As this episode is about blessing, and as indeed that initial call is in large part a promise of blessing, it is fitting that the oracle culminates with explicit reassurance that attempts to lessen Israel's blessedness will incur God's curse, while those who attempt to enhance it will themselves be prospered.

2.3.4 Conclusion

The Balaam story illustrates the power of human blessings. Though Yhwh may be in overall control of what happens, nevertheless humans (at least, certain humans such as Balaam) can by their words affect how Yhwh will act in the future. Thus it is significant that towards the end of Israel's wandering in the wilderness her status as blessed is reaffirmed by Balaam – and that in seeking to undermine this, Balak succeeds only in creating trouble for his own people.

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[85] Cf. e.g. Gray (1903) p366; Sturdy (1976) p176; Davies (1995) p271. Also above p27.

[86] Cf. Budd (1984) p271 (above p34n53). Beentjes (1982) p510 hesitantly suggests that Num 24:9 may be older than Gen 27:29.

[87] Coats (1985a) pp57-8, though he holds that the contact here, unlike 24:9, 'is secondary, not an intrinsic part of the story'; Ackerman (1987) p86.

The oracles echo in parts the patriarchal promises: what Yhwh has already promised to his people will be fulfilled. This is a great boon for them, but need not be for the detriment of others if they are prepared to accept Israel's status. 24:9b provides an explicit statement of this principle, as it picks up Gen 12:3a. Its main point is that Israel is under Yhwh's protection, and thus is secure. The reason it offers for this security is that other nations which seek to add to Israel's blessing will thereby themselves gain blessing, while attempts to curse Israel will rebound on the cursers' heads.

Chapter 3
The Niphal in Hebrew

3.1 Introduction

The question of the force of the niphal נברכו in Genesis 12:3 still divides
commentators. There are generally reckoned to be three possibilities: passive ('be blessed'),
'middle' ('Segen finden', 'sich Segen erwerben'[1]), and reflexive ('bless themselves'). It is
normally accepted that all are possible renderings; the arguments are generally about what
the word is likely to mean in context, not about what it could or could not mean.[2] Four
factors are then brought into play. First, the immediate context: if, for example, והיה ברכה
(v2) states that Abraham will be a source of blessing,[3] a passive or 'middle' translation is
clearly in keeping with the tenor of the passage; if instead it means that Abraham's name
will be an example others cite in uttering blessings,[4] this would cohere well with reflexive
force for the niphal. Such considerations are of course rarely decisive: so Wenham, for
example, believes that ברכה means 'formula of blessing' while נברכו has 'middle' force;
and Westermann conversely that ברכה means 'source of blessing', while נברכו has
reflexive force. Secondly, there is the wider context in Genesis – does Genesis as a whole
show blessing coming to the families of the earth through Abraham (and his descendants)?[5]
Thirdly there is the relation of the patriarchal promises formulated with the niphal (12:3;
18:18; 28:14) to those formulated with the hithpael (22:18; 26:4). Do they have the same
meaning?[6] If so, is the force of the hithpael perhaps clear, enabling a decision on the force
of the niphal?[7] Finally one can ask whether there is a reason for Gen 12:3 to employ the

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[1] For the former cf. Procksch (1924) pp96-7, for the latter Schreiner (1962) p7.

[2] The only such arguments I know are in Schreiner (1962) p7n21 (on which see p75n156 below),
Blum (1984) pp350-1n9, and Boyd (1993) pp12-13, though the suggestion of e.g. Jenni (1969),
Lambdin (1973) and Siebesma (1991) that the niphal fundamentally expresses one meaning in
Hebrew, even if it requires different translation equivalents in other languages, is clearly important.
Again, this will be discussed below.

[3] So e.g. Wolff (1966), von Rad (1972), Westermann (1985).

[4] So e.g. *KBS*; Wenham (1987); Moberly (2000) p124.

[5] So e.g. Wolff (1966).

[6] Positive answers are given by e.g. Allis (1927) (with grammatical arguments to demonstrate that the
hithpael can have passive force); Vriezen (1973); Westermann (1985); it is denied by e.g. Schreiner
(1962); Wehmeier (1974).

[7] So e.g. Westermann (1985), drawing on Ps 72:17 and Jer 4:2 for reflexive meaning of the hithpael.

niphal *rather than* the pual or hithpael. Is the niphal used because neither pual nor hithpael would quite capture the nuance intended? If, then, the pual would have passive force and the hithpael reflexive, it might be suggested that the niphal is used as a 'middle'.[8]

The arguments outlined in the previous paragraph clearly have some merit: we respond to them especially in ch6.3 below. However perhaps grammatical analysis of the niphal may contribute more to the debate than is usually accepted. To demonstrate this I shall draw on modern general linguistic research, especially Suzanne Kemmer's typological study of the middle voice.[9] I am also heavily indebted to Stephen Boyd's study of the niphal.[10] Boyd, using modern linguistic methods, analyses in particular those niphals which have been claimed to be reflexive; he also considers in detail the relationship between the niphal and the hithpael. My overall conclusions are similar to Boyd's, though we differ on details, I employ comparative material (which he does not), and my task requires me to consider some uses of the niphal to which he gives little attention. However this study – as Boyd's – is not intended as a complete survey of the niphal. My goal is simply to shed light on Genesis 12:3. Thus exact analysis and categorisation will not be important, unless such categorisation might affect analysis of the niphal of √ברך. Likewise describing usage of the niphal will be more important than explaining why the one stem is used in all these ways. Of course, the work here is equally the kind of ground-clearing and preliminary study necessary before synthesis is possible.

We shall employ as a tool, more often implicitly than explicitly, the three-level diathesis model used by Geniusiene and Boyd.[11] (The arguments here are independent of the question whether transformations work upon the sentence or upon the verb as a lexical item;[12] wherever possible I use non-committal terminology). The three-level diathesis sets out the correspondences between the syntactic features of the arguments of a verb, the referents in the situation described, and the semantic roles of those referents. For example, in the case of 'Liz gave a book to Alan' we have:

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[8] Cf. e.g. Schreiner (1962), taken up by Wolff (1966).

[9] Kemmer (1993); cf. also her earlier co-authored article, Croft, Shyldkrot et al. (1987).

[10] Boyd (1993).

[11] Geniusiene (1987); Boyd (1993).

[12] For arguments in favour of the latter, see Bresnan (1982); also Klein (1992) pp29-35, 288-9 on the theory and its possible application to the niphal.

Referent	Person1 (Liz)	Object (the book)	Person2 (Alan)
Role	Agent	Patient	Addressee
Syntactic Coding	Subject	Direct Object	Indirect Object

It is generally held that there are interlinguistically a number of fixed semantic roles into which every referent must fit: for example, Agent (the causer of a process or state in causative situations involving a Patient); Actor (the willing subject of an intransitive verb); Experiencer (the one who undergoes a mental process or state); Patient (an entity undergoing a non-willing change of state or location, or existing in a state); Addressee (a referent receiving information or a thing).[13] The syntactic coding varies between different instances and different languages: so, for instance, in a passive construction the referents and roles may be the same as in the corresponding active, but the Patient is likely to be coded as subject, while the Agent may be coded as an oblique object; in an accusative language it is likely that Agent and Actor will be coded as subject, with Patient differently coded, while in an ergative language[14] Actor and Patient will be coded as absolutive, while an Agent will be coded as an ergative. The assumption of this study, following Geniusiene and Boyd, is that any of the diathesis levels may change when one construction is derived from another. As we have seen, in the case of the passive it may be only the syntactic coding that varies. In the case of a reflexive, it may be just the referent structure: so 'he hits himself' can be assigned the following diathesis

Person	
Agent	Patient
Subject	Direct Object

in comparison with that for 'he hits her'

Person	Person
Agent	Patient
Subject	Direct Object

Equally the semantic roles may change. 'The roller turns' can be assigned the diathesis:

Object
Actor
Subject

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[13] For details, see e.g. Boyd (1993) pp76-84, Geniusiene (1987) pp39ff. The definitions given are only approximate, and draw heavily on Geniusiene. Creason (1995) p105 in passing criticises Boyd's use of this approach; as he provides no details of how he thinks it leads Boyd astray, his critique cannot be properly evaluated. Klaiman (1992) pp37-42 provides a cautious assessment of the possibility of defining semantic roles.

[14] On ergativity see below p69.

in comparison with that for 'the river turns the stones' which is:

Object	Object
Agent	Patient
Subject	Direct Object

This proceeds from the assumption that (in the first example) the roller is not performing on itself an action of turning, and is therefore not an Agent; but equally it cannot be a Patient, because any situation involving a Patient must have a corresponding Agent, yet this construction is used precisely to avoid attribution of agency (compare the difference between 'the roller turned [by itself]' and 'the roller was turned by the groundsman').[15]

In the use of the terms 'passive', 'middle' and 'reflexive', three levels must be distinguished: 'morphological', 'semantic' and 'relational'. First, the *morphological* level. Geniusiene's study *The Typology of Reflexives* begins:

> The term **reflexives,** or **reflexive verbs**..., is used here to refer to verbs
>
> with a reflexive marker..., whatever their meaning, in accordance with the
>
> traditional use of this term in Baltic (and Slavic) linguistics.

A reflexive marker is later defined as

> an element in the verb (affix, ending, etc.) or its environment (particle,
>
> pronoun, etc.) which has (or once had) a reflexive meaning (of coreference
>
> of two semantic roles) as its only or one of many functions.[16]

Thus to describe a verb as morphologically reflexive implies nothing about its meaning; it does not even (on this definition) entail that the form ever now expresses reflexive meaning.[17] Of course, one's definition may be somewhat tighter. So the middle may be

> morphologically, a verb form predominantly indicating middle diathesis,[18]

implying that middle use is not only current, but also the form's main function. However, even in this case labelling some form as morphologically 'middle' clearly implies nothing about the meaning expressed or the usage of the particular word. Such morphological terms enable interlinguistic comparisons. The alternative is to give labels to the various morphological categories which are either arbitrary (as the numbers for the various stems in

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[15] Cf. Boyd (1993) p74.

[16] Geniusiene (1987) pp1, 25.

[17] Geniusiene (1987) p77 notes that in both Lithuanian and Latvian the reflexive marker is rarely used to express semantic reflexivity.

[18] Boyd (1993) p298. Interestingly, Boyd's definition of the morphologically reflexive is much broader: 'a verbal category that may be used to indicate any or all of reflexive action, middle action, reciprocal action, or passive' (p300).

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Arabic) or descriptive of the particular form in some given language (e.g. 'niphal' in Hebrew); but neither of these options reveals the way that, for example, in many different languages reflexive verbs – temporarily adopting Geniusiene's definition – express certain kinds of meaning in addition to simple reflexivity. However one can over-emphasize morphology: in Latin, for example, passive and middle are morphologically identical, but there is a clear difference between a passive (which has a corresponding active and can take an agent marked with 'a(b)') and a middle (which cannot take an agent, may have no corresponding active, and may take an object obliquely expressed[19]).

The *semantic* level relates to the meaning expressed. Reflexivity is easiest to define: it denotes the coreference of two semantic roles in the sentence.[20] Such reflexivity may be *direct* if Agent and Patient corefer (e.g. 'I hit myself' where I both perform an action of hitting as if I were hitting another, and am hit as if someone were hitting me) or *indirect* if there is coreference of Agent and Beneficiary (e.g. 'John cooked tea for himself') or Agent and Recipient (e.g. 'Mary sent a letter to herself'). However it is unclear whether all semantic middles share some common property or properties. Boyd, for example, suggests as a definition that

the subject is both in control of and affected by the action of the verb.[21]

Alternatively, one may consider that a certain range of situations, not defined in terms of common properties, are those in which one can rightly talk of middle semantics.[22] We return to this issue below (pp51-53). The passive cannot be defined in purely semantic terms,[23] since passives at least commonly imply a corresponding active expressing precisely the same situation, and therefore sharing all semantic properties. However this does impose a semantic restriction, namely that passives at least typically imply, or make explicit,

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[19] So e.g. *utor*, 'I use' takes an ablative of the item used, and has no corresponding **uto*; *morior*, 'I die', obviously takes no object, and there is no corresponding **morio*. *Moveor*, 'I move (myself)' (intransitive) is at least arguably middle (cf. Claflin (1927) p168), though there corresponds an active *moveo*; this case is more complicated, because *moveor* can also be used as a passive 'I am moved (by someone/something)', and can then take an agent expressed with 'a' or 'ab'.

[20] Cf. the definition of morphologically reflexive verbs cited from Geniusiene above.

[21] Boyd (1993) p298.

[22] One might, e.g., derive from Kemmer (1993) a list of situations typically middle-marked: body actions, changes in body posture, spontaneous events, etc.

[23] Siewierska (1984) pp259-60 questions the value of any tight definition of the passive: it will either be so broad that it includes cases clearly different from each other, so narrow that it excludes clearly related categories, or arbitrary.

someone or something which could function as the subject of an active sentence.[24]   A further restriction is that the Agent or Actor (or Experiencer, if (s)he is subject of the corresponding active) cannot be the subject of the passive; either some other referent is promoted to subject, or the passive is 'impersonal' (with insertion of a dummy subject, or with no subject expressed).[25]

What I shall label the *relational* level is also a semantic category, but more restricted than that just discussed. Here we are dealing with the relation of a particular reflexive, middle, or passive use to some corresponding active construction.[26] A use is never in general relationally reflexive etc., but may be the (relationally) reflexive of some active if it expresses precisely the same action, but with Patient and Agent coreferring.[27] The purpose of distinguishing this level from the general semantic one is mainly that something which fails to be relationally reflexive may yet be semantically reflexive. So when Boyd suggests that the niphal of מכר√ in Lev 25:39, 47, 48, 50 is not a true reflexive, since the action described is different from any other sale,[28] this clearly does not exclude the possibility that we have here a situation in which there is Agent/ Patient coreference.[29] Those verbs found only in the niphal, such as נאבק and נאות also show the importance of the distinction:[30] while they cannot be relationally middle or reflexive, we should surely

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[24] E.g. an Agent ('You were hit' : 'I hit you'), Experiencer ('A sound was heard' : 'I heard a sound'), Actor (Latin 'ventum est' : 'veni'). This last possibility is not instantiated in Hebrew.

[25] 1Chr 2:9 וּבְנֵי חֶצְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר נוֹלַד־לוֹ provides a Hebrew example.

[26] One might call this the 'derivational' level; however it is possible (a) that synchronically neither of the two uses should be regarded as primary, and (b) that diachronically back-formation may occur, with an active being formed from the passive, middle, or reflexive.

[27] Since we argue below (p60) that sometimes the middle describes an action different in kind from a corresponding active (e.g. when it is said of a person in Latin that 'movetur', [s]he is not performing an act of moving on herself, but is just moving) we perhaps should allow that if the nature of the action differs, but accords with certain fixed relational rules specific to the language, one can still speak of one item being relationally middle, reflexive, or passive, of the other.

[28] For, in Boyd's view, the seller receives neither money nor any other material in return for what is sold. Yet vv50-1 suggest there might be a value put on the slave; might not this sum be used to pay his debts, with perhaps any amount greater than the debt being retained by the slave (cf. e.g. Rashi (1972b) pp120b-121)? However for the sake of the argument, I concede Boyd's point.

[29] Boyd (1993) p161; his criteria are set out on pp129-131. Interestingly, his definition of 'reflexive' in the glossary (p300) does not include the nature of the action being the same: in the glossary he defines what I have called the semantic reflexive, in the body of the thesis he is concerned with the relational reflexive.

[30] Other languages also offer many examples of items morphologically reflexive or middle, but with no corresponding active: e.g. Latin *fruor*, (classical) Greek ὑπισχνοῦμαι, Tatar *aškynu* (cf. for the last example Geniusiene (1987) p339).

subject them to semantic analysis, and expect conclusions from this to help us understand the niphal more generally.

Here we should note the phenomenon of semantic shift, i.e. the possibility that a form originally in direct relation to another may change its meaning somewhat, thereby also losing its direct relationality. Thus the French *se trouver* ('be situated') no longer obviously has any nuance of finding (*trouver* means 'find'). Similarly in English, 'blasted' may be used as an expletive without implying that the thing thus designated has been subject to any literal or metaphorical blast. A derived form may take on a life of its own; however this plainly does not imply that relationality is not normally expected. (Of course equally semantic shift may occur in the base word, while the derived one retains its original sense.) The situation may well be similar in Hebrew: compare e.g. √ספר (meaning 'count' in the qal, 'recount, declare' in the piel) and √פקד (meaning 'be counted [as present]' in the hithpael, while often 'be noted as absent' in the niphal).[31] In the case of √באש 'stink' where qal and hiphil are used literally, hiphil, niphal and hithpael metaphorically,we quite possibly should explain this in terms of independent semantic development in the case of the latter group, rather than attempting to relate the niphal specifically to the hiphil.[32] However it hardly follows that relationality was never perceived, or even seen as the norm.[33] In Jer 17:14 (רְפָאֵנִי יְהוָה וְאֵרָפֵא) much of the sentence's force surely derives from the correspondence between רְפָאֵנִי (describing Yhwh's action) and וְאֵרָפֵא (describing the result).[34] So also in Gen 27:33 (וָאֲבָרֲכֵהוּ גַּם־בָּרוּךְ יִהְיֶה) Isaac's action in blessing (piel) makes Jacob blessed (qal passive participle). We must not deny relationships which do exist, though equally we cannot presume them to be always present.

Suzanne Kemmer has marshalled an impressive array of evidence from a wide variety of language families, though unfortunately not using any Semitic evidence, to demonstrate that certain semantic domains regularly attract grammatical marking which differentiates them from active constructions in the particular language, while their sense if

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[31] For the last example and other examples of hithpael and niphal being used with different nuances, cf. Boyd (1993) pp254-7.

[32] See further below p63 on the niphal of intransitive verbs.

[33] Cf. also the arguments of Sawyer (1967), responding to Barr (1961).

[34] Cf. Held (1965).

not also their morphology shows them not to be passive.[35] Thus there seems to be some kind of 'middle domain' which is a natural way for humans to think about the world, not just a feature of (near-)arbitrary divisions made by particular languages.[36] One certainly cannot assume that any particular language will instantiate it, and interlinguistically there is great variety in which of these fields of meaning and which items within those fields receive middle marking. However it is a reasonable hypothesis that a) a language may mark a middle domain, and b) if so, the domain will include only fields from those detailed by Kemmer, or others closely related.[37] I contend that the Hebrew niphal is used thus, and indeed that this accounts for almost all its non-passive usage: by analysis of the Hebrew evidence, and use of comparative material, I seek to argue this, and to give some idea of the fields within the middle domain where the niphal is used. For comparative evidence I will prioritise French, German, Latin and classical Greek, where I have some personal competence; for other languages I entirely depend on the sources cited.

This study uses little evidence from other Semitic languages, for three reasons. First, as my argument is that the niphal fits into a scheme typical of human language in general, the comparative evidence is more compelling the further removed it is from Hebrew. Second, I am not competent to assess such evidence. But third, most previous work on those languages has been carried out without the sophistication in linguistic method made possible by the recent work in linguistics on which the present study depends. Thus categorisations made in discussions of other Semitic languages cannot be assumed to be reliable. In particular, all too often 'reflexive' means that the word can be translated as a reflexive in some modern European language, rather than being based on analysis of the particular language being studied.[38] However initial impressions are encouraging for my thesis that the Hebrew niphal is used as both a passive and a middle[39] – see below for arguments that items cited here are included in the middle domain. For example, according

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[35] Kemmer (1993); also Croft, Shyldkrot et al. (1987).

[36] Cf. the similar argument in Geniusiene (1987) p3 concerning 'reflexive verbs' (cf. above p46 for her definition of these; Kemmer would argue that many 'reflexive verbs' in this sense belong to the middle domain).

[37] I proceed on the assumption that Kemmer's categorisations are approximately correct; challenging details would not affect the main lines of this study.

[38] Boyd (1993) makes a similar point with regard to work on the niphal.

[39] Palmer (1995) also expresses the opinion that work on the Semitic languages would support Kemmer's thesis.

to Huehnergard,[40] the Akkadian N stem is middle as well as passive; *nashurum* means 'turn (oneself)';[41] the N stems of *amaru* and *nabutu* mean respectively 'flee' and 'meet';[42] the N stem of statives can be used ingressively. In Ugaritic, the N stem is sometimes passive, but other uses include words for making war, pouring out (of tears), being girded.[43] In Phoenician, the examples of niphals given by van den Branden are all translated as French passives.[44]

Can the middle be defined more exactly than that it includes certain semantic domains? A number of common properties might be suggested. For example, valence reduction: a middle is derived from an active construction when one of the referents is deleted (e.g. 'I opened the door' becoming 'the door opened'; 'I dressed the child' becoming 'I dressed [myself]'). However a central use of the middle seems to be to express not a reduction in valence but a further involvement of the subject: so in classical Greek, αἱρῶ means 'I take (something)', αἱροῦμαι 'I take (something) for myself, I choose'. That any expression of Beneficiary is optional suggests that such an expression is always an increase in valence compared to the active construction, rather than a decrease caused by coreference of Agent and Beneficiary.[45] In Fula, from the West Atlantic language group of Niger-Congo, a few verbs are intransitive in the active but transitive in the middle (e.g. *wela* 'be pleasant, sweet', *welo* 'please'), and middles such as *resake* 'put on deposit' occur in the case of radicals which in the active cannot take an indirect object; again valence reduction seems most implausible.[46] Kemmer suggests that the middle denotes a low 'elaboration of events'. However her arguments are sometimes unconvincing: her class of 'spontaneous events', for example, is not obviously less elaborated than any other one-participant event.[47]

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[40] Huehnergard (1997) pp361-2.

[41] Huehnergard labels this 'reflexive'.

[42] Huehnergard (1979) pp248-9.

[43] Sivan (1997) pp131-2; Gordon (1965) p82 and Segert (1984) mention the passive use.

[44] van den Branden (1969) pp75-6.

[45] Cf. Geniusiene (1987) pp134-6 for Lithuanian and Latvian examples; also Croft, Shyldkrot et al. (1987) pp184-5 for the argument.

[46] Klaiman (1992) pp56, 279-81.

[47] Cf. Palmer (1995) and Haspelmath (1995); the specific criticism I cite is offered by Palmer, while both make the general point.

Perhaps in the middle the subject is both affecting and affected:[48] arguably this might define the semantic middle. However the middle is regularly used for verbs denoting fighting, because standardly in fighting one is simultaneously fought against; hence we shall class the Hebrew נלחם as a middle.[49] Yet נלחם is often used where the subject's affectedness is at best far from clear – the complaint of the Psalmist in Ps 109:3 (וְדִבְרֵי שִׂנְאָה סְבָבוּנִי וַיִּלָּחֲמוּנִי חִנָּם) surely is that he is the victim of his enemies' attacks, with no implication that he is forced into fighting himself thereby making the enemies fought against. Moreover that middle morphology often develops into or from passive morphology suggests that the nuance of subject as affecting is not always strong in the former, if present at all; while the existence of impersonal passives must prevent us from thinking that even the passive stresses subject as affected.[50]

Hence there is probably no common property of all instances which one would wish to label semantically middle. Rather the middle embraces a group of semantic domains, where any particular domain will be closely related to at least one other (hence the common morphology often used for the two) but may be less closely related to further domains which in certain languages receive the same marking. This argument extends in languages where the same morphology can express (some) semantic reflexives and (some) passives: polysemy may well be a better explanation than trying to find some common property that all uses of that morphology share.[51] Nor is it clear that even if there is some common property, that property should be seen as the essential idea expressed by the form.[52] Thus it is doubtless true that the Hebrew niphal very commonly expresses subject affectedness (most middle uses, and all passive uses except impersonals), and can be used thus whether the subject is also in any way in control of the action or not. However Hebrew writers certainly *could* distinguish situations in which the subject was also affecting from those in which it is just affected (since they employ qal passive, pual and hophal only when the

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[48] Cf. Boyd (1993) p298, cited above p47.

[49] Below p56. Cf. Old Norse *berjask*, Turkish *döviş-* (Kemmer (1993) p104); also classical Greek μάχομαι.

[50] Cf. Andersen (1990) pp193-4. For an impersonal passive in Hebrew, see above p48n25.

[51] Contra e.g. Jenni (1969), *W/O'C* p380, and Siebesma (1991) on the niphal; Bicknell (1984) esp. p128 on niphal, pual and hophal.

[52] Creason (1995) ppp367ff suggests that all niphals have one force, but offers no arguments that they were thus perceived, seeking only to show that one definition can encompass them all. Nor is it clear why he seeks to homogenise all niphals, since he allows piel and hiphil to have several forces (the piel, e.g., can be factitive, resultative, and iterative).

subject is not in control of the action). Moreover they clearly do not use the niphal only when the role of the subject is indifferent: in Gen 2:4 (אֵלֶּה תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבָּרְאָם), for example, it is surely essential to the theology that the world was created *by God*, and did not emerge spontaneously or create itself. Similarly in classical Greek, passive and middle morphology coincide in the present tense, but diverge elsewhere;[53] are we to think that the present tense expresses that which is common to the two semantic domains, while in other tenses differences are marked? Do Latin passives and deponents fundamentally express the same idea, though the former relate to an active and can take an Agent marked with *a(b)* while the latter cannot? Finally, we should note that in many languages there are semantic domains in which for no obvious reasons some items attract middle morphology and others do not:[54] while this hardly proves that there is no common force in all the examples which are middle-marked, it does at least suggest that the middle nuance is not strongly felt (else why should its use seem arbitrary?).

Thus we proceed on the assumption that the Hebrew niphal may well have several forces. Further, we assume that the niphal may well not be sharply distinguished from all other stems.[55] Thus two stems of the same verb may often act as complementary.[56] √כשל occurs twenty-two times in the qal perfect, and seventeen times in the niphal imperfect, while it is found in the niphal perfect only in Daniel 11 and in the qal imperfect only in the Kethib of Prov 4:16. √נשש occurs forty-seven times in the qal imperfect or jussive, sixteen times in the niphal perfect (and never in qal perfect or niphal imperfect/ jussive):

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[53] This is an over-simplification (cf. e.g. Andersen (1991) pp67-70); however it remains true that certain forms are typically passive, others typically middle.

[54] Cf. e.g. Croft, Shyldkrot et al. (1987) p180: in Spanish, e.g., many emotive speech actions take middle marking (*gloriarse* 'glorify', *jactarse* 'boast', *quejarse* 'complain, lament, moan' etc.), but *exclamar* 'exclaim' does not.

[55] Jenni (1969) denies both these suggestions, claiming (p61) they would be unlikely in a productive system. However why cannot a language use the same morphology in several ways (is polysemy and homonymy in vocabulary also objectionable?), or two different morphological forms sometimes overlap (again, cannot items of vocabulary coincide in meaning, at least over some of their range?)? On the latter point, cf. Retsö (1989) p51n7.

[56] A finite form of the niphal may be strengthened by the qal infinitive absolute, as well as by the niphal infinitive (cf. e.g. Ex 21:20, 22, 28; 2Sam 23:7; Jer 10:5). However since the qal infinitive can also be used with other stems (cf. the common מוֹת יוּמַת, Gen 26:11, Ex 21:12 etc., and e.g. Isa 24:19 with hithpoel), this does not show any particular qal/ niphal overlap. Lev 19:20 and 2Ki 3:23 join the niphal to a hophal infinitive. In both cases one could repoint to a niphal, though this seems unnecessary, given 1Sam 2:16 (piel infinitive with hiphil) and Ezek 16:4 (hophal infinitive and pual), where consonantal changes would be necessary to assimilate the infinitive and finite forms. See *GKC* §113w; *JM* §123p.

particularly significant are Gen 33:7 and Ex 24:2, where qal and niphal are found in the same verse, clearly describing precisely the same activity. √טמא evidences niphal perfect (fifteen times) and hithpael imperfect (thirteen times); both forms are attested within the same book (Leviticus, Numbers and Ezekiel use both – Leviticus 11:43 and 18:24 within the same verse), while hithpael perfect and the niphal imperfect/ jussive are not attested.[57] In general the hithpael and niphal are used by many verbs to express similar meanings.[58] So one notes, for example, the employment of √עטף at Lam 2:11-12, and that of √חבא in Gen 3:8, 10; in each case both hithpael and niphal are found with no obvious difference in force between them.[59] The hithpael is not usually used with adverbial modification, while such modification is more frequent with the niphal: the niphal of √קדש, for example, occurs eleven times, always with an adverbial phrase governed by the preposition ב, expressing something about where or how hallowing happens, while the hithpael (twenty-four occurrences) is constructed with ב only at 2Chr 31:18, and there it relates to the subject's motivation. Hence one might surmise that the niphal is used at Ezek 38:16, while the hithpael occurs in v23, merely because of the use of בך in the former. Finally we must note those cases where the niphal seems to be related to stems other than the qal.[60] We have already noted (above p47) that some such examples could be due to semantic shift. Moreover apparent usage may deceive. If the qal of √קדש means 'be holy', the niphal 'become holy',[61] and the piel 'make holy', perhaps in the case of √חלל the niphal means 'become polluted', and so serves to express an idea at least similar to the passive of the piel 'pollute' while not actually being particularly related to the piel.[62] However clear examples

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[57] For these and further examples, cf. Lambert (1900) pp212-3, *W/O'C* pp392-3. On the text of Lev 11:43, cf. Milgrom (1991) p685. Deut 24:4 has a hothpaal perfect of √טמא.

[58] Cf. especially Boyd (1993) ch6.

[59] Creason (1995) pp355-7, in seeking to distinguish the niphal and hithpael generally, suggests that the niphal of √חבא means 'be hidden' and so downplays agency, while the hithpael 'hide oneself' implies agency. This is *prima facie* plausible in Gen 3: the narrator (v8) stresses the action of hiding, while Adam prefers to suggest to Yhwh that he just happened not to be visible. Yet any more general distinction seems dubious; notably, in Isa 28:15 the niphal of √סתר means 'take shelter' where the subject indubitably acts intentionally, while the hithpael is used at 29:14 (parallel to √אבד 'perish', 'be destroyed') where the implication is that בינה cannot be found. Hence the suggested difference in meaning in Gen 3 seems improbable.

[60] Cf. especially *W/O'C* pp393-5.

[61] On this, see below pp63-64.

[62] Contra e.g. Bauer and Leander (1962) §38z´-a´´.

of niphals serving as passives in relation to the hiphil are provided by √זהר and √שמד; while √ברך provides a clear case of niphal relating to piel.[63]

3.2 The niphal as a 'middle' stem

The rest of this chapter will discuss the classification of particular examples of the niphal in Hebrew, considering first middle and related uses, then passive uses, and finally reflexive uses. To establish middle use I invoke two kinds of evidence: semantic evidence from general considerations or from usage of other stems of the verb, that the particular niphal is not passive or reflexive; and comparative evidence that such a semantic domain receives middle-marking in other languages. The two types of evidence interact: a plausible semantic case may be made probable by comparative evidence; a strong comparative case may be rendered implausible by the Hebrew evidence. For example, the niphal of √נקם (e.g. Judg 15:7) could be a reflexive form, expressing coreference of the avenger and the victim of the crime (who can be coded as the direct object of the qal). However the Latin *ulciscor* might make us wonder whether the niphal is better analysed as a middle, expressing an action typically performed for one's own benefit; this possibility is strengthened by the fact that the victim of the crime is only infrequently expressed as the object of the qal.[64]

Further examples of niphals expressing something one might typically do for one's own benefit are provided by √שמר, √אחז and √שאל. The niphal of √שמר is passive at Ps 37:28

כִּי יְהוָה אֹהֵב מִשְׁפָּט וְלֹא־יַעֲזֹב אֶת־חֲסִידָיו
לְעוֹלָם נִשְׁמָרוּ וְזֶרַע רְשָׁעִים נִכְרָת

and Hosea 12:14[13] (וּבְנָבִיא הֶעֱלָה יְהוָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם וּבְנָבִיא נִשְׁמָר). Elsewhere it denotes not an act of guarding performed on oneself, but an activity of being careful concerning something which affects one's interests (cf. especially 2Ki 6:9-10 where Elisha warns Israel's king to beware of a particular place).[65] The classical Greek φυλλάσσεσθαι provides a parallel:[66] that this can take an accusative of the thing guarded against shows that

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[63] √ברך differs from √קדש in that the qal passive participle shows there is no implied active qal meaning 'be blessed'.

[64] Only 1Sam 24:13[12]; Lev 19:18 of the ten instances of the qal. For this and more detailed analysis, see Boyd (1993) pp163-170.

[65] Cf. Boyd (1993) pp230-1.

[66] Cf. *GKC* §51c, though this is regarded there as a reflexive.

the subject is not regarded as Patient. The niphal of √אחז is passive at Gen 22:13 (וְהִנֵּה־

כַּדָּנִים שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים בִּמְצוּדָה רָעָה וְכַצִּפֳּרִים) and Eccl 9:12 (אַיִל אַחַר נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבַךְ בְּקַרְנָיו

הָאֲחֻזוֹת בַּפָּח). Elsewhere it apparently denotes gaining possessions, as Latin *potior* and

Turkish *edin-* both mean 'gain possession of, acquire'.[67] The niphal of √שאל at 1Sam 20:6,

28 and Neh 13:6 means 'ask permission (to depart)': the subject is clearly doing the asking,

and asking another, so the verb is neither passive nor reflexive. Comparative evidence

comes from classical Greek γουνόομαι/ γουνάζομαι 'beseech, beg for mercy' and Hungarian

kéredzked- 'ask, request', which Kemmer classes amongst middles denoting action one

might typically perform for one's own benefit.[68] There is no other obvious example of a

niphal used to denote an action performed for the subject's own benefit; this use of the

niphal was thus presumably not productive, occurring only in the case of a few particular

verbs. (Similarly in Latvian only a few verbs are middle-marked with this nuance, though

in the closely-related Lithuanian the morphology is very productive in this sense[69]).

The niphal is also used to mark actions that are typically reciprocal; that is, the

Agent is simultaneously the Patient of a similar action performed by the person toward

whom the Agent's own action is directed. We have already (p52) noted נלחם; a similar

meaning is expressed by נחרבו at 2Kings 3:23. נאבק, again found only in the niphal, and

only at Gen 32:25-6[24-5] may also fit here if it means 'wrestle';[70] comparative evidence

comes from Latin *luctor* and Bahasa Indonesian *bergumul*.[71] The niphal of √שפט means 'go

to court' (except Ps 9:20[19] קוּמָה יְהוָה אַל־יָעֹז אֱנוֹשׁ יִשָּׁפְטוּ גוֹיִם עַל־פָּנֶיךָ where it may be

passive); the middle morphology doubtless derives from mutuality in most court

appearances (e.g. 1Sam 12:7; Isa 43:26), though any idea of mutuality seems to have been

lost in e.g. 2Chr 22:8 which apparently uses the word of Jehu's executing judgment. The

niphal participle נדון at 2Sam 19:10[9] (וַיְהִי כָל־הָעָם נָדוֹן בְּכָל־שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר

הַמֶּלֶךְ הִצִּילָנוּ מִכַּף אֹיְבֵינוּ), describing the people disputing with one another, seems related

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[67] Kemmer (1993) p78.

[68] Cf. Kemmer (1993) p78. γουνόομαι/ γουνάζομαι clearly originally meant 'clasp someone's knees in entreaty', but this does not affect my argument concerning the middle nuance. We discuss an alternative possible analysis for נשאל below p66.

[69] Geniusiene (1987) p132, plausibly suggesting that the Latvian examples are a remnant of an earlier more extensive usage.

[70] The word's precise force is unclear, as is whether it derives from √אבק 'dust' or √חבק 'clasp, embrace'. Cf. e.g. Sarna (1989) p366n10 (to ch32).

[71] Kemmer (1993) p104 provides this and the comparative evidence for the rest of the paragraph.

to this idea of struggling, physical or legal. √יעד, meaning in the niphal 'meet', may well have similar intrinsically reciprocal implications: when X meets Y, Y also meets X.[72] Old Norse *hittask* and Hungarian *talákoz-* evidence middles with this meaning. The niphals of √יעץ, meaning 'consult together' and of √דבר, 'speak together' (cf. especially Ezek 33:30) also fit this analysis (cf. Sanskrit *saṃvadate*[73]). Thus the niphal clearly can have reciprocal functions. However, it seems to have them only in the case of a few verbs of struggling, meeting, or talking together; thus it is unclear that it could express a reciprocal in the case of a verb of very different meaning.

Middle forms are interlinguistically very commonly used for verbs of 'grooming', i.e. of altering one's outward appearance in a socially expected way (washing, combing hair, dressing, etc.). Such verbs regularly take morphological forms used for middles but not reflexives: in English one can say 'I washed' or 'I shaved', as 'the glass broke', but not 'I hit' (meaning 'I hit myself'); Latin *lavor* 'I wash'; Hungarian *borotválkozottφ* 'he shaved' (whereas the reflexive *saját magát borotválta* would mean 'He shaved *himself* [not another]').[74] Presumably they are seen as actions normally performed for one's own benefit, and done with one's body rather than to it (which we shall see in the next paragraphs to be a regular use of the middle). Such uses of the niphal are rare in Hebrew, with a few possible exceptions. In Ps 65:7, the niphal of √אזר means 'girded (with)'. In Jer 16:6, יִקָּרֵחַ means 'shave one's head'. In 2Sam 6:20, the niphal of √גלה means 'undress' (cf. Isa 47:2 where the piel takes an object of the clothes taken off; Lev 18:7 referring to 'uncovering [someone's] nakedness'). These could be analysed as reflexives; given the small number of examples, we can hardly prove conclusively that this is a domain which Hebrew sometimes middle-marked. However, as the last two never take a direct object of a person shaved[75] or undressed we do not have relationally reflexive forms.

Boyd argues that many niphals are 'self-move' middles. By this he means that they are verbs of motion (which thus regularly stand parallel to other verbs of motion, and admit directional prepositional phrases); that they describe an action done with one's body, not to

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[72] However one could also analyse this as a verb of assembling, on which see below p60.

[73] *GKC* §51c compares the classical Greek βουλεύεσθαι with the niphal of √יעץ. However the former normally refers to a person deliberating for him/herself.

[74] Cf. Kemmer (1993) pp53-67.

[75] Though √קרח occurs only six times, so this could be due to lack of evidence.

it; and that the subject is Actor, not Agent and Patient.[76] We cannot here provide detailed argument for each verb, such as Boyd offers; we aim rather to establish the general case that some niphals are self-move middles, and to suggest some verbs which might fit this category.

Ezek 14:16,18 employs the niphal of √נצל. Some translate as a reflexive ('save/ rescue themselves'[77]), most as a passive ('be saved/ delivered'[78]). The latter seems unlikely, since v14 has raised the possibility of them saving their own life (נפשם) and in both vv16 and 18 the question is whether *they* can save their children, not about divine saving activity (which the passive would imply).[79] Similarly, in Deut 23:16[15] (לֹא־תַסְגִּיר עֶבֶד אֶל־אֲדֹנָיו אֲשֶׁר־יִנָּצֵל אֵלֶיךָ מֵעִם אֲדֹנָיו) there is no obvious external Agent in view; the deliverance is the result of the slave's own action, not of another's. Yet the construction with אֵלֶיךָ, suggests that the primary nuance in the verb is of movement. Might it then be a middle, meaning 'flee', 'escape', here and perhaps also in Ezekiel?[80] Support for this comes from the niphal of √מלט: this occurs in Gen 19:19-20 with phrases describing the destination of escape (שׁמה, ההרה); more significantly, it here and elsewhere parallels the qal of √נוס (1Sam 19:10; Jer 46:6; 48:19; Amos 9:1), a verb of motion with no reflexive force. Moreover comparative evidence is provided by Hungarian (*meneked-* 'flee') and the Andean language Ayacucho Quechua (*ayqekuy* 'flee').[81]

Another good example of a self-move middle denoting 'motion away from' (Boyd's classification) is the niphal of √נשא at Ps 7:7[6] and 24:7. Two factors suggest that the first (קוּמָה יְהוָה בְּאַפֶּךָ הִנָּשֵׂא בְּעַבְרוֹת צוֹרְרָי) is a middle: firstly, use of the imperative, while

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[76] Cf. Boyd (1993) pp170ff; Boyd gives seven marks, but these are designed more to distinguish self-move middles from reflexives than to define them in their own right.

[77] REB; Brownlee (1986).

[78] NRSV; RSV; NIV; Eichrodt (1970) p185; Zimmerli (1979).

[79] Cf. Boyd (1993) p199. One can contrast Psalm 69:15[14], where the parallel with the call to God to deliver (hiphil) means that passive force is plausible.

[80] In Deut 23:16, Targums Onqelos and Neofiti have ישתזיב, 'flee for refuge' (I owe this reference to Dr C.T.R. Hayward).

[81] Kemmer (1993) p57.

passive imperatives are very rare;[82] secondly, that the verb is parallel to קוּמָה, clearly a verb of motion expressing an action of the subject, but with no particular reflexive nuance. In the light of this, the example from Psalm 24 (שְׂאוּ שְׁעָרִים רָאשֵׁיכֶם וְהִנָּשְׂאוּ פִּתְחֵי עוֹלָם) can be classified as middle: while it could be reflexive, that it is unlikely to be passive[83] is shown again by the imperative, and by the fact that in the previous clause the equally inanimate gates are personified and regarded as capable of initiating their own movement. Similarly the niphal of √עלה means simply 'rise': it is used of the cloud guiding the Israelites in the wilderness, where the force is clearly not reflexive (and e.g. Num 9:17, where the qal of √שׁכן is used of the cloud as well as the niphal of √עלה suggests the latter is unlikely to be passive, even though 'was raised up [by God]' is not strictly impossible); in Num 16:24, when the people are told to get away from Korah, Dathan and Abiram, passive force is clearly impossible. So in Ps 47:10[9] and 97:9 we should not think of God 'exalting himself';[84] if the word does not just describe a state of being or becoming high (see below pp62-63 for such uses of the niphal) it is a metaphorical rising that is depicted.

Verbs of separation also occur in the niphal as middles relating to movement, whether the movement depicted is actual or metaphorical.[85] The use of √עלה at Num 16:24 (see previous paragraph) could be described thus; the niphal of √בדל in v21 seems equally to describe a literal movement (indeed in v24 Yhwh is precisely instructing the whole assembly to do what in v21 was reserved for Moses and Aaron); in Ezra 6:21 the niphal of this root describes separation from idols. In this category, one could also include some niphals relating to opening (e.g. נִפְתְּחוּ in Gen 7:11); however as they are basically processes undergone by inanimate objects, more than movements which animate creatures and inanimate objects alike might make, they are perhaps best categorised otherwise (see p61). However instances like this where middle forms seem related to two semantic categorisations are those which explain why the same morphology is used for both.

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[82] Though e.g. Gen 42:16 may provide an example with the niphal; on qal passive, pual and hophal see n120.

[83] Contra Held (1965).

[84] Contra Eaton (1974) p338.

[85] Boyd (1993) p231 and elsewhere refers to 'processual figurative movement', without clarifying why he believes the term appropriate; I reserve the term 'movement' for verbs which have as a central use some kind of actual movement, and explain Boyd's examples without appeal to this notion.

Verbs denoting hiding (חבא, טמן, כחד, כנף, סתר, עלם) frequently occur in the niphal, and are often analysed as reflexives. However they are better seen as self-move middles. For in hiding (note that in English this idea, like that of washing [oneself] is expressed with non-reflexive morphology) one does not normally do to oneself what one might do to another to hide them, but moves to a place where one cannot be seen. Hiding oneself by placing a blanket over one's head, as one might over another's head, would be semantically reflexive; hiding by moving behind foliage – as presumably Adam and Eve did in Gen 3:10 – is no more reflexive than any other verb of motion.[86]

The niphal is also used for body posture, whether describing a state or non-translational motion. Again one is not doing something to one's body, but with it. Comparative middle material is provided by e.g. classical Greek κλίνεσθαι 'lean (on)', Latin *vertor* 'turn', Lingala *bóngwana* 'turn around', German *sich verbeugen* 'bow'.[87] The last parallels the niphal of כפף√ at Micah 6:6. The others provide comparative evidence for the verbs listed and analysed by Boyd as 'verbs of posture and bodily contortions': נצב, נטה, שקף, כפף, כנע, כפל, עלס, עקש, ענה, סמך.[88] To this one could add, for example, the niphal of לחץ√ in Num 22:25 (וַתֵּרֶא הָאָתוֹן אֶת־מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה וַתִּלָּחֵץ אֶל־הַקִּיר וַתִּלְחַץ אֶת־רֶגֶל בִּלְעָם אֶל־הַקִּיר): the ass is not performing an act of pressing on herself (making her Agent and Patient), but is pressing against the wall as an Actor.[89] Likewise the niphal of לפת√ at Ruth 3:8, if the root is cognate to the Arabic *lafata* 'twist',[90] would denote a change in body posture (though in Job 6:18, of caravans turning aside, it seems a more general verb of motion). To Boyd's list we should also add שען√ 'lean on, rest' (e.g. 2Sam 1:6) and metaphorically 'trust' (e.g. 2Chr 16:7); while semantic reflexivity is not precluded by the non-existence of any non-niphal form, it seems likely that a niphal regularly used as a semantic reflexive would have a corresponding active form extant.

Verbs of gathering and assembling clearly include some idea of motion. However they differ in two ways from self-move middles. Firstly, they require at least two

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[86] Cf. Boyd (1993) pp176-183.

[87] Kemmer (1993) pp56-7.

[88] Boyd (1993) pp210-7. Boyd argues on p269 that נצב /יצב is a single root.

[89] Boyd (1993) pp172-3.

[90] So e.g. Clines (1989) p161. Boyd (1993) p140 considers this option, but prefers to see the verb meaning 'touch' (cf. Akkadian *lapatu*), middle-marked as classical Greek ἅπτεσθαι.

participants, and so are analogous to the 'naturally reciprocal' class of middles discussed above.   So Kemmer lists Latin *congregor* 'gather, assemble' and Hungarian *tüleked-* 'throng' under that heading.[91]   Secondly, they generally relate to an active expression in which one gathers people by issuing orders/ invitations,[92] deriving from a diathesis:

Person	Person
Initiator	Addressee/ Actor
Subject	Direct Object

while self-move middles derive from:

Person	Object
Agent	Patient
Subject	Direct Object

Yet the semantic evidence shows they are not passive or reflexive (the subjects are Actors, moving), and the comparative evidence gives good grounds for judging them semantically middle.   In this class one might include niphals from the roots אסף, קבץ, קהל, זעק and צעק.[93]

A further use of the niphal is to denote events which either are, or are represented as, spontaneous.   When we say in English 'the door opened' there is no necessary implication of external causation ('the door opened: being badly built, its own weight causes the latch to give way').   Such causation is not denied ('the door opened: John was at home, and let us in'), but equally the middle form implies that the event could have been spontaneous: a child denying responsibility for the fact that a vase lies in pieces will say that 'it broke' not that 'it was broken' while she played.   However we may well have here the reason why many languages mark middle and passive in the same way: there is no great distance between them, so the morphology spread from one to the other.[94]   Comparative evidence for this as a middle domain is provided by German *sich öffnen* 'open', Lingala

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[91] Kemmer (1993) p125.

[92] Boyd (1993) p217.

[93] Some uses of √זעק and √צעק could be passives, describing the people's being called out. However at least at 1Sam 14:20, where √זעק is used for the behaviour of Saul and his soldiers in battle, the meaning is clearly 'came together', and hence it is at least an option to analyse the other uses thus (though in 1Sam 14:20 LXX's ἀνεβόησεν suggests it read a qal; Smith (1899) p113 argues for the latter).

[94] *W/O'C* p383, e.g., suggests that the niphal acquired its passive functions thus.

-fungwana 'open', and French *se casser* 'break'.[95] Middle uses of the niphals of √בקע and √פתח occur in Gen 7:11: while these could be passives, with God the implied Agent, the surrounding verses describe the flood's coming as if a natural process, nowhere mentioning divine agency, and hence middle analysis is preferable; the 'fountains' and 'windows' are Actors, as the waters in v10, not Patients of God's activity. In Ezek 33:22, by contrast, the niphal of √פתח, describing the opening of the prophet's mouth, follows a use of the qal describing Yhwh's doing just that, and hence is probably a passive. In Isa 5:27 נִתָּק means 'is broken', where it is unimportant whether someone broke the sandal or whether it just wore out. The niphal of √הפך at e.g. Lev 13:16 also seems to describe a spontaneous process: there is no obvious external cause for the skin's changing colour. However at Ex 7:15 it is unclear whether we should consider that the staff was changed (by God, or by Moses) into a snake, or whether again it just 'changed'.

The previous paragraph mentioned verbs where middle use seemed secondary to an active use which took Agent and Patient as arguments. The niphal is also found in the case of verbs which have an intransitive qal;[96] I include them here because since many denote natural processes there may be a link with the previous class. Sanskrit *pavate* 'become pure, clear, bright', Turkish *hastalán* 'get sick', Mohave *mat ičo* 'become, change into', and Ayacucho Quechua *jampikuy* 'recover from illness', for example, provide comparative evidence for the semantic domain.[97] Yet it may well be that the niphal of such verbs simply has ingressive or inchoative force.[98] This appears to be so in Akkadian.[99] Grimshaw suggests that the romance reflexive clitic may likewise produce inchoatives: she instances French *s'endormir* 'go to sleep' and *se briser* 'become broken'.[100] However one should probably distinguish the class of the previous paragraph from that with which we are now concerned; the former appears to be restricted to processes which imply a change in physical

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[95] Kemmer (1993) p144; cf. also Huehnergard (1997) pp361-2 for Akkadian examples.

[96] By 'intransitive' I mean 'taking no direct object'; for our purposes more accurate definition of transitivity is unnecessary.

[97] Kemmer (1993) pp19,23 and 143.

[98] Kaufman (1994) pp572-3. Kaufman restricts this to 'stative' roots; however it is unclear that it applies only to morphologically stative forms. Cf. also Jenni (1969) p63, noting that the niphal of intransitive verbs can be neither active nor passive (though his suggestion that it means 'sich als etwas erweisen' [p64] is implausible – נרדם hardly means 'prove to be asleep').

[99] Cf. Moscati (1969) p127; Huehnergard (1997) p362.

[100] Grimshaw (1982) p100.

state, whereas here there is no such implication. So we note the niphals of such roots as באש,[101] בער, היה, חלה, and לאה. Possibly some niphals denoting movement are inchoative (e.g. those of √רמם, or √עלה [see above]) though such force is often at best unclear (e.g. נהלכתי at Ps 109:23; the niphal of √כשל is not obviously more inchoative than the qal, though this could denote a change in body posture more than motion): moreover Latin *gradior* and Lingala *kílingana* provide comparative evidence for what Kemmer calls 'translational motion actions'.[102] As such verbs clearly have little in common with √ברך, greater precision here is unnecessary.

However inchoative use of the niphal *may* explain the niphals of √טמא, √חלל (III), √כבד, √נזר and √קדש. I will give analysis of √קדש; analysis of the others would proceed similarly (though √חלל and √נזר have no extant qal). It seems pointless to deny that any form of √קדש could take on nuances of 'hallowed, treated as holy', not just 'holy in itself' – clearly the piel embraces both the ideas of treating God or a person as holy, and that of consecrating something not already holy.[103] This creates three possibilities for the niphal: inchoative from qal ('become holy/ hallowed'), passive of piel ('be treated as holy') and reflexive of piel ('make oneself treated as holy'). Different uses may of course have different forces. Hence we cannot argue from Ex 29:43 where the tent of meeting נקדש בכבדי – clearly the tent does not sanctify itself, and the instrumental phrase suggests a passive (though 'become holy because of my glory' is not impossible) – that reflexive force should be excluded from consideration in other cases. Equally one should ask whether users of the language would be as aware of the differences as detailed analysis makes us; as the middle in the case of 'spontaneous events' shades into the passive, so here passive and middle do not stand far apart ('become holy' versus 'be made holy [by someone]') and also the passive may shade into the reflexive ('be treated as holy [through some deliberate action of one's own]'). So at Lev 22:32 (וְלֹא תְחַלְּלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם קָדְשִׁי וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) the hallowing of God is the result of an action of the people, though the phrase which employs the niphal of √קדש (passive? or middle, not denying agency?) does not explicitly mark this; at Isa 5:16 the qal of √גבה, which seems to denote a state of being high with no implications

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[101] See above p49.

[102] Kemmer (1993) p57.

[103] For the former, cf. e.g. Deut 32:51; for the latter, Lev 16:19. Cf. our comments on semantic shift, above p49; contra Boyd (1993) p148, whose analysis depends in part on the contention that God cannot make himself קדש.

of any agency, stands in parallel (suggesting middle force for the niphal?); at Ezek 36:23 the niphal of √קדשׁ follows God's statement that he will gather the people (reflexive, continuing the idea of divine agency? or middle with such agency neither denied nor affirmed?). Our conclusion must be either that this niphal is always a middle; or that the context establishes the force from within the whole range of niphal meanings (though a niphal often used with particular force would surely take on that force as its normal meaning, so this could hardly be a viable analysis for the niphal generally); or that the context selects between the particular options allowed by the word (perhaps, for example, the niphal of √קדשׁ was available as a middle or as a reflexive form, but not as a passive).

The niphal of √ראה presents another case where involvement of the subject varies. Sometimes the subject is clearly responsible for his being seen: so e.g. Gen 46:29 where Joseph 'presented himself' (NRSV) to Jacob; here and often the word is constructed with אל or another similar preposition (את־פני, ל, על), precluding us from considering it simply a nuance of the passive ('be seen by').[104] Sometimes the subject is clearly not responsible for its being seen: at Ex 13:7 when the Israelites are ordered לֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ חָמֵץ the point is surely that if leavened bread were seen *the Israelites* would be responsible. However this may well not be a simple passive: the issue is the presence of the bread (i.e. its potential visibility) not whether anyone actually sees it. Sometimes we have cases which seem at least akin to the 'spontaneous process' middles, where there is no implication that the subject is not responsible, though by being inanimate the likelihood of Agency is small. When the mountain peaks 'appear' in Gen 8:5 they are hardly Agents making themselves visible, but equally, especially given the use of the niphal with animate subjects noted above, we might well wonder whether they are Actors[105] rather than Patients of an act of seeing or an implied act of being made visible; earlier in the verse the no less inanimate waters are an Actor.[106] There is strong comparative evidence for 'appearing' being denoted by a middle form of a verb for seeing: Turkish offers *görün* formed thus, and Ayacucho Quechua *rikaku*.[107] Hence the niphal of √ראה should be classed as a middle.[108] A similar

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[104] Cf. Podella (1989).

[105] Cf. Boyd (1993) pp74-5 for the suggestion that the subject of process middles has the role of Actor.

[106] Similarly at Gen 1:9 יקוו is plausibly a self-move middle rather than a passive, and hence the niphal of √ראה there may well be a middle, as in 8:5.

[107] Croft, Shyldkrot et al. (1987) p183.

case can be made for the niphal of גלה√ at e.g. Gen 35:7, since in Old Icelandic *synask* and Guugu Yimidhirr (an Australian language) *miiradhi* a verb meaning 'appear' is a middle form of that for 'show':[109] the piel of גלה√ has the force of 'make known' at e.g. Ps 98:2; Prov 11:13. And doubtless the niphal of ידע√ at e.g. Ex 6:3[110] (note the parallel וָאֵרָא) and Ruth 3:3 should be treated similarly; perhaps also נשמע at e.g. Neh 6:1.[111]

Two final middle uses of the niphal require brief mention. Firstly, the middle is often used interlinguistically for verbs denoting emotion, as Latin *misereor* 'pity', Hungarian *bánkód-* 'grieve, mourn'.[112] Speech actions with emotive force also often receive like marking: Latin *lamentor* 'lament' and Ayacucho Quechua *anchikuy* 'complain'.[113] The former group provides a parallel for the niphal of נחם√; the niphals of אנח√ and אנק√ find parallels in the latter if not in the former.[114] Secondly, the middle is used for verbs of committing oneself, including performative speech actions: classical Greek ὑπισχνεῖσθαι 'undertake, promise', Kanuri *ásə̀mtə̀kìn* 'resolve, vow', Hungarian *fogadkoz-* 'swear, promise'.[115] These suggest that נשבע should be classed as a middle. Calling it 'denominative' hardly explains why this stem was adopted for the word, since Hebrew uses various stems for denominatives; the comparative evidence suggests we need not try to explain it as semantically reflexive.[116] However the niphal is not obviously used for other speech actions merely qua speech actions. נדבר (see above p57) seems to have (intrinsic) reciprocal nuance, though it is not impossible that the niphal should mean simply 'speak'

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[108] Contra e.g. Podella (1989) who considers it a reflexive of the hiphil (i.e. 'cause oneself to be seen') in the animate cases. The Turkish parallel clearly has no reflexive force (Croft, Shyldkrot et al. (1987) p190 – I do not have information on this for Ayacucho Quechua).

[109] Croft, Shyldkrot et al. (1987) p183.

[110] Though the versions (e.g. LXX ἐδήλωσα) interpret as 'made my name known', or similar (reading הורדעתי?).

[111] These niphals are often taken as examples of a tolerative sense, 'allow oneself to be seen' etc. (so e.g. Eaton (1974)), though see below p71.

[112] Kemmer (1993) p131.

[113] Kemmer (1993) p133.

[114] Cf. *GKC* §51c (from which the example of *lamentor* is drawn) and *W/O'C* p386 for the niphal denoting emotion. Both suggest this is a reflexive sense; however there is no semantic reflexivity. The subject is affected, but does not obviously affect him/herself.

[115] Kemmer (1993) p140.

[116] '[B]ind oneself with seven things' *BDB*; *W/O'C* p386.

with the context supplying reciprocal nuance. The niphal of √נבא (with which cf. perhaps Latin *ominor, vaticinor* 'prophesy') may have some kind of emotive force, or denote entering a prophetic state: it often evidences overlap with the hithpael (e.g. 1Sam 19:20; Jer 14:14)[117] which we argue below (p219n64) to sometimes denote prophetic frenzy as well as spoken prophecies. נשאל might be classed as a middle denoting a speech action; indeed Kemmer includes 'pray' in a list of speech actions which may receive middle marking (p269) despite earlier (p78) listing Greek εὔχεσθαι and λίσσεσθαι amongst middles used for situations in which one is normally acting in one's own interests. However our earlier suggestion (p56) that נשאל does describe an action typically performed in one's own interests seems preferable, since there is no other obvious 'simple' speech action middle niphal. Hence it seems implausible that the niphal of √ברך should denote a speech action 'utter blessing';[118] we shall be arguing that contextually passive force for this niphal is at least as appropriate in all its occurrences.

3.3 Passive niphals

The niphal thus has a wide variety of uses which yet can be grouped together as 'middle' in the light of interlinguistic evidence. It also clearly has passive force.[119] It was probably not a passive form in origin, since qal, piel and hiphil each have their own internal passive, and unlike them the niphal has an imperative.[120] However at every stage of Hebrew for which we have evidence the niphal has passive force. The niphal eventually displaced the qal passive; for our purposes it is unimportant whether expansion of the niphal forced the qal passive into retreat, or whether for some reason the qal passive began to retreat and the niphal expanded to compensate.[121] Nor need we discuss the extent of passive use at the

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[117] Cf. Boyd (1993) p265.

[118] Though we shall argue below (chs7-8) that the hithpael of √ברך has precisely this force.

[119] Cf. e.g. Kutscher (1982) pp9, 37 for the judgement that the *n*- stems in the Semitic languages generally took on passive functions.

[120] Qal passive, pual and hophal show no signs of having imperatives, except perhaps the forms found at Jer 49:8 and Ezek 32:19 which may be *ad hoc* literary creations (so e.g. *W/O'C* p452n6). However since an originally passive niphal might early gain middle force and then develop an imperative, the imperative does not establish the ultimate origins of the niphal. Similarly the internal passives only testify to non-passive origin of the niphal if they too existed in the earliest stages of Hebrew.

[121] Though Retsö (1989) p144 suggests that the qal passive was never fully productive and always shared meanings with the niphal; on this hypothesis the niphal simply came to be used in the case of particular classes of verbs for which it had not previously been employed.

various stages of the language: it seems that such use increased during the biblical period.[122] Rather we shall demonstrate that the niphal does regularly have clear passive force; there is no space for detailed argument for other examples, and mere listing of instances is pointless. No-one denies that passive-like uses of the niphal are exceedingly common; the only question is whether these are really passive or whether their force is slightly different.

By 'passive' I understand a diathesis in which the subject of a corresponding active construction formed from the same verb is no longer coded as subject,[123] but in which the role of the other participant(s) remains the same. This characterisation may not be cross-linguistically valid: in classical Greek, for example, the verb ἀποθνῄσκω 'die' forms the passive of the verb ἀποκτείνω 'kill'; the former means 'be killed' when the context makes clear the presence of an Agent.[124] However we cannot define the passive as (inter alia) a construction which implies an Agent not expressed as subject, given that passives do not correspond only to diatheses which have Agent and Patient in their role structure: a good Hebrew example of this is √זכר, where the semantic roles are Experiencer and Content;[125] in the case of √זהר we might suggest a person warned is more Addressee than Patient. Nor can we list roles which can be taken by active subjects, and suggest that a passive is a construction which has coded as subject a participant not having one of these roles. For the Addressee can be the subject in passive constructions (as with √זהר in Hebrew, or 'she was given the book' in English), while in the case of 'the prisoner received thirty lashes' the prisoner is Addressee, yet the sentence is not passive, as evidenced by the fact that it cannot take an Agent expressed with 'by'.[126] The passive may well have to be characterised as a

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[122] So Boyd (1993) p17. Kutscher (1982) notes that the Chronicler sometimes employs a niphal where his *Vorlage* has a qal passive (cf. e.g. 1Chr 20:6 [וְנִם־הוּא נוֹלַד לְהָרָפָא] with 2Sam 21:20 [וְנִם־הוּא יֻלַּד לְהָרָפָה]).

[123] Cf. above p47. Note also Siewierska (1984) pp75, 256.

[124] Cf. Andersen (1991) pp36-7, 121ff. Siewierska (1984) pp31-2 instances Nitinaht, a Wakashan language, which does not allow active expression of situations with third person Agent and first person Patient; is an ungrammatical active implied, or is there here no corresponding active?

[125] 'Content' being 'the second role in verbs of perception and mental activity' (Geniusiene (1987) p40).

[126] In 'he received thirty lashes from the warder' the warder is not the Agent (cf. 'he received a book from my library'). 'At the hands of' can only introduce a human depicted as active, but 'at the hands of the warder' does not obviously express a different role from 'from the warder'; the phrase cannot be used with the standard English passive construction ('he was given thirty lashes at the hands of the warder' means that someone ordered the warder to give him thirty lashes, not simply that the warder gave him thirty lashes). This point is implicitly shared by Andersen (1991) p124 and the anonymous reviewer cited there.

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family of constructions, largely but not always overlapping (for example, many passives both imply a corresponding active and have as subject a Patient, a role which cannot be taken by an active subject).[127] However for our purposes we may accept my initial characterisation as at least describing cross-linguistically a central group of passives, and as adequate to include niphal passives (though this latter must remain assertion, since to argue it would involve presenting analysis of every niphal).

The niphal as passive, then, is marked by subject deletion or demotion. However it differs from e.g. the self-move middle in that under passivization the Patient of the corresponding active remains a Patient (something is done to it), whereas in the self-move middle the Patient becomes an Actor (it does something).[128] To assess whether a particular verbal form is used passively, one therefore must consider the roles expressed: firstly whether there is an Agent obliquely coded; secondly whether the role of some participant which is coded implies the existence of a further participant, since for example a Patient implies an Agent, and Content implies an Experiencer; thirdly whether the context gives clues to the role of those participants that are expressed either directly, or indirectly by implying a non-expressed participant with particular role. (That a construction may regularly imply a non-expressed participant is proved by the Finnish *-[t]ta-n/ [t]tä-n* suffix which is used to express a passive only when there is a human Agent, but that Agent is rarely coded.[129]) We have already (p53) suggested that Gen 2:4 provides a good example of a passive niphal, since divine agency is clearly implied and hence the subject must be a Patient. On the other hand, at Gen 7:11 context suggests a middle use with the subjects of נבקעו and נפתחו coded as Actors, not Patients (above p62). Further good examples of the passive are provided by the niphal of √קבר at e.g. Gen 15:15: burial of bodies always implies external causation, hence the niphal has diathesis

Abraham
Patient
Subject

corresponding to an active

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[127] Cf. also p47n23 above.

[128] Cf. above p46. Andersen (1991) p138 stresses the difference between passives and 'anticausatives' (what I have termed spontaneous process middles).

[129] Andersen (1991) pp82-3.

Someone(s)	Abraham
Agent	Patient
Subject	Direct Object

We note that the identity of the Agent(s) is not clear – indeed sometimes the passive may be employed precisely because it does not require the making explicit of the Agent.[130] In Gen 18:4, for example, mention of an Agent would perhaps stress the work involved in preparing the meal for the visitors which politeness wants to play down.[131] At Jer 17:14 (רְפָאֵנִי יְהוָה) (אושעה, וְאֵרָפֵא הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי וְאִוָּשֵׁעָה), 'I will be saved' draws attention to the result for the Patient, while 'I will be saved by you' would have left some of the reader's attention on the Agent; contrast Deut 33:29 (אַשְׁרֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי כָמוֹךָ עַם נוֹשַׁע בַּיהוָה) where significant is that it is Yhwh who saved Israel.[132] To give a couple more instances of passive niphals: uses of the niphal of √אכל, in the sense of 'eat' (e.g. Ex 12:46) always imply an eater, and hence are passive. In Jer 31:18 (שָׁמוֹעַ שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶפְרַיִם מִתְנוֹדֵד יִסַּרְתַּנִי וָאִוָּסֵר) the sentence makes explicit the corresponding active: importantly, the niphal אוסר here is apparently the passive of a piel, יסרתני.[133]

The concept of ergativity has sometimes been employed to elucidate the niphal.[134] In modern linguistics ergativity denotes

> [a] grammatical pattern in which subjects of intransitive verbs and direct
> objects of transitive verbs are treated identically for grammatical purposes,
> while subjects of transitive verbs are treated differently.[135]

Thus the only possibly ergative feature of the niphal in biblical Hebrew is the rare usage of את to mark the subject, thereby treating it the same as the object of a transitive verb. However in ergative languages, it is generally the intransitive subject and transitive object

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[130] Cf. the 'divine passive' in New Testament Greek, used to avoid mentioning the divine name. Rieger (1990) pp63-68 discusses some reasons for use of the passive.

[131] So Brockelmann, cited by Bicknell (1984) p30.

[132] For the latter example, cf. Bicknell (1984) p48, for the former Bicknell (1984) pp130-1. Bicknell proposes that the former suggests the niphal not normally to imply an agent at all. However her argument is weak, since it applies equally to English as to Hebrew (I have stated it simply in terms of possible translation equivalents), while English passives derive only from verbs which imply agency without cancelling that agency even if sometimes downplaying it.

[133] This example is sometimes analysed as a 'tolerative', but see below p71.

[134] Cf. e.g. Anderson (1971); Müller (1985); W/O'C p382.

[135] Trask (1993) p93; cf. also Dixon (1979); Comrie (1981).

that are unmarked.[136] Moreover it seems that ergativity normally develops out of accusative languages, rather than vice versa, and therefore it is improbable that Hebrew shows the last traces of an ergative structure which has become accusative (but which, according to some, has left nuances of meaning).[137] Hence the concept of ergativity has little to offer our analysis.

I have suggested that the passive regularly implies an Agent; however Hebrew only very infrequently expresses an Agent with the niphal (and qal passive, pual and hophal). This need not surprise us, since interlinguistically non-agentive passives are more common than agentive passives.[138] Indeed if passive use of the niphal did develop from the spontaneous process middle, the niphal coming to be used in situations where agency was implied as well as where it was not, then diachronically at least the primary form of the passive would lack Agent expression.[139] However it is perverse to deny that Hebrew ever could express an Agent with a passive, and so to have to explain away those cases where a prepositional phrase in the clause mentions the person who is clearly that Agent. So at Ezek 20:3 (הֲלִדְרֹשׁ אֹתִי אַתֶּם בָּאִים חַי־אָנִי אִם־אִדָּרֵשׁ לָכֶם) when God refuses to be inquired of by the people (ל + suffix), the initial use of √דרשׁ establishes the people as (potential) Agents of the action denoted by the verb, and it is implausible that some other role would be assigned to them when God is precisely denying them the result they seek.[140] Likewise at Ex 12:16 (כָּל־מְלָאכָה לֹא־יֵעָשֶׂה בָהֶם אַךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל לְכָל־נֶפֶשׁ הוּא לְבַדּוֹ יֵעָשֶׂה לָכֶם) agentive force seems clear for לכל־נפשׁ and לכם. And of course, these cases where the Agent is made explicit, in confirming that the niphal is used as a passive, provide supporting evidence that the non-agentive uses may be genuinely passive – it is surely unlikely that agency would either be explicitly established or implicitly denied, but never implicitly suggested.

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[136] Dixon (1979) p59; Boyd (1993) p34.

[137] Boyd (1993) pp32-3; Müller (1985) p415 suggests that original ergativity can help explain the force of the niphal.

[138] Siewierska (1984) p30 suggests that passives 'typically lack an overt agent'. To give a Semitic example, in High Arabic the Agent can never be expressed with a passive (W/O'C p383, citing König).

[139] Hence such uses are best not called 'incomplete passives' (W/O'C p384), since this implies they fail to be something (when is incompleteness regarded as a good quality?); 'non-agentive' is more neutral, but still judges the construction by what it is not.

[140] Cf. Boyd (1993) p59 for the example.

The so-called 'tolerative' use of the niphal requires discussion here.[141] Recent studies suggest it is a nuance of the passive;[142] this seems entirely correct. For the passive is strictly neutral concerning the attitude of the Patient to the action described: in English we can say 'He was hit – though trying to duck', 'He was hit – he knew a child couldn't hurt him, so did not stop her', and 'He was hit – he ensured the blow struck him, not his friend'. Similarly the niphal does not deny that the subject may have desired or allowed the result. Thus at Jer 31:18 (cited above p69) Ephraim's complaint may be not just that discipline was meted out, but that it was borne. At Ezek 20:3 it is certainly implied that the reason why God will not be inquired of is that he refuses to allow it. Moreover the nuance has probably gone beyond that of allowing the act of seeking to that of giving a positive response (cf. e.g. Isa 65:1). A similar nuance occurs in the case of the niphal of √עתר, used of God's answering prayer (e.g. Gen 25:21). We may indeed wonder whether these words were used so much with this nuance that they would have such sense even where the context is insufficient to establish it: thus in 2Sam 21:14 ויעתר presumably does not depict only an act of supplication – and we know that David's action should be enough to restore divine favour (v1) – yet nothing other than this word signals that God's attitude did indeed change. Another nuanced use of the niphal (especially the participle) which again presumably developed from passive use, is that of denoting the fitness of something to have the action denoted by the verb done to it: so at Ex 16:35 (וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָכְלוּ אֶת־הַמָּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה) נוֹשָׁבֶת (עַד־בֹּאָם אֶל־אֶרֶץ נוֹשָׁבֶת) suggests a land fit for habitation, not one that is inhabited; similarly in e.g. Prov 8:10 (קְחוּ־מוּסָרִי וְאַל־כָּסֶף וְדַעַת מֵחָרוּץ נִבְחָר) נבחר denotes not just something that someone has chosen, but something 'choice' i.e. likely or fit to be chosen.[143]

3.4 Reflexive niphals

We have thus far considered the niphal as a middle and as a passive. In the process we have discussed many alleged instances of reflexive niphals: verbs of hiding, classed above as self-move middles are often taken as reflexive;[144] the niphal of √ראה, again classed

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[141] We have already suggested (pp64-65) that some niphals often considered toleratives may rather be middle forms. However my argument here is not much affected if they are regarded as toleratives.

[142] Siebesma (1991) p35; Boyd (1993) p19, noting that while such features as person, number, gender, mood and voice are often marked in verbs, other things are normally nuances of these, often lexicalised.

[143] Cf. especially Lambdin (1973) p177.

[144] Cf. e.g. Lambert (1900) p199; *GKC* §51c.

above as a middle, is sometimes seen as reflexive of hiphil ('cause oneself to be seen');[145] the niphal of √שאל, which may be semantically an indirect reflexive, we have seen to belong to a class of words denoting action regularly done in the subject's own interests, which may take middle marking even if such marking is not also used for reflexives in the language.[146] In fact there are very few semantically directly reflexive niphals: this was noted by Jenni in 1969, but thereafter largely ignored.[147] The following examples I would claim to be the only niphals in the Hebrew Bible likely to be semantically direct reflexives; analysis of other less plausible candidates is not possible here.

In Lev 25:30, the niphal of √גאל clearly has passive force, to say that a house can be redeemed. As the house can hardly be an Agent reflexive force is impossible; nor does this idea fit any of the middle domains noted above. Rather the house is the Patient of an act of redemption performed by some unspecified Agent. A similar analysis clearly applies to the niphals at 27:20, 27, 28 and 33. On the other hand, at 25:49 (‐אוֹ דֹדוֹ אוֹ בֶן‐דֹדוֹ יִגְאָלֶנּוּ אוֹ

וְנִגְאָל יָדוֹ הִשִׂיגָה אוֹ‐יִגְאָלֶנּוּ מִמִשְׁפַחְתּוֹ בְשָׂרוֹ מִשְׁאֵר) the situation differs.[148] Here the subject is animate and so could be Agent as well as Patient. The first half of the verse ordains that a person in slavery may be redeemed by a family member; as an alternative it is stated that if the person prospers, נגאל. Clearly here the implied Agent is the person him/herself – the point of the clause about prospering is to establish his/her ability to perform the act of redemption. Yet equally clearly the Patient status of the slave is no less present in the second half of the verse than the first: the purpose of the regulation is that the person may perform for him/herself exactly the same action that another might perform for him/her. Hence we have here a semantic direct reflexive. However the verse is more concerned with establishing that the person may be redeemed (i.e. that the owner may not refuse redemption), than with stipulating who may perform the redemption (e.g. that a cousin may

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[145] E.g. Podella (1989).

[146] Cf. Klaiman (1992) pp63-9, 87-90 arguing that in Fula, classical Greek and Sanskrit the middle encodes various 'reflexive-like' functions, but not true semantic reflexives.

[147] Jenni (1969) p63; Bergsträsser (1929) volII p89 states that the niphal occurs 'selten im Sinne eines vollen Transitivs mit *sich* als Akk.-Obj.', though he labels many other uses 'reflexive', glossing with German reflexives. Creason (1995) pp374-5 gives very few examples of semantically reflexive niphals (and he notes on pp377-8, for example, that the niphals of √אסף, √בקע and √קבץ are not semantically reflexive); thus even were he correct that the niphal can be used for any of a range of one-participant situations, with the reader deducing the nuance from context and his/her knowledge of the world (pp367-8), it still seems unlikely that reflexive force would be perceived where any other were possible.

[148] My analysis here is indebted to Boyd (1993) pp132-5.

not do so, though a brother may). When we further recall that the niphal is used within the same chapter with passive force, we may suspect that we have here essentially a use of the passive niphal with the context establishing Agent-Patient coreference.

Analysis of the niphal of √מכר is hampered by our ignorance of the institution of slavery in ancient Israel. It may well have been obvious to ancient readers of the Pentateuchal law codes whether those in need of money would put themselves up for sale, or whether sales were always initiated by creditors. As with √גאל, there are clear passive uses of the niphal: for example, Lev 25:23, 34 describe the sale of land; Ps 105:17 describes the sale of Joseph. At Lev 25:39, on the other hand, we hear of the sale of someone who has become impoverished, as also in vv47-50 and Deut 15:12. In the first and last of these debt is not explicitly mentioned (though not excluded), though Lev 25:47 might hint at debt in ומך...עמו (NRSV translates 'fall into difficulty with one of them'; Hartley prefers 'one of your brothers beside him becomes poor'[149]). Thus it is at least possible that we have the voluntary sale of a person before debts mounted up, rather than a sale by a creditor owed money. If debt is implied – and cf. Ex 22:2[3] where this is clearly the case – it is still possible, though less likely, that the person was expected voluntarily to sell him/herself rather than being forcibly sold at a creditor's behest. We perhaps should enter a verdict of *non liquet*. However what seems clearly the case is that any reflexive force is again a nuance of the passive: the texts are concerned with the fact that the person ends up sold, not with who might be doing the selling. Moreover reflexive force would be implied by the societal context within which the texts were read; there would be a strong reason for the reader to understand this particular niphal to have reflexive force.[150]

The niphal ויחנק at 2Sam 17:23 is also reflexive. Ahithophel sees the writing on the wall for him, so resolves on death: he goes home, gives final instructions concerning how he wishes things after his death,[151] and commits suicide. There is no reason to think that anyone else hanged him. Nor does ויחנק seem likely to be a middle: the self-move middles discussed above had movement as their main force, whereas in performing an act of hanging

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[149] Hartley (1992) p419.

[150] We discuss Boyd's analysis of √מכר above p48. As Boyd argues, the second use of the niphal of √מכר in Neh 5:8 shows the first to be probably passive rather than reflexive.

[151] Cf. 2Ki 20:1 and Isa 38:1, where the implied orders are clearly those one would expect from someone about to die; hence in 2Sam Ahithophel is probably not commanding someone to kill him (contra Boyd (1993) pp137-140).

there is at least as much stress on the tying of the rope to some tall object and round the neck as on the movement by which the person becomes suspended by the rope. However yet again we note that the stress is on the fact that the subject undergoes the action, not that he is Agent; important is that Ahithophel ends up dead, not that he himself rather than, say, one of his servants does the killing.

The niphal of חלץ√ at Num 32:17 (וַאֲנַחְנוּ נֵחָלֵץ חֻשִׁים לִפְנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and v20 may also be reflexive. The root occurs elsewhere only in the qal passive participle and at Isa 58:11 in the hiphil where it is clearly metaphorical;[152] it is thus not clear that an active corresponds to the niphal (though a rare active could be implied) or exactly what such an active would mean. However were there an implied active meaning 'arm someone', the niphal could be a reflexive meaning 'arm oneself'; were the non-reflexive form implied but non-existent, this would be a case of semantic reflexivity, but not derived reflexivity. Num 31:3 (וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם לֵאמֹר הֵחָלְצוּ מֵאִתְּכֶם אֲנָשִׁים לַצָּבָא) is difficult, since מאתכם אנשים appears to be the direct object:[153] repointing to hiphil and assuming that this means 'arm someone' would solve the problem (and provide an active which could be implied by the niphal), though the versional evidence need not testify to more than an assumption about the text's meaning, and the Samaritan manuscripts which offer a hiphil may represent a tidying of the text rather than more accurate transmission. An alternative to the strictly reflexive analysis of the examples in Num 32 is to see the verb as a 'grooming' middle, connected to ideas of dressing. However our discussion of such verbs above (p57) showed that they are at best infrequent in Hebrew and that reflexive interpretation cannot be excluded; hence it is hardly safe to suggest that a word denoting equipping for battle should be classed as middle, not reflexive.

Two final verbs require brief discussion. Firstly the niphal of פדה√ at Lev 19:20 (וְאִישׁ כִּי־יִשְׁכַּב אֶת־אִשָּׁה שִׁכְבַת־זֶרַע וְהִוא שִׁפְחָה נֶחֱרֶפֶת לְאִישׁ וְהָפְדֵּה לֹא נִפְדָּתָה אוֹ חֻפְשָׁה) and 27:29 (כָּל־חֵרֶם אֲשֶׁר יָחֳרַם מִן־הָאָדָם לֹא יִפָּדֶה מוֹת יוּמָת) could be reflexive. However there seems no reason to deny that the redemptions concerned could have been performed by an external Agent: in Isa 1:27 the niphal certainly has passive force, given the clear divine agency in v26, and the obvious Patient status of the subjects of יכלו in v28. Lev 19:20 and 27:29 may leave open the possibility of the subject redeeming him/herself, but

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[152] חלץ√ I 'withdraw' seems clearly unrelated.

[153] 'Clearly the direct object' according to Gray (1903) p421.

can hardly be other than passive. Secondly the niphal נאבנה(ו) found in Gen 16:2 and 30:3 has received reflexive analysis.[154] Since the qal of √בנה is employed at e.g. Deut 25:9 and Ruth 4:11 with an object of what is built up, the birth of children being the implied means, it seems more probable that we should derive the niphal from that root than that we should see it as denominative from בן, 'son'.[155] (Of course the word was doubtless used in this context in part because it sounded like בן.) The niphal could denote the woman 'building herself up' by use of a surrogate. However in both verses the niphal forms part of a short speech in which the woman who is its subject is not active in the action denoted by any of the other verbs, though all the actions are being performed in her interest; hence most probably it too describes a result produced for her, not one she explicitly produces. This case is stronger in Gen 30:3, since the implied Agent were this taken as a passive, i.e. Bilhah, is the Agent in the previous clause.

3.5 Conclusion

The Hebrew niphal is rarely a semantic direct reflexive; where it is such it is unlikely that the reader would have been in much doubt that this was the correct understanding. Rather it would have been clear that the subject was undergoing the action; equally it would have been clear that the subject was acting as Agent, but that the fact that he/she was Patient was of more importance than the agency. Hence it seems implausible that נברכו in Gen 12:3 is a direct reflexive. For in the context the blessing which God gives is being stressed; reading the niphal as a passive, implying divine agency, fits very naturally. (Alternatively the word בך at least raises the possibility that Abraham is the Agent.) It is true that the first half of the verse has suggested that other humans might bless (or curse) Abraham, so it is possible that they might be Agents in the case of the niphal as well. However given the great rarity of reflexive use of the niphal this possibility is not enough to make the reader likely to perceive reflexive force. Thus נברכו is very unlikely to be a reflexive. But could it have middle force? In the light of the analysis above this seems very doubtful, even though the niphal very frequently has such force, since the word does not obviously fit into any of the categories described.[156] Our hypothesis, therefore, is that Gen 12:3 states that all the families of the earth will 'be blessed' through or by Abraham: in

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[154] E.g. Lambert (1900) p197.

[155] So e.g. Wenham (1994) p2, contra *GKC* §51g.

[156] Schreiner (1962) p7n21 suggests an analogy with the niphal of √שאל. However if that means 'ask for oneself', analogous would be 'bless for oneself' not 'obtain blessing' (Blum (1984) pp350-1n9).

ch6.3 below we examine whether passive understanding of the niphal seems appropriate in the context.

Chapter 4

Parallels to Genesis 12:3b with the Niphal

4.1 Introduction

The niphal of √ברך occurs twice in the Old Testament in addition to Gen 12:3, in Gen 18:18 and 28:14. These clearly echo the initial divine promise to Abraham. Hence their use of the niphal is likely not only to demonstrate the possible force(s) of that form in Hebrew, but also specifically to illuminate Gen 12:3.[1]

4.2 Genesis 18:18

Much has been written about Genesis 18-19, and especially about vv16b-33. However vv17-19 often receive short shrift, although they contain arguably

> an extravagant credentialing of Abraham, perhaps the most extravagant of all of scripture.[2]

I am aware of no article which focuses on them as a unit; and even in commentaries they are sometimes passed over briefly (Westermann, for example, has only three and a half lines on the second half of v18, concerned with the history of the patriarchal promises but not with what the promise of blessing for the nations might mean in this context).[3] 22:15-18 had suffered a similar fate until Moberly's article identifying the omission and seeking to rectify it.[4] In both cases it is possible to dismiss the verses as secondary, and to concentrate on the action (in ch22) or dialogue (in ch18) in which the divine speech is now set. Yet in the final form of Genesis the action and dialogue are equally contextualised by the promise.[5] Thus we must investigate the meaning and force of vv17-19 as part of the narrative, in attempting to discern the precise significance of v18b.

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[1] Even were some of the passages to stem from different levels of tradition it is improbable that in the final form of Genesis the three interrelated passages could hold radically different meaning.

[2] Brueggemann (1985) p409.

[3] Westermann (1985) p288.

[4] Moberly (1988b).

[5] So rightly Westermann (1985) p290: vv23-32 are 'to be understood as part of a dialogue throughout which the first part, vv17-21, is to sound constantly'.

4.2.1 The context

Vv1-15 describe Abraham's hospitality to strangers who in some way represent Yhwh;[6] the encounter culminates in the announcement that Abraham and Sarah will soon have a son. The main issue we must discuss here is whether the promise of a son is in any way a reward for Abraham's hospitality.[7] In 2Ki 4:8ff Elisha promises a son to a barren woman explicitly in return for her hospitality to him.[8] In Genesis, however, it seems more that the whole purpose of the visit was to announce the birth: on every other occasion in the book when God appears it is for the purpose of some act of communication (12:7; 17:1; 26:2; 26:24; 35:1, 9; 48:3). Moreover, the preceding promises would suggest that God is committed to giving Abraham and Sarah a son at some point; the birth will not be just a reward for this behaviour. Yet it may also be significant that this final, climactic promise of a son is given in a context where Abraham shows himself magnanimous to strangers;[9] while God's promise is not a reward, human behaviour is not irrelevant to God's treatment of them and to how God may use them (cf. 17:1-2; 22:16-18). Moreover ch18 immediately follows the account of Abraham's obedience in having his whole household circumcised (17:23-7). Again there is no explicit link, no suggestion that God can act as he does only because of the preceding obedience; but again the collocation is suggestive. Conversely, however, Sarah in ch18 hardly models right response to God. She laughs from disbelief – while Old Testament characters often have initial reservations on hearing something surprising, they are then meant to voice their doubts to God (cf. e.g. 17:15-19; Exod 3:11ff; Jer 1:6-8) – and then lies when challenged about her laughter. So while human character and behaviour may not be irrelevant, Yhwh is not limited to the perfect: the early part of the Jacob cycle stresses that God may call someone with significant failings (cf. above pp24-25).

Secondly we must discuss v22 in which according to MT 'Abraham remained standing before Yhwh'. However this passage is one of the Tiqqune Sopherim: according to ancient Jewish tradition, 'Yhwh remained standing before Abraham' was the original reading, but scribal piety reversed the names, considering the phrase undignified as עמד

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[6] On the identity of the strangers, cf. above pp17-18.

[7] On his hospitality, cf. e.g. Wenham (1994) pp46-7, noting that Abraham's bowing down and provision of finest flour and a good meal would be fitting for a conscious encounter with the divine, even though Abraham is here unaware of the strangers' identity.

[8] So e.g. Gunkel (1997) p196.

[9] Cf. Begrich (1989) p227, suggesting that the text deliberately leaves space for its hearer to debate this question.

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לפני elsewhere regularly denotes an inferior standing before a superior (e.g. Gen 41:46; 43:15; Lev 9:5; Deut 4:10). That Yhwh might here be putting himself at Abraham's disposal is found attractive by some commentators.[10] Yet there is no manuscript evidence for the alleged earlier version. Moreover 19:27 supports the current text, yet is not recorded as a Tiqqun Sopherim.[11] Emendation of the text thus seems at best doubtful.[12] However the sense does not much differ either way. For Yhwh here clearly chooses to wait, and to wait with Abraham, thereby encouraging Abraham to interact with him. V33 confirms this, in that Yhwh departs 'when he had finished speaking to Abraham', not 'when Abraham had finished speaking with him', again suggesting that the initiative for the dialogue was Yhwh's.[13] Does Yhwh then specifically want Abraham to intercede – is he waiting because there is something Abraham ought to say in response to what he has just heard? The text certainly leaves open the possibility, even if all that is explicit is that Yhwh provides the opportunity. One might note here Ex 32:10, where

> God seems to anticipate that Moses would resist what is being said. At the
> least, [the passage] recognizes that what Moses might say about God's
> decision places some limits on what it would be possible for God to do.[14]

Similarly one might note that when God reveals to a prophet his intention to judge, he aims not just to convey information, but to enable the judgement to be averted by the repentance of the people threatened (cf. notably Jonah 3-4) or by the prophet's intercession (e.g. Amos 7:1ff). At the very least, then, Yhwh will not have been surprised by a plea for mercy.

And what follows is indeed a plea for mercy, not simply a discussion about the nature of justice or the character of Sodom[15] (though in it we may indeed learn much about both). In form it is similar to Num 16:22,[16] where a question to God about the extent of punishment functions as a plea for him to reconsider. Abraham's indignation equally

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[10] E.g. von Rad (1972) p211; Brueggemann (1982a) p168; also Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980a) p658 for traditional Jewish understandings.

[11] Cf. Skinner (1910) pp304-5; Hamilton (1995) pp23-4.

[12] Cf. also the discussion of McCarthy (1981) pp70-6.

[13] Cf. Kidner (1967) p132.

[14] Fretheim (1991) p284; cf. also e.g. Childs (1974) p567, Balentine (1989) p607. Davidson (1983) pp70-1, however, argues that God expects Moses to comply with what should seem to him an attractive course.

[15] Suggested by e.g. Coats (1985b) p130; Westermann (1985) p291.

[16] Cf. Blenkinsopp (1982) p126; Miller (1994) p90.

suggests that he is protesting against something he thinks might happen, not just seeking reassurance that Yhwh would spare the righteous.[17] Lot's plea for Zoar in 19:18ff, which causes a divine change of plan, and Abraham's praying for Abimelech in ch20 also suggest that the text might depict intercession. (Even if 18:23ff are ascribed to an early J and ch20 is seen as part of a later layer, the latter still gives the interpretation of Abraham's role in the final form of the text.) Abraham's plea is not for the wicked. Rather, in seeking that the cities be spared if sufficient righteous people are within them he attempts to ensure that the righteous not be punished for the sins of others: it is not enough for him that they be plucked from the destruction, if they lose their property and their community. Ch19 shows that God may indeed exempt a few people from unmerited death – a quorum of righteous people is necessary if the wickedness of the whole city is not to demand its destruction[18] – but more may be necessary. Abraham's concern is also for God, that he be just.[19] Old Testament prayers regularly offer God reasons why he should act in a particular way, for example to bring glory to himself (Ps 79:9) or to protect his reputation (Ex 32:12):[20] this may sometimes be a bargaining ploy on the part of the intercessor, seeking his own interests by reminding God of what God might gain, but it seems unduly sceptical to think that there is never a genuine concern with God's interests. It also seems unnecessary to see behind Abraham's words particular concern for the safety of Lot,[21] since nothing in chs18-19 (except possibly 19:29, on which see below), or indeed subsequently in Genesis, suggests Abraham has any thought for his nephew (we might contrast Abraham's explicit intercession for Ishmael in 17:18). Abraham's aid to Sodom in ch14 may have been due to Lot's presence there (14:14), but now[22] his mind is on other things.

Space precludes detailed discussion of Lot's character, with its mixture of good and bad qualities. While his hospitality at the start of ch19, echoing Abraham's in ch18, is

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[17] At 44:18 when Judah pleads for Joseph to have mercy, he too asks him not to be angry and calls him אדני; the language of 18:30-32 is the language of request (cf. Greenberg (1983) p21).

[18] Cf. Ex 18:21, 25 where a 'ten' is the smallest division of the people (Schmidt (1976) pp154-5).

[19] Stressed by Brueggemann (1982a) pp168ff.

[20] See further Miller (1994) pp114-126.

[21] Contra e.g. Driver (1916) p196; Clements (1986) p20; Turner (1990b) p89; Lundbom (1998) pp141-2.

[22] Perhaps because the separation from Lot has been longer and Abraham has a son of his own?

perhaps the only unequivocally good thing he does,[23] he does eventually break from Sodom after his initial dallying – and he is strongly contrasted with the Sodomites in general (vv4-11) and his sons-in-law (vv12-14). However in ch13 he chooses to move to territory which has not thus far clearly been promised to Abraham (though we soon find that it is included), and seems to succumb to the attractions of the cities of the Plain.[24] In ch19 he is willing to sacrifice his daughters, though only in an attempt to provide safety for his guests;[25] he initially fails to flee when ordered to do so; he commits incest with his daughters, though only when unaware of his actions through inebriation (as, we might note, the righteous Noah having survived the catastrophe of the flood, becomes drunk and is treated improperly by his son[26]). Lot is not a bad man, though perhaps we cannot simply call him good either – as indeed Abraham's character is hardly unimpeachable.[27] Lot's rescue is thus not utterly undeserved, and is not surprising if Yhwh can have dealings with ordinary human beings. Yet equally it is due to divine mercy (v16) beyond the strict requirements of justice. Again divine grace interacts with, without being limited by, human behaviour.

But what of 19:29, suggesting that Lot's deliverance resulted from God's remembering Abraham? The reader will reach this point in the story believing that Lot has many good qualities, is certainly far better than his city's other inhabitants, and has therefore been rescued because of his character – at least, his character made the exercise of divine mercy possible (v16). More probable than that this picture is dramatically undercut is that v29 gives an additional reason for Lot's rescue.[28] It could be his kinship with Abraham that is significant, as in 21:13 God promises to make Ishmael a nation because of his kinship to Abraham (though Ishmael is of course closer kin than is Lot). However the text has just (v27) drawn attention to Abraham's intercession. While that intercession sought a sparing of the cities, not a rescue of a few from the cities (above p80), underlying it was a concern

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[23] Against Speiser (1969) p143 who considers Lot merely 'dutiful' and his manner 'servile' compared to the 'spontaneity' and 'simple dignity' of his uncle, cf. e.g. Gunkel (1997) p206; Turner (1990b) p91.

[24] Cf. Helyer (1983); Coats (1985b) p117.

[25] Lasine (1984) p39 describes his behaviour as 'overblown hospitality'.

[26] Cf. Alexander (1985) p291.

[27] McKeown (1991) pp183-194, esp. 188-9, plausibly suggests that the difference between Abraham and Lot in Genesis is between two men of the same moral character, but of whom one has been chosen by God and the other not. Turner (1990b) p100 suggests that Lot shows Abraham's division of humans into 'righteous' and 'wicked' to be over-simple.

[28] Cf. Fields (1997) p141.

for due discrimination between the righteous and the wicked. Had there been ten righteous people in Sodom, Sodom would have been spared because of them and because of Abraham; though there were not, Lot is spared because of his character and because of Abraham. Abraham's prayer is thus a further piece of human behaviour which interacts with the divine grace.

4.2.2 The promises

18:16 clearly marks a change of scene: the men depart towards Sodom, with Abraham escorting them as they begin their journey.[29] While they walk, Yhwh ponders[30] whether to tell Abraham about his intentions to investigate Sodom and Gomorrah. The question of v17 is clearly not addressed to anyone else, since Yhwh provides his own answer; but it does seem a genuine question Yhwh puts to himself, not just a way of presenting his thoughts to others.[31] Abraham may well not hear these words, and hence his words and actions are not a response to them: his concern for the צדיק and for משפט evident in vv23ff could be deliberately echoing the צדקה ומשפט of v19, but are perhaps more likely to be his natural response to learning of the intended visit to Sodom (he does not use the noun צדקה, and links צדיק with its antonym רשע rather than with words relating to משפט). Vv20-1, by contrast, Abraham does hear, since it is in them that Yhwh tells him of what he purposes to do. Yhwh has heard a cry of distress from Sodom and Gomorrah, and knows of their sins; he now will confirm that things are as bad as they seem, and then act accordingly. Any punishment that comes on Sodom and Gomorrah will not be undeserved, the result of defective information. Thus we have a divine soliloquy making a decision, followed by an announcement to a character consequent on that decision; precisely this structure is found at both the beginning and the end of the Flood Narrative (6:7, 13ff and 8:21ff).

Thus in vv17-19 Yhwh expresses his thoughts to himself: hence his words can be taken not just as entirely reliable – as any words of God might be – but also as unaffected by

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[29] The position of the subject before the verb in v17 perhaps suggests v17 may begin the new unit (Loader (1990) p17), as well as stressing that it is indeed Yhwh speaking in vv17-19.

[30] אמר means 'think' as well as 'speak'; often 'in one's heart' is added when internal speech is depicted, but e.g. Gen 2:18; 3:22; 6:3,7; 11:6-7 show that the addition is not necessary (though in some of these, especially 11:6-7, Yhwh could be addressing the heavenly court).

[31] Cf. MacKenzie (1955) pp160-1, noting that divine soliloquies in the J parts of Genesis show God making a decision. He includes 2:18; 3:22; 6:3; 6:7; 8:21-2; 11:6-7; 18:20-1; 18:17-19 he believes a later addition, different in form. However 18:20-1 in its present context seems not a decision, since v16 suggests there is already a plan to visit Sodom.

any need to present matters in a particular light for a hearer's benefit.[32] They simply describe the situation as Yhwh sees it, namely that it is natural for him to tell Abraham his plans: Yhwh asks himself not 'Shall I tell Abraham...?' as if that would be the departure from the norm, but 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?'. Moreover, while the context makes clear that the particular divine plan at issue is the one to investigate the wickedness of the cities of the Plain,[33] the fact that the question is phrased generally may suggest that it is a wide range of divine plans, not just this particular intention, that naturally would be revealed to Abraham. Abraham is thus depicted as a prophet (cf. Amos 3:7 'Surely the Lord Yhwh does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets'). Intercession is a prophetic role: 20:7 calls Abraham a prophet as he is ascribed the status of an effective intercessor, whose prayers will bring healing to Abimelech and his household. Further, Abraham is taught by God not just for his own benefit, but in order to teach others (v19). The one who stands for God before people also stands for people before God.[34]

This prophetic role fits well with the use of ידעתיו 'I have entered into a relationship with him' (v19). √ידע in Hebrew has a wide variety of uses.[35] These include a quasi-legal sense meaning 'acknowledge', particularly with regard to mutual obligations within covenant.[36] So at Hos 8:4 God complains that the people have appointed princes whom he has not acknowledged (he was presumably aware of their actions); thus Israel's claim in v2 to 'know' God is surely a plea that they have done their covenant duty to him (v1 explicitly mentions the covenant). At Ex 33:12, 17 the statement that God knows Moses by name is a credentialing of him as God's agent: he is the person God has chosen,[37] not just someone God has got to know better. Yet that does not exclude an intimate personal relationship:[38] God speaks to Moses as a man to his friend (33:11); God reveals his glory to

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[32] Cf. Lapointe (1970) pp179-80.

[33] The destruction of the cities is not already decreed (contra Turner (1990b) pp92-3): Abraham's intercession (vv23ff) results from his knowledge that there is indeed great wickedness in the city, and hence investigation is likely to lead to punishment.

[34] Cf. Miller (1994) p262.

[35] Cf. e.g. Schottroff (1997).

[36] Cf. especially Huffmon (1966), Huffmon and Parker (1966) for discussion of both the OT material and Hittite and Akkadian parallels.

[37] In this same context Ps 106:23 describes Moses as God's בחיר.

[38] Muilenburg (1968) points to both aspects of the word here.

Moses (33:18-34:7); Moses is not afraid to make requests of God, knowing how to persuade him (e.g. 32:11-14; 33:13, 16, 18; 34:9). It seems likely that Gen 18:19 similarly includes both the personal and the covenantal (hence my translation 'I have entered into a relationship with him', stressing both the deliberateness and the mutuality of what is envisaged). God has chosen Abraham to become a great nation and to bring blessing to the nations of the earth; he has chosen him as the start of his covenant people (cf. ch17 for the covenant, especially 17:1, the only place previously where God has placed general behavioural demands on Abraham and his descendants). He must know God's plans to fulfil his role. Yet Abraham is more than an instrument in Yhwh's hand: Yhwh is being gracious to him, the promises are for him (cf. על־אברהם and עליו in v19). To be in God's confidence is a personal privilege: God makes known his plans to someone he can trust, one concerned that those plans be right for the sake of those they will affect, and for the sake of God himself. Similarly to help bring blessing to the nations contributes to Abraham's own greatness and is thus a significant privilege for him.

The promises of vv18-19 are not exactly conditional.[39] Abraham *will* become a great nation; all nations will be blessed through him; Yhwh will do for Abraham what he has promised. Abraham's role is to charge his descendants to act with צדקה ומשפט; fulfilment of the promise is not explicitly dependent on this, though equally we might suppose that fulfilment would result from the charge and presumably Israel's behaving as the charge demands. Once again it is assumed that divine grace is not completely independent of human behaviour, but equally that the human behaviour is not entirely determinative. Similarly Yhwh's disclosing his plan, with the possibility of Abraham's sharing in the divine decision-making as a result, is not exactly a test of Abraham;[40] and yet one might wonder whether a different reaction from Abraham would have shown him to be unfit to be the recipient of the promises.

Thus far I have spoken of the nations being blessed through Abraham. However we must consider alternative interpretations of v18b, i.e. taking the niphal ונברכו as 'middle' ('all nations shall find blessing') or as referring to the use of Abraham's name in blessings (whether the niphal be a reflexive 'bless themselves by...', reciprocal 'bless each other

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[39] Contra e.g. Driver (1916) p195.

[40] Contra e.g. Roshwald (1989) p157.

by...' or speech action middle 'utter blessings by...').[41] In the immediate context of vv17-19 the latter would make good sense. Because Abraham and his descendants gain such signal favour other nations will wish to fare as them and hence will pray 'May we be blessed as Abraham is blessed'.[42] Gen 48:20 where Jacob says to his grandsons 'By you will Israel invoke blessings, saying, God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh' illustrates the thought. Thus this phrase could be simply a promise for Israel, further stressing Israel's greatness but bringing little benefit to others. Deut 28:7-14 would then provide a parallel. For here, in describing the blessing consequent on obedience to the law it is stated that the peoples of the earth will see that Israel is called by Yhwh's name, and shall fear them, that is, shall not take military action against them (v10; cf. also v7). Moreover Israel will be so prosperous that it always has money to lend other nations, but never has to borrow (v12).[43] Deut 4:5-8 similarly describes other peoples' admiration for Israel because of Yhwh's nearness to her, and because of her law; again the issue appears more the greatness of Israel than the benefit accruing to the nations.[44] However the wider context of Gen 18-19 suggests that a concern for non-Israelites may be envisaged. We indeed see Abraham receiving the promise of a son through Sarah, and also enjoying an intimate relationship with God. Others might well pray to share like privileges. Yet we also see him acting on behalf of other peoples, seeking to ensure continued life and well-being for the righteous of the cities (if there be any such) – and indeed he may well be invited by God precisely to do this. Thus the narrative context would support passive translation. However, there is no suggestion that anyone beyond Abraham's line of descent gets to hear of what happens, such that they might wish to share his felicity;[45] as we noted above (p81)

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[41] Cf. p191n262, p193n270 and p193n271 below for some authors who support the various options (with particular reference to Gen 12:3).

[42] Contra Junker (1959) p556n2, who suggests that ונברכו could not be reflexive since it is not explicitly stated that Abraham will be blessed.

[43] Contra Wright (1996) pp11-2, 281, who links Deut 28 to Gen 18:17-19 but considers both to illustrate that '[w]hat God did in, for, and through Israel was understood to be ultimately for the benefit of the nations'.

[44] Contra Wright (1996) pp48-9. A further point of the verses is of course the possibility for universal glorification of Yhwh. Wright also (p12) suggests that Ex 19:6 ascribes to Israel a mediatorial role in respect of the nations. However in context the phrase ממלכת כהנים seems more probably descriptive of priestly access to the deity than of any priestly *function*.

[45] Cf. Chew (1982) p8. However the promise could be consequent on Abraham's becoming a great nation, which clearly other nations would observe. In the case of 22:18 – which we argue below (ch8.2) to promise that others will cite Abraham as a signal example of blessing – the immediate narrative context hardly draws attention to other nations, though the preceding and following chapters both show him interacting with them. 26:4, however, is situated in a context where foreigners admire Isaac's prosperity (cf. ch8.3 below).

there is no subsequent contact even between Abraham and his nephew Lot. Further, and more significantly, as we have argued above (ch3) reciprocal or 'speech action middle' senses for the niphal would be unparalleled. Further, the niphal is only extremely rarely a reflexive, and on those few occasions where it is, this is a development from the passive: the stress is on the subject being the patient of the action, while the context makes clear that the subject is also the agent. In Gen 18:18 there is nothing to suggest that the 'blesser' is the nations themselves, and there are two other obvious candidates for the role, God and Abraham, which would allow the normal passive force to be retained. Since Abraham's action is not one of invoking blessing but of appealing for justice, as a result of which God might bless the people,[46] presumably God is the implied agent and Abraham is the instrument through whom the nations may be blessed by God (see further below ch5 on blessing and ch6.3.9 on the interpretation of Gen 12:3b).

I will not dwell long on the possibility of 'middle' translation. Firstly, that is even more dubious grammatically than reflexive force (cf. above p75). Secondly, the middle is close in meaning to the passive – both suggest that blessing will come to the nations because of Abraham. But thirdly, where they might differ in meaning is that the middle might add the idea of the active participation of the nations in the acquisition of blessing. Yet Gen 18-19 surely notes how Abraham may contribute to the blessing of the nations, rather than telling of how they may acquire blessing for themselves (though cf. below ch6.3.9 on the precise force of 12:3). Thus the alleged middle force for ונברכו here is less plausible than passive force.

For Abraham's reaction to the information he receives gives definition to the ideas of becoming a strong nation, and being a channel of blessing for others.[47] The phrase גויי הארץ may well be used in v18b instead of the משפחת האדמה of 12:3 since the context has the patriarch dealing with a גוי, as also in 26:4 (for 22:18 we might note Abraham's dealings with foreigners in chs 21 and 23, as well perhaps as the reference to 'possessing the gate of their enemies' in 22:17).[48] The promise of blessing here (and only here) immediately follows the promise of Abraham's becoming a great גוי: this makes clear that the issue is

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[46] Cf. Victor (1972) p161.

[47] In the light of 12:3, בו presumably refers to Abraham, not the גוי.

[48] So Chew (1982) p19 (though he does not note here the significance of chs21 and 23 for 22:18); cf. also below pp198-199 on the reasons for the selection of משפחת at 12:3. גויי הארץ occurs outside Genesis at Deut 28:1; Jer 26:6; 33:9; 44:8; Zech 12:3. גויי האדמה never occurs.

how Abraham's becoming a nation will affect other similar entities. The idea that Abraham will become a strong nation receives considerable stress through its wording: the finite יהיה is strengthened with the infinitive היו; the word עצום is added to the גדול found at 12:2 (and with respect to the nation springing from Ishmael at 17:20 and 21:18). Moreover that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah immediately follows the double promise of Isaac's birth (17:15-18:15) encourages us to read it in the light of Yhwh's intentions for Abraham's descendants. The use of עצום suggests that the 'greatness' in question is a matter of the people's strength, in general or specifically numerically: עצום normally refers to numerical strength (e.g. Num 22:6; 32:1), but its collocation with רב (in e.g. Ex 1:9) suggests it might mean not simply 'numerous', which would make it tautologous, but 'strong through numbers'; sometimes its force is 'strong' with no numerical implication (e.g. Prov 18:18; 30:26). Similarly גדול normally denotes greatness in extent, number, power or importance, and does not have the moral nuance of the English 'great'.[49] One might naturally suppose that this strong nation will become and remain such by the standard means of treating others: dispossession of their lands, should there be an excuse and Israel have need of them; ensuring that actual or potential enemies lose their power to prosecute hostilities for as long as possible. However instead here Abraham intercedes for the Sodomites, asking that many wicked people be spared if only a few righteous can be found. Clearly the expansion of this particular people does not necessarily entail the destruction of undeserving nations – or even of all who do deserve it.[50] Of course, Sodom is so wicked that its destruction is inevitable, as the Old Testament suggests that the Canaanites' behaviour was such that their expulsion from the land was necessary, which did give Israel the opportunity to take it over (e.g. Gen 15:16; Lev 18:24ff; Deut 18:12). But the nation to come is to be one built on Abraham, one that will bring blessing to those outside it (v18) and will act rightly (v19).

However in Gen 18-19 other nations do not gain blessing through Abraham, for all his efforts on their behalf – the cities of the plain (except Zoar) are destroyed. It is not enough to say that the promise of blessing is for the future, and so what happens in the

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[49] Cf. the examples in *BDB*; Jenni (1997) pp305-6 discusses the application of the word to God, noting that it is used in comparison with other deities (suggesting that Yhwh is mightier, more significant than they – Ex 18:11; Ps 77:14[13]; 95:3; 135:5; 2Chr 2:4) and also in connection with Yhwh's relation to the nations of the world, often in conjunction with a royal title (e.g. Ps 47:3[2]; 86:9-10; 99:2).

[50] Cf. Wolff (1966) p148 who, considering this part of a work from the early monarchy, suggests its point is that 'Israel's commission does not consist in agreeing with the well-deserved judgement on her subjects, or even in its execution, but in unabating, intercessory activity she should be intent on forgiveness and forbearance'. Cf. also Roshwald (1989) p161.

present is strictly irrelevant to it. For the central theme of the Abraham narratives is how God began to fulfil the promise of many descendants by giving him a son through whom they would be reckoned; the future promise has present implications. So too we may expect the promise of blessing to have present implications: it would be odd if God intended good for other nations in the long term but paid no regard to their short-term welfare. This is confirmed by 30:25ff, where Laban is blessed because of his relationship to (Abraham's descendant) Jacob. That Sodom is not blessed, then, is significant: it shows that the nations will not gain blessing if they persist in wickedness; that the promise of blessing does not mean that issues of justice and divine judgement can be ignored.[51] Once again divine promise and human activity are linked: the promise of future blessing is unconditional, but appropriate human behaviour must be present before this comes about. Abraham's prayer had aimed to show that sparing the cities should there be sufficient righteous people within is consistent with, if not demanded by, divine justice, not to appeal to a divine mercy which could ignore the character of the inhabitants.

However the divine soliloquy does not end with the promise of blessing for others, but instead explicitly specifies the character of the great nation which is to come from Abraham. It is to be a nation which observes the way of Yhwh, and a nation where צדקה ומשפט are both practised and taught to subsequent generations. Thus far I have used the conventional translations 'righteousness' and 'justice' for these words, and related English words for other words derived from their roots. This suggests that צדקה is largely a matter of avoiding certain wrong actions, and משפט is upholding impartial forensic standards. Certainly the pairing of צדיק and רשע in 18:23ff is reminiscent of legal terminology,[52] as in e.g. Ex 23:7 and Deut 25:1. However the Hebrew terms are not equivalent to English forensic concepts: for the Hebrew ideal is not impartial decision-making but action to create a right situation. צדקה is not primarily about abstaining from evil, but about doing good, maintaining good relationships (צדקה is often associated with God's salvation when God is the subject [e.g. Psa 98:2; Isa 51:5]);[53] √שפט denotes action to restore well-being to the

[51] Cf. Westermann (1985) pp308-9.

[52] So Speiser (1969) p134.

[53] Koch (1997) glosses the root as 'to be communally faithful, beneficial'. One must of course not assume that all uses of the root have essentially the same meaning, that precisely the same concept is employed when צדקה refers to divine salvation or human dealings with one another, say; or that a collocation such as צדקה ומשפט may not give a particular force to the individual words. However my argument here aims to specify a field of meanings, not a precise force for the word. Moreover in Gen 18 it seems suggested that divine and human משפט are related; one might expect something

community, whether through some kind of legal process or not (cf. e.g. Isa 1:17; Ps 82:3-4; and especially the book of 'Judges', concerned with people who have no forensic role).[54] The pairing of צדקה and משפט occurs in contexts of general deliverance from oppression (Ps 103:6; Jer 22:3). In the prophetic literature and Psalter

> the concept refers primarily to the improvement of the conditions of the
> poor, which is undoubtedly accomplished through regulations issued by the
> king and his officials, and not by offering legal assistance to the poor man
> in his litigation with his oppressor.[55]

It also occurs parallel to חסד in Ps 33:5 (and Jer 9:23[24]): God's care for people is supremely manifest in his concern for צדקה and משפט. (Zech 7:9, where חסד ורחמים עשו parallels משפט אמת שפטו, seems to go further, suggesting that justice *is* care and compassion.[56]) Hence in Gen 18:19 the character envisaged for Abraham's descendants is not merely one of shunning wrongdoing, but of aiding others: in this context, God invites Abraham to intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah. Hence השפט כל־הארץ (v25) must spare the wicked for the sake of the צדיקים, rather than allowing deserved punishment of the wicked to affect many undeserving people.[57] Hence in considering whether Lot is at least partially צדיק in ch19 one should concentrate as much on the positive concern he shows for the visiting strangers as on explaining those actions apparently evidence to the contrary.

Abraham is told of God's plans because he is to charge his descendants with doing what is right. Given the previous paragraph, we may think that this has double force. Firstly, Abraham's descendants must understand the consequences of wickedness, that they may avoid them.[58] As blessing is available for the nations (v18b), but cannot come to them if they persist in wrongdoing, so the promise of becoming a mighty nation (v18a) requires

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similar to be the case with צדקה. Isaiah 1-39 speaks primarily of human צדקה, often pairing the word with משפט (e.g. 1:27; 5:7; 9:6[7]; 33:5); then in chs40-55 attention focuses on divine צדקה, and the word is often paired with words for salvation (e.g. 46:13; 51:5); significantly, however, chs56-66 draw together the two usages, notably in 56:1 and 59:9ff (Rendtorff (1994) pp162-4).

[54] On √שפט, cf. especially Liedke (1997); also Weinfeld (1992) pp241ff.

[55] Weinfeld (1992) p237.

[56] Cf. Levenson (1994) pp104-6. On the pair צדקה ומשפת, see also Weinfeld (1995) chs 1-3, 9.

[57] Cf. von Rad (1972) p213: 'Yahweh has a communal relationship with Sodom.... [D]oes Yahweh's "righteousness" with regard to Sodom not consist precisely in the fact that he will forgive the city for the sake of these innocent ones?'.

[58] So e.g. von Rad (1972) p210; Krasovec (1989) p171.

right conduct from Abraham's descendants. But secondly Abraham may be told God's intentions to give him the chance to practise צדקה ומשפט himself. We have seen that Yhwh deliberately allows Abraham to interact with him over the plans he announces, whether or not he specifically hopes that Abraham will intercede as he does. In the intercession Abraham explicitly seeks to establish משפט; this is not just a case of requiring from God what he requires of humans[59] (as we have seen [p82] Abraham may not have heard the words of vv17-19, so may not be knowingly demanding of God what he demands of his people), though one might ask whether the דרך יהוה includes צדקה ומשפט if Yhwh himself does not practise them, but of *Abraham* demonstrating compassion and seeking to promote the well-being of (at least the righteous of) Sodom. Even had Abraham not made this particular plea, any discussion with God over his intentions would be an example of Abraham putting forward an idea of how God should govern human affairs and hence of promoting משפט, though צדקה could describe only an attempt to lessen the punishment.[60]

4.2.3 Conclusion

Divine grace and human behaviour, high privilege and concomitant responsibility go together. God has entered into relationship with Abraham and will make him into a great nation; Abraham demonstrates his fitness for this by his response to God and the concern he manifests for justice – and his descendants are to do likewise. Abraham and his descendants are privileged for their own sake (note especially על־אברהם and עליו in v19); but also that others may benefit, including those outside their number. Contextually passive sense seems most appropriate for the niphal ונברכו: while vv17-19 might in themselves simply state Abraham's signal blessing, the wider story depicts a concern for the well-being of non-Israelites who show no sign of using Abraham's name in blessing.

4.3 Genesis 28:14

In this section we assess the meaning of the clause ונברכו בך כל־משפחת האדמה ובזרעך in Gen 28:14 by setting it in its context of Jacob's vision at Bethel, Gen 28:10-22 (an episode neatly marked by the itinerary notices in v10 and 29:1).

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[59] Silberman (1995) p32.

[60] צדקה denotes only that which promotes relationship, so would not apply to an increase in the punishment, however just such an increase might be.

4.3.1 The narrative and the promises

The episode occurs at a critical point in Jacob's life. He is fleeing for his life (27:41-5), leaving his immediate family and the land where God has installed them (28:4). He is thus going into a kind of exile, and might well wonder whether he will experience a safe journey, or what sort of reception his maternal family will give him (as the event proves, Laban is not above making profit from him), or whether his brother's anger will cool enough that he may return (cf. chs 32-3). He also needs a bride (27:46-28:5): he does not yet even have the beginnings of a family of his own, with the comparative security that would provide.[61] He has received his father's blessing, first by deceit (27:1-40) and then by Isaac's choice (28:1-5), and therefore perhaps should not be entirely without hope (at least one aspect of his future has also been established by the divine oracle of 25:23, but as argued above [p23] Jacob may well not know this). Nevertheless it is as the words of blessing are most obviously threatened that Yhwh himself makes promises to Jacob about his future.

It is easier to indicate the general significance of what Jacob sees in v12 than to explain its details. (In passing we must note that since Jacob is clearly not seeking a vision, what happens is not an instance of incubation.[62]) The vision clearly symbolises the contact possible between earth and heaven (cf. v17): the מלאכי אלהים go backwards and forwards doing Yhwh's will; hence Yhwh can influence events on earth. סלם is traditionally translated 'ladder' but is more plausibly a 'stairway' or 'ramp', which would certainly allow for a greater amount of traffic upon it (!): the word occurs only here in the Old Testament, but is plausibly related to √סלל 'heap up', suggesting some stone construction (cf. Akkadian *simmiltu* 'stairway').[63] If, as seems likely, the story originated at Bethel as an aetiology of cult there, the physical landscape of the place, 'a stony hillside rising in terraces towards heaven',[64] may well have influenced the description. Babylonian ziggurats of course were places of contact between heaven and earth, and had stairways (mis)understood as ways for humans to reach the top: the story thus may be suggesting that there is no need for humans to make such constructions to attain to the place of the gods (cf. 11:1-9), since there is

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[61] On the relationship between 27:41-5 and 27:46-28:5, see above p20.

[62] Cf. Lipton (1999) pp28-9, 77-9, with some bibliography.

[63] Cf. e.g. von Rad (1972) p284; Westermann (1985) p454.

[64] Skinner (1910) p378.

already a stairway, normally unseen, by which divine emissaries pass between the two.[65] The descriptions of v17 אלהים בית and השמים שער may recall the popular etymology of Babylon, *Bab-ilim* 'gate of the gods';[66] Jacob is travelling to Mesopotamia.[67] However the סלם is not certainly modelled closely on Babylonian practice, so we should probably not infer details of what is envisaged from the latter.[68] The precise significance of the מלאכי אלהים is even less clear: presumably they are divine messengers doing God's bidding, and perhaps reporting on what is happening on the earth (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; Zech 1:8-17,[69] though both represent a more developed, or at least more systematised, conception of the role of heavenly beings than is obvious in Genesis[70]). Rashi suggests that the ascending מלאכים are those responsible for Jacob's homeland, leaving him now he is heading abroad, to be replaced by those responsible for the land to which he is going: this however seems to over-interpret what is described.[71]

Once the stairway and the messengers have been seen, they fade into the background as Yhwh himself addresses Jacob (vv13-15):[72] the triple והנה (vv12-13) produces an effect of climax. Strikingly there are no words of condemnation for Jacob's

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[65] Cf. the discussion of Lipton (1999) pp99-104. Turner (2000a) p124 also suggests that the divine initiative in this episode contrasts with the human initiatives which have brought Jacob to this point; cf. also Janzen (1993) p112. The order of עלים וירדים hardly implies that the communication is initiated from the earth (Janzen (1993) p108): there is no sign here or previously in the Jacob stories that he is seeking to relate to Yhwh (cf. Brueggemann (1982a) pp241-2).

[66] Cf. e.g. Sarna (1989) p199; Wenham (1994) p223.

[67] Speiser (1969) p220.

[68] Equally, since the description does not obviously relate directly to Israelite practice, it is implausible that we have here instructions to build a temple (contra Lipton (1999) pp80-98), though the vision may more indirectly legitimate temple-building.

[69] von Rad (1972) p28; Wenham (1994) p222.

[70] 'Angel' is probably not a helpful translation of מלאך in Genesis, since it is likely to import ideas from a more-developed angelology (though Husser (1991) suggests that what is seen in v12 is a very late layer in the text): if these מלאכים use a סלם presumably they do not have wings!

[71] Lipton (1999) p80 notes that 24:7 connects angels with travel outside the land, though in ch28 there is no specific suggestion that the angels will go with Jacob (Walton (1998) p43). Presumably the מלאכים are mentioned to stress that the link between heaven and earth not only exists, but heavenly emissaries frequently traverse it.

[72] Cf. Fokkelman (1975) p54 (though the סלם and מלאכים hardly seem 'a mere eye-catcher', like the burning bush in Ex 3).

behaviour thus far,[73] nor are there are words of command or instruction for the future. Rather there is first a brief divine self-introduction (v13) in which Yhwh describes himself to Jacob by means of his relationship to Jacob's father and grandfather: the explicit description of Abraham as אביך 'your father/ ancestor', without the same description being attached to Isaac, Jacob's literal father, stresses the significance of the former.[74] For what follows in vv13b-14 is a reaffirmation of the promises first made to Abraham (the wording in particular recalls 13:14-16 and 12:3[75]), and then reiterated to Isaac, both confirming those promises and making clear that it is through Jacob that they will be fulfilled. Thus Jacob clearly receives the ברכת אברהם (v4).

The promises begin with a unique formulation of the land promise, presumably to fit in with the context of this narrative: Jacob is promised the land on which he lies. This hardly makes explicit the extent of what Yhwh will give, and thus depends on the previous land promises to clarify its content (cf. 12:7; 13:14-15; 15:18; 17:8; 26:3). That the following clause contains a promise of numerous descendants certainly makes it implausible that here the land promise is narrowed to include just the environs of Bethel; that would hardly be adequate to Jacob's descendants. However for Jacob himself, about to go into exile, knowledge that any part of the land would be his is of great significance. For while real possession of all the land will be Jacob's only in his descendants – as in v14 it seems that it is in the multitude of his offspring that Jacob will spread abroad[76] – he may expect at least the token possession which both Abraham and Isaac enjoyed (cf. v15 where Yhwh explicitly promises to bring him back to the land; also 35:1ff where he returns precisely to Bethel). The mention of descendants is also particularly significant to Jacob at a time when he is seeking a wife.

Berge argues that Jacob's spreading is limited to the 'Kulturland': the spreading is from Bethel to fill (the fertile territory which will be) the land of Israel.[77] Certainly there

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[73] Cf. von Rad (1972) p287.

[74] Cf. Lipton (1999) p70 (though this hardly implies 'a criticism of Isaac for his difference of opinion with God over which son should be blessed').

[75] כעפר הארץ occurs in the patriarchal promises only at 13:16 and 28:14; the four compass points only at 13:14 (where Abraham is told to look all round) and 28:14; ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה only at 28:14 and 12:3 (with ונברכו בו כל גויי הארץ at 18:18).

[76] Fokkelman (1975) p59.

[77] Berge (1990) pp231-3.

does not seem elsewhere in the patriarchal stories, or in the Old Testament in general, a vision for the people of Israel to fill the whole world; if there were, we might well wonder why they are promised possession only of the one land. With Gen 28:14 we might compare Isa 54:3, where spreading (פרץ√) to right and left is a description of repossessing the land after the exile.[78] Nevertheless, even allowing for the probable hyperbole, one might ask whether descendants כעפר הארץ could be contained within Israel. Further, in the post-exilic context in which the Pentateuch was finally redacted, a reference to the diaspora would surely be heard.[79] Perhaps we should think of a spreading to fill the land but not limited to it, a spreading which will extend more widely into the world but is not primarily to occupy it.

As in 12:3, 22:18 and 26:4 the promise linking the patriarch with blessing for the nations is climactic: for v15 turns from the long-term vision of vv13-14 to address the particular concerns of Jacob's own life.[80] There are essentially two main options for the interpretation of the phrase נברכו בך כל-משפחת האדמה ובזרעך: either it refers to other peoples regarding Jacob and his seed as signal examples of blessing and thus using their names in blessing, or it refers to other peoples actually gaining blessing. The former option is the case if the niphal is seen as a reflexive ('bless themselves by...'), reciprocal ('bless each other by...') or speech action middle ('utter blessings by...') form; the latter were the niphal regarded as passive ('be blessed by/ through...') or what its proponents generally term 'middle' ('gain/ find blessings in/ through...'). In favour of the former it might be suggested that 27:29 has stated that Jacob will be master over other peoples, and 28:13 suggests an encroachment on their *Lebensraum*;[81] it is not obvious that he is to benefit them. Moreover it is entirely plausible that the divine speech should interpret the prosperity implied in the gift of the land and the numerous descendants as blessings for Jacob, thus confirming Isaac's blessings in 27:27-9 and 28:3-4. However we have argued (ch3) that on grammatical grounds passive force for the niphal is most likely. Nor is this implausible in

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[78] Cf. e.g. Whybray (1975) pp184-5, noting that ירש (ה)גוים is idiomatic for dispossessing the nations of Canaan. Isa 54:3 *might* be dependent on Gen 28:14: cf. especially 51:2 for deutero-Isaiah's interest in patriarchal traditions.

[79] 30:43 uses פרץ√ of Jacob growing wealthy in a foreign land (stressed by e.g. Lipton (1999) p71). However 28:14 envisages primarily a spreading in his descendants and at least *from within* the land; thus while 30:43 *might* indicate part of what is included it cannot be taken as precisely illustrative of 28:14.

[80] Cf. Chew (1982) pp51-3.

[81] Cf. Scharbert (1973b) p6.

the context. For the dreams God grants in Genesis function to affirm and enhance the status of the dreamer (or someone else: Abimelech's dream in 20:3-7 primarily enhances Abraham's status), just as commonly in the Ancient Near East rulers claimed to have been granted dreams by deities.[82] Thus Jacob's dream might well function to ascribe to him the status of one through whom others will gain blessings. Israel's spreading will not simply deprive others of what they might otherwise have enjoyed, but can be for their good: as we have seen there is no implication of Israel taking over or filling the entire world (and Genesis seems not to ask how Israel's inheritance of the land will affect its previous inhabitants, with the partial exception of 15:16).[83] Further, as we have noted, the promises here function to affirm that Jacob is heir to those made to Abraham. Thus if those when first stated culminated with blessing for the nations, we should hardly be surprised that the same is offered to Jacob:[84] 12:3b is phrased precisely as 28:14b.[85] Laban is shortly to be blessed because of Jacob (בגללך, 30:27); while this may not manifest the same dynamic as 28:14 with its promise of blessing through/ by means of (ב) Jacob,[86] and therefore perhaps should not be claimed as the beginnings of its fulfilment, there is certainly no sign of anyone using Jacob's name in blessings. As Jacob goes into exile in a foreign land he must remember that ultimately his existence is to be for the good of others, even if the primary fulfilment is likely to be dependent on and subsequent to the multiplication of his descendants.

V15 marks a shift in the promises: those that precede have been more general, though not without relevance to Jacob's immediate situation, while those of v15 directly address his most pressing concerns.[87] (The shift is also marked by the fact that Yhwh is the first-person subject of six clauses in v15, while not the subject at all in v14.) Thus while v13 tells Jacob that Yhwh will give the land to him and his descendants, v15 makes the

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[82] Lipton (1999) e.g. pp32, 52-5; here I develop Lipton's idea with respect to 28:10-22, since the status she sees granted there is that of birthright and blessing.

[83] Fokkelman (1975) pp60-1n35 suggests that the use of אדמה rather than ארץ makes clear that families of the whole world are to be affected by the blessing, not just those of the ארץ of v13.

[84] Similarly 26:2-5 deliberately applies to Isaac the promises made to Abraham in 22:15-18.

[85] Cf. n75. Chew (1982) p68 stresses that 28:14 reverts to the language of 12:3.

[86] See below pp195-198 concerning the probable force of ב here.

[87] Cf. Walton (1998) p47: vv13b-14 and v15 'are clearly complementary, with one reaching more beyond Jacob's life (though there are also signs of fulfilment in it), and the other more immediate to Jacob's concerns and being worked out in his life (though wider parallels can be seen in the story of Israel)'.

explicit promise that he will return to the land. Yhwh's promise to be with Jacob and watch over him perhaps makes explicit the implications of the connection between earth and heaven seen in the vision of v12.[88] Jacob's vow of vv20-2 echoes the promises of this verse: however we should not see great significance in Jacob's focusing on those promises which relate to his immediate needs, since elsewhere the patriarchs do not make any obvious response to promises relating to the more distant future.[89]

But is Jacob's response appropriate, or does it indicate a failure to trust the promise or an attempt to extort more from God?[90] While one might attempt to argue that the promise and vow stem from different sources, and hence in its original setting the vow was in no way a challenge to what Yhwh had said,[91] this provides little help in seeking to read the final form of Genesis where vow and promise do stand together. Equally while vv20-2 may originally have been designed to legitimate the practice of making vows at Bethel – and hence would presumably regard such vow-making positively – the final form of Genesis seems unlikely to have that in view, given its likely post-exilic date. However Genesis might intend at least to establish that vow-making has precedent in the activity of the patriarchs, even if the location is now incidental.[92] Thus the vow would not be entirely inappropriate. Yet since the Jacob stories regularly present Jacob in an ambiguous light, laying foundations for the future Israel even as he acts in ways at best questionable,[93] aetiological function for the story would not prove his actions irreproachable. Nevertheless there is nothing clearly inappropriate in the vow. While it is formulated as a conditional, this need not show that Jacob has doubts whether God will fulfil the promise, but may be

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[88] Brueggemann (1982a) p244. On the implications of divine promises to be with someone, see below pp249-250.

[89] Cf. Fokkelman (1975) p75; Berge (1990) p168.

[90] For a sustained negative view of the vow, cf. Cartledge (1992) pp166-175.

[91] Cf. Skinner (1910) p379.

[92] Westermann (1985) p458. Jewish tradition has often sought to locate these events in Jerusalem (cf. e.g. Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980b) *ad loc.*); however any resonances with Jerusalem – e.g. perhaps the use of המקום (cf. 22:4; Deut 16:16) – can hardly outweigh the clear statement that the events occur at Bethel. Lipton (1999) p98 suggests that such interpretations at least show that the rabbis could not deny that the events related to temple practice, that they *ought* to have taken place at Jerusalem (cf. also her general discussion of pp80-98). Cf. also Wyatt (1990), arguing that the location at Bethel is secondary.

[93] Cf. especially Walton (1998) *passim.*

simply the standard form of a vow:[94] Jacob states what he will do in response to Yhwh's actions, rather than seeking to persuade a possibly grudging Yhwh not to renege on his promises. Thus we should not regard it as a primitive religious barter which no redactor bothered to excise from the text, but as something perfectly proper – at least in principle – in the terms of Old Testament religion; as part of proper engagement with God, not an attempt to force his hand.[95] Nor should we see great significance in Jacob's mention of food and clothes and return to his father's house (while v15 speaks of a return to 'this land', and has no reference to food and clothing). For he is surely right to assume that God's presence and protection will mean that he is fed and clothed.[96] Equally, to suggest that a return in peace to his father's house is to move significantly beyond v15 would make the divine promise somewhat grudging: it would imply that Jacob will return to the land, since he must inherit it, but will not be restored to his family. Nor is it unreasonable for Jacob to include having Yhwh as his God in what he vows.[97] For allegiance to Yhwh seems an entirely proper response to his fulfilling what he promises; were he (*per impossibile?*) to fail to do so, Jacob would be justified in seeking some other deity. Israel has to choose whether or not to be committed to Yhwh (e.g. Deut 30:19ff; Josh 24):[98] provided Jacob is not seeking to defer any commitment, but rather recognising that the fulfilment of the promises will add a new depth to the relationship, strengthening it greatly, his vow entirely respects the contours of Israel's faith.

Jacob's vow includes two further parts. First, he undertakes to make the pillar he had set up בית אלהים, a temple for the worship of God. On rising in the morning he had

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[94] Cf. Kidner (1967) p158; Sarna (1989) p200 suggests, following one option given in *Genesis Rabbah*, that the force may be as much 'when...' as 'if...'.

[95] von Rad (1972) p286; Wenham (1994) p224.

[96] Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980b) p1234 notes that the Midrash on v15 elucidates the idea of God's not forsaking Jacob by reference to Ps 37:25, where parallel to the righteous not being forsaken is their children not begging for bread. Fokkelman (1975) p77 suggests that in making explicit his need for food and clothing Jacob acknowledges his complete dependence on Yhwh.

[97] Two factors suggest that the last clause of v21 begins the apodosis, contra e.g. Fokkelman (1975) pp75-6; Lipton (1999) pp74-7. First, the subject changes from אלהים to יהוה (Walton (1998) p50). Second, the apodosis in vows in prose elsewhere always begins with waw-consecutive perfect: in 1Sam 1:11, as here, the protasis is formed with an imperfect followed by waw-consecutive perfects (plus one imperfect, necessitated by the negative), while the apodosis begins with another waw-consecutive perfect and continues with a clause in which the subject is placed first, followed by an imperfect verb (on the grammatical form of vows, cf. Cartledge (1992) pp143-150; also *W/O'C* pp526-7 on conditionals).

[98] Walton (1998) p50.

immediately memorialised his vision by erecting a pillar (v18): the standing stone (מצבה) with oil poured on its top (ראשה) recalls the ladder of v12, standing (מצב) on the earth with its top (ראשו) reaching to heaven.[99] He now commits himself to making this memorial a place where others worship. The place where heaven and earth touch, where God has already encountered him (and thus which is already God's dwelling place, בית אלהים [v17]) is to become a place of cult.[100] Secondly, he promises to tithe the possessions he acquires. His fulfilment of this promise is nowhere explicitly recorded:[101] at 35:1-7 when he builds an altar at Bethel there is no mention of tithing or any sacrifice. However even if one judges this lack of evidence of fulfilment significant, it need not show that the initial vow was insincere, but rather that Jacob later, for whatever reason, did not keep to it: for all his trickery, it seems unlikely that Jacob would take the risk of making a binding commitment to God which he had no intention of keeping. Yet there is probably no great significance to be found in it. For the promise is not one of tithing what Jacob gains outside the land – nothing has suggested that he will grow wealthy there – but rather of tithing, presumably on an ongoing basis, once he has returned to the land. Hence, while we are never told that Jacob does tithe, equally there is no obvious occasion on which we feel that tithing should have been recorded, particularly as mention of any kind of sacrifices is rare in the patriarchal stories.[102]

4.3.2 Summary

Thus it seems that Jacob makes an appropriate response to Yhwh's promises (even one who remains uneasy about aspects of the vow – Jacob will be Jacob – may yet hold that there is demonstrated here as much responsiveness to Yhwh as he is capable of showing). Yhwh makes no specific demands of Jacob: his speech is rather one of reassurance, both for Jacob's immediate future and for his longer-term significance. In context, Jacob clearly needs that reassurance, though we might have wondered whether a word of rebuke for his past conduct might have been in order first. Thus his response is significant in suggesting that Yhwh's choice of him is not completely arbitrary. Despite his failings, Jacob at least

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[99] Fokkelman (1975) pp66-7.

[100] Cartledge (1992) p171 suggests that Jacob's pledge may rather be to publicly acknowledge what he has discovered about the place; however the other reading seems more natural, and (as Cartledge notes) at 35:1-7 Jacob builds an altar at Bethel.

[101] Cartledge (1992) pp171-2.

[102] Pagolu (1998) pp190-1 notes the difficulty of paying tithes in an imagined context where there were not priests to receive them.

sometimes does genuinely engage with Yhwh. Israel as a people, though it may be no better than Jacob and equally depends on Yhwh's grace and commitment to his promises, and the merits of their forefathers (22:18; 26:5), still is called to respond faithfully to its God, that it and other peoples may gain blessing. For the niphal ונברכו at v14 we have suggested to be plausibly passive, although the context might also allow that it rather expresses the idea of others citing Jacob and his descendants as signal examples of blessing.

Chapter 5

Blessing

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to establish the meaning(s) of the Hebrew verb √ברך 'to bless' (including the adjective בָּרוּך, however this form be analysed[1]), with its associated noun בְּרָכָה. (Henceforward I shall use √ברך as a short-hand reference to these forms, but excluding the use of the same root letters in words meaning 'knee', 'kneel' and 'pool', on which see below pp103-104.) We treat the words, not the theme or concept of blessing. Semantic field analysis[2] stresses that a particular word's meaning cannot be isolated from the meanings of other words with which it can be associated either by (near-)synonymy or antonymy over part or all of its semantic range: we may, for example, gain further understanding of ברוך through asking why אַשְׁרֵי was sometimes employed with apparently similar meaning.[3] Exhaustive analysis of √ברך would demand exhaustive analysis of the theme, though for reasons of brevity that is not attempted here. However the meaning of particular words is more restricted than that of their associated concepts:[4] forms of √ברך are not necessarily available for every part of a wider concept of blessing with which we might rightly associate the words. Thematic study thus cannot replace verbal study.[5]

However we need to consider further what the meaning of a word might be. First, one word can have several meanings, whether this is a matter of polysemy (דָּבָר clearly sometimes means 'word', sometimes 'event', and the two meanings have no common denominator) or simply of various possible nuances which sometimes are present, sometimes not (נַעַר sometimes has the nuance 'servant' in addition to the sense 'young man'). Secondly we must distinguish between the nuances which are part of the meaning of

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[1] Cf. below pp121-123.

[2] Cf. e.g. Silva (1983) pp161-3 and ch5; Mitchell (1987) pp6-7, 179-183.

[3] Cf. below pp125-127.

[4] Cf. the criticisms of *TDNT* in Barr (1961) ch8 for discussing a concept in the guise of discussing a word.

[5] Cf. Silva (1983) p30: '[p]urely linguistic studies, though not an end in themselves, are of utmost importance if we expect our broader semantic discussions and specific exegetical decisions to rest on a solid footing'. This is balanced by his acknowledgement of the dangers of concentrating on the meanings of words (pp22-8).

the word, and those which are associated with the concept in particular contexts.[6] That God's blessing is often (e.g. Deut 28; Mal 3:10) seen as consequent on human obedience forms no part of the meaning of √ברך, for example. Thirdly, meaning may operate at the level of sentences or discourses as well as that of words: the meaning of the whole may not be merely the sum of the parts, and conversely a word's meaning may not be separable from its place in the whole. Fourthly meaning cannot be reduced to a matter of referring to some thing or concept: some greetings (e.g. 'hello') or prepositions have no such reference, but are clearly not meaningless. Even where a word clearly has some referential function, that may not exhaust its meaning: to say 'Jesus is Lord' may be both to ascribe an objective status of Lordship and to pledge one's allegiance to Jesus. Combining these last two points, we may wonder whether ברוך אל עליון אשר־מגן צריך בידך (Gen 14:20) is an acclamation of praise as much as, or instead of, an ascription to אל עליון of a property of being ברוך, or a wish that he be such.[7]

Thus this study attempts to be alert to the possibility of words having different meanings, and different kinds of meanings, in different contexts. It also attempts to describe linguistic usage, rather than to synthesize a 'biblical portrayal of blessing'. Of course language could hardly function unless different users typically gave at least closely similar force to most words (though the biblical texts are a corpus written over several centuries), or if most words had a vast array of different meanings or shades of meaning. Nevertheless linguistic investigation is more likely to yield raw material for theology than a concept which theology can immediately take over. (However our evidence for the use of √ברך in classical Hebrew is predominantly biblical: thus though the extant evidence might seem to suggest particular involvement of Yhwh in the bestowal of blessing, doubtless the word was also used of the activity of other gods.) Moreover we are investigating several words: we have at least the noun ברכה and the verb ברך, and it is entirely possible that, for example, the form ברוך should have particular nuances not associated with other forms of the verb. We cannot *assume* that the meaning of any form was a meaning in some way of the root.[8] However Hebrew speakers clearly perceived these words as related: in Gen 27:33-41, for

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[6] Cf. Cotterell and Turner (1989) pp151-3.

[7] See below pp127-128 on 'blessing' God.

[8] Cf. Wehmeier (1970) p7; Barr (1961) pp100-3 notes the general danger of what he terms the 'root fallacy'.

example, Isaac blesses (ברך√ piel), giving a ברכה, and the recipient is ברוך.[9] We may thus expect at least some interplay between the meanings of these different forms; their linkage is not simply etymological. In some of what follows, then, I shall not separate out uses of the various forms (e.g. ch5.4); but acting as a control on this will be sections where they are analysed separately, which should establish particular nuances of each form.

5.2 Etymology and Diachronic Study

Saussure established that a word's meaning is determined by its place in the current system of the language, and thus that synchronic study must be prioritised over diachronic study in an attempt to ascertain meaning.[10] Etymology is no safe guide, since a word's sense can shift: we learn nothing about present usage of the English 'nice' from its origin in the Latin *nescius* 'ignorant'.[11] However this valid principle can be exaggerated. The current system of any language is clearly influenced by at least its more recent history, and certainly by texts (including oral texts) which are still being read/ heard.[12] Secondly, when attempting to establish the meaning of a word in a language for which we have a very limited corpus and no native speakers from whom to obtain further information, if the synchronic evidence is inconclusive we may surely make cautious use of diachronic evidence to suggest what a word is likely to mean.[13] Thirdly, if we cannot plausibly account for development of a particular meaning, it must question our reading of the synchronic evidence. Since the development of a language is a historical phenomenon we must in consonance with normal historical method seek the simplest possible historical hypothesis to explain it and again in consonance with normal historical method that may lead to re-evaluation of individual pieces of evidence.

We shall therefore pay attention to diachronic considerations. (This is all the more necessary as past studies have often depended heavily on them:[14] to answer them adequately

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[9] The piel and ברוך are also linked in e.g. Gen 14:19; Ps 118:26; Isa 19:25. The piel and ברכה are linked in e.g. Deut 33:1; 2Sam 7:29; Ps 129:8.

[10] On the relationship between synchronic and diachronic considerations, cf. e.g. Sawyer (1972) ch5; Silva (1983) ch1; Mitchell (1987) pp8-15; Johnstone (1998) pp130-6.

[11] Cf. Barr (1961) p107.

[12] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p10; Johnstone (1998) p135.

[13] Cf. Silva (1983) pp42-4; Johnstone (1998) pp134-5.

[14] E.g. the attempt of Pedersen (1926) to account for blessing as in origin a power of the soul, or that of Brown (1996) to derive uses of ברך√ from a sense of 'knee'.

one must show that one's synchronic explanations allow at least as adequate a diachronic hypothesis as theirs.) We must simply ensure that they do not control the reading of the synchronic evidence. If the diachronic hypotheses are intrinsically plausible and allow a natural reading of the texts, our synchronic conclusions receive further support. However we shall not attempt a detailed history of the use of √ברך, even within the biblical period. Since the dating of so much biblical material is controversial confident conclusions would be impossible (and we have even less evidence for the early religious history of Israel); and since we cannot assume uniform development in how all Hebrew speakers used a word we cannot argue that a text exhibiting a more developed sense for that word is therefore subsequent to one showing a less developed sense.

A root ברך is also found in Hebrew in a verb (finite qal and hiphil) meaning 'to kneel', and the noun בֶּרֶךְ 'knee'; however there is no obvious connection to blessing. Nowhere is a kneeling posture particularly associated with blessing[15] (and linking blessing to the prosperity evidenced by a herd of kneeling camels[16] seems fanciful). *Birku* in Akkadian sometimes denotes the genitals, but this presumably euphemistic or extended sense[17] hardly suggests that blessing has underlying connotations of fertility in other languages, Arabic as well as Northwest Semitic.[18] Nor should blessing be associated particularly with the recognition of children by taking them upon one's knees, as in Gen 30:3; ?48:5ff; 50:23; Job 3:12[19] (though the having of children was clearly *part* of blessing): the word for 'knee' would not obviously have been used to denote the recognition as a whole,[20] and presumably taking a child on one's lap symbolised accepting responsibility for care of the child rather than anything to do with the genitals or fertility.[21] A link between blessing and בְּרֵכָה 'pool' is equally speculative. While a water-source might well be considered a result of blessing,[22] it is not obvious that a word meaning 'pool' (and not also

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[15] Contra e.g. *BDB* '*bless God*, adore with bended knees'; Henderson (1977) pp28-30.

[16] Cf. the references in Mitchell (1987) pp13, 15.

[17] Scharbert (1975) p281.

[18] Contra Murtonen (1959) p176.

[19] Contra Mowvley (1965) pp74-5; Helfmeyer (1974) p212.

[20] The sense 'bless' seems perfectly satisfactory for ואברכם in Gen 48:9, though e.g. Procksch (1924) suggests 'so I may set them on my knee'.

[21] Unfortunately Pedersen (1926) p518 note to p204 combines the two senses.

[22] Murtonen (1959) pp164, 176-7. Cf. perhaps Ps 84:7[6].

denoting other water-sources) should derive from √ברך 'to bless',[23] nor that this would evidence much about the latter were it the case. Still less plausible (at best) is Toll's argument, following the biliteral root theory, that –רב is equivalent to –פר; the latter means 'penetrate' in Hos 4:10; hence √ברך originally meant 'penetrate (sexually)'.[24]

> [I]n popular Arabic belief, the 'blessing' was regarded as an impersonal
> power that produces fertility and prosperity, and is mediated to the tribe by
> the father or tribal chief, or to men in their own neighborhood by a holy
> person, without specifically mentioning God as its source or author.[25]

(In the Koran, however, and elsewhere under Islamic influence, blessing is regularly connected to God.) The word here is well integrated with its users' animistic religion; only if the Arabs preserved the original religion of the Semites (on the outmoded evolutionistic hypothesis that animism is primitive and preceded belief in deities?) is this likely to evidence the root's original meaning.[26] The Akkadian verb *karābu* and its cognate nouns, though strikingly similar in meanings to √ברך, are probably etymologically unrelated: metathesis of first and third root letters is rare, and Old South Arabic apparently had a root *krb* 'consecrate, sacrifice'.[27] However roots cognate to √ברך occur in Ugaritic, Phoenician-Punic and Aramaic, and all link blessing to deities.[28] In Ugaritic, for example, in twelve of the root's thirteen occurrences what is envisaged is clearly a divine bestowal of prosperity, and this may be implied in the thirteenth.[29] In Phoenician-Punic, gods are regularly subject of the verb *brk*; when one human blesses another, a deity is always mentioned (with the preposition *l*) as the source of the boon sought. Thus it seems a likely hypothesis that in Hebrew √ברך will be intimately and essentially connected with divine activity. Nouns from

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[23] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p14.

[24] Toll (1982).

[25] Scharbert (1975) pp283-4.

[26] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p14; contra e.g. Wehmeier (1970) pp65-6; Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p268.

[27] Cf. Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p266; Scharbert (1975) pp281-2; Mitchell (1987) p11.

[28] Cf. Scharbert (1975) pp282-3; Schottroff (1969) pp178-198 (with special reference to forms related to ברוך); Wehmeier (1970) pp18-66 (cautioning [p65] that the predominantly literary Hebrew evidence is largely different in kind from the inscriptional evidence on which we generally depend for the cognate languages).

[29] Wehmeier (1970) p66.

√ברך occur in Northwest Semitic outside the Old Testament only rarely and in late texts:[30] we might hypothesise that bestowal of blessing, rather than blessing-power in the abstract, was central to the root's original force (which must again count against the animistic hypothesis). In the various texts, 'the content of the blessing is long life, descendants, prosperity, success, and power':[31] the content of √ברך is similar in Hebrew (below ch5.4). Outside clearly Jewish literature, only in Palmyrene texts from the second to fourth centuries A.D. is there anything analogous to the Hebrew use of √ברך in praise of a deity, and this seems probably a result of Jewish influence.[32] Thus this Hebrew usage is plausibly not a straightforward application of the root in its shared Northwest Semitic sense(s), but a particular development of its meaning. It is therefore improbable that the word's original sense was 'praise' or 'magnify', and the specific idea of blessing derived from this (when a deity praises the words bring about prosperity; when a person praises another to a deity, the deity is meant to reward him/ her).

5.3 Cursing

A word's antonyms help to establish its place in the language.[33] (What follows is an attempt to sketch an account of the words for cursing, not to give exhaustive analysis.) Forms of √ברך stand in opposition to forms of √ארר (cf. e.g. Gen 27:29; Num 22:12; Deut 28:3-6, 16-19; Prov 3:33; Jer 20:14), and of √קלל (e.g. Gen 27:12; Deut 11:26; Prov 27:14; 30:11). In Num 23:11, 25 and 24:10 √ברך piel is contrasted to √קבב qal. In Judges 17:2 ברוך is employed in a declaration intended to cancel a curse described by √אלה. (√ברך is also used euphemismistically in 1Ki 21:10, 13; Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9; ?Ps 10:3: to avoid even mentioning a curse directed at God or the king, a word meaning the opposite is substituted.[34]) We must not uncritically oppose the *roots*, disregarding the various forms of

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[30] Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p267.

[31] Scharbert (1975) p283; cf. similarly Wehmeier (1970) p66.

[32] Wehmeier (1970) p66; Mitchell (1987) p12; for a cautious summary of relevant evidence Schottroff (1969) p187n5.

[33] Cf. e.g. Silva (1983) pp129-132.

[34] Contra Toll (1982) p118, suggesting that √ברך can refer to any powerful utterance. Cf. also Mitchell (1987) pp161-2, against *BDB* p139 suggesting these might be over-done blessings (also Taylor (1992) p34). Linafelt (1996) argues – implausibly, at least in the case of the Job instances – that the sense of 'bless' is always present without denying the euphemistic sense. Cf. also Frettlöh (1998) pp308-314.

each: we cannot assume that everything that can be said with a form of √קלל, for example, stands in opposition to something expressible with a form of √ברך:

> [t]here is no single root that is antonymous to *brk* in all its forms. Though *'ārûr* is the usual antonym to *bārûk*, *qĕlālâ* is the usual antonym to *bĕrākâ*, and the finite forms of the verb *brk* can have forms of *qll*, *'rr*, *'lh*, *nqb/qbb*, or rarely other verbs as antonyms, depending on the meaning and context of *brk*.[35]

Nor can we assume at the outset that throughout its history √ברך was opposed to forms of some other particular root(s),[36] especially given this choice of possible roots in opposition to any or all of which √ברך might have begun its life.

The various words for 'curse' are clearly at least closely linked semantically. In Num 22-4, finite verbal forms of √ארר, √זעם and √קבב describe what Balak wishes Balaam to do (all three occur, for example, in 23:7-8). In Deut 28:15ff, קללות are expressed by phrases beginning ארור. In Ex 22:27[28] (on which see below pp107-108) acting disrespectfully to God and to a leader of the people are expressed by respectively √קלל and √ארר. However, as we shall now see, the different words at least often have particular nuances.

In comparison to related words, √ארר is 'zweiffellos die stärkste Bezeichnung, über die das Hebr. verfügt'.[37] A person who is ארור is 'one stricken by misfortune and afflicted, whose existence is disastrous':[38] cf. especially Deut 28:15ff; Josh 6:26; Jer 20:15-17. In Deut 28, it might simply be reported that anyone disobeying the law will be afflicted by Yhwh. However in the other two the speaker is rather bringing it about that certain people be afflicted who otherwise might not be so; that is, he is cursing (cf. also e.g. Judg 21:18; 1Sam 14:24).[39] A curse may be expanded with clauses expressed in the simple future (e.g.

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[35] Mitchell (1987) p42.

[36] So Westermann (1978) pp23-4n12; Wehmeier (1970) pp6-7; contra e.g. Schottroff (1969) p163.

[37] Schottroff (1969) p30.

[38] Keller (1997a) p180.

[39] Cf. e.g. Scharbert (1974) p411.

Josh 6:26),[40] which may perhaps suggest human authority to pronounce a curse and expect its fulfilment (though cf. below p118). In the Old Testament there is no sign that the operation of curses could be independent of Yhwh;[41] that Akkadian cognate words are regularly connected with divine activity[42] suggests that this is not a superficial theologising of earlier material. (Moreover the cognate languages provide little evidence suggesting any original sense for the root much different from 'curse'.[43])

In declaring someone afflicted, or requesting that (s)he be such, one obviously dissociates oneself from that person. However nowhere in the Old Testament is אָרוּר used to express such dissociation more than to denote affliction.[44] Gen 3:14 and 4:11 might seem exceptions: could not מִן אָרוּר mean 'excluded from'? However in the former a 'מִן of comparison' makes perfect sense;[45] in the latter מִן־הָאֲדָמָה more probably concisely indicates the result of the affliction (cf. Gen 27:39), or its source, than instantiates a sense of אָרוּר not probable elsewhere.

Uses of other forms of the root are as one might expect from the uses of אָרוּר. The verb generally means 'to curse', clearly in the sense of invoking a curse in e.g. Num 22:6, clearly in the sense of afflicting in Num 5:18-27. The noun מְאֵרָה (Deut 28:20; Prov 3:33; 28:27; Mal 2:2; 3:9) means 'curse', in each case denoting affliction sent by God, though it is not always clear whether it refers to the act of afflicting or to the affliction experienced.[46] However in Ex 22:27[28] the qal of √אָרַר probably denotes any disrespectful speech:[47] √קלל has this sense (see below), and it seems more likely that v27b changes the verb for variety than that the leaders are to be protected only from cursing *strictu senso*. (In general

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[40] Schottroff (1969) pp47-8.

[41] Cf. Brichto (1963) pp205-15 for detailed discussion; also below pp116-117 on 'magic'. Westermann (1978) pp23-4n12 suggests that curses were less theologised than blessings.

[42] Scharbert (1974) pp406-7.

[43] Schottroff (1969) pp30-5; Scharbert (1974) pp405-8.

[44] Scharbert (e.g. Scharbert (1974) pp408-412) stresses the element of dissociation in cursing.

[45] JPSV, following Ramban, suggests a similar understanding of Gen 4:11 (cf. Sarna (1989) pp34, 355n11).

[46] Cf. e.g. Keller (1997a) p181; Scharbert (1958) p7 (also Scharbert (1974) p413).

[47] The cognate *arāru* in Akkadian may also sometimes have this meaning: cf. Scharbert (1974) p407.

√ארר need not denote formal cursing which could only be performed by persons with particular abilities or authority:[48] in Jer 20:14-17 Jeremiah is not obviously speaking with prophetic authority, and in 1Sam 26:19 David is hardly claiming regal authority.)

'The root *qll* "to be light, small, contemptible," etc. is common Semitic'.[49] In Hebrew, forms derived from the root develop various senses, some approximating 'fast, fleet', others relating more to the idea of insignificance, physical (e.g. Gen 8:8, 11 [qal]; Jonah 1:5 [hiphil]) or in value (e.g. 1Sam 18:23; Jer 6:14 [both niphal]; Isa 8:23 [hiphil]); it thus mirrors the senses of √כבד.[50] Hence the piel gains the sense 'make of no account', whether 'dishonouring' or 'reviling' with words, or 'treating as of no account' in actions. Such sense(s) seem the most plausible in e.g. Ex 21:17; Deut 27:16; Judg 9:27; 1Sam 3:13; Eccl 7:21-2. The context of 1Sam 3:13 suggests that Eli's sons are despising God in their actions rather than specifically speaking against him;[51] conversely in Judg 9:27 the content of the disparaging is clearly the sort of words given in vv28-9, 'Who is Abimelek that we should serve him?'.[52]

However the piel of √קלל also means 'curse'. In 1Sam 17:43, ויקלל הפלשתי את־דוד באלהיו, Goliath invokes his gods in some kind of imprecation. In 2Ki 2:24, ויקללם בשם יהוה, not only is Elisha's calling on Yhwh explicit, but also the words' effect is apparent when bears attack the boys thus cursed. While the use of √קלל in such contexts doubtless derives from the more general sense of 'abuse verbally', nothing suggests that it means less than 'curse'. Of course in both these passages explicit mention of some god(s) makes the nuance clear; however in Deut 23:5[4] and Josh 24:9, both referring to Balaam's design, √קלל without further verbal expansion certainly has this meaning. The noun קללה even more clearly can mean 'curse' in the fullest sense: in Deut 28:15, 45 it denotes the afflictions caused by disobeying the law, of which some (vv16-19) are formulated with ארור. In Jer 29:22, קללה means a formula of cursing, 'Yhwh make you like Zedekiah and Ahab...'. In Jer 24:9, where it stands parallel to משל and שנינה, it must refer to the use of

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[48] Contra Scharbert (1974) p412.

[49] Keller (1997b) p1141.

[50] Keller (1997b) p1142.

[51] Brichto (1963) pp148-9.

[52] Scharbert (1958) p9.

the people in cursing-formulae: on account of their affliction, others will say of their enemies 'May you become as the remnant of Judah'. The parallel to שמה in 2Ki 22:19 suggests a sense of 'person/ place afflicted'. However in Prov 26:1-2 קללה is antonymous to כבוד, and hence presumably means 'slighting words', not 'curse'.[53]

Other words for cursing can be discussed more briefly. √אלה generally occurs in judicial or quasi-judicial contexts (except 1Sam 14:24): it is used for a curse invoked on any who breach some particular restriction, a sanction protecting some general standard (e.g. Zech 5:3) or some particular agreement (Deut 29:11; Neh 10:30[29][54]); it also can denote a curse invoked on the unknown perpetrator of some offence (e.g. Judg 17:2). In e.g. Num 5:21, 27; Jer 29:18 the noun denotes someone afflicted, i.e. the object of such a curse, perhaps also implying that the person will be used as an example in the curses of others. The roots √זעם, √קבב and √נקב (the latter two perhaps alternate forms of the same root) occur too infrequently in the sense 'curse' or similar to attempt much analysis:[55] the use of the first two in the Balaam story demonstrates they can bear the sense 'curse'; Lev 24:11, 16 *may* suggest the qal of √נקב can mean 'disparage'.[56]

In ch5.3 we have seen that √ארר in its various forms generally denotes affliction received as a result of divine displeasure or invoked: thus when some form of √ברך stands in opposition to a form of √ארר, the former probably relates to prosperity received or invoked. Forms of √קלל (and √קבב and √זעם) sometimes have at least closely similar meanings, and these may be evident where they are opposed to forms of √ברך (e.g. for קללה and ברכה Gen 27:12; Deut 30:1; for √קבב qal and √ברך piel Num 23:11). However a sense of 'disparage', 'treat as of no worth' is also evident, particularly for verbal forms of √קלל: this seems the obvious meaning of יקלל in Prov 30:11, suggesting that in the parallel clause those who do not bless their mothers fail to honour them rather than specifically to invoke blessings upon them.

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[53] Brichto (1963) p189.

[54] Here and elsewhere (e.g. Gen 26:28) אלה may denote the whole oath, not just the cursing on one who breaches it.

[55] So Brichto (1963) pp200-3; on √קבב Aitken (1998b) pp118-120.

[56] See most recently Aitken (1998a).

5.4 The content of blessing given to a human

Blessing often conveys benefits. It is not simply a commendation, or an acknowledgement of relationship, but (at least commonly) makes a material difference in the world. This is clear when Yhwh's blessing is said to be operative in a particular realm: in Gen 39:5, for example, it is said to be on all that Potiphar had; in Deut 28:12 Yhwh promises to bless all the people's undertakings, provided they are obedient to him. In general the benefits are tangible enhancements to life,[57] not what we might consider 'spiritual' rewards. This is of course largely because the Old Testament does not relegate divine activity to some 'spiritual' realm, discontinuous with the physical world. Rather Yhwh's influence is seen in the ordinary things of life: divine favour is expected to bring material reward (though texts such as the Joseph story and Job challenge any simplistic equation of prosperity with divine favour.) However, blessing is not limited to the material. Amidst the very material blessings of Deut 28:1-14 is the promise that Israel will be Yhwh's holy people (v9).[58] In Num 6:22-7,

> [t]he benefit which the blessing called on God to bestow does not consist of
>
> fertility, prosperity, or dominion, but God's favor itself.[59]

However this can be over-stressed: the protection of v24b is clearly 'material'; likewise the שלום granted in v26b is not just 'peace', as conventionally translated, but all-round well-being. God's favour is here conceived as something which will produce prosperity, not only an intrinsic good. Similarly in Ps 24:5, where ברכה parallels צדקה: צדקה can refer to very concrete acts of deliverance (cf. e.g. Ps 65:6[5]) and to the bestowal of fertility (e.g. Joel 2:23) as well as denoting a right relationship with God.[60] While the blessing may be more than physical benefits, it is not less.

Hempel suggested that blessing's content can be summed up as שלום.[61] The concepts are linked in Gen 26:29; Num 6:26; Deut 29:18; Ps 29:11; 128:5-6; Ezek 34:25-6; Zech 8:12-13. שלום is also employed in greetings (Judg 19:20; 1Sam 25:6; 2Sam 8:10=1Chr 18:10) and leave-takings (1Sam 1:17), which may be forms of blessing (cf.

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[57] Taylor (1992) p251.

[58] Cf. also Isa 44:3 (Mitchell (1987) pp56-7).

[59] Mitchell (1987) p96.

[60] Cf. e.g. Koch (1997) pp1054-5; also above pp88-89.

[61] Hempel (1968) pp58-61; so also e.g. Horst (1947) p30; Mowinckel (1962) pp44-5; Mitchell (1987) pp181-3.

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below pp119-121). However none of these texts individually does more than suggest that the words are part of the same semantic field; nor are they sufficiently numerous that we may conclude that every blessing imparts שלום. A link between blessing and שלום might conclude a study (were it demonstrated that the latter embraces the content of the former, denoting the prosperity which can be conveyed by blessing) but cannot be its starting point.

√ברך often has strong connotations of fertility:[62] cf. e.g. Gen 1:22, 28; 17:16; Lev 25:21; Deut 7:13; 28:4; 33:13-16; Ps 107:38; 128:2-6; Hag 2:19; Mal 3:10-11. (שלום rarely has such connotations: its nuances thus differ somewhat from those associated with blessing.[63]) Blessing leads to an enhancement of natural powers:

> God usually blesses by making the natural processes work better than they
> normally do, rather than by circumventing them..[64]

However, this connection to fertility is probably not central to the word's meaning (we have argued above pp103-105 that an etymological link to fertility is implausible, as is a basic animistic sense for the word akin to 'life-enhancing power'). Rather blessing often bestows fertility because in the worldview of the Old Testament writers this was one of the most valued benefits that could be given.[65] If the content of blessing was general prosperity, important parts of it would be success in agriculture and animal husbandry, and the begetting of children to continue the family, though these would not exhaust its significance.

We have already suggested that blessing does not convey only material benefits (above p110): in itself this renders questionable a tight link between blessing and fertility. Further, blessing can also involve the accumulation of money:[66] cf. Gen 24:35; Deut 15:6; 28:12; Ps 112:2-3; Prov 10:22. There is no reason to suppose that the blessing proper made large crops and/ or herds (and/ or success in slave-breeding), which in turn created wealth: in Gen 24:35 silver and gold are listed with animals and slaves as equally things Yhwh gave Abraham in blessing him. As well as granting wealth, blessing ensures success over foes (cf. e.g. Gen 27:29; Deut 28:7): the value of prosperity is much diminished if one has no

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[62] Stressed by Pedersen (1926) pp204-211.

[63] Mitchell (1987) p182.

[64] Mitchell (1987) p39.

[65] Cf. Henderson (1977) pp75-6; Mitchell (1987) pp165-6; Tigay (1996) p494 notes that the contents of blessings and curses listed within and outside the Bible as incentives to uphold oaths parallel the contents of omens, suggesting that they relate to people's most basic hopes and fears.

[66] Contra Guillet (1969) p175.

assurance of security.[67] Thus the distinction Westermann[68] seeks to establish between Yhwh's ongoing work of blessing and his occasional acts of deliverance is overdrawn, since maintenance of the blessing requires those acts: √ברך and √ישע are linked in e.g. Ps 67:2-3[1-2] and Zech 8:13.[69] However blessing is inherently long-term, so the vocabulary of blessing is not commonly employed in the face of an immediate crisis (unlike, for example, language of God 'being with', on which see below pp249-250). Even Num 22-4, where ahead of a possible battle Balaam blesses Israel, does not suggest that armies were regularly blessed before fighting. Rather Balak seeks to have Israel cursed, that is, to have her made unfortunate, which will enable her defeat; Balaam, instead of complying with the request, does the opposite. This confirms that blessing creates military success, but need not imply that blessings were common in such situations.[70]

The content of blessing is thus prosperity, i.e. everything required for a good life.[71] In Ps 133:3b, indeed, the blessing God gives is חיים, life; this presumably means more than existence, since vv1-3a describe what might make a good life, though the concept's precise richness is not clear.[72] The word 'prosperity'[73] implies a close connection between blessing and human interests. 'Flourishing' might apply equally to plants and animals fulfilling their potential for growth and health.[74] However blessing seems particularly connected to human

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[67] Müller (1969) p142 suggests that peoples (Num 24:8b; Deut 28:7, 13a; 33:29b; Judg 5:31a), kings (Num 24:7b; Ps 45:4a[?], 6a), patriarchs (Gen 9:26f; 27:29a, 40b; Deut 33:25) and matriarchs (Gen 24:60) 'werden durch Segen Sieghaftigkeit, Sicherheit und herrscherliche Stellung unter ihresgleichen zuteil'.

[68] Westermann (1978) pp3-5 and *passim*.

[69] So Scharbert (1975) p306; Mitchell (1987) pp177-9. Cf. also Frettlöh (1998) pp45-62. Westermann would not deny that in practice the OT connects blessing and deliverance (cf. e.g. pp34, 49); however he believes the two themes in principle separable, that only in certain theologies is blessing linked to particular acts of deliverance.

[70] Ps 28:9 is plausibly a prayer for ongoing protection of Israel, not primarily for help in the Psalmist's particular circumstances (references to which may be confined to vv1-5); in Ps 109:28 √ברך is doubtless used, as in Num 22-4, mainly to contrast with √קלל.

[71] Cf. Wehmeier (1970) p205, referring specifically to the Yahwist's concept of blessing; also above p105 on other Semitic evidence. Of course prosperity need not imply blessing: one prospering from wickedness, not Yhwh's favour, is not blessed (Mitchell (1987) p19).

[72] Cf. Mitchell (1987) pp75-6. עד־העולם is best taken as expressing the permanent availability of Yhwh's favour on Zion, rather than qualifying חיים.

[73] Classical Greek εὐδαίμων might be even more appropriate.

[74] In the OT whether or not animals might be happy or prosperous is hardly an issue.

flourishing.[75] In Ex 23:25 (וברך את־לחמך ואת־מימיך) the metonymy is clear: envisaged is the people having a plentiful supply of bread, not bread multiplying. Similarly in Deut 28:5 (ברוך טנאך ומשארתך) clearly the people, not the basket and kneading-bowl, experience the effect of the blessing. V4 speaks of blessing experienced in human, crop and animal fertility, and the blessing thus *might* affect humans, plants and animals alike. However we might wonder whether again the blessing is fundamentally the human prosperity to which such fertility would contribute.[76] In Ps 65:11[10] God blesses the growth of the field, but v10[9] shows that this is – at least in part – to provide humans with food. In Gen 27:27, the field which Yhwh has blessed could be simply a fertile field; but v28 makes clear the value of such a field to humans. We argue below (p130) that ברכה in Isa 65:8 does not denote simply a power of fertility. P's creation account employs √ברך three times, for blessings on birds and sea creatures (Gen 1:22), humans (v28) and the seventh day (2:3). The blessing on the seventh day presumably means that through it the creation will be prospered.[77] We must then ask whether the importance of the other things created lies in their relationship to humans, or somewhere else (their relationship to God, perhaps, or some intrinsic value). That Gen 1 prefaces a history focussing on humanity suggests that the former is at least an issue; indeed v14 states that the heavenly bodies are created *inter alia* to mark the time of festivals (מועדים), relevant only to humans. Thus the blessings on the Sabbath, and on the birds and sea creatures, surely point to their relevance to human flourishing. However it seems unlikely that this exhausts their significance: many of the creatures blessed (e.g. the תננים) do not obviously benefit humankind.[78] At the centre of the concept of blessing is human prosperity, but plausibly the sense occasionally extended to include fertility, for example, not certainly relevant to humanity.

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[75] '[I]m eigentlichen Sinne... segnet Gott Menschen und alles andere nur um der Menschen willen' (Horst (1947) p33); '[t]hings can only be blessed when they are a metonymy for the human beings who will benefit from their existence or use' (Taylor (1992) p292). Scharbert (1975) p295 suggests that the verb originally took humans as its object: only Gen 27:27 and Ex 23:25 of the texts referring to blessing on things does he consider precedes Deuteronomy.

[76] V11 thus interprets it: vv7-13a pick up and expand on the blessings of vv3-6 in reverse order. However vv7-13a 'highlight[] selected aspects of certain blessings that are not their only meanings, or not necessarily the ones intended in verses 3-6', v7, e.g., taking v6 as a reference to military activity (Tigay (1996) pp490-1).

[77] See in particular Westermann (1984) pp170-2.

[78] The original audience would scarcely have considered their role in the overall ecosystem.

For Pedersen,

> [b]lessing is the inner strength of the soul and the happiness it creates.[79]

Blessing is thus a power in and of itself; God blesses by acting on the person, who in turn affects his surroundings. (What follows responds to any suggestion that blessing is a power in its own right, not just Pedersen's location of that power in the soul.) However, the texts suggest not that a blessed person has some power which causes invulnerability in battle and fertility in what surrounds him, but that if a person is blessed Yhwh ensures fertility and protection.[80] Gen 27:27-9 (to take an example from a story where traces of blessing as 'a substance effective in itself' are sometimes found[81]) makes clear that agricultural fertility, and the rain that enables it, are gifts of God, not the result of blessing-power. Nor does Yhwh bestow on crops or animals a power of thriving when he blesses, but continuously provides that which enables their flourishing.[82] In Balaam's oracles, Israel's victories result from God's fighting for them (cf. Num 23:21-2; 24:8), not from powers they intrinsically possess. When Jacob brings prosperity to Laban (Gen 30:27), and Joseph to Potiphar (39:5; cf. v3), the text makes explicit that the prosperity results from Yhwh's action, not from power inherent in the patriarch.[83] We need not multiply examples further.

5.5 God's blessing

When God blesses, he bestows benefits, whose nature we have just discussed. Divine blessing need not involve speech.[84] Blessing-speeches are confined to Priestly texts in Genesis, and Isa 19:24-5:[85] even in these the speech may not be essential to the blessing-process, but at least in part a narrative technique for telling the audience the content of the blessing, or evoked by other themes in the context (e.g. the importance of the creative word in Gen 1[86]).

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[79] Pedersen (1926) p182; cf. also pp194-5.

[80] Cf. esp. Mitchell (1987) pp176-7.

[81] Cf. Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p277; contra e.g. Westermann (1978) pp54-5.

[82] Mowvley (1965) p75 sees blessing as primarily the potentiality for growth. He cites only Gen 1:22, 28, but even there God probably bestows ongoing favour in fulfilling their function not a one-off gift (cf. Mitchell (1987) pp62-3): God's making humankind in his image (v26a) probably already gives humans a function as his vice-regent (cf. v26b; so e.g. Wenham (1987) pp29-32).

[83] Mitchell (1987) pp70-1; contra e.g. Pedersen (1926) p191; Mowinckel (1962) p45.

[84] Contra e.g. Blank (1950) p79.

[85] Cf. Scharbert (1975) pp305-6.

[86] Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p277. Ps 109:28 might imply divine words of blessing to contrast with the human cursing/ reviling.

5.6 Humans blessing humans: especially √ברך piel

We begin our discussion with three key passages: Num 6:22-7; Gen 26:34-28:9; and Num 22-4. The first describes how the Aaronite priests are to bless Israel.[87] The blessing calls on Yhwh to favour the people and prosper them (cf. above p110). The narrative frame states that when the priests utter this formula, Yhwh will bless the people. The priests bless (√ברך piel v23) by invoking Yhwh's favour, which they can be sure will be forthcoming.[88] (ושמו את־שמי על־בני ישראל [v27] may refer to the utterance of Yhwh's name, or perhaps to a gesture accompanying the words; in context reference to the priests giving amulets bearing the blessing – similar sixth century amulets have been discovered – seems unlikely.[89]) The priests' words are thus effective because Yhwh has promised to respond to them – not because of power inherent in the words, or in the priests.[90]

Gen 26:34-28:9 has been discussed in ch2.2 above. We noted there (pp29-30) that it is assumed that Isaac's words once uttered have been effective and cannot be unsaid, probably because there was no convention of recalling a death-bed blessing. (On the use of actions in blessing, cf. below p116: the kiss [vv26-7] may be part of the bestowal of blessing, though it may alternatively or also be an ordinary sign of affection.) Vv27-8 (cf. above p114) show that Yhwh is seen as the dispenser of the prosperity sought in blessing (and cf. also לפני יהוה in v7): Esau's distress – and the subsequent careers of the brothers and their descendants – suggests that the blessing is not just an expression of Isaac's sentiments, but is expected actually to beget prosperity. Thus here again the effectiveness of human blessings is signalled: in response to a human blessing Yhwh grants prosperity. Equally, while the story emphasises the human power to bless, the wider context stresses the limitations of that power:[91] while Isaac cannot alter the effect of his action, the result of his blessing the 'wrong' son is furtherance of Yhwh's plan.

Numbers 22-4 also illustrates the power in human blessings, as has been discussed in ch2.3 (cf. especially pp31-34). Balak summons Balaam because he believes Balaam's

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[87] The reason for the unit's position within the text is unclear, since it has no obvious connection with what precedes or follows. For possible explanations and verdicts of *non liquet*, cf. e.g. Gray (1903) pp39, 71; Milgrom (1989) p51; Davies (1995) p67.

[88] Cf. Frettlöh (1998) p377.

[89] For the options, cf. Milgrom (1989) p52; Davies (1995) p69.

[90] Cf. e.g. Schottroff (1969) p171; Scharbert (1975) p290.

[91] Cf. Guillet (1969) p164.

cursing would diminish Israel's military effectiveness; Yhwh's evident concern that Balaam should not curse suggests that Balak's view is not fundamentally misguided. (Israel's being ברוך [22:12] does not imply that curses against her in principle cannot work, but states that Yhwh wants to prosper her [cf. 23:19-20].) Hence Balak's anger when Balaam does precisely the opposite of what he has requested: rather than bringing affliction on Israel, Balaam increases Israel's prosperity. He does this not by invoking Yhwh's favour, but by declaring what Yhwh will do. This is not merely prediction, but as it is declared Yhwh becomes committed to it. (The text stresses Yhwh's preparation of Balaam to say only what Yhwh wants, and does not explain what would have happened had Balaam spoken contrary to Yhwh's will.)

Appeal is often made in discussing blessing to the category of 'magic'.[92] However 'magic' can mean various things (and often indeed is not precisely defined) – indeed sometimes 'magical' practices are no different from 'religious' practices, except that those labelling them magical thereby indicate disapproval.[93] The term has generally been used in discussion of blessing to denote

> the idea that blessing can be acquired from sources other than God, or that

> there exist means by which blessing can be coerced from God.[94]

This quotation in itself illustrates one problem with the term, in that obviously power which is independent of God, and power which, though not independent of him, can be coerced are quite different.[95] We shall here concentrate on the issues that have been raised under the heading of 'magic' for the interpretation of blessing, rather than trying to define the term and asking whether blessing might fit into that. We have already seen (above pp104-105) that Israel's neighbouring cultures did not regard blessing as independent of the activity of deities. Clearly the Old Testament links it closely to Yhwh, and while one might seek to discover earlier conceptions behind the texts, many attempts to do this have presupposed naïve evolutionistic models presuming that 'religion' developed from some kind of animism (which possibly included belief in spirits, but not in deities).[96] One primary kind of

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[92] Cf. classically Hempel (1968). Wagner (1997) pp258-264 offers a recent discussion of the relationship between blessing and 'magic', aware of some of the issues mentioned here.

[93] Hutton (1995) p251: 'magic is little more than a label to de-legitimate what it is that »they« do – whoever »they« are'.

[94] Mitchell (1987) p171.

[95] It is unimportant for Mitchell's point in context, which is that blessing is neither.

[96] Cf. the discussion of Wagner (1997) pp259-262.

evidence invoked has been the use of gesture/ ritual acts in the transmission of blessing: the laying on of hands in Gen 48:14ff (vv17-20 showing that the right hand designated the one given precedence) being the clearest example, but perhaps also the kiss in Gen 27:26[97] and possibly the raising of the priests' hands in blessing.[98] However these gestures hardly establish that the blesser bestowed a power possessed independently of Yhwh: the gesture might symbolise Yhwh's bestowal of power (as anointing symbolises Yhwh's appointing someone king), or perhaps the human indeed transmits power but this power is still ultimately under Yhwh's control.[99] Somewhat different is Balak's choice of viewpoints for Balaam (Num 22:41; 23:13, 27), though again ideas of magical power need not be invoked: as blessings often take their inspiration from what is perceived (cf. 23:9; 24:5ff; Gen 27:27), so the viewpoint may influence their content; alternatively we should perhaps allow that deities might choose particular sites at which especially to interact with humans (as e.g. Yhwh in the temple).

Thiselton advanced discussion of blessing in the Bible by introducing into it the idea of 'performative language'.[100] In uttering particular words in a particular context one may describe, order, apologise, give, or perform various other actions (the action thus performed is termed the utterance's 'illocutionary force'). Conventions, including both linguistic usage and extra-linguistic fact, determine whether the act is successfully performed: one can give someone something by saying 'I hereby give you this', but only if (*inter alia*) one owns it; one can convict of a crime by saying 'Guilty' only if one is a jury foreman speaking at an appropriate moment in a trial or in certain other specifiable circumstances. We can thus speak of effective words without suggesting that words are intrinsically power-laden. Further the effect produced may, again quite unproblematically, bind others: a judge cannot ignore the jury's declaration of guilt on the grounds that (s)he personally believes the defendant innocent, since the jury convicts, rather than simply expressing an opinion. Thus perhaps a person by uttering certain words in certain circumstances may *bless*, i.e. effect blessing.

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[97] Cf. above p115. It has also been suggested that the meal was intended to give Isaac the strength necessary for blessing and that the text reflects a formal identification prior to the blessing proper (cf. e.g. Westermann (1985) p440).

[98] Num 6:27; cf. above p115.

[99] Mitchell (1987) p84 notes Num 27:18-20 and Deut 34:9 where laying-on of hands 'symbolizes physically the bestowal of God's spirit, authority, and responsibility'.

[100] Thiselton (1974); cf. also Austin (1962).

> [O]ne aspect of Israel's conventional view of reality was the acceptance that *certain* words are potentially power-laden and that *certain* persons in *socially and conventionally defined contexts* were effective word-wielders.[101]

Such persons and contexts would include, for example, priests in the temple, and fathers on their death-beds. However while the society may arbitrarily regulate the status of 'first-born' son, and hence allow a father on his death-bed to specify who shall have that status, can it think it chooses how and by whom divine blessing is bestowed?[102] Is it not more likely that a human who blesses is requesting God to act? Doubtless one can be (at least tolerably) certain that certain requests will be granted, such as perhaps a priest's request in the liturgy for God to favour his people. The Old Testament records a few clear requests to God to bless: Deut 26:15; 33:11; 2Sam 7:29 and Ps 28:9 all show a piel imperative of √ברך addressed to God; 1Chr 4:10 describes Jabez's invocation of God's blessing on himself as a request (√שאל); blessings may be formulated with the jussive (e.g. Gen 27:28-9; Num 6:24-6), perhaps a natural way of requesting God to do something. However it is an important principle of linguistics that illocutionary force is not restricted by grammatical form: 'the door is open' may be a statement, or a warning, or a command (equivalent to 'shut the door'). Further, there seems in principle no reason why God could not confer the authority to bestow blessing, binding himself to act in response to certain human actions, at least *ceteris paribus*.[103] Certainly Num 22-4 suggests that Balaam has authority to declare what God will do, not merely to present requests to God. Priests have authority to declare (certain) things clean or unclean, thereby stating how God views those things; why could they not also declare God's blessing authoritatively and effectually? Moreover that blessings are normally addressed to the person blessed, and not explicitly to the deity – sometimes not even mentioning him (e.g. Gen 24:60) – again indicates that they are thought to effect blessing rather than to request it.

Thus far our argument has primarily invoked three particular passages, each featuring a person or class whose blessing might well have particular weight. We must therefore ask whether anyone can bless. Deut 24:13 and 2Sam 14:22, for example, show

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[101] Hutton (1995) p254.

[102] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p174. Of course many societies do not see their organisation as merely a matter of revisable conventions.

[103] Cf. Scharbert (1975) p289; Taylor (1992) p276. On pp261-2 Taylor notes that any prayer assumes that divine purposes may require human co-operation for them to be effected.

that inferiors could utter blessings concerning their superiors;[104] Ruth 2:4, 2Ki 4:29 and Prov 27:14 suggest that blessings might be common in everyday life.[105] Nor are blessings restricted to those with whom one has a close relationship:[106] 2Ki 4:29 and Ps 129:8 imply one might bless anyone one meets. We shall discuss below whether √ברך necessarily always has some nuance of blessing, or whether it sometimes means approximately 'greet' or 'thank' (cf. also pp121-122 on the use of ברוך). However, if we accept that at least sometimes some nuance of blessing is present, we must ask where such utterances lie on the spectrum between effective words and requests. It seems entirely possible that, in appropriate circumstances, anyone might effectually declare God's blessing: to allow people to invoke prosperity upon a benefactor (e.g. Deut 24:13; 2Sam 14:22) hardly requires that they have great spiritual discernment, for example.[107] Equally, however, human blessings may sometimes have been requests to God. Generally we cannot determine which of these senses might be intended.

5.7 Greeting, thanking, congratulating

√ברך is often employed when people meet or part: it is thus used in greetings and farewells.

> In everyday Israelite speech, *brk* pi. (subj.: people, obj.: people) means, first, quite simply 'to greet' (Gen 47:7; 1 Sam 13:10; 25:14; 2 Sam 6:20; 2 Kgs 4:29; 10:15; Prov 27:14; 1 Chron 16:43), 'to bid farewell' (Gen 24:60; 28:1; 32:1; 47:10; Josh 22:6f.; 2 Sam 13:25; 19:40; cf. Ug. *KTU* 1.15.III.17), or 'to congratulate' (Exod 39:43; 2 Sam 8:10 = 1 Chron 18:10; 1 Kgs 1:47: Neh 11:2; oneself: Psa 49:19), 'to wish well' (Josh 14:13), 'to thank' (Deut 24:13; 2 Sam 14:22; Job 31:20), or 'to honor thankfully' (Prov 30:11).[108]

These uses presumably derive from the uttering of blessings on such occasions: cf. e.g. Gen 24:60; Ruth 2:4; ברוך is used in a congratulatory context in e.g. Gen 14:19 and Ex 18:10.

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[104] Cf. e.g. Scharbert (1975) pp291-2.

[105] Mitchell (1987) p107.

[106] Contra Scharbert (1975) p285 (though he suggests that in Ps 118:26 possession of the same faith is sufficient connection).

[107] Mitchell (1987) pp98-106 suggests that some human blessings may be based on the principle that God rewards those who act rightly (though he sees such blessings as requests). Cf. also p168.

[108] Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p271.

Such blessings were, at least originally, invocations of God's power:[109] that blessing formulas elaborated with regard to the future always talk of the prosperity of the recipient, and have little if any reference to the speaker, makes it improbable that their primary function is to establish relationship.[110] Even if

> [t]he common feature of all the meanings of *brk* is that blessing... is an act
> freely performed which expresses the grace and goodwill of the blesser. It
> has the connotation of a favorable relationship between the blesser and the
> person blessed[111]

this establishes very little about the word's meaning(s). For a common feature shared by two or more uses of a word is not the word's essential meaning, what is really being said on each occasion (when עלה√ hiphil denotes the bringing of an offering surely its primary force relates to the making of the offering, not the physical action of moving an object, though the latter is a common element shared with other uses of the hiphil). And doubtless bestowal of prosperity on a person correlates to a favourable relationship, but the action is essentially one of bestowing prosperity, not of manifesting or creating relationship.

However this does not establish whether the original force 'bless' is present in later uses of forms of ברך√: perhaps they became stereotyped, and used without a nuance of invoking divine favour. The piel might mean simply 'greet' etc.; 'God bless you' or some formula involving ברוך – which of course may not even mention the deity – might be simply a conventional element of greeting, departure or congratulation (the English 'goodbye' derives from an invocation of God's presence 'God be with you', but now expresses good wishes with no religious content). We shall argue below (pp127-128) that precisely such a shift has occurred when ברך√ is used in praise of God. There seems little which might help us distinguish between instances where nuances of blessing are still present and those where it has disappeared. However it seems unlikely that all nuance of blessing should have been lost from all uses of ברך√ in these contexts. Would invocation of Yhwh's favour on a departing friend or on a benefactor have been entirely displaced by a custom of using a form of words simply to express the speaker's goodwill, when those

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[109] Pedersen (1926) p202 suggests they established or confirmed psychic communion; however bidding someone to prosper when greeting or departing hardly needs explanation other than in terms of the norms of human interaction.

[110] Contra e.g. Horst (1947) p30; Helfmeyer (1974) p211; Scharbert (1975). We note above (p107) that ארר√ denotes affliction more than exclusion.

[111] Mitchell (1987) p2.

words could obviously equally bear the other meaning? Certainly it seems unhelpful to suggest that

> [t]hose who utter the benedictions normally do not expect them to be fulfilled in a striking manner[112]

and hence they have little religious content. For even priests blessing in the temple would presumably not expect their blessings to be 'fulfilled in a striking manner', though they might trust that Yhwh's favour thus invoked would cause those present to have at least a relatively successful life. Why might someone blessing in greeting or thanksgiving not hope that the words might make a small difference?

5.8 The word ברוך, especially as applied to humans

ברוך has been analysed in essentially three different ways: it may mean something akin to 'praised' or 'thanked', or be a stative form, or a qal passive participle meaning 'blessed'. We have argued (pp 104-105, 110-114) that the root's original meaning relates to the divine bestowal of prosperity. Of course a further sense might develop from its use in contexts of thanksgiving, praise etc.,[113] and this 'further' sense could conceivably be the only or the predominant one instantiated in the Old Testament.[114] However in, for example, Gen 27:29, 27:33, Num 24:9 and Deut 28:3-6 ברוך clearly refers to prosperity gained from blessing. In Judg 17:2 the primary force of the phrase ברוך בני ליהוה is more plausibly to cancel the curse which Micah the Ephraimite's mother had placed on the thief of her silver than to thank her son for his honesty.[115] When applied to Yhwh, ברוך does mean 'praised' or similar, and has no nuance of blessing (cf. below pp127-128), but the word may have different senses in different uses:[116] that it was applied to Yhwh in some particular instance would be sufficient signal that only certain of its range of meaning(s) were appropriate.[117] (LXX generally translates εὐλογητός when ברוך is applied to God, εὐλογημένος when it is

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[112] Mitchell (1987) p106.

[113] Since utterance of a ברוך-formula is typically evoked by a recent action which benefited the speaker – often specified by a clause introduced by כי or אשר (e.g. 1Sam 23:21; 2Sam 2:5) – it can clearly function to express thanks. However, in Gen 14:19 Abraham is not thanked, since Melchizedek has not benefited from his action (Scharbert (1973a) p10).

[114] Scharbert (1975) pp284-8 attempts to explain at least many of the OT's uses of ברוך thus.

[115] Contra Scharbert (1975) pp284-5.

[116] Contra e.g. Scharbert (1975) p287; Scharbert (1973a) pp26-7.

[117] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p146: '[o]ne of the most common causes of meaning change is a change in the referent of a word'.

applied to a human, perhaps suggesting that some difference was perceived between the usage – though the practice is not uniform, and 'the manuscripts frequently confuse these two forms'.[118] Use of forms of εὐλογ- may not reflect a perception that blessing necessarily involves speech,[119] but the development of a word whose secular sense is sometimes appropriate to cover other meanings of a Hebrew concept lacking obvious Greek equivalent.[120]) ברוך thus in origin related to blessing, and retained this sense at least sometimes when applied to humans. However its use in contexts of praising/ thanking may also have made it occasionally stereotypical, with any nuance of blessing at best secondary to the function of expressing praise/ thanks. Thus when in 1Sam 25:33 ברוך is applied to Abigail's טעם presumably Abigail's judgement is praised, though plausibly an indirect blessing on her is also intended. As we suggested above, evidence is generally lacking to assess how strong a sense of blessing is present on each occasion, but its possible absence sometimes hardly implies uniform weakening of the word.

Were ברוך a stative form, analogous might be such words as אנוש, בטוח, עצום, ידוע, זכור, and אמון,[121] or נדול and קדוש.[122]

> The man who has the blessing within himself is *bārūkh*, full of blessing.
>
> We render this word by 'blessed', but ought not to put a passive meaning into it, as if it designated one on whom a blessing had been pronounced. It does not designate a man with whom something has been done, but a man possessing a power, a capable, vigorous man, full of *b^erākhā*.[123]

However since blessing as experienced by humans refers essentially to the ongoing bestowal of prosperity from God (above p114) – and is not a power which someone might possess, and which might flow from its possessor to another – ברוך applied to one who has just performed some commendable action cannot describe the person as 'the originator of a healthful situation' or 'equipped by Yahweh with benevolent power'.[124] Further, ברוך as a

[118] Scharbert (1975) p302.

[119] So Scharbert (1975) p302.

[120] Cf. Beyer (1964) pp754-5.

[121] Pedersen (1926) p518.

[122] Wehmeier (1970) p131.

[123] Pedersen (1926) p199.

[124] Contra e.g. Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p269. Cf. also Mitchell (1987) p112.

passive would mean 'one (continually) gifted with prosperity by God' and thus would describe a person as prosperous without necessarily implying a particular earlier act by which God had pronounced or imparted blessing. However in Gen 27:33 and Deut 7:14 the status of ברוך is clearly consequent on a previous act of blessing, in the former a human blessing, in the latter, blessing from Yhwh (√ברך piel occurs twice in v13[125]): passive sense thus seems highly appropriate, though indeed as a result of blessing one might be described as 'prospering', not 'blessed'. The use of ברוך in the construct (Gen 24:31; 26:29; Isa 65:23) certainly supports a passive understanding (cf. the similar construction with the pual participle in Deut 33:13): in each case 'blessed by Yhwh' makes perfect sense, while 'prosperous and belonging to Yhwh', as required by the stative interpretation, seems hardly appropriate since nothing suggests possession by Yhwh is an issue.[126]

ברוך is commonly found as a predicate in verbless clauses (which I shall label VBCs, i.e. verbless ברוך clauses). In at least arguably similar clauses the jussive of √היה occurs in Ruth 2:19, Prov 5:18 and (with אל) Jer 20:14; the indicative of √היה occurs in Gen 27:33 and Deut 7:14. In e.g. Deut 33:24 and 2Sam 2:5-6 a clause formulated in the jussive invoking Yhwh's favour follows a VBC; in 1Sam 26:25 a statement in the indicative of David's future success follows a VBC (cf. also 1Ki 2:45). However we must be cautious about inferring illocutionary force from grammatical form (cf. above p118): while, for example, a jussive will not be used for a descriptive statement it need not indicate a prayer rather than an effectual word. Moreover, while the clauses formulated with ברוך and the jussive of √היה *may* be no more than a different formulation of the VBCs, making explicit implied jussive force, equally the different formulation might express different meaning, indicating a development in the language[127] rather than revealing what was meant all along. Both Gen 27:33 and Deut 7:14 report the result of a blessing just mentioned, and thus might differ from other VBCs which have no such context. A clause in the indicative following a VBC might be an effectual word in itself, or depict what will eventuate if a blessing (effectual word or prayer) is successful, or be parallel to a VBC which simply states that a person will be blessed: i.e. such clauses seem in principle compatible with any analysis of the VBC.

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[125] Mitchell (1987) p40.

[126] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p68 (noting for the construction *GKC* §116l), against Wehmeier (1970) pp115-7.

[127] So e.g. Wagner (1997) pp276-7, suggesting they mark part of a process in which blessings changed from effectual words into prayers for Yhwh to bless.

Twice VBCs are clearly not descriptive statements: in Judg 17:2 surely the mother is not stating that Yhwh will favour her son (could she be certain his change of heart would bring such reward?) but rather seeking to ensure he is at least not harmed by the curse; in Isa 19:25 the VBC is explicitly a word of blessing spoken by Yhwh. Moreover no VBC requires analysis as a descriptive statement. Deut 28:1-13 describes the results of Israel's obedience to the law, and the VBCs of vv3-6 may simply form part of that description.[128] However plausibly they are rather effective declarations of blessing, bringing prosperity on those who are obedient, with vv7-13 (which might be either descriptive or effectual) indicating the content of this prosperity: the blessings of obedience (v2) are thus created, not just described, by vv3ff. Hence VBCs are most probably not simply statements that someone(s) will be prospered (cf. also above pp106-107 on אָרוּר). In Deut 28 they seem effectual words, not prayers; the VBC in Isa 19:25 is spoken by Yhwh, and hence clearly not a prayer. No VBC demands analysis as a prayer, though equally in most cases such analysis cannot be excluded. Perhaps sometimes VBCs are more prayers than effectual words, as sometimes they are more expressions of thanks or congratulations than blessings. But they may well normally be intended as effective invocations of Yhwh's favour.[129]

Seven times a person or group is בָּרוּךְ לַיהוה (Judg 17:2; Ruth 2:20; 3:10; 1Sam 15:13; 23:21; 2Sam 2:5; Ps. 115:15); in Gen 14:19 Abraham is בָּרוּךְ... לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן. The לְ may denote the agent who is to bestow prosperity.[130] However this also could be a passive transform of √בָּרַךְ piel + לְ,[131] a construction not instantiated in the Old Testament (Gen 27:7 has √בָּרַךְ piel + לִפְנֵי) but found in Hebrew inscriptions: in Aramaic inscriptions

bryk l and *bryk qdm* alternate without significant difference in meaning,

suggesting that the former may mean 'blessed to', 'blessed before'.[132] This evidence does not seem compelling; in any case it would not much affect our assessment of the

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[128] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p40.

[129] Wagner (1997) pp278-9 suggests that VBCs enable expression of a blessing without drawing attention to the speaker's role in its transmission. However Num 6:24-6 equally makes no mention of the speaker, and stresses that the blessing comes from Yhwh, yet is still an effective word (above p115).

[130] Cf. e.g. *JM* §132f for agentive lamed.

[131] Regarding the construction as a passive transform seems preferable to speaking of a *lamed relationis*.

[132] Quote from Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p269. For the inscriptions cf. conveniently Wagner (1997) pp256-7, 268. See also briefly *JM* §132f; in more detail Scharbert (1991).

construction's meaning: for under both analyses the prepositional phrase functions to make explicit the deity from whom the prosperity wished must ultimately come.[133] But why this occasional explicitness? Since blessing was never independent of deities, the prepositional phrase does not function to make explicit that the blessing is theistic, not animistic/'magical'.[134] The phrase might serve to make clear *which* deity was being invoked.[135] While within the Old Testament Yhwh might seem the only possible source of blessing, that is the result of the processes which formed the canon: in ancient Israel one could seek prosperity from various deities. A construction enabling invocation of a particular deity would thus be useful, and that construction might become a set formula sometimes employed even when no particular emphasis was laid on the invocation of Yhwh rather than some other deity[136] (thus my next suggestion about the formula's *function* in the Old Testament does not exclude the possibility that in *origin* it specified the particular deity invoked). A further possibility is that the construction functioned to indicate that a particular use of ברוך was not merely a conventional greeting or congratulation, but an invocation of Yhwh;[137] or that the construction indeed makes the blessing more emphatic. These last options seem to me very plausible, though space precludes detailed examination of the texts to establish it.

5.9 The word אשרי

אשרי[138] describes people as fortunate, whether because of their present position (e.g. 1Ki 10:8; Ps 144:15) or because of what will happen to them in the future (e.g. Ps 41:2[1]; Isa 30:18).[139] Ps 128 links it closely with √ברך: the person prospered through fearing Yhwh is called אשרי in vv1-2, while v4 calls him blessed (√ברך pual). Moses' final blessing of

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[133] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p112.

[134] Contra e.g. Müller (1969) p138.

[135] Cf. Wagner (1997) pp258-266, also suggesting that the ל-phrase clarifies that a blessing is not intended as 'magical'.

[136] Only in Gen 14:19 might the source of the blessing need specification. In the case of Ps 115:15 idols have not been mentioned since v8, while vv12-13 have mentioned Yhwh's blessing. Further, each of vv9-18 contains יה/יהוה.

[137] I.e. it does not theologise an originally non-theological concept but retheologises a phrase becoming at least sometimes non-theological.

[138] On which see especially Janzen (1965); Mitchell (1987) pp180-1; Taylor (1992) pp21-9.

[139] Mitchell (1987) p180; Käser (1970) p245.

Israel ends (Deut 33:29) by describing Israel as אשרי.[140] In general the quality of life of a person who is אשרי is the same as that of one who has received blessing.[141] However אשרי – unlike ברוך, to which it might seem at least to approximate in meaning – is always descriptive, being never used to invoke blessing;[142] consequentially it never occurs on the lips of God;[143] moreover it is not used as a greeting. It is also not found in opposition to ideas of cursing.[144] אשרי thus describes a person/ group as prosperous, but apparently makes no intrinsic reference to the prosperity's source.[145] The similarities between Jer 17:7 and Ps 40:5 may suggest that אשרי and ברוך can have near-identical meanings in certain contexts,[146] but hardly establish complete synonymy between the words, certainly not over their entire semantic range. In the Old Testament אשרי-status often depends on Yhwh (e.g. Job 5:17; Ps 146:5[147]); but this could be due to the nature of the literature, rather than intrinsic connection of the word to divine activity. Not that אשרי is necessarily 'more secular' than ברוך:[148] that 26 of its 44 occurrences are in the Psalter suggests that it is completely comfortable in explicitly religious contexts. However its not infrequent use in wisdom literature (7x in Proverbs; Job 5:17; Eccl 10:17; in the Psalter it sometimes occurs in contexts with affinities to wisdom literature, e.g. Ps 1:1; 34:9[8][149]) might suggest that it equally suited not-explicitly religious contexts.

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[140] Cf. also Ps 72:17; Mal 3:10-12.

[141] Janzen (1965) p223.

[142] Deut 33:29 could be an effectual word of blessing, but if so it is expressed as a description of Israel's future state.

[143] Janzen (1965) pp223-4.

[144] Janzen (1965) p220; contra e.g. Wehmeier (1970) pp105-6, suggesting formal opposition to הוי or אוי.

[145] Cf. Brown (1996) p763. Contra Janzen (1965) pp225-6, אשרי has no obvious intrinsic connotation of envious desire: its non-application to God is doubtless because God does not prosper as humans.

[146] Mitchell (1987) p181.

[147] Cf. Käser (1970) p237.

[148] Cazelles (1974) p446, following H.-J. Kraus; though Cazelles equally suggests that אשרי was a 'liturgical cry' used in the Second Temple.

[149] Cf. Sæbø (1997) pp195-6.

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Thus the meaning of אשרי is not unrelated to that of forms of בר͏ך√, but a distinction can be drawn. The distinction could be over-played: context often shows that אשרי refers to prosperity bestowed by God, so the word hardly affirms that the source of the prosperity is unknown or unimportant. Nevertheless to describe the bestowal of prosperity, not just the prosperity bestowed, or to effect such bestowal, בר͏ך√ must be employed.

5.10 Humans blessing God

Since our primary concern is the meaning of בר͏ך√ applied to humans we need not discuss in detail its application to God (which, as noted above p105, seems distinctively Hebrew). Clearly it expresses praise of or thanks to God – nowhere is an alternative meaning indicated. Words which parallel the piel include הלל√ piel (Ps 104:35;145:2), ידה√ hiphil (Ps 100:4; 145:10), שיר√ qal and בשר√ piel (Ps 96:2), רום√ polel (Ps 145:1).[150] In Ps 18:47[46] ירום אלוהי ישעי parallels צורי ברוך; in Ps 135:21 ברוך יהוה is combined with הללו-יה. This usage probably arose by analogy from that in contexts of praising or thanking humans (we note below passages employing בר͏ך√ where both God and humans are thanked/ praised). It is implausible that Israelites ever believed that they could increase a deity's power by blessing:[151] even if sacrifices could be conceived as in some way meeting the deity's needs, בר͏ך√ is connected with praising – particularly extra-cultic praising (Gen 14:20; Ex 18:10; 1Ki 5:21[7] etc.) – not particularly with sacrificing.[152] Nor does ברוך describe the deity as possessor or source of blessing:[153] blessing in general is not something a deity might possess, but rather the human prosperity that might be bestowed;[154] while ברוך *might* thus describe a deity as bestower of blessing, the word's vowel-pattern hardly encourages such an interpretation. Moreover in 1Ki 5:21[7] (ברוך יהוה היום...) Yhwh has bestowed no particular blessing that day, while Hiram might well express his desire to praise God on this occasion.[155] Further, though it may be a sound theological principle that

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[150] Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p272.

[151] Contra e.g. Hempel (1968) pp96-7; Mowinckel (1962) pp46-7.

[152] Pace Taylor (1992) pp94-5.

[153] Contra Wehmeier (1970) p131.

[154] Mitchell (1987) p148.

[155] Wehmeier (1970) pp127-8 considers היום a secondary liturgical addition; however only a few Greek manuscripts omit, while 2Chr 2:11[12] reformulates the verse in various ways (2Chr 6:19 also omits the היום of 1Ki 8:28).

praise is an appropriate response to God's beneficence, that is not obviously enshrined in the meaning of ברך√:[156] in the human case there is no obvious connotation of rendering a benefit *in return for something*.

However, the meaning of ברך√ applied to God need not be in all respects the same as when applied to a human. When the piel has a human object, the semantics are different depending on whether the subject is Yhwh, who bestows prosperity, or a human who bestows Yhwh's gift of prosperity (or perhaps requests Yhwh to grant prosperity). In 1Chr 29:20, when the people bowed before or did reverence to Yhwh and the king (וישתחוו ליהוה ולמלך) the verb's nuance plausibly differs somewhat with respect to each of its objects, though this is not marked syntactically.[157] Similarly in 2Chr 31:8 (ויברכו את־יהוה ואת עמו ישראל) God may simply be praised, while blessing may also be invoked on Israel (cf. also 1Sam 25:32-3). In Gen 14:19-20 the syntax even marks the difference between application of ברוך to God (v20) and Abraham (v19): for Abraham is ברוך לאל עליון, while v20 obviously contains no parallel prepositional phrase.

5.11 The pual

Ps 128:4 sums up the prosperity of the one who fears Yhwh, described in vv1-3, with כֵן יְבֹרַךְ, the pual serving as passive of a piel denoting God's bestowing prosperity. In Ps 113:2 Yhwh is praised with יהי שם יהוה מברך, the pual being passive of a piel denoting praise of God. In Num 22:6, Balak tells Balaam ידעתי את אשר־תברך מברך, the pual here the passive of a piel denoting a human blessing another human. Hence plausibly the pual could express the passive of any piel sense: it would be hazardous to suggest that the pual could not take a particular force only because none of the Old Testament's thirteen puals instantiate that sense. It would also be hazardous, given the limited evidence, to argue that the pual participle and ברוך are used to signal distinct meanings. Both מברך in Num 22:6 and ברוך in Gen 27:33 describe someone who will be prosperous because of a human blessing successfully accomplished. While conceivably the latter might mean 'prospered by God', the former 'blessed by a human and hence prospered by God', such nuances are certainly not obvious in the contexts.[158] The blessing invoked on Joseph's land with מברכת

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[156] Contra Mitchell (1987) p147; Frettlöh (1998), e.g. pp29, 386-7.

[157] Mitchell (1987) p137.

[158] Though cf. Silva (1983) pp163-9 on semantic neutralisation, the principle that a distinction between the meanings of two words in certain contexts may simply be absent in other contexts.

יהוה ארצו (Deut 33:13) hardly expresses anything significantly different to the blessing on Asher formulated with ברוך (v24).[159] Likewise there is no obvious distinction in the meaning of the participles between יהי שם יהוה מברך מעתה ועד־עולם in Ps 113:2 and ברוך שם כברו לעולם in Ps 72:19.

5.12 The word ברכה

God's ברכה causes prosperity. When he blesses Potiphar's house (ברך√ piel) the ברכת יהוה is upon all Potiphar possesses (Gen 39:5); to avoid famine in the jubilee, he undertakes to send his blessing (וצויתי את־ברכתי) in the previous year to produce a crop large enough for several years (Lev 25:21); his blessing makes rich (Prov 10:22). Not that the ברכה is a force which Yhwh may employ, or somehow separable from Yhwh. Rather, to speak of his blessing is to speak of his activity of prospering: his ברכה may sometimes apparently be reified or personified, but this is analogous to similar uses of, for example, his 'name' or his 'word' (e.g. Ps 54:3[1]; Isa 55:11);[160] to produce prosperity he works directly on the powers of nature (cf. Deut 28:11-12), rather than through intermediate powers.[161]

ברכה also can denote (part of) the prosperity that results from God's blessing: cf. Ps 21:4[3], 7[6];[162] Prov 28:20; Joel 2:14. In Deut 11:26-7; 28:2; 30:1, 19, ברכה seems to denote both the activity of blessing and the resultant prosperity.[163] In Gen 49:25-6 the blessings are apparently the things that contribute to prosperity – rain, dew, crops, fertile wombs, ?protection (cf. vv23-25a).[164] What Jacob grants by his blessing surpasses the great fertility of the hills: there is not a comparison of Jacob's blessing-power with that of the mountains (as e.g. NRSV's 'The blessings of your father are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains...' might suggest).[165] Nor is the text concerned with fertility in the

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[159] Cf. Mitchell (1987) pp89-90.

[160] Taylor (1992) p123.

[161] Mitchell (1987) pp39, 71.

[162] On which see further below p132.

[163] Cf. Mitchell (1987) pp40-1.

[164] The parallel Deut 33:13-16 stresses the yield from the earth, though the significant differences between the passages make it quite possible that deliberate reinterpretation is at work.

[165] On נברו על, see Sarna (1989) p344; emendation of הורי to הררי makes good sense of what is otherwise obscure (cf. e.g. Sarna (1989) p345), but more extensive emendation (cf. e.g. Speiser (1969) pp369-70) seems unnecessary.

abstract, but with fertility as it contributes to Joseph's prosperity. In general God gives blessing to people, not to things (e.g. Lev 25:21; Deut 12:15; 28:8; Ps 3:9[8]), and thus ברכה refers more to his prospering than his making fertile. When ברכה comes upon Potiphar's possessions (Gen 39:5), the point is clearly the benefit to Potiphar, not the fertility of crops and herds *per se* (and might the blessing 'in the house' include business success?).

It is sometimes suggested that Isa 65:8 is a fragment of a song, or alternatively a proverb,[166] and hence might preserve an archaic usage of ברכה. However equally plausibly the words are merely what any person might say in the circumstances indicated. If תירוש, the juice from which wine can be made,[167] is found in a cluster of grapes the cluster will not be destroyed. This is used as an analogy to how Yhwh will treat his people: he will not destroy them all because of the potential within. Further details of the analogy are somewhat obscure:[168] does the image relate to pruning (though תירוש would not obviously be found until later in the grapes' development), or to harvest (though comparison to grapes cut from the vine, soon to have their juice removed, would not necessarily be comforting)? Does the productivity of the cluster save the whole vine (though the suffixes in תשחיתהו and בו would naturally refer only to the cluster)? However our concern is primarily with the meaning of ברכה. It need not have a non-theological meaning of 'vitality', 'power that makes for growth': if it does refer to the power for growth in the cluster, nothing in context denies that such power might be God-given,[169] or that the purpose of the power might be to produce growth for the sake of humans. Yet equally plausibly ברכה refers specifically to the benefit the grapes could be to humans: included in the prosperity God may bestow is wine (cf. Gen 27:28; Deut 7:13).[170] The cluster is not discarded because it is valuable, because it can be a blessing to humans.

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[166] Cf. variously Skinner (1898) p214; Westermann (1969) p404; Watts (1987) p344.

[167] תירוש normally denotes wine, but in Mic 6:15 apparently has this meaning (Mitchell (1987) p66).

[168] Taylor (1992) p208 suggests Isa 65:8 is 'an incidental illustration', which should not be pushed too far.

[169] Cf. e.g. Westermann (1969) p404; Whybray (1975) p272.

[170] Mitchell (1987) p66, noting that if the image relates to harvest, the grapes will not grow further.

ברכה can also denote a blessing given by a human, either the words of blessing, or the prosperity caused by such words, or both:[171] it seems unlikely that in e.g. Gen 27:12, 36; 49:26; Deut 33:1; Job 29:13 we will be able to restrict the meaning to one or other of these senses, though in e.g. Deut 33:1 it might well seem that the ברכה is at least primarily the words Moses is about to speak, while in Gen 49:26 ברכת אביך refers primarily to the results of Jacob's blessing (above p129). In Zech 8:13, ברכה seems to denote the use of a name in a formula of blessing.[172] As Israel has been a קללה – her punishment made other peoples curse their enemies by wishing them to become like Israel – so when Yhwh saves her others will use Israel's name in invoking blessings.[173] We might compare Gen 48:20, where Ephraim and Manasseh are blessed by being told that others in blessing will say the (זכר צדיק לברכה ושם רשעים ירקב) Prov 10:7. ישמך אלהים כאפרים וכמנשה. antithesis with the second clause is the main indication of the force of the first clause, which thus probably refers to the preservation of the fame of the righteous. The antithesis would be exact were it stated that the names of righteous people will continue to be used in invocations of blessing.[174] A meaning that the memory of the righteous will be admired would also produce a good antithesis, though this would require an unparalleled sense for ברכה.[175] That the memory of the righteous might be a source of prosperity,[176] presumably as an example which others might follow,[177] would more obviously contrast with the maleficent effects of the wicked than with their name being forgotten; moreover the example would be at best an indirect cause of blessing (that others follow it would be the direct cause). Hence most plausibly ברכה here means 'formula of blessing'.

Thus a person said to be a ברכה may be a byword of blessing. Elsewhere it seems to mean that (s)he is signally in receipt of blessing. (Since a person's name functions as a byword of blessing precisely because (s)he has been signally blessed, we perhaps should not

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[171] Cf. Scharbert (1975) pp297-8; Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p275 finds this ambiguity in Gen 27.

[172] So e.g. Wehmeier (1970) p99; Scharbert (1975) p300; Mitchell (1987) pp59-60.

[173] On קללה, cf. above p108.

[174] So Wehmeier (1970) p100.

[175] Mitchell (1987) p118 suggests Ezek 34:26 and Ps 37:26, though even on his account (pp52-3) the blessing received in these is material.

[176] *BDB* p139b.

[177] Cf. McKane (1970) p423 (which in my opinion is unclear on precisely what sense is ascribed to the word).

seek to draw a sharp line between the two uses.[178]) This seems clear in Isa 19:24-5: Israel, Egypt and Assyria are a ברכה because Yhwh has blessed them. There is no suggestion that these peoples might be acting as a source of blessing for others:[179] indeed possibly the three peoples symbolise the entire world.[180] In Ezek 34:26 the text is probably corrupt, since סביבות seems to require את before it, and the reference of גבעתי is entirely unclear (Ezekiel avoids reference to Zion[181]). Drastic surgery cannot be excluded, for example BHS's ונתתי את־הרביבים בעתם, which (if ברכה is retained[182]) would make the blessing rain, as later in the verse. However if one retains MT, or something close to it, the sense of ברכה seems clearly 'recipient of blessing':[183] the context stresses the prosperity the people will enjoy, because of great fertility and protection from foes and wild animals; nothing suggests they act as a source of prosperity for others.[184] Ps 37 describes the reward God gives the righteous. Hence v26 is unlikely to refer to their children bringing prosperity to others.[185] Rather, as in v25, the behaviour of the righteous ensures their descendants' prosperity. Hence ברכה most probably means 'recipient of blessing' here, though 'formula of blessing' cannot be excluded since the good name of their descendants would be an entirely suitable reward for the righteous.[186]

Thus ברכה is not used to describe a person as a source of blessings. Ps 21:7[6] is no exception: it seems better to take the suffix on תשיתהו as an indirect object, and ברכות as

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[178] Cf. Taylor (1992) pp216-7, suggesting the word has both forces in Zech 8:13.

[179] Contra e.g. Wehmeier (1970) pp87-8; Clements (1980) p172; Wildberger (1997) p280; Mitchell (1987) p55.

[180] Emendation of ברכו in v25 to בְּרָכָה would strengthen this suggestion: v25 would then state that Yhwh blesses the whole earth in blessing these peoples.

[181] So Block (1998) p305; however, against Block, the whole land could hardly be described as 'my hill'.

[182] It is deleted by e.g. Zimmerli (1983) p210.

[183] So e.g. Mitchell (1987) pp52-3; Block (1998) pp294, 305.

[184] Contra *BDB* p139b.

[185] Wehmeier (1970) p100; Mitchell (1987) pp50-1; contra e.g. Anderson (1972) p298.

[186] Mitchell (1987) p51 rejects the latter (against Wehmeier (1970) p100) since '[t]he children are blessed, but not to an extreme degree'. However why might they not prosper sufficiently that others regard their life as enviable?

in v4[3] to denote benefits given by God[187] – which would fit well with the reference in the second half of the verse to God's making the king glad – than to suggest that God here makes the king a source of benefits to others.[188] Hence in Gen 12:2 we should expect it to mean either 'recipient of blessing' or 'formula of blessing': both suggestions have at least *prima facie* plausibility. We return to this below (chs6.2, 6.3.7)

Three further uses of ברכה require brief notice:

1) ברכה can denote a gift, given as an attempt to appease (Gen 33:11; 1Sam 25:27) or an expression of thanks (1Sam 30:26; 2Ki 5:15). The usage presumably derives from the fact that the good things given would contribute to the recipient's prosperity.[189]

2) In Neh 9:5 ברכה denotes the praise of God (cf. the parallel תהלה; also 2Chr 20:26) – a usage common in the Qumran texts and other post-biblical Jewish literature.[190]

3) In 2Ki 18:31=Isa 36:16 ברכה seems a technical term, perhaps referring to the blessing clauses at the end of a treaty, and hence by metonymy to the whole treaty[191] – though the Rabshakeh apparently also suggests that Israel will gain prosperity from treating with Assyria.

5.13 Conclusion

There is not one meaning associated with all forms of √ברך. When applied to God as object they refer to praise (or similar). In relation to humans, whether explicitly or by metonymy, they standardly have something to do with prosperity bestowed by God, as a result of a human invocation of such prosperity or simply on account of the divine will. Sometimes this sense seems somewhat attenuated, and at issue when a human 'blesses' is a greeting, congratulating, praising or similar at least as much as anything to do with the bestowal of prosperity. However it is not clear that the latter nuance ever completely disappears. Human blessings are sometimes more than requests to Yhwh to grant

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[187] Cf. above p129.

[188] So e.g. Briggs and Briggs (1906) p185; RSV ('[t]hou dost make him most blessed for ever'); Mitchell (1987) p74; contra e.g. *BDB* p139b; Hempel (1968) p38; Köckert (1988) p277; cf. Anderson (1972) p181.

[189] Cf. Wehmeier (1970) p92. Less plausibly Guillet (1969) pp166-8; Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p275; Mitchell (1987) p126.

[190] Cf. e.g. Wehmeier (1970) pp100-1; Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p275.

[191] So Wehmeier (1970) p94; Mitchell (1987) p44. Less plausibly Horst (1947) p31 and Scharbert (1958) p19 suggest a blessing may have been a way to acknowledge a new suzerain.

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prosperity: humans have the authority, in certain circumstances, to make effective declarations of blessing. In general there is a close link in the senses they can express between the various verbal forms of the root, and between them and ברכה (though the sense of 'praise' for the latter is only apparent twice in the Old Testament and seems to have been a late development).

Chapter 6

Genesis 12:3

6.1 Genesis 1-11

6.1.1 Introduction

Gen 12:1-3 does not begin a work *in medias res*, but continues the story of Gen 1-11. We must therefore ask what contextualisation chs1-11 provide for Yhwh's initial address to Abraham as a first step in the interpretation of Gen 12:1-3 (which continues in chs6.2 and 6.3).

6.1.2 Is there a 'primeval history'?

The most significant structural marker in Genesis is the formula אלה תולדות,[1] which provides verbal links within Genesis, but also stresses the genealogical continuity at its heart: Israel's ancestors, and those of all peoples, are traced back to Adam.[2] Indeed, the formula takes that continuity beyond Adam, since in 2:4a it introduces the account of Adam and Eve's creation, marking their continuity with the initial creation of 1:1-2:3. For since elsewhere[3] the formula uniformly heads a unit, and names the progenitor not the progeny, 2:4a begins the story of what arises from the universe established in 1:1-2:3, rather than acting as a concluding summary of that unit.[4] The formula introduces very diverse material, ranging from genealogy with little or no story (e.g. ch5; 11:10-26), to story with little genealogical component: the תלדות יעקב (37:2) begins after the birth of Jacob's children, and while it recounts the birth of a few of his grandchildren, this is hardly a major concern. The formula thus characterises the whole as a story of origins, rather than signalling the particular character of parts of the text.

However the formula serves to mark division as well as to unite. 2:4a explains the continuity of what follows with what precedes, but also marks the transition from the creation account in 1:1-2:3 to the story of 2:4bff which both recapitulates aspects of the former (for example, in giving its own account of the creation of humanity) and extends it.

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[1] See above p19

[2] Cf. Childs (1979) p158: '[t]he same history-like story extends from Genesis 1 to 50 which is set in a genealogical framework of human history'.

[3] Besides the instances in Genesis, cf. Num 3:1; Ruth 4:18; 1Chr 1:29.

[4] Cf. e.g. Childs (1979) p146; Stordalen (1992). Contra e.g. Westermann (1984) p81; Renaud (1990) pp15-17.

5:1 signals the beginning of the genealogy linking Adam and Noah, clearly a new section in Genesis. Yet we must not exaggerate the character of the divisions. For while אלה תולדת in 6:9 serves to mark a beginning for the flood story, clearly vv5-8 (if not also vv1-4) form important background for it. Thus while the תולדות-formulae at 11:10, 27 mark out what follows as a new stage in the ongoing account, the significance of the division is not immediately apparent. Whether there is in either of these places (or indeed at 10:1) a break between 'primeval' and 'patriarchal' stories must therefore be assessed on other grounds. However if we cannot find a break where a significant structural marker is found, we may well question whether Genesis sharply distinguishes between primeval and patriarchal times – the genealogical structure maintained throughout rather suggests that there is never radical discontinuity with what had gone before,[5] even though

> [t]he Masoretes and the Midrash already understood Gen 1-11 and 12-50 as two books.[6]

Genesis does not obviously distinguish between symbolic stories and historical report.[7] Chs1-11 are not simply allegorical. Most of the characters in the genealogies of 4:17-5:32 are merely names, apparently functioning to provide genealogical links, rather than having symbolic value (or, indeed, being brief allusions to stories known by the book's original audience). Adam is clearly representative 'Man', and is often referred to as האדם, 'the man'.[8] However we cannot infer from his representative function that he is not also regarded as an actual person:[9] the story does not just illustrate God's requirements that all people obey his injunctions and worship him aright,[10] but seeks to explain *inter alia* labour-pains and the difficulty of agriculture, which humans now surely inherit rather than cause

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[5] While what follows the flood is 're-creation', it involves Noah *and his children* who ensure continuity with what precedes, even with the wickedness of humanity, (8:21; cf. 6:5): the Noah-cycle bridges the pre- and post-flood periods (Clark (1972) pp209-10).

[6] Westermann (1984) p585, referring to L. Blau.

[7] Cf. Van Seters (1992) p332; also p30 where he suggests that the Greeks blurred such a distinction.

[8] אדם without article or prefixed preposition first occurs in 4:25 (except 1:26, referring to humanity, male and female, not a person Adam; 2:5 likewise seems to refer to generic humanity). In 2:20, 3:17, 21 MT points לאדם anarthrously, but the frequent use of האדם in the context makes questionable whether a proper name (as in MT?) is the best interpretation.

[9] Contra e.g. Fokkelman (1975) pp41-2.

[10] For these themes, cf. Wenham (1987) pp61-2, 65-6, 86, 91; Moberly (1988a).

for themselves through their own disobedience.[11] (Similarly in ch22, Abraham is both a historical figure on whose obedience the promises to Israel can be grounded, and a paradigm of the faithful response required from everyone.[12])

We also must not overstress the distinction between the universal and the particular. Much of Genesis 1-11 tells of humanity as a whole, while much of chs12ff is particular to Israel. However not all of chs1-11 is exactly universal: ch10 recounts the beginnings of the particular nations, and immediately previously (9:25-7) some nations are made subservient to others. Nor is all after ch12 particular to Israel: we learn, for example, of the origins of the Moabites and Ammonites (19:30-8), Ishmaelites (25:12-18) and Edomites (36:1-43).[13] Lot's rescue from Sodom's destruction parallels the rescue of Noah from the general destruction of the flood.[14] Nor is Israel's particular experience totally absent from chs1-11: the post-exilic audience of the Pentateuch's final form might consider that

[t]he dispersion of the nations (Gen. 11) is Israel's own diaspora, the flood is the uncreation of Israel's life at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the judgments of God upon primaeval disobedience, murder, lust and hybris are his righteous judgments upon sinful Israel....[15]

Of course, Abraham's significance for Israel must not be denied. With him distinctively Israelite history, and Yhwh's dealings with Israel in particular, begin – even though not all his descendants are Israel. In this respect there is a significant shift in content when we reach Abraham in Genesis, which hardly needed labouring in the work's original context. (Abraham is mentioned only 42 times in the Old Testament outside Genesis, but in such a variety of locations – Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel – that traditions about him were certainly widely known, at least by the

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[11] So rightly Wenham (1987) p91. Westermann (1984) p455 suggests that each primeval event manifests a shift to history in concluding with the world more as it is now.

[12] Cf. von Rad (1972) p159 on 12:1: '[e]ven though... this tells an actual fact about Israel's beginning, yet it is doubtful that the narrator's interest here and in what follows is solely the representation of past events. In this call and this road which was taken, Israel saw not only an event in her earliest history, but also a basic characteristic of her whole existence before God'.

[13] Contra Crüsemann (1998) pp194-5, we should not see those peoples descended from Abraham as sharing in all promised to Abraham except the covenant, promised to Isaac only in 17:20. This ignores both 21:12, stating that in general Abraham's line must be traced through Isaac, and the work's ancient Israelite context, in which it is surely unlikely that the promises would have been heard as applying to other peoples unless this was signalled clearly.

[14] Cf. above pp80-82.

[15] Clines (1997) p104.

post-exilic period. In any case, after an initial reading of Genesis Abraham's significance in the book would be clear in retrospect.) Moreover the call of and promises to Abraham set in motion the primary storyline of the rest of the Pentateuch, the growth of a people and its journey towards life in the land God has given to it.[16] In that respect, perhaps, Gen 1-11 serves as prologue to the whole work. Yet as we have seen, chs1-11 are integrated into the structure of Genesis as a whole, and thus presumably do not play an entirely different function compared to the patriarchal stories. This function is doubtless that of providing background to the events at Sinai where Israel (at least as the Pentateuch presents the story) received from Yhwh the laws which were to shape her existence and as a people made a covenant with him.[17] But there is no reason to think that chs1-11 form a prelude to Exodus, while having no particular implication for the rest of Genesis: the structural link, indeed, makes this most unlikely. Whatever may be new with Abraham, we should look for links with what precedes, not radical discontinuity.

> It is true that the Abraham material begins a new section of the Pentateuch,
> but the precise beginning of the Abraham material – and therewith the
> conclusion of the pre-Abrahamic material – cannot be determined.[18]

11:10-26 clearly functions as an introduction to the patriarchal story, since it presumably traces Shem's line because that will lead to Abraham.[19] Yet nothing at 11:10 or shortly thereafter signals that what follows differs significantly from what precedes; similarly the linear genealogy of Adam (through Seth) in ch5 hardly makes a sharp division with ch4, though its main function is clearly to introduce Noah. When the genealogy reaches Abraham (11:26), he is mentioned alongside Nahor and Haran as Terah's sons. Thus Abraham is introduced, briefly, at the end of this unit, though hardly singled out. The תולדות-formula at 11:27 discloses the start of a new unit, but again Abraham is not highlighted before 12:1: his name is always coupled with one or both of his brothers (vv27, 29) or with Lot (v31). Terah's name heads the unit (v27), and in v31 he is clearly head of the family as he moves from Ur to Haran, taking Abraham, Sarah and Lot with him. Thus only with the divine address in 12:1 is Abraham lifted out from the rest of his family.

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[16] Cf. Clines (1997) chs4-6. Clines cannot integrate Gen 1-11 into the theme of partial fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises which he finds in Gen 12-Deuteronomy, though he believes (pp22-3) that any literary work should have only one theme.

[17] Cf. Westermann (1984) p2; Moberly (1992b) especially ch4.

[18] Clines (1997) p84.

[19] So e.g. Steinberg (1989) pp43,47.

Hence 11:27-32 is not sharply opposed to what precedes: Yhwh's initiative comes in the midst of what is otherwise continuous with the story thus far. A major break at 11:27 is not indicated.[20] Nor should we see such a break at 12:1: not only does the text contain no obvious structural marker (the note about Terah's death at 11:32 perhaps signals the end of a paragraph, but hardly suggests a major section break), but 11:27-32 seems in large part introductory to 12:1ff, giving necessary background information such as the identity of Abraham and Lot, Sarah's barrenness, Abraham's location in Haran.[21] Still less can we see a break after 12:9:[22] nothing in either structure or content indicates a major division here. (If 11:27 begins the patriarchal stories, there would be five תולדות-formulas in the primeval stories and five in the patriarchal, assuming 36:9 recapitulates 36:1, rather than beginning a separate unit.[23] However the series of ten could easily be divided elsewhere, for example into the three pre -and seven post-flood instances. More importantly, even if we accept the scheme it hardly obtrudes itself at 11:27: it may reinforce the reader's overall sense that there is something new in the patriarchal stories, but scarcely indicates a radical break. Nor is there some literary structure in chs1-11, which would indicate by its completion the end of the primeval material. Both Sasson and Rendsburg have proposed such structures, in which the sequence of the pre-flood material is paralleled by the story of the flood and what follows,[24] but neither scheme is convincing: for example Sasson sees the first unit as 1:1-2:14 – a strange place to find a break – while Rendsburg's 1:1-3:24 though less implausible is not obviously only one unit. Rendsburg also believes that the parallel structure is not maintained in the last two units, 11:1-9 and 11:10-26 paralleling respectively 6:1-8 and 5:1-32; the reason he offers for this, that 11:10-26, culminating in Terah, had to be placed last in the primeval material, cannot disguise the fact that this destroys the alleged parallel structure.)

Nor does the primeval history end with ch8 or in ch9. We shall reject below (p146) the idea that 8:21 marks the end of the curse on the ground of 3:17-19: the flood hardly marks a conclusion to the story begun in ch3. 9:1-7 clearly picks up some of the language of ch1, marking a renewal of creation after the flood; 9:20-9 echoes ch3 with such themes as

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[20] Contra e.g. Westermann (1984).

[21] Cf. in detail Baumgart (1996) pp50-1n135.

[22] von Rad (1972) is ambivalent on where the primeval history ends: p152 suggests 11:9, p154 that 12:1-3 is its 'real conclusion', while pp161ff include 12:4-9 within it (cf. Clines (1997) p151n52).

[23] Cf. e.g. Blenkinsopp (1992) pp58-9, 94n4, 99-100.

[24] Sasson (1980); Rendsburg (1986); Tomasino (1992) slightly modifies the latter's scheme.

nakedness, fruit, curse.[25] Thus ch9 is similar in character to the first chapters in Genesis. 9:25-7, as we have already noted, begins to look to the existence of separate nations, and thus suggests that ch10 does not mark a radical break; again, as we have noted, any neat distinction between 'primeval event' and 'history' (which might fall between chs 9 and 10) is dubious. The story of the Tower of Babel in 11:1-9 tells of all humanity when there was yet but one language, explaining why God disrupted that original harmony – to prevent humans asserting autonomy by 'making a name for themselves',[26] and failing to obey the command to fill the earth (1:28; 9:1). It thus seems a continuation of the themes of chs1-9, rather than part of a radically new stage in the story. The three-fold אחר המבול (10:1, 32; 11:10) may stress the flood's significance, but need not indicate that 10:1-11:26 has a very different character to that which preceded and must therefore be separated from it.[27] 12:1-3 picks up from 10:1-11:26 (cf. below p151 on the theme of name, and p152 on the nations): but that there are more thematic links between 12:1-3 and what immediately precedes than between it and earlier sections of Genesis is hardly surprising, given natural plot development, and is what we should expect were there no major break at all.[28]

6.1.3 Themes in Genesis 1-11

i) Creation

The primary theme in Gen 1-11 is creation. While at the beginning of ch1 there is nothing,[29] by the end of ch11 the earth has been formed and filled with plants and animals – and fish in the sea and birds in the air –, humans have been created and have developed various arts and technologies, God has renewed/ recreated the earth after the flood,[30] humans are spreading through the world and developing into nations. (The placing of ch10 before the story of the Tower of Babel suggests the development of national identity is not

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[25] Cf. e.g. Blenkinsopp (1992) p58; Tomasino (1992).

[26] Cf. below pp143 and 151.

[27] Witte (1998) pp48-50 sees it as a marker of a 'Zwischenzeit' between the primeval history proper (1:1-9:29) and the patriarchal stories (11:27ff). אחר המבול also occurs at 9:28.

[28] Contra Baumgart (1996).

[29] For our purposes it is unimportant whether ch1 describes some kind of *creatio ex nihilo*, or the ordering of pre-existent matter: in either case the point is the complete dependence of the world as humans experience it on God's creative activity.

[30] On creation themes in the flood story, cf. e.g. Clines (1997) pp80-1.

intrinsically bad.[31]) While much is also said about human activity, and particularly its deleterious consequences, this must not overshadow the evidence of the divine creative project's general success. Satisfactory the situation at the end of ch11 may not be, and the effect of human evil on the world as a whole cannot be denied (cf. 6:12). But the order established in chs1-2 has not been destroyed, nor has the subsequent progress been negligible. Amidst the curses (3:14ff; 4:11-12; cf. 8:21[32]) and *Lebensminderungen* the divine blessing still stands (1:22, 28; 9:1ff).

ii) Sin

Within chs1-11 a number of stories tell of sin and punishment. Clines proposes a common structure for these:[33]

	I. *Sin*	II. *Speech*	III. *Mitigation*	IV. *Punishment*
1. Fall	3.6	3.14-19	3.21	3.22-4
2. Cain	4.8	4.11-12	4.15	4.16
3. Sons of God	6.2	6.3	?6.8, 18ff	?7.6-24
4. Flood	6.5, 11f	6.7, 13-21	6.8, 18ff	7.6-24
5. Babel	11.4	11.6f	?10.1-32	11.8

Clines insists that to note the common pattern is to highlight, not to deny, the distinctiveness of each story: for example, in the first two stories individuals sin and are punished, while 3-5 tell of communities; in 4 mitigation takes effect only for one man and his family, not for all who suffer the punishment. However, as the question marks in the table make apparent, the structure does not evidently fit two of the episodes: it seems unlikely that the flood and Noah's rescue from it function as 'punishment' and 'mitigation' for the Sons of God episode (which seems complete in itself);[34] nor should the absence of any 'mitigation' between 'speech' and 'punishment' in the Babel episode be played down by suggesting that the preceding Table of Nations might function analogously for the episode.[35] Moreover Lamech's song (4:23-4) and the story of Noah and his vineyard (9:20-7)[36] seem important

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[31] Cf. e.g. Clines (1997) p74: '[i]f the material of ch. 10 had followed the Babel story, the whole Table of Nations would have had to be read under the sign of judgment; but where it stands it functions as the fulfilment of the divine command of 9.1… which looks back in its turn to 1.28'.

[32] On this, see below p146.

[33] Clines (1997) p68.

[34] Cf. below p144 and n52 on the meaning of 6:3.

[35] Even if it does function thus the structure still differs from that claimed for the other stories, where 'mitigation' follows the sin and speech.

[36] Cf. p139 above on thematic links between this episode and ch3.

parts of the description of the human condition, but even more clearly do not fit the structure: the latter contains elements of sin and speech announcing punishment but has no following 'mitigation' or 'punishment' (thus its structure might parallel that of 6:1-4); the speech is Noah's not God's, though invoking God's action.[37] Human sin regularly (i.e. in the five stories Clines singles out) calls forth a divine response, expressed in a speech to make clear its reasonableness;[38] yet, since the response is proportionate to its cause, there may be some sign that the punishment is limited ('mitigation'); the stories sometimes end with a statement making explicit the carrying out of the punishment earlier decreed. Thus the literary structure is a manifestation of underlying theological principles; hence it is not surprising that the element of limitation, or the carrying out of the punishment, are not always explicitly stated. Nor are the stories' other differences surprising: humans act wrongly in various ways, and the divine response equally is far from stereotyped.

Von Rad famously suggested that J's primeval history 'is characterized on the human side by an increase in sin to avalanche proportions'.[39] However chs1-11 do not obviously depict steady increase in the magnitude of human sin. For in 6:1-4, human culpability seems played down: if the situation depicted is that of divine beings marrying human women, that doubtless implies the consent of the women themselves, and perhaps more significantly also their fathers,[40] but the story focuses on the action of the Sons of God in taking rather than on the human role. Nor does the Tower of Babel obviously mark a stage beyond that prior to the flood, when the earth and all flesh were corrupt, the earth was full of חמס, and human inclination was always and only towards wrong (6:5, 11-12). Genesis 6:5ff may arguably describe only sin on the intra-human level, while the sin of 11:1-9 involves standing in opposition to the will of God and attempting to usurp his position (see next paragraph);[41] nevertheless that the appropriate divine response to the pre-flood situation was to destroy all creatures along with the earth (6:13) hardly allows us to downplay its significance. The judgment on Babel effected a lasting destruction of the unity

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[37] Cf. ch5 for arguments that blessing and curse were always seen as part of divine activity.

[38] Cf. Westermann (1976) pp53-4.

[39] von Rad (1972) p152.

[40] Cf. e.g. Wenham (1987) pp138-141. √לקח is regularly employed for taking in marriage (e.g. 4:19; 21:21; 24:4; Jer 29:6); likewise בני־האלהים and similar phrases refer to divine beings (Ps 29:1; Job 1:6); Gen 6:1 most naturally refers to the multiplication of and birth of daughters to all of humanity.

[41] de Pury (1978) p91 suggests that when the collective enthusiasm in ch11 becomes destructive, 'le mal prend une dimension presque démoniaque'. While this may be right, again it need not mark out the situation as worse than that prior to the flood.

of humankind, while the flood simply eradicated one generation,[42] but this is because one man was at least comparatively exempt from the guilt shared by all others rather than because the sin was less serious.[43] Further the text stresses the universality of wrongdoing in the flood story, while the involvement of all people in the sin at Babel is hardly stressed (though certainly implicit): the text thus is not concerned to highlight a growth of sin from affecting almost all to affecting all without exception.

Rather than a crescendo of sin, the text presents a series of stories illustrating the many different ways in which humans can sin.[44] (Indeed to refer to them all as instances of 'sin' is convenient, but misleading if it suggests that the text is exploring an idea rather than showing some of the ways in which humans may go wrong; the text offers no word to describe them all.) Ch3, for example, shows disobedience to a specific divine command in an attempt to surpass the boundaries separating the human from the divine. In 4:1-16, one human murders another because of jealousy; God has previously warned of the temptation, stressing that it can be mastered (v7). 4:23-4 speaks of excessive retaliation, of one human valuing himself above others. 6:1-4 again relates to a blurring of boundaries between the human and the divine; while the humans are not the prime movers, they cannot deny all responsibility for what happens, for giving way to temptation (cf. above p142). Here and in the flood and Babel episodes, the actions are ascribed to the community as a whole, not to individuals. The flood illustrates the depth of corruption in humanity – which still remains after the destruction of all but Noah and his family (8:21) – and its effect on the world as a whole. The episode of Noah's nakedness shows perhaps foolishness on Noah's part, but more importantly serious disrespect to a parent on Ham's part.[45] The Babel episode[46] shows humans trying to avoid the divine mandate to fill the earth (פֶּן־נָפוּץ v4), and seeking to assert their autonomy by making a name for themselves in their self-chosen projects, rather than remaining content with the reputation that God would grant them (cf. 12:2; 2Sam 7:9, 8:13; elsewhere in the Old Testament it is always God who makes a name for himself, as in

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[42] Cf. Clines (1997) p76.

[43] Cf. further, briefly, below p152.

[44] Cf. Westermann (1984) p53.

[45] 'If the covering was an adequate remedy, it follows that the misdemeanour was confined to seeing' (Cassuto (1964) p151, against commentators ancient and modern who have suggested that some kind of sexual assault on Noah or incest with Noah's wife is intended).

[46] Though I refer elsewhere to the 'Tower of Babel episode', as is conventional, Cassuto (1964) p226 rightly notes that this may give undue prominence to the tower compared to other features of the episode.

Isa 63:12, 14; Jer 32:20; Neh 9:10).[47] While we perhaps should not ascribe to the builders a naïve belief that they could build a tower tall enough to reach the divine realm,[48] nevertheless they surely are trying to assert complete mastery at least over their small part of the אֶרֶץ and that part of the שָׁמַיִם that is visible to them. Elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g. Isa 2:12-15; 30:25) tall towers are seen as signs of human arrogance.[49] Here, then, as in ch3 and in 6:1-4, the need for humans to stay within appropriate creaturely limits with respect to the divine is again stressed;[50] however it is far from obvious that all the instances of 'sin' in chs1-11 can be subsumed into this category.

iii) 'Punishment'

As the character of the 'sin' varies, so does that of the 'punishment'. 'Punishment' certainly seems the appropriate term for the pain in childbirth and toil in agriculture decreed in 3:16-19. However the expulsion from the garden in 3:22-3 is a preventative measure: withdrawal of the possibility of immortality is necessary to keep humans within appropriate creaturely limits now they have become God-like in knowing good and evil, and thus may not be exactly punitive – indeed it might even be imposed for humanity's own good. Similarly the limitation of lifespans in 6:3 may be as much preventative as punitive: though not simply a statement that since the offspring of the unions are בָּשָׂר they will die,[51] it is a divine establishing of appropriate limits.[52] The confusion of language in 11:7 is necessary

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[47] Wenham (1987) p240; de Pury (1978) pp89-90, esp. p90: 'en Gen 11, comme en Gen 3 et 4, c'est la volonté d'autonomie, c.-à-d. le refus des conditions d'existence crées par Dieu, qui est à l'origine du mal'.

[48] So von Rad (1972) pp149, 151, contra e.g. Driver (1916) p135; Wenham (1987) p239. References to towers with tops in the sky are clichés in Mesopotamian building inscriptions, especially with reference to ziggurats (cf. Sarna (1989) pp82-3 with examples); however even if there is some literary influence, this does not determine whether the phrase in Genesis is, as in the Mesopotamian inscriptions, a figure for imposing height, or whether it is being taken more literally as a 'criticism of man's folly and presumption' (Speiser (1969) p76).

[49] Sarna (1989) p83.

[50] On this theme in Gen 1-11, cf. further Miller (1978) chI.

[51] Contra Clark (1972) p190; Harland (1996) p125.

[52] 6:1-4 of course contains various obscurities. The repeated יְמֵי in ch5 suggests יָמָיו (v3) refers to human lifespan, not to a period of 120 years before the flood; this produces some dissonance with ch11 where humans live beyond 120 years, but why as a result of 6:1-2 God should announce the destruction of humanity 120 years later would be obscure. בְּשַׁגַּם is best taken as בְּ + relative particle + גַּם. This is highly unusual for Genesis, and doubtless a reinterpretation of something else: were the following הוּא omitted and appeal made to the Assyrian šagamu, 'bellow, howl' we might discern a story similar to the Atrahasis epic where the flood is caused by the gods' annoyance at human noise (Clines (1979) p40). However the reinterpretation is doubtless ancient (cf. LXX), and therefore we should not look behind it for the text's meaning. (Pointing בְּשַׁגַּם with some manuscripts and

to prevent humans again combining in one place and seeking collectively to rival God;[53] their dispersal (v8) may be more an enforced fulfilment of the divine mandate to fill the earth than a punishment[54] – in 10:18 √פוץ denotes a neutral 'spreading abroad', not a negative 'scattering'. Cain's punishment is an appropriate consequence of his crime: as he has spilled his brother's blood on the אדמה, so his relationship to the אדמה is to be disrupted (4:10-12). (Since Cain is an עבד אדמה [v2] the punishment also is directed specifically at the central feature of Cain's livelihood.[55]) Similarly the flood is – at least in part – an intensification of what has already begun: because all creatures and the earth itself have become spoilt (√שחת niphal and hiphil), God will complete the spoiling (√שחת hiphil; 6:11-13). Thus it is not just a way of punishing those responsible, though it certainly is that, but also a way of attempting to remove an intolerable state of affairs.[56] We must also note that the flood is more radical than the other punishments of chs 1-11, since it takes away life itself while the others consist in various kinds of *Lebensminderungen*.[57]

iv) Grace

However the divine reaction to humanity does not just become one of judging. There are also signs of grace, limiting the effects of the judgment. In 3:21 God clothes Adam and Eve: doubtless this is little comfort in comparison to the *Lebensminderungen* just announced (vv16-19), but it does demonstrate that God will not abandon the first couple despite their failings. It has also been suggested that Adam and Eve's not dying is itself a sign of grace, God not carrying through his threat of 2:17.[58] However it seems more likely that the text refers to death in a metaphorical sense, i.e. the loss of fullness of life with God, than that it depicts the serpent correctly challenging a divine statement:[59] Yhwh does carry

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deriving the word from √שנג is implausible, since both the preceding אדם and subsequent הוא suggest a singular suffix would be more appropriate.)

[53] Cf. Coats (1983) p95; Westermann (1984) p550.

[54] Cf. Baumgart (1996) pp56-7, noting the continuity of this interpretation with Jewish tradition (despite, one might think, the temptation to find here punishment on Babylon).

[55] Cf. Miller (1978) pp31-2 (though Miller probably overstresses the element of conflict between shepherd and agriculturist in the story); his chII in general seeks to establish 'The Correspondence of Sin and Judgment' throughout chs1-11.

[56] Cf. Coote and Ord (1991) p46.

[57] Steck (1971) p547.

[58] Cf. e.g. Gunkel (1997) p10.

[59] Cf. Moberly (1988a).

out his threat, and the text stresses its severity by calling the new situation 'death'. That said, the preservation of physical life is not negligible, since the divine threat left ambiguous the sense(s) of death intended: the punishment in ch3, for all its seriousness, is not the maximum that the earlier words would have allowed. In ch4, though God decrees a wandering existence for Cain, this is not meant to make him an easy victim for other people (although there might seem a measure of justice in Cain suffering at the hands of another what he had inflicted on Abel); hence God ensures by means of the 'mark' that Cain will not be killed (4:11-16). In 8:21 (see next paragraph) God declares that, despite continuing human wickedness, he will never again destroy all creatures as he has just done, and in 9:8ff he confirms this with a covenant. All these are in no way reversals of the judgments that are pronounced (a promise never to send another flood does not undo the effect of the first flood), but divine provision for life after them.

Indeed the *Lebensminderungen* of ch3 seem precisely aetiological for the human condition as experienced in ancient Israel (as indeed today). Hence Rendtorff's suggestion that 8:21 tells of the ending of the curse on the ground from ch3 is highly implausible.[60] (Rendtorff also requires that √קלל piel have the sense 'treat as cursed', when – as he notes – it can mean *schmähen*, 'treat hardly' [cf. above ch5.3]: it thus seems improbable that the reader would connect it with the use of √ארר in ch3. The idiom √יסף + infinitive + עוד normally refers to doing something again, not a continuing action;[61] that the idiom is thus used at the end of 8:21 can only make it more probable that it has that meaning earlier in the verse.[62] The repetition from 6:5 of the reason God gave there for the flood equally must increase the likelihood that the first part of the speech of 8:21, as the second, is a promise not to send another flood or equivalent.) The relief brought by Noah (5:29, clearly echoing 3:17) is thus most probably a reference to his introduction of viticulture, producing wine which 'gladdens the human heart' (Ps 104:15):

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[60] Rendtorff (1961) (nuanced in Rendtorff (1963) esp. p21), followed by e.g. von Rad (1972) p122; Clark (1972) pp206-8; for criticism, cf. especially Steck (1971) pp527-32.

[61] E.g. 8:12; 18:29; 38:5, 26; Ex 10:29; 1Sam 3:6 (cf. *BDB* p729; Petersen (1976) pp442-3). A continuing action is, however, referred to in Gen 37:5, 8; 1Sam 18:29; 2Sam 2:28.

[62] Contra Cassuto (1964) p120; Wenham (1987) p190 (cf. also Harland (1996) p116) the position of the עוד does not clearly make any difference to the basic sense of the idiom, distinguishing 'do again' (יסף + עוד + infinitive) from 'do further' (יסף + infinitive + עוד): compare Ex 10:29 and Ex 14:13 (and note also Gen 37:5, 8 where 'they hated him more' is expressed by ויוספו עוד שנא אתו).

[t]he curse is not lifted from the ground, but even the cursed ground can produce some comfort and enjoyment for humans.[63]

Thus the *Lebensminderungen* in ch3 are not lifted in chs4-11. There are, however, two grounds on which one might attempt to argue that they are still not viewed as permanent. The first is that the text should be read in the light of expectations of a future where there would be no suffering, and harmony between humans and animals (cf. e.g. Isa 11:6-9; 65:17ff),[64] that it depicts an *Urzeit* to which the reader would expect an *Endzeit* to correspond. Nothing in Gen 1-3 particularly draws attention to eschatological themes, but equally nothing militates against reading the chapters in this light (for example, the *Lebensminderungen* are not explicitly permanent). The text neither points to a corresponding *Endzeit*, nor denies that there might be such. However, secondly, we must consider 3:15, sometimes seen in Christian tradition as the 'protoevangelium'.[65] Does this simply describe ongoing hostility between humans and snakes, or might it suggest a time when the seed of the woman will finally defeat a power of evil? If Genesis 2-3 is symbolic of how humans should relate to God, we might wonder whether 3:15 is more than an aetiology of why humans dislike snakes.[66] That the snake's head may be crushed,[67] while he may only crush the human heel might hint that ultimately the snake will be vanquished: a pronouncement of curse on the snake might well include such a final outcome.[68] זרע here is doubtless a collective; yet, as later in Genesis Abraham's collective seed is to be reckoned through the singular Isaac, so here it hardly seems impossible that one particular person should be victorious on behalf of all humanity.[69] Thus a messianic reading, or one which

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[63] Clines (1997) p78. 9:20ff does not stress the benefits of viticulture, but it seems more likely that these were meant to be sufficiently obvious to the reader than that 5:29 finds its fulfilment in 9:1-17 (Witte (1998) pp215-6), where there is no obvious relief for human labour, nor anything to which מן־האדמה could refer, or that Lamech's words find no detailed fulfilment (Wallace (1990) pp27-9), making them exceptional amongst the name aetiologies of Genesis.

[64] Lohfink (1982) p180 suggests this with respect to 1:28.

[65] Early Jewish traditions, such as LXX and Palestinian Targums also see Messianic reference here (Wenham (1987) p80).

[66] Wenham (1987) p80.

[67] The precise nuance of √שוף is not important here.

[68] So Wenham (1987) p80, contra the insistence of Westermann (1984) p260 that because the unit has the form-critical character of pronouncement of punishment or of curse, it cannot contain elements of promise or prophecy. (Cf. also pp33-34 for the relationship between blessing and prophecy.)

[69] Alexander (1995) p35 suggests that the stress given to the special lineage, זרע, later in Genesis should influence our interpretation of 3:15.

sees foreshadowed some kind of future triumph of humanity over some power of evil, appears not unjustifiable, at least given a wider (if, arguably, later) context. Perhaps it is enough for our argument to note that, while this reading may not be unjustifiable, the text at most hints at the possibility of such future victory, neither clearly pointing to it nor giving any idea what its character might be

6.1.4 12:1-3 in Context

Von Rad suggests that the reader of J's work would be sharply confronted by certain questions at the end of the Babel story, given the lack of any sign of grace in the divine response to that episode:

> Is God's relationship to the nations now finally broken; is God's gracious
> forbearance now exhausted; has God rejected the nations in wrath forever?
> That is the burdensome question which no thoughtful reader of ch. 11 can
> avoid; indeed, one can say that our narrator intended by means of the whole
> plan of his primeval history to raise precisely this question and to pose it in
> all its severity.[70]

However we need not think that chs1-11 have left particular questions obviously demanding answers in order to assess how 12:1-3 might relate to them: we need not ask 'What would any competent reader require to be told after reading ch11?', but instead 'Given chs1-11, what is the force of 12:1-3?'.[71] Since, as argued above, there is no sharp break between 'primeval' and 'patriarchal' stories, the reader would not perceive a grace-less end to the former. Rather the Babel episode is succeeded by the genealogy of Shem, showing the continuity of life (if with no specific indication of divine favour), which soon leads to Abraham. Nor need the reader have been struck by the lack of 'mitigation' in the Babel story, given our argument above (p141) that a neat sin-speech-mitigation-punishment structure is not central to how chs1-11 presents the human condition.

Clearly the main theme of 12:1-3 is blessing: √ברך occurs five times. However in the final form of Genesis God blesses humans in 1:28, and reiterates this blessing after the

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[70] von Rad (1972) p153.

[71] This seems to be the method of Wolff (1966) p145, where he suggests that 12:3b discloses in retrospect the *Leitfrage* of J's primeval history to be explaining why the nations need blessing; Wolff thus asks questions of chs1-11 in the light of 12:1-3.

flood (9:1-7).[72] That Abraham, and others through their relationship to him, should receive blessing is not particularly surprising in the light of what has preceded.

One consequence of blessing is the having of many offspring (cf. above ch5p111); 12:2 (on which see below ch6.3.4) promises that Abraham will become a great nation. Yet again this is not unexpected after chs1-11. Childbearing has become painful (3:16), but human fertility has not decreased; indeed the punishment's effect would be diminished if pregnancy became less frequent as it became painful. Rather

> in chapters 5, 10, and 11 the very monotony of the genealogical
> enumeration suggests that begetting children is a matter of course.[73]

Barrenness becomes an issue only with Sarah, Abraham's wife. The repeated תולדות, with its connotations of fertility,[74] also suggests that human procreation is not problematic. Shem's genealogy – introduced with the תולדות-formula – in 11:10ff specifically shows that humanity's dispersal after Babel has not affected their capacity to multiply.[75] Ch10, which clearly looks beyond 11:1-9,[76] demonstrates that the development of nations is equally unproblematic. That Abraham is to become a great nation, not simply a nation, is of course significant; but again nothing in chs1-11 has suggested that becoming a great nation would require particular divine intervention.

A second consequence of blessing is the fertility of land and animals, since these were obviously of great importance for the prosperity which blessing bestows (cf. above ch5p111). Thus these, though not explicitly noted in 12:1-3, would certainly have been in the mind of any ancient reader.[77] 3:18, with its mention of thorns and thistles, suggests that

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[72] However in J, as traditionally conceived, no-one has been blessed (9:26 is a blessing on Shem's God in MT), while in chs3-4 humans have been subject to divine cursing. Cf. Wolff (1966) pp145-6 (and p148n71 above); Steck (1971) pp538-9n38.

[73] Fokkelman (1987) p43. Westermann (1984) p15 suggests that 5:1-2 sets the following genealogy in the context of the blessing given at creation. 4:1, 25 note Yhwh's involvement in granting children.

[74] Fokkelman (1987) p42.

[75] Witte (1998) p49.

[76] While 11:1ff assumes humans living together with one language, ch10 refers to different languages and different lands; 10:25 may anticipate humanity's division in the Babel episode (cf. e.g. Wenham (1987) pp230-1).

[77] Contra Witte (1998) p197 who suggests that 12:1-3, unlike the 'Yahwistic' primeval history, is not concerned with the relationship of humans to the soil.

the land's productiveness has been diminished,[78] though 3:17-19 doubtless primarily stresses the toil involved in agriculture rather than ultimate lack of success in it. However nothing subsequent in chs1-11 suggests a diminution in the fertility of land or crops. The curse on Cain, admittedly, affects his relationship to the אדמה, but Cain's fate is not one all humans share.[79] 8:22 affirms the continuation of the seasons necessary for agriculture, especially with the mention of זרע and קציר. 9:2-3 affirms human control over animals, and their use, with plants, for human food; this is subsumed under the blessing on Noah and his sons of v1, though the blessing is primarily explicated in terms of their multiplication, which use of plants and animals will sustain. 9:20-1 portrays agricultural success. The results of the Babel episode hardly seem likely to affect cultivation. However the conspicuous success one would expect from blessing is not obviously present prior to Abraham, while Abraham and his descendants do enjoy such (24:35; 26:12). Abraham thus may perhaps mark a new stage in the relationship of God and humanity, a realising of possibilities not previously realised. But this would not be an 'answer' to a 'problem' posed by the earlier stories, so much as a reaffirmation of the divine commitment to human flourishing within the limits set by what has preceded.

The previous paragraph referred to a 'new stage in the relationship of God and humanity'. It is easy to overuse the idea of relationship in discussing the material, particularly if it is closely tied to an idea that religion (Christianity?) essentially concerns a 'personal relationship to God'. Disruption of this is certainly a theme of Gen 3: after eating the fruit humans perceive the need to hide from God, and are expelled from the garden, symbolic of his presence.[80] However nothing subsequent in chs1-11 obviously affects the possibility of personal intercourse with God. Yet even after ch3 God can address humanity, notably in 6:11-7:4 and 9:1-17. In 11:1-9 there is communication within the divine and human realms, but not between them:[81] humans assert their autonomy and God leaves them to it. But to generalise this into a lasting breach in relationship seems questionable.[82] Further, the stories of ch3, 6:1-4 and 11:1-9 as much assert the need to maintain appropriate

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[78] Since, as argued above pp112-113, blessing denotes not fertility *per se*, but its contribution to human prosperity, land bearing thorns and thistles is clearly not a sign of blessing.

[79] Clearly most humans cannot be described as a נע ונד בארץ.

[80] Cf. Wenham (1987) p90.

[81] Blenkinsopp (1992) p91.

[82] Contrast the citation from von Rad, above p148.

distinctions and divisions between the human and the divine as illustrate the possibility of close relationship. Thus although 12:1-3 represents the first divine initiative since creation not evidently a response to the immediate human situation,[83] it does not obviously mark a possibility of relationship not already present with Noah, to whom God equally gave instructions and promises. 12:1-3 states what God will do for Abraham, and for other people, but nothing promised falls under the category of 'personal relationship'. As the promises are made, and the divine activity becomes focused in one person and his descendants, the character of the divine-human relationship – in the sense of how God and humans behave vis-à-vis each other – is reshaped: God promises to show favour to this particular family, for example. Thus it is confirmed that the assertion of human autonomy in 11:1-9 is not the last word (though, as I have suggested, there is no particular reason why a reader would have thought it was likely to be such), and the story of God's activity in the world continues. But 'relationship' as a category is not obviously at issue.

In one respect 12:1-3 explicitly picks up the theme of autonomy. We have already noted (above p143) that when humans at Babel seek to make a name for themselves, this is arrogating to themselves a divine privilege. In 12:2 God offers Abraham a great name: Abraham can gain in obedience a dignity closer to God's than is possible for humans who seek to place themselves in a god-like position. (One might also note that the repeated √גדל in 12:2 echoes the tower, מגדל built at Babel;[84] God grants Abraham a greatness whereas the מגדל of Babel was intended as part of a project which ignored God.) Yet the Babel episode is framed by two genealogies, one segmented, the other linear, recounting the descendants of Shem whose name precisely means 'name'.

> The whole earth marshals its energy to make a šēm for itself. But, even
> before the people came together to their task, God had already provided a
> Shem through the orderly process of procreation.[85]

Having a name is thus a possibility prior to Israel's call; equally the line of Shem is not disrupted by Babel. What God promises Abraham is an outworking of a project begun long before, which human misadventure has not destroyed. But that Shem is the head of a third of humanity suggests that the gaining of a name was not to be restricted to only a very few

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[83] Steck (1971) p550; de Pury (1978) p92. √ברך occurs five times in 12:2-3, as אור 1:3-5, but readers are surely unlikely to link the passages (contra Jacob (1934) p339; Frettlöh (1998) p274).

[84] Fokkelman (1975) p19 suggests that the original audience would have noticed the etymology of מגדל.

[85] Robinson (1986b) p603.

people. Is Abraham's great name, we might ask, the sole remaining trace of a wider goal in the mind of God, or might it be that Abraham is here a sign of continued divine commitment to the fulfilment of that goal, proof that post-Babel conditions of existence do not exclude it?[86]

12:1-3 presupposes the world of nations established in 10:1-11:9, with its ambiguity.

> [A]ccording to the primeval history in the Old Testament, the phenomenon
> of the nations is not clear. They derive from God's wealth in creation; but
> at the same time in their disorder they bear the deep scars of God's judging
> intervention.[87]

There is no obvious divine intention to reverse the effects of 11:1-9: that Abraham is to become a גוי (12:2), and that blessing comes to the nations in their משפחת (v3b) surely confirms that restoring humanity's original unity is not the divine goal, especially since that unity has just been disrupted in part as a preventative measure.[88] Similarly Abraham's migration is part of the general dispersal of humanity, though this particular movement takes on special significance: Yhwh shows that he can work good in the process of dispersal, as in the world of גוים and משפחת now established. Thus, as previously in chs1-11, the *Lebensminderungen* are not reversed by renewed divine grace, but it is made clear that their effect is not unconstrained.

In the flood story, Yhwh takes the initiative to rescue Noah and his family from the fate hanging over all other people. However, as we have just suggested, Abraham is not removed from the general conditions of human life; rather something new begins with him. Equally, the flood story emphasises Noah's difference from other people (cf. 6:8-9; 7:1).

> Unlike his predecessors, Noah is the picture of biblical rectitude: he is
> 'righteous, blameless and [one who] walk[s] with God', unimpeachable
> accolades in biblical language.[89]

Indeed Noah is the only man in the Old Testament described as צדיק (6:9; 7:1);[90] he (6:8) and Moses (Ex 33:12) are the only individuals described as having found favour in God's

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[86] Cf. also Jenkins (1978) on the theme of 'name' in the Pentateuch.

[87] von Rad (1962) p163; cf. also above pp140-141 and n31.

[88] Cf. above pp144-145; also de Pury (1978) p94.

[89] Forrest (1994) p10.

sight.[91] One may debate whether finding favour is simply the result of Noah's righteousness, whether בדרתיו in 6:9 and בדר הזה in 7:1 qualify the approbation to suggest Noah's merit was largely comparative, and whether perhaps J may have stressed Yhwh's favour rather than Noah's merit.[92] However in the final form of the text Noah's character is clearly given significant positive evaluation, and this is at least a major factor in his rescue from the flood. Yhwh takes advantage of Noah's character to bring about the preservation of life on earth: while plausibly that preservation is not just for Noah's sake, but because life on earth in its varieties is worth saving, nevertheless Yhwh's primary aim is to rescue the one who is (at least comparatively) guilt-free.[93] Thus the flood story; yet, in contrast, there is no attempt to distinguish Abraham from other people in chs11-12, no reason given why Abraham might be favoured above others. Abraham's character is, of course, tested later in the cycle of stories about him, and found adequate (cf. 15:6; 18:17-33; and especially 22:1-18). Nevertheless his choice from among the nations in 12:1-3 would seem quite arbitrary, if it is essentially for his good that he is thus favoured.

After the flood, God reaffirmed his commitment to all of humanity, a commitment which human wickedness will not destroy (8:20-2); and he renewed the mandate given to all humanity at creation (9:1-7). Unless the Babel episode has altered God's desire to preserve and bless all humanity, 12:1-3 can hardly imply a limitation of God's purposes to Abraham and his descendants: it must rather function as a reaffirmation of God's original intentions, even if their outworking is now somewhat altered by the particular place given to this one family.[94] A good life is possible in the post-Babel world of nations. Certainly it would not be surprising in context if the promises to Abraham include the possibility of others also participating in blessing. Given what has preceded we may also not be surprised at the possibility of some nations failing to behave appropriately in these new conditions which God has created, and thus failing to receive the blessing (v3a; in the light of 9:25-7 we

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[90] Harland (1996) p45.

[91] Moberly (1983) p92.

[92] On these issues, cf. the recent, generally judicious discussion of Harland (1996) ch2, responding to e.g. Clark (1971); Barnard (1971).

[93] Renaud (1990) pp19-20 notes that while the mention of Noah's descendants in 6:9-10 may indicate a concern with the whole future of humanity, not just with Noah, Noah's personal qualities are also very much stressed there.

[94] Cf. Clines (1997) pp85-6. Baumgart (1996) p58 suggests that Israel's function is to bring further good to the nations, beyond the 'common grace' visible in the primeval stories.

might imagine that Canaanites, at any rate, will dishonour Abraham and thus fall under the curse). But God has not rejected humanity as a whole in favour of one particular people.

That 12:1-3 functions as an aetiology of Israel must not be downplayed. The Israelite who has read ch10, detailing the nations of the world, would surely want to discover the origins of her own nation: this, to such a reader, would be a significant unanswered question at the end of ch11.[95] Ch10 suggests that Israel is but one small part of humanity; yet leaves open the possibility that Israel's foundation will differ somehow from that of the other nations. While the descendants of Peleg may in many respects be no different from those of Joktan (so ch10),[96] Israel originates in an address and promise of Yhwh (so 12:1-3). 12:1-3 is a significant new beginning, telling the reader about the people whose existence is of most concern to him. Yet in the context of the ongoing story of God, the world, and humanity, God's calling of Israel as it is expressed in Genesis makes best sense if it is not simply for Israel's sake, nor even for God's sake, but also for the sake of the nations. God's care for humanity as a whole has not finished. And while the *Lebensminderungen* which have resulted from human wrongdoing in chs1-11 cannot be reversed, at least not quickly, the possibility of a good life in the world there established – the world of ancient Israel, as of today – is thereby assured.

6.2 The syntax of Genesis 12:1-3

The clause-structure of the divine speech of 12:1-3 is easily analysable.[97] For convenience, I reproduce the text with my labelling of its clauses:

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[95] Cf. Baumgart (1996) p31.

[96] von Rad (1962) pp161-2 stresses that in Genesis the line from creation to Israel passes through the nations (though as a result of overstressing the break between 'primeval' and 'patriarchal' stories, and the distinction between 'myth' and 'history', von Rad dissociates the origins of Israel from 'Creation').

[97] See especially Wolff (1966) pp137-8; Miller (1984).

1a	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם
b	לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ:
2a	וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל
b	וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ
c	וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ
d	וֶהְיֵה בְּרָכָה:
3aα	וַאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ
aβ	וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ אָאֹר
b	וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה:

The speech begins with an imperative addressed to Abraham (1b); this governs four prepositional phrases, to the last of which a relative clause (containing a verb in the imperfect with suffix) is added. The following six clauses all begin with simple-ו: distinctive is 3aβ, in that the ו is attached to a nominal, not a verbal, form. The verbs in 2c and 3aα are cohortative. Hebrew has no distinctive cohortative form when a verb takes a pronominal suffix, using instead a form identical with the imperfect: this is clearest in e.g. 1Ki 1:12 where נא is added to a form indistinguishable from an imperfect.[98] We may thus suspect that the verbs in 2a and b have the same force as those in 2c and 3aα:[99] cohortatives commonly follow imperatives to express a nuance of purpose or result.[100] Imperatives express precisely the same nuance in the second person,[101] so 2d, we may suspect, also expresses purpose or result: thus 2a to 3aα is a chain of clauses of similar function. Gen 45:18 provides a parallel where an initial imperative is expanded by a form with cohortative force and a further imperative, both connected with simple ו:

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[98] Cf. Miller (1984) pp475-6; W/O'C p565. Both note that *lamed he* verbs likewise have no morphologically distinct cohortative.

[99] My phrasing is deliberately non-committal about the precise nature of these forms, since our concern is entirely with their function: *JM* §114b(1) suggests we should simply distinguish between cohortative mood and cohortative form. Revell (1989) pp13-21 notes that there is at least a high correlation between clause-initial position of an imperfective form and volitive force.

[100] Cf. *GKC* §108d; W/O'C §34.5.2b; *JM* §116a-b; Gibson (1994) §87(a) and Rem. 3 (noting that in 1Ki 22:7-8 ו + cohortative parallels ל + infinitive, though this follows a question, not an imperative).

[101] Cf. *JM* §116; Bergsträsser (1929) §10a on the cohortative, imperative and jussive forming one system; also *GKC* §110f-i; Gibson (1994) §86.

וקחו את־אביכם ואת־בתיכם ובאו אלי ואתנה לכם את־טוב ארץ מצרים

ואכלו את־חלב הארץ

Similarly 1Sam 28:22, where indeed the second imperative is followed by a further jussive:[102]

שמע־נא גם־אתה בקול שפחתך ואשמה לפניך פת־לחם ואכול ויהי בך כח

כי תלך בדרך

However Gen 12:3aβ is distinctly different from vv2a-3aα. Since the ו is attached to a nominal form, the clause is most probably disjunctive (whereas the other clauses from 2a-3b are conjunctive).[103] Moreover אאר is a simple imperfect, not a cohortative, suggesting this stands outside the chain of purpose/ result clauses.[104] (The separation of the ו from the verb is not in itself enough to prevent use of the cohortative: cf. e.g. Gen 22:5; 33:14.[105]) Finally the speech ends with a clause whose verb is a perfect (3b), and the ו which links it to the previous clause(s) must be a ו-consecutive, since the sense required is clearly not that of the simple perfect. This use of ו + perfect probably indicates a consequence, 'logical and/ or chronological'.[106]

I have just suggested that a cohortative following an imperative commonly expresses 'purpose or result'. But can we be more precise? Here and elsewhere the clauses might simply be juxtaposed: והביאה לי ואכלה (Gen 27:4) *could* mean 'and bring it to me, and let me eat it', not 'and bring it to me that I may eat it';[107] likewise here we could translate 'Go... and I will indeed make you a great nation....'. Nevertheless there is at least normally some clear relation between the imperative and subsequent cohortatives, as one

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[102] *JM* §116h.

[103] Cf. *W/O'C* pp650-2.

[104] Miller (1984) pp472-3. No cohortative form of √ארר is attested in the OT, nor any 1st sing cohortative qal of a geminate verb, but such a form would probably have been available. The qal plural form וְנָבֹזָה (1Sam 14:36) would seem analogous to a hypothetical *אָאֹרָה (the only other qal plural cohortative of a geminate is ונבלה [Gen 11:7]): cf. also the niphal אֵחַתָּה at Jer 17:18. Contra Berge (1990) p23n62, who suggests that אאר can be a cohortative, with no evidence except an appeal to Bauer and Leander (1962) §58i which hardly argues the case.

[105] *JM* §116i, with further examples.

[106] *W/O'C* §32.2.2; cf. also *JM* §119e.

[107] *JM* §116b note(1). Berge (1990) pp280-1 suggests this parallels Gen 12:1-3 in being the preparation for a blessing, albeit a human blessing; however the similar grammatical construction scarcely need reveal any close connection.

would indeed expect from the principle that one clause or sentence in a speech usually has some connection to what precedes.[108] One would need good reason to maintain that the promises in Gen 12:2-3 are entirely independent of the command in v1. Abraham's going is meant to further their fulfilment: that is not to say that their fulfilment is necessarily dependent on his going ('if A, then B' does not imply 'if not A, then not B'), simply that the text does not discuss what might happen were he to remain in Haran.[109] Since his obedience to the command is related immediately after the divine speech (וילך v4, picking up the command לך-לך) whether or not the promise is conditional is hardly an issue. When the construction denotes a result, it is always an intended result[110] (as one might indeed expect from the use of the cohortative, a form with volitive force): if Abraham's going will result in his becoming a nation etc., this is because God thus intends. But is it the purpose of Abraham's going? Gen 23:4 'give me a burying place among you ואקברה מתי' provides an example where the speaker clearly desires to effect what is expressed with the cohortative, but those to whom the imperative is addressed may not have this desire; we learn what Abraham gains by buying the land, not what the Hittites would gain from selling it. Yet the content of Gen 12:2-3 should certainly be desirable to Abraham, since everything (with the possible exception of v3b) contributes to his self-interest. If obedience to the command of v1 will ensure these results, Abraham has every incentive to obey. Moreover there is no evident explanation for the command except insofar as Abraham's separating himself from his past will enable him to be made into a great nation etc. and all the nations to be blessed through him. Thus we must surely conclude that the promises of vv2-3 give precisely the reason – or at least a reason[111] – why Abraham should go, thereby stating the (or a) divine purpose in ordering and the (or a) human purpose in obeying. To translate 'Go... in order

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[108] Cf. the English 'Do this, and I will do that', which would normally be taken as a conditional 'If you do this, then I will do that'.

[109] Though Kelly (1920) p3 notes the difficulty of neatly distinguishing between expressions of result and conditionals. Cf. also the previous note.

[110] Cf. *GKC* §108d 'intention or intended consequence'; *JM* §116b note(1): 'the distinction between "purpose" and "consecution" (result) cannot always be sharply drawn, since one is dealing with an intended effect or result'; Gibson (1994) §87: the construction expresses '*design* or purpose, though the notion of consequence or effect is never far away'.

[111] We must not exclude the possibility of further divine purposes, not here expressed; equally we must allow that humans should obey divine commands *qua* divine commands, not just because of particular beneficial results which may accrue. One might compare Mal 3:7, שובו אלי ואשובה אליכם, where humans may have further reasons to return to God, but some nuance of purpose seems undeniable (contra *JM* §116b, also suggesting that Gen 12:2 expresses consequence rather than purpose).

that I may make you a great nation...' would hardly violate the meaning, except insofar as it makes explicit what the Hebrew leaves for the reader to infer.

When two imperatives are connected by ו, they sometimes are merely juxtaposed, but more commonly the second is a consequence of the first: after any volitive (imperative, cohortative, jussive) the imperative expresses in the second person what the cohortative expresses in the first person.[112] Examples of simple juxtaposition are Gen 17:1 (התהלך לפני והיה תמים) or Isa 66:10 (שמחו את־ירושלם וגילו בה); of logical subordination Gen 42:18 (זאת עשו וחיו) 'do this and [thus you shall] live', or perhaps 'do this in order to live') and 2Ki 5:13 (רחץ וטהר) 'wash and [thus you shall] become clean').[113] In Gen 42:18 the second imperative is hardly an order, since it is at least not straightforwardly in the addressees' power to obey such an order;[114] Joseph tells his brothers how they can preserve their lives, which it is assumed that they will want to do, rather than commanding (or requesting) them to do so. Thus were one to suggest that the imperative of Gen 12:2d was structurally linked to that of v1b, v2a-c forming as it were a parenthesis,[115] it would be at least as likely to express a further goal of the initial imperative ('go... and you shall be a blessing') as a further command. On the other hand, it is unclear why one should seek thus to analyse the text, when v2d can simply follow v2c as a further expansion of the divine promise: as noted above (p155) cohortatives and imperatives can be used together after an initial imperative.

To assess further how v2d fits into the structure, we shall need to consider the meaning of ברכה. As argued above (ch5.12), the word ברכה does not elsewhere describe a person as a source of blessing. Rather, a person said to be a ברכה is either a byword of blessing or signally in receipt of blessings; since the function as a byword is a result of evident blessing (X is a byword of blessing if people say 'may God bless me as he has X') we probably should not seek to maintain a sharp distinction between the uses. But if this is so, it is unclear how a person could be instructed to be a ברכה: while someone might be

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[112] Cf. n101.

[113] *W/O'C* §32.2.2a compares the English 'eat and drink', where the imperatives are coordinate, and 'divide and conquer' where the second is logically dependent on the first: '[t]hese two statements are grammatically similar, but they represent different relationships for lexical reasons'.

[114] Cf. van der Merwe, Naudé et al. (1999) p172. *JM* §114o notes that in v16 האסרו also is not straightforwardly an order, but rather 'express[es] the speaker's will, wish or desire'.

[115] Cf. e.g. Andersen (1984) p108.

commanded to act in such a way as to bring blessing to others, one cannot act in such a way as to be a signal example of blessing, since the granting of such blessing entirely depends on God.[116] Hence the force of the imperative is not to issue a command, but to state further the divine purpose.[117] This analysis does not make v2d a repetition of v2b, inasmuch as v2d says more than that Abraham will be blessed:[118] while many people receive blessing, only a few become exemplars of blessing.

· Since, as we have just demonstrated, MT makes perfect sense as it stands, the various proposals to emend v2d must seem dubious. Emendation to והיתה involves a change in the consonantal text, and would be motivated only by failure to understand that the imperative might not be issuing an order.[119] Repointing to וְהָיָה is a minor change, since it preserves the consonantal text.[120] Abraham's שם would then be the most probable subject of the verb: one might compare Prov 10:7 זכר צדיק לברכה, where indeed שם רשעים stands parallel to זכר צדיק.[121] (Diedrich suggests a sense 'es wird Segen sein', comparing Gen 39:5 where ברכה is subject of a masculine verb;[122] yet this hardly makes better sense than the more obvious option of taking the שם as subject.) However every other clause in the divine speech mentions Abraham in the second person, and it seems unlikely that this clause should differ.[123] Hence the repointing solves no problem (since there is no problem to solve), and does not obviously offer a preferable text. Further, SP reads here והוי, i.e. an imperative (Aramaism), as at 17:1 where וְהָיָה is also found in MT; LXX and Vulgate (see

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[116] One can certainly act in such a way as to make God unwilling to bless. Equally, once blessing has been promised as a result of obedience (cf. e.g. Deut 28), one can ensure blessing by one's actions. However were Gen 12 to suggest that by his obedience Abraham will acquire blessing, then that blessing would precisely be consequential on his going (in context the primary instance of obedience required), and the imperative of v2 would not be independent of that of v1. Further, it must be questionable whether Genesis would depict Abraham assuming that obedience will lead to signal blessing prior to God's making any such promise.

[117] LXX has here καὶ ἔσῃ εὐλογητός; Vulgate *erisque benedictus*.

[118] Contra Wehmeier (1970) p99.

[119] Cf. Ehrlich (1968) p47.

[120] Cf. e.g. Skinner (1910) pp243-4; Ehrlich (1968) p47; Speiser (1969) pp85-6.

[121] Cf. p131 above.

[122] Diedrich (1979) p32.

[123] Cf. Schreiner (1962) pp4-5.

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n117) also have second person forms. Similar objections apply to Coats' proposal ויהיה.[124]

Freedman suggests[125] that underlying MT is an original hiphil *wa'ahyehû 'I will cause it to be', the suffix of which would not have been represented in the earliest orthography, and the aleph of which might have been lost in pronunciation; hence in vv2-3a there was originally a sequence of six first person verbs with divine subject. However even if we accept Freedman's hypotheses concerning, for example, the text's original date and the existence of a hiphil of √היה – as well, indeed, as the likelihood of the aleph being omitted in the written text – we would still have to suppose that the original meaning was no longer clear when *matres lectionis* were introduced into the text, and hence that the reinterpretation (if such it be) is itself early: the reinterpretation would seem likely to predate the formation of the final form of the Pentateuch, and thus the supposed original force would be of no importance for reading that text.

At this point we must consider the relation to one another of a sequence of clauses following an initial imperative. Do they describe parallel results/ purposes of the imperative, or mutually successive results/ purposes? In other words, is the syntax of the speech of Gen 12:1-3 'Go... that a) I may make you a great nation, and b) I may bless you, and c) I may make your name great, and...'? Or is the structure 'Go... that I may make you a great nation, that (as a result of making you a great nation) I may bless you, that (as a result of blessing) I may make your name great, that...'? Or might some of the clauses be parallel, others successive? It seems, once again, that it is the content and context that has to shape how the syntax is read.[126] For in 1Ki 13:18 (השבהו אתך אל־ביתך ויאכל לחם וישת מים), for example, both eating and drinking are consequences of the prophet's coming to the house, but the drinking is not dependent on the eating. In 2Chr 1:10 (חכמה ומדע תן־לי ואצאה לפני העם־הזה ואבואה) similarly the 'going out' and 'coming in' are presumably co-ordinate.[127] However in Gen 45:18 (cited above p156) each clause depends on the previous: 'take your father and your households, to come to me that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, that you may eat the fat of the land'.[128] Likewise in Judg 20:13

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[124] Coats (1983) p107.

[125] Freedman (1953) p193.

[126] Cf. Berge (1990) p21.

[127] Cf. also e.g. Ps 90:14; 119:34, 117; Isa 41:23 Qere.

[128] Making the logical connections explicit is perhaps over-translation; I aim simply to highlight their existence.

<p dir="rtl">תנו את־האנשים בני־בליעל אשר בגבעה ונמיתם ונבערה רעה מישראל</p>

('hand over the scoundrels in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel') the removal of the evil is surely consequent on the putting to death of the men, which itself depends on their being handed over.[129] In Gen 12:1-3, there does not seem a continuous sequence of consequence:[130] while making Abraham a nation (v2a) might be part of a purpose of blessing him (v2b), it seems unlikely that the blessing would then be part of a further purpose of making his name great (v2c); while – to attempt a different analysis – blessing (v2b) might result in Abraham's name becoming great (v2c), his becoming a nation (v2a) would equally be a result, not a cause, of his being blessed. Thus most probably the clauses of v2a-c are essentially parallel; that is not to say that they are unconnected, simply that the text does not present them in such a way as to draw attention to the connections (as a continuous sequence would do). There is no reason to think v2d other than a further parallel expression, the shift to an imperative being due to the change to the second person:[131] again this is not to deny that there may be a nuance of sequence (Abraham's being an example of blessedness is doubtless a result of what has been said in v2a-c), but only to affirm that this clause is not highlighted by the syntax. One must, of course, ask why the text has a change to the second person, rather than e.g. וְאֶתֶּנְךָ בְרָכָה (cf. Ezek 34:26 s.v.l.[132]), if not to highlight the clause. My suggestion is that Abraham's blessedness is more emphatically stated by a clause referring entirely to him than it would be by one making explicit Yhwh's activity in blessing him. For if we judge v2d somehow exceptional in the sequence of verbs which begins in v2a, we will then be unable to see v3aα as simply continuing the sequence. While v3a might conceivably make a new start[133] – the cohortative marking emphasis – or might draw a consequence from v2d ('...you will be a blessing, and [as a result] I will bless those who bless you'), it is simpler to maintain that the cohortative, as those of v2a-c, depends on the imperative of v1b.

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[129] Cf. also e.g. 1Sam 28:7.

[130] Cf. Bailey Wells (2000) p197.

[131] While indeed 'a consecutive clause in the second person, after a cohortative, is formed with the indirect imperative' (Wolff (1966) p137), Wolff does not consider the possibility of continued dependence on the imperative of v1b.

[132] On Ezek 34:26, cf. above p132.

[133] So apparently e.g. Wolff (1966) p137, Westermann (1985) p144, RSV, NRSV, which all begin a new sentence at the start of v3.

We suggested above (p2) that the placing of the וֹ in v3aβ before a nominal form marks the clause as disjunctive: it is not simply sequential to the preceding clause. Clearly here the contrast between vv3aα and β is being indicated. The position of the object before the verb, thereby juxtaposing it to the contrasting object of the previous verb (מְבָרֲכֶיךָ/ מְקַלֶּלְךָ) in itself has similar effect.[134] Of course the two clauses are not completely disconnected: it might indeed seem a natural corollary of God's treating favourably those who bless Abraham that he would treat with disfavour those whose relationship with Abraham is less happy (cf. also Gen 27:29b; Num 24:9b). Yet – as again we noted above – there is a significant difference in the verbal forms between the two clauses, since אֲבָרֲכָה is a cohortative while אָאֹר is a simple imperfect.

> The significance of the syntax for the theology of the passage should be
> obvious. The word about curse is clearly not set here as a part of the divine
> intention.[135]

We might connect to this the use of the singular מְקַלֶּלְךָ in v3aβ in contrast to the plural מְבָרֲכֶיךָ in v3aα: while Yhwh looks to there being many who bless Abraham, there need not be many who wish him harm.[136] (The singular appears *lectio difficilior*; those manuscripts – including a Cairo genizah fragment – and versions which suggest a plural are presumably harmonising the two clauses of v3a and assimilating to Gen 27:29 and Num 24:9.[137]) Thus we should translate v3a as 'and that I may bless those who bless you, while the one who abuses[138] you I will curse'.

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[134] Cf. Yarchin (1980) p177n32. *JM* §155oa: 'an object ending the preceding clause may cause the object of the following clause to follow it immediately.... [I]t is difficult to say whether the resultant chiasmus is by design or not.... In some cases, however, contrast may be the cause'.

[135] Miller (1984) p473.

[136] So e.g. Radak and Ibn Ezra (Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980a) p430); Junker (1959) p554; von Rad (1972) p160; Wolff (1966) p139; Sarna (1989) p89. Cassuto (1964) p315 and Hamilton (1990) p373 think the difference is purely for the sake of variety. My phrasing in the text deliberately accounts for the fact that Israel's history provided many examples of people seeking to do her harm: such were not isolated exceptions in fact, and presumably it is not being suggested that Yhwh was unaware when he called Abraham of what would actually happen. Nevertheless it is no part of Yhwh's purpose for Israel that this should be the case.

[137] Emendation to מְקַלֲלֶיךָ is accepted by e.g. Gunkel (1997) p164; Skinner (1910) p244; BHS ad loc.; Westermann (1985) p144. Wenham (1987) p266 notes that the consonants *could* represent a defective spelling of the plural, misinterpreted by the Masoretes as a singular.

[138] On the meaning of מְקַלֶּלְךָ see ch6.3.8.

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Finally we must give more detailed attention to v3b: we shall not here consider the syntax of the niphal, and of its construction with ב, but shall simply consider how the use of the perfect with ו-consecutive connects this clause with what precedes. As with the constructions we have analysed previously, it appears that the precise nuance of a perfect with ו-consecutive following a volitive has to be inferred from the context. Since, indeed, it is 'by far the most common construction after an imperative'[139] it is presumably not peculiarly emphatic in that case, instead continuing the line of thought established by the imperative.[140] In 1Sam 6:7 (קחו ועשׂו ...ואסרתם) the yoking is the obvious next step in the preparation, and is presumably as much an order as those preparations expressed by the imperatives, though there may of course be some further nuance expressed, whether temporal succession 'and then you shall yoke', logical consequence 'and thus you shall yoke', or even purpose 'that you may yoke'. In 1Ki 1:2 (לאדני המלך נערה בתולה ועמדה לפני המלך יבקשׁו) the perfect clearly expresses the purpose of the action recommended in the previous jussive;[141] but it seems unlikely that any great weight is placed on it. In 1Sam 15:30 a ו-consecutive perfect is used where a cohortative is used in the similar v25: plausibly both express purpose ('return with me that I may worship Yhwh').[142] In Judg 11:37 ('grant me two months ואלכה וירדתי על־ההרים ואבכה על־בתולי) the perfect's force can hardly be different from that of the cohortatives, so its use is presumably for the sake of variety.[143] In Gen 31:44 (לכה נכרתה ברית אני ואתה והיה לעד ביני ובינך) again a nuance of purpose is surely present: the point of making the covenant is, in part, that it may stand as a witness between Jacob and Laban. On the other hand, in Judg 1:3 there is, as in Gen 12:1-3, a sequence imperative, cohortative with simple ו, ו-consecutive perfect (Gen

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[139] Driver (1892) p125 (though Revell (1989) p22n22 suggests that its frequency may be somewhat less in narrative prose than in e.g. legal material).

[140] Revell (1989) p25 (and cf. the preceding discussion concerning use of simple ו + perfect following an imperative versus use of a second imperative) suggests that it may be less forceful than a volitive form in the same position, though often either construction would be possible; however it is unclear that this is the case in general, and implausible that Gen 12:3b deliberately employs a non-emphatic construction.

[141] So Gibson (1994) §87 Rem. 3; *JM* §169i states that waw conversive can express only result, not purpose, though §119i, 12 qualifies this, suggesting that while the construction *in itself* can express only consecution the context and/or the particular meanings of the words involved may add a nuance of purpose.

[142] Cf. again Gibson (1994) §87 Rem. 3.

[143] Cf. *JM* §119i. Emendation of וירדתי to ורדתי (√רוד 'wander') is attractive (cf. *BDB* p923; Soggin (1987) p214) but obviously does not affect my point.

12:3b connects in the logical sequence more to v3aα, with its cohortative verb, than to v3aβ with its simple imperfect). However when Judah says to Simeon

עלה אתי בגורלי ונלחמה בכנעני והלכתי גם־אני אתך בגורלך

the force of the ו-consecutive perfect is to make a promise consequential on the imperative being heeded, not to give the purpose of the injunction: the sense is not 'go up with me... and let us fight... in order that I may go up with you', but 'go up with me... and let us fight... and then I too will go up'.

Hence the construction used in Gen 12:3b does not have one narrow meaning: we cannot assume that Judg 1:3 gives the only possible meaning of the perfect with waw-consecutive following an imperative and cohortative + ו, since it is far from clear that in Gen 31:44, where it follows an imperative and cohortative without ו, the absence of the ו on the cohortative is enough to determine how the last clause must be read. Nor should we see great significance in the use of a perfect rather than a volitive form (i.e., for the third person, a jussive) in Gen 12:3: in the examples we have considered, the perfect is not used to ascribe to an outcome a certainty greater than that expressed by a volitive,[144] nor (conversely) to suggest that the outcome may not be part of the speaker's intention. That God's initial call of Abraham should culminate in the statement of foreseen but unintended consequence is hardly probable; that Abraham should have some significance for all the families of the earth is more plausibly climactic in the promises[145] than an incidental aside. V3b thus must have some nuance of purpose. Less clear is whether it is parallel to the previous clauses, or successive to them; that is, whether it states a further result of the imperative logically on the same level as the previous promises, if the greatest of them, or whether it is a result of the previous promises also (by becoming a great nation etc. Abraham takes on significance for other peoples). The latter possibility might give some significance to the choice of perfect rather than jussive, marking this clause as different from the preceding clauses with ו and a volitive.[146] However it is equally possible that we should see no particular

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[144] Contra Wolff (1966) p138, suggesting that v3b 'is the real result and it is, therefore, confirmed definitively by the perfect'; cf. Brockelmann (1956) §41f (to which Wolff refers): 'das perf. konstatiert nach einem imperf. künftige Ereignisse und Zustände, die als sicher zu erwarten sind...; so auch, um das nach der Schilderung eines Zustandes dann daraus zu erwartende Ergebnis vorzuführen...; so auch nach einem Vebot...; nach einer Aufforderung...'.

[145] See below ch6.3.9.

[146] In Gen 26:3

גור בארץ הזאת ואהיה עמך ואברכך כי־לך ולזרעך אתן את־כל־הארצת האל והקמתי את־השבעה

significance in the use of a non-volitive form whose function seems often to overlap with that of the volitive: if in Judg 11:37 (cf. above) the reader was presumably not meant to remark on the alternation between cohortative and first person perfect, the selection of a perfect rather than a jussive for a third person verb following first and second person volitives is hardly much of a signal as to the function of the clause. Purely syntactic analysis, it seems, can carry us no further: we shall return to the question in ch6.3.9 below.

6.3 Genesis 12:3 in its context

6.3.1 Introduction

The interpretation of Gen 12:3b is a much controverted issue, which has been extensively discussed. The interpretation of vv2-3a has, perhaps surprisingly, received much less attention,[147] given that, in addition to their intrinsic importance in this initial divine address to Abraham, they set the context for v3b and thus might be expected to throw light on its interpretation. This study thus attempts to interpret Gen 12:3b in the context of the whole divine speech of vv1b-3 – and indeed to set that speech in its narrative context. The immediate narrative context begins in 11:27, with the formula תרח תלדת ואלה: as argued above (pp135-136), this is a significant structural marker in Genesis (which is not to say that it marks an absolute break with what preceded), and the information that follows in vv27-32 seems designed in large part as introduction to 12:1ff, giving background information necessary for its comprehension, such as the identity of Abraham and Lot, Sarah's barrenness, and Abraham's location in Haran.[148]

11:27-12:9 is generally considered to contain material from both J and P: the classic analysis ascribes 11:27, 31-2 and 12:4b-5 to P, 11:28-30, 12:1-4a, 6-9 to J.[149] More recently there have been challenges to the possibility of making neat – or, in the view of some, any –

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an imperative is followed by two forms with presumably cohortative force (אהיה and אברכך); after a clause introduced by כי containing an imperfect verb, the last clause with ו + perfect may sum up the whole (Johnson (1979) p50, though it is far from clear that Johnson's general point about the function of the perfect can be sustained). The issue is complex since the preceding clauses do not correspond in detail with what Yhwh explicitly swore to Abraham (22:16-18; 24:7), whereas vv4-5 clearly do pick up those passages (see further below p252): the last clause thus might summarize ('and thus I will fulfil...') what has been a general correspondence to the oath, or might add a new item to the promise ('and furthermore I will fulfil...'), introducing the details of vv4-5.

[147] Ruprecht (1979a) and Ruprecht (1979b) being significant exceptions to the general trend.

[148] Cf. in detail Baumgart (1996) pp50-1n135.

[149] So e.g. Skinner (1910); Driver (1916); Speiser (1969); von Rad (1972); Emerton (1992) is a recent defence.

divisions in 11:27-32;[150] recent challenges to the classical documentary hypothesis of course include theses that J, or at least key parts of what has been commonly seen as J, is of post-exilic provenance,[151] but these at least often do not challenge the distinction between Priestly and non-Priestly material.[152] Kikawada and Schedl[153] both suggest that the literary artistry in vv1-9 is such that it could hardly be the result of combining sources: however the latter's method of 'logotechnische Analyse', seeing significant patterns in the numbers of words and phrases in the various units, is hardly compelling; while Kikawada's analysis is unconvincing (e.g. were בית־אל מים והעי מקדם [v8] a sentence not dependent on the previous verb, surely an initial ו would be necessary) and hence no grounds for asserting the implausibility of creating such a unit from sources. However

> [t]hese two introductions [to the Abraham story] are joined together in such
>
> a way as to form a coherent account which reaches from 11:27 to 12:9.[154]

Analysis into separate sources thus depends on affinities between the material and what is ascribed to the different sources elsewhere (the תולדות-formulae being distinctive of P; use of יהוה being characteristic of J etc.), more than on possible incongruities in the text as it stands. The primary exception to this is the original location of Abraham's family in Ur (11:28, 31), on which see below pp170-172, and perhaps also the chronologies of Abraham's and Terah's lives (below pp168-169).[155]

The speech of 12:1-3 is generally treated as a unity in its origin:[156] even if it may be felt that there is some repetition of ideas

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[150] So e.g. Westermann (1985) pp134-5 suggests that the divisions are uncertain, since the text was shaped by P using some material from J, such that the precise contributions of each are unclear (cf. also Van Seters (1975) p225 and Van Seters (1992) p202); Crüsemann (1981) p16 and Ska (1997) pp369-70 argue that there is no good reason to see J here at all.

[151] So e.g. Levin (1993): on pp44-7 he argues that 12:1-3 is the work of this late Yahwist. Ska (1997) argues that 12:1-4a is post-exilic and part of a late layer in the Pentateuch, without asking how this relates to the classical source-divisions in the Pentateuch.

[152] Cf. above p20. Cf. also Crüsemann (1981) who denies the existence of a J-source common to both Primeval and Patriarchal material, but allows the presence of P-material in both.

[153] Kikawada (1973); Schedl (1984).

[154] Westermann (1985) p145.

[155] One might also regard 12:4a and 5a as doublets, or suggest that 12:5a repeats information about the identity of Lot and Sarai which 11:31 has already told the reader (Ruprecht (1979b) p172n6), though 11:31 specifies their relationship to Terah, while 12:5a relates them to Abraham.

[156] For this paragraph, cf. the detailed discussion of Berge (1990) pp11-31.

le style redondant de cet oracle est voulu et convient parfaitement à cette

»ouverture« de l'histoire d'Abraham et d'Israël.[157]

(We shall indeed be demonstrating that each phrase has a particular function, and hence that nothing in the speech is merely repetitious.) Certainly the command and promise belong together, as a matter of narrative logic and of literary form: divine orders to travel despite the obvious risks involved in moving to a strange location are accompanied by assurance of divine favour.[158] Diedrich suggests that vv2b and d are insertions into an original speech which left implicit that what Abraham himself received was blessing;[159] however even were we to grant that the speech Diedrich thus reconstructs would be preferable to that we have in the book of Genesis, it is unclear that he gives any good reason to think that such an original existed.[160] While it *might* be possible to divide the text between sources – Eißfeldt, for example, sees vv1-2 as belonging to his source L and v3 to his J[161] – or to ascribe parts to (a) redactor(s), this would have to be on the basis of a pre-existing conception of what belongs in each source, not on the grounds of difficulties with the extant text.[162]

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[157] Ska (1997) p369n9. Cf. also Gunkel (1997) p163: 'such repetition of thought is understandable in such a solemn text'.

[158] Ruprecht (1979b) p175; Westermann (1985) pp147-9, noting Gen 31:3; 32:10; 46:1-5a; in 26:1-3 the order to remain in the land despite famine also is linked with a promise; Berge (1990) pp17-8. That the promise is a later layer is suggested by e.g. Hoftijzer (1956) ch1; Van Seters (1975) pp271-8; Emerton (1982) esp. pp21-2.

[159] Diedrich (1979).

[160] Cf. also Zenger (1977) pp46-8 concerning vv2c-3a: his literary arguments seem to have little weight; his arguments concerning the dating are only as convincing as his beliefs that Gen 11:1-9; 27:29 and Num 24:9 are post-Yahwistic (no earlier than the eighth century). Köckert (1988) pp255-260 defends the literary unity of vv1-3, critiquing Diedrich and Zenger.

[161] Noted by Diedrich (1979) p26, together with Holzinger's division of vv2-3 into J[1] and J[2], and Resenhöfft's division of vv1-4 between J and E.

[162] Warning (2000) notes that 12:1-3 contains the seventh uses of אברם, גוי, משפחה, √ברך, and the adjective גדול, and the twelfth use of √הלך in Genesis; the twelfth use of אברם is in 12:7, the first time God is said to appear to anyone. While this initially may seem unlikely to be coincidental – and hence testimony to a careful unity in the final form of Genesis – the twelfth use of משפחה is of Esau's descendants in 36:40, and that of גדול in 17:20 of Ishmael (or 15:18 of the Euphrates if the piel אגדלה in 12:2 is included); it is implausible that these should receive particular stress. (However √ברך occurs for the twelfth time in 17:16 when God promises Sarah a son, and גוי at 17:5 when Abraham's name is changed, both clearly significant passages.) Similarly שם 'name' occurs for the twenty-fifth time in 12:2, though it is obscure why, if the other important words of the speech have been carefully used in order that their occurrence should be numerically significant, this should differ (the seventh use of שם is at 4:17, and the twelfth at 4:25, neither obviously worthy of special emphasis).

6.3.2 The context of the promises

There is no account of a divine appearance in 12:1: Yhwh as it were speaks out of nowhere. There probably holds no great significance, since elsewhere in Genesis divine speeches are introduced with equally little detail (cf. e.g. 13:14; 21:12; 22:1; 31:3[163]), though it is not impossible that theophany language is reserved for v7, when Abraham has reached the land.[164] Nor can we suggest that the speech lacks context.[165] For while it may be significant that no reason is given why Yhwh should choose Abraham, or select this particular occasion to speak to him – emphasising the divine initiative and the mysteries of divine election – at least the approximate time and place are specified, since Abraham hears the words in Haran when aged seventy-five.

That, at least, is the most straightforward reading of the text, the ויאמר continuing the story from the end of ch11. The situation is slightly complicated by the fact that, if Abraham was born when Terah was seventy (11:26) and left Haran when he himself was seventy-five (12:4), this departure preceded Terah's death, when Abraham would have been one hundred and thirty-five: 11:32 thus recounts an event prior to 12:1 – dismissing Terah before Abraham takes centre-stage[166] – and 12:1 chronologically succeeds 11:31. In 11:32 SP gives 145 as Terah's age at death, but this is presumably a deliberate correction to make Abraham's departure follow Terah's death: it is obscure how an original 145 could have been corrupted/ changed into the MT figure; LXX has the same figure as MT, though specifying the 205 years as the length of Terah's life *in Haran*. It is possible that 11:26 does not give Terah's sons in the order of their birth, rather placing first the one who is to be most important, since the similarly-phrased 5:32 lists Noah's sons in the order Shem, Ham and Japheth (cf. also 6:10, 7:13, 9:18 and 10:1), while 9:24 is explicit that Ham is Noah's youngest son;[167] if this does not simply reflect the failure fully to integrate different sources, it may be that the list's order is governed by considerations of euphony, Hebrew preferring

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[163] Cf. Premsagar (1974) p114 (though it is not evident that '[t]his form of revelation may be understood as an inner inspiration by which the devotee becomes aware of God's presence and God's word'); Ska (1997) pp374-5 notes other possible similarities between 12:1 and 31:3.

[164] Cassuto (1964) p309. Cf. also below p251 on Gen 26:24.

[165] Contra Westermann (1985) p147: 'the stylization shows that J does not intend to narrate an event, but to pass on a divine oracle whose situation he leaves open'.

[166] Cf. Wenham (1987) p269.

[167] 10:21 describes Shem as אחי יפת הגדול: this probably means 'the elder brother of Japheth', since adjectives rarely modify proper names in biblical Hebrew, but LXX, *Gen Rab* 37:6 and most medieval Jewish exegetes render 'the brother of Japheth who is the oldest' (Sarna (1989) p78; Cassuto (1964) p165 takes in the latter sense).

to place short words before long ones.[168] However were Abraham born when Terah was 130 – thus being seventy-five when Terah died – it would be difficult to understand why at 17:17 he cannot believe that he could become a father when aged 100.[169] Moreover were Terah still alive when Abraham leaves Haran, it would explain the lack of תולדות-formula in ch12: Terah is still head of the family.[170] Thus we should probably suppose that 11:32 gives the information out of chronological sequence, though it remains possible that we have here a failure to integrate all the chronological details.

However ויאמר (12:1) *could* also – if less obviously – be taken as a pluperfect, relating a divine address to Abraham considerably prior to his leaving Haran, perhaps while still in Ur: Acts 7:2-3 (and e.g. Philo *Abr* 71) certainly suggests that when still in Ur Abraham was summoned to leave his family and go to the land God would show him (and in Gen 15:7 Yhwh refers to his bringing Abraham from Ur); Ur might seem more naturally described as Abraham's ארץ ומולדת ובית אב than Haran; a call received in Ur might explain why the family set out from there ללכת ארצה כנען (11:31). Yet 11:31 suggests that the migration to Haran was Terah's responsibility. While it is possible that Abraham should have told his father of the divine call, his father should have chosen to go also, and hence as head of the household taken responsibility for the journey,[171] v31 is hardly an obvious way to describe this. Further 12:4a is most naturally taken as a statement concerning Abraham's leaving Haran, not as relating a different departure to v4b; and the absence of Terah would be surprising if it referred to the departure from Ur. Yet 12:4a reads as the immediate sequel to the divine speech (the וילך, indeed, picking up the לך־לך of v1): if 12:1 introduces a parenthesis ('Yhwh had said to Abraham...') there is nothing to indicate to the reader that the main story line has been resumed. If 12:1-3 relates an experience in Ur, the text hardly expresses this with any clarity.[172]

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[168] Cf. Cassuto (1964) pp164-5. Hamilton (1990) pp367-8 compares 11:26 and 5:32.

[169] Kidner (1967) p112.

[170] Wenham (1987) p269.

[171] Cf. e.g. Calvin (1965) Ip338.

[172] *Jubilees* 12:21 locates Abraham in Haran, but has him ask Yhwh whether he should remain there or return to Ur: hence Yhwh's reply can tell him to abandon his homeland.

The word מולדת might refer either to Abraham's 'family' or to his 'birth';[173] if the latter it presumably forms a hendiadys with ארץ, the phrase denoting his 'native land' (cf. 11:28 for the phrase בארץ מולדתו, which LXX translates ἐν τῇ γῇ ᾗ ἐγενήθη). The meaning 'birth' is clear for מולדת in Ezek 16:3-4, whereas the meaning 'kin' is clear in Gen 43:7 and Esther 8:6; Gen 48:16 and Lev 18:9, 11 evidence a sense 'offspring'. One could explain the phrase ארץ מולדת as either 'land of birth' or 'land of kin': either could well describe a place to which one feels allegiance.[174] Yet hendiadys seems unlikely in Gen 12:1, since we must also reckon with the phrase ומבית־אב; the verse seems to employ a series of three items of increasing specificity, ארץ a broad term denoting the whole land, בית־אב referring to the close family unit, and מולדת denoting a wider kin group. Describing Abraham's leaving Haran as his leaving his kin may seem somewhat odd, since we might suppose his wider kin are still in Ur (below p171), but 12:1 is not commanding him to leave his birthplace.

It has been suggested that the Ur mentioned in Genesis is not the city of that name in Lower Mesopotamia, but rather a city in Upper Mesopotamia;[175] thus Abraham's origins are firmly placed in Upper Mesopotamia, and a move from Ur to Haran becomes a relocation within one territory rather than a major migration which Genesis leaves unexplained. However three significant objections can be raised to this theory. The first is that the description אור כשדים would be inappropriate for a northern Ur; while its application to a city in Lower Mesopotamia would doubtless only be possible in the mid-first millennium B.C., such anachronism (if locating a place by a later designation even counts as anachronism) is hardly consequential. Secondly 11:31 would seem to report a considerably more substantial movement than a migration of a few miles, since the phrase ללכת ארצה כנען, however interpreted (see below p174), hardly fits a minor relocation within Mesopotamia. Thirdly there is the question of whether there is a plausible candidate in Upper Mesopotamia to be identified as Ur. Urfa (i.e. Edessa) has been suggested by some, but this is unlikely on philological grounds;[176] Ugaritic and Hittite texts mention an

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[173] For some of the arguments, cf. e.g. Skinner (1910) p236; Cassuto (1964) pp274-5; Westermann (1985) p137; Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980a) pp426-7.

[174] Cassuto (1964) p274 suggests that nomads would consider the place where a person happened to be born unimportant. However even if we grant this, it is unclear that Genesis consistently portrays the patriarchs as nomads.

[175] Cf. the discussion and bibliography in Hamilton (1990) pp363-5.

[176] Cf. Wiseman (1980) p1611.

Ura, but this is a seaport on the Cilician coast in Hittite territory.[177]   Of course our knowledge of ancient places and their names is very imperfect, so arguments from silence are hardly conclusive.   Nevertheless to assert that Ur must be a place in Northern Mesopotamia, though we have no record of any such, not the well-known city further south, is surely to place excessive weight on those few indications which might support such a theory.

More plausible as an attempt to explain the text is the suggestion that mention of Ur stems from (a) late stage(s) in the text's redaction. Thus originally the patriarchs' ancestors were located at Haran, from whence Abraham was called, leaving behind most of his family.   Hence in ch24 Nahor's descendants live in Aram-naharaim, i.e. in Upper Mesopotamia (whereas 11:31 in the final form of the text would most obviously imply that they remained in Lower Mesopotamia, so we would have to assume either a subsequent migration paralleling Terah's,[178] or else that they moved with Terah, though the text sees no reason to note this[179]). Ur is mentioned only three times: 11:28, 31 and 15:7. In 11:28 באור כשדים could easily be a later addition, inasmuch as the text would make perfect sense without it. In 15:7 it is stated that Yhwh brought Abraham out from Ur: while this might well simply make explicit what ch11 leaves implicit, namely that the departure from Ur was part of the divine purpose,[180] it is certainly also possible that the two chapters offer two different conceptions of the departure from Ur. Westermann would date 15:7ff to probably the seventh century, regarding it as certainly different from original J material;[181] while we cannot here enter into the details of the argument, we can at least note that there is thus other evidence which *might* point to 15:7ff differing from an underlying layer in Genesis. This leaves 11:31, which, if attributed to P (cf. above pp165-166) again may not reflect the earliest strata of Genesis, though

> even in P itself the names in xi. 10-27 seem to point to Mesopotamia as the
> home of Abraham's ancestors.[182]

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[177] Hamilton (1990) p365.

[178] Sarna (1989) p88.

[179] Baldwin (1986) p28.

[180] Cf. Sarna (1989) p89.

[181] Westermann (1985) p224.

[182] Driver (1916) p142.

In other words, the redactional history lying behind the mentions of Ur could be very complicated; however it is a plausible hypothesis that Ur has been combined with (a) tradition(s) locating Abraham originally at Haran. This may have left a few awkwardnesses, notably the sudden appearance of Nahor's descendants in Aram-Naharaim in ch24 (which Abraham in v4 describes as אַרְצִי), and the language of 12:1 which is not entirely happy as a command to leave a land to which (in the final form of the text) Abraham's wider family has no allegiance. Nevertheless the obvious reading of the text as it stands has Abraham called from Haran – perhaps using language which is slightly overblown if each phrase of the command be pushed, but is not completely inappropriate as a description of any place where one lives, where (some of) one's family are and hence where one has at least a measure of security – subsequent to a move from Lower Mesopotamia at Terah's behest for which no explanation is given, but which can, at least with the benefit of hindsight, be regarded as an important part of Yhwh's purpose (15:7). The infelicities in the text if we adopt this reading seem fewer than those we would have to admit if we hold that Abraham received the call in Ur; if the infelicities can plausibly be explained in terms of the text's redaction-history, this should not shape our reading (cf. above ch1.2) but may at least encourage us to hope that we have not missed the true significance of such details.

The language of 12:1 suggests that leaving Haran is for Abraham a move away from a place of at least relative security.[183] The three-fold phrase מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, each element specifying a closer tie which Abraham has to break, confirms the difficulty of what is asked:[184] we might note the similar use of four phrases at 22:2, where each of אֶת־ בִּנְךָ, אֶת־יְחִידְךָ, אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ and אֶת־יִצְחָק specifies more closely Abraham's tie to Isaac and hence increases the enormity of the act commanded.[185] לֶךְ־לְךָ equally stresses the break which Abraham must make, since the preposition and pronoun with the verb serve to mark separation.[186] If we accept the chronology suggested above (pp168-169), Terah is still alive, and hence Abraham is leaving his father: however this is hardly emphasised, since readers can discover it only after reading v4 and comparing the various chronological data which

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[183] Contra Gunn and Fewell (1993) p91.

[184] So e.g. Ramban (Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980a) p427); Driver (1916) p144; Sarna (1989) p88.

[185] Cf. *Gen Rab* 55.7, cited by Levenson (1993) p127.

[186] Cf. Cassuto (1964) pp309-311, noting e.g. Ex 18:27; Josh 22:4; 1Sam 26:11-12; Jer 5:5; Song 2:10; Gen 21:16 (וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב לָהּ); also Muraoaka (1978), e.g. p497 'the idiomatic preposition can be best described as centripetal. Basically it serves to convey the impression on the part of the speaker or author that the subject establishes his own identity, recovering or finding his own place by determinedly dissociating himself from his familiar surrounding'.

have then been imparted.[187] Further, Abraham is not told where he is going, simply that he must proceed at Yhwh's direction: again he must move from (relative) stability into a situation which is completely unknown, except insofar as Yhwh's promises are trustworthy. Even were it suggested that the patriarchs are depicted as 'nomads', who would therefore be less unwilling to move than more sedentary peoples, even nomads would surely not make long migrations going they know not where without some good reason.[188] Famine, military threat, or some other such compulsion might force the whole group to relocate; lesser problems with the amount of land/ food available might compel some of the group to leave the rest to use what resources there are (cf. Gen 13?).[189] However Gen 12 depicts no such compulsion: that Abraham must leave his family behind shows there to be no general crisis, while the promise of increase at least hints that the problem is not too many mouths to feed.[190] Abraham's motivation for leaving is to be the divine command, not the pressure of circumstances.[191] Yet the command is accompanied by promises. We might well imagine that even when circumstances seemed to indicate a move, divine reassurance was still desirable, because of the inevitable risks in any migration.[192] Here the promises are necessary if Abraham is to understand the command, if God is not to require blind obedience. And the promises indeed seem to overshadow the command, being substantially longer (17 words, compared with 10); what will happen following Abraham's response is more important than the command in itself.[193] Abraham's obedience is thus to be far from unmotivated. Not that obedience is easy, inasmuch as it requires faith that Yhwh will indeed accomplish the great things promised – although, for example, detaching a man whose wife is barren from his home is not the obvious way to create a great nation.

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[187] Contra Cassuto (1964) p312, there is no necessary implication in the use of בית־אב that the father is still alive: cf. 24:38 (though it is possible that Abraham was unaware of Terah's death).

[188] Contra Westermann (1985) p148.

[189] Cf. Ruprecht (1979b) pp173-5.

[190] Ruprecht (1979b) pp173-4.

[191] Cf. Gunkel (1997) p164.

[192] Ruprecht (1979b) p175: 'Maag sagt mit Recht, daß die Risiken und Strapazen einer Transmigration nur angesichts einer göttlichen Verheißung bewältigt werden können'. Other divine addresses in Genesis also have the form of command plus promise (p167 and n158 above).

[193] Cf. Wolff (1966) p138; Westermann (1985) p146; Wenham (1987) p274.

Thus it would seem that Abraham is here tested, as Jewish tradition has often asserted.[194] Equally we should allow that the promises may be conditional on the obedience.[195] Nothing is said about what would happen should Abraham disobey; it is certainly not stated that disobedience would preclude fulfilment of what is offered. Yet the syntax implies that the promises are linked to the command (see ch6.2 above), that their fulfilment – at least in the preferred divine plan – will somehow follow from its execution. Divine grace seeks the co-operation of human obedience, perhaps, though the text does not explore the issue in any depth. Nor does it allow access to Abraham's mind, or establish any tension concerning what his response to the command will be: no sooner does the divine speech finish than Abraham obeys (the first word of v4 is ‏וילך‎, as Abraham fulfils to the letter the ‏לך-לך‎ of v1). Abraham is thus a model of faithful obedience.[196]

It is not explained how Abraham discovers in which direction he is to go – as in ch22 it is never revealed how Abraham knew Moriah was to be his destination.[197] In 11:31 ‏ללכת ארצה כנען‎ is probably proleptic,[198] noting the start of a journey which will end in Canaan: had Terah intended to move to Canaan, it is obscure why the family would have gone anywhere near Haran,[199] not just why they should have remained there. (11:31 may also serve to raise the possibility of migration from Mesopotamia to Canaan, suggesting perhaps that Canaan would be a not unattractive destination.) Yhwh's language in v1 would seem exceedingly vague if Abraham already had an inkling that Canaan was to be his goal.

6.3.3 The promises

The function of the promises of vv2-3 can be considered on two levels. We may first ask what they would have meant as promises to Abraham: whatever one's opinion concerning whether (at least parts of) the promises were part of the experience of some

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[194] Cf. e.g. Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980a) p424.

[195] Contra Wolff (1966) p138.

[196] Not that the text necessarily depicts him as acting with an unclouded mind: mental anguish and faithful obedience may not be incompatible.

[197] Ska (1997) pp370-1.

[198] So e.g. Calvin (1965) Ip344.

[199] Unless one considers a historicizing explanation relevant: '[t]he reason for Terah's detour to Haran is not given, but it may have had to do with Haran as a focus of the international donkey caravan trade and with the fact that both it and Ur were centers of the moon-god cult' (Sarna (1989) p88).

historical Abraham, one can – or rather must – enquire also their meaning for the character Abraham within the narrative-world of Genesis. But we may secondly ask their function(s) for the reader of Genesis living considerably later than (the imagined) Abraham.[200] The promise of becoming a great nation, for example, is for Abraham a promise of personal greatness in having a large posterity and being the founder of a significant people (cf. Ex 32:10 and Num 14:12, where God wishes to reward Moses for his faithfulness by destroying the rebellious people but making him into a great nation). However for the reader – at least for an ancient Israelite reader – the promise may function more to state the greatness God wills for Israel. It is not simply that the reader is more interested in the implications for his own people in his own day; rather, the text encourages such interest. As suggested above (ch6.1), the reader will reach ch12 with the question 'what about Israel?' clamouring for an answer. Thus Abraham will be seen from the outset not merely as an individual, but as the founder of the people. Hence the first of the promises is that of becoming a great nation. Given the importance of blessing in vv2-3 – √ברך occurs five times – we might have expected that it would head the promises, but instead they first signal explicitly that their effect extends well beyond Abraham's own life and lifetime.[201] This is not to deny any interest in Abraham as a character. The promises are addressed to him (v2a may look to the existence of Israel, but is a promise to Abraham, not to Israel) – and as we have seen their fulfilment may not be unconnected to his obedience. Through the rest of the Pentateuch God's purposes for Israel are grounded not just in his present relationship to the people, but in his commitments to the patriarchs (cf. e.g. Ex 2:24; 32:13; Lev 26:42; Deut 1:8; 7:8): the patriarchs are not just ciphers for the present Israel. Each of the promises in Gen 12:2-3 makes sense as a promise to an individual, and hence the imagined context is never broken.[202] In our discussion we shall attempt to respect both levels of functioning of the promises.

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[200] This distinction differs somewhat from that of Westermann (1976) p118, who distinguishes those promises which are fulfilled in the time of the patriarch who receives them and those which can only be fulfilled after the nation of Israel is in existence.

[201] Cf. Westermann (1985) p147: '[t]he reason why the sentence, "I will bless you," does not stand at the beginning is probably due to the overarching function of 12:1-3. The promise is directed to Israel; it is the basis of the people's greatness; and this is to be stated at the beginning'.

[202] Cf. Ruprecht (1979a) p462: 'alle diese Verheißungen sind eigentlich nur [?] als Verheißungen für einen Einzelnen möglich und sinnvoll, und zwar in besonderer Weise als Verheißungen für einen König, aber trotzdem werden sie auf eine kollektive Größe bezogen. Sie sollen sich an dem sich von Abraham herleitenden Volk verwirklichen' (on the link of the promises and royal traditions, see below pp179, 181, 191).

6.3.4 'I shall make you a great nation' (v2a)

The word גדול normally denotes greatness in extent, number, power or importance, and lacks the moral nuance of the English 'great': in 18:18 the nation Abraham is to become is not just גדול but also עצום '(numerically) strong'.[203] Numerical strength is at least a significant part of what is promised in 12:2: it is surely a natural part of a nation's greatness,[204] and Abraham is later explicitly told that he will be ancestor of many people (13:16; 15:5; 17:2 etc.). Indeed for Abraham to become any kind of nation significant enlargement of his family will be necessary, and hence numerical growth is implicit. Ruprecht connects the promises of numerical growth in Genesis with language used in military contexts, 1Sam 13:5 for example referring to Philistine troops as 'like the sand in multitude'.[205] However since the phrase 'great nation' itself never occurs in such contexts, Gen 12:2a has no obvious military overtones. However the phrase seems implicitly comparative, inasmuch as it implies that Israel will not be like other nations which do not attain greatness.[206]

But does the promise mean more than that Abraham's family will become great? The word גוי designates an entity linked together by race, government and territory; עם, by contrast, denotes more a gentilic unit.[207] (The alliteration between גוי and גדול[208] may also have influenced the term's selection here, though that does not diminish its particular nuances in the context.) Thus v2a promises that Abraham's family will become a significant political entity, not just an important family. Hence it clearly points beyond the period of the patriarchs to the existence of an Israel that could be called a גוי[209] – or (in the post-exilic context of the Pentateuch's final redaction) to an Israel which might be re-

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[203] Cf. above p87.

[204] Ruprecht (1979a) p445n5: 'die zahlenmäßige Größe [ist] eine wesentliche Voraussetzung für die Bedeutung eines Volkes..., wie Prov. xiv 28 mit Recht hervorhebt...'.

[205] Ruprecht (1979a) pp446-451.

[206] Cf. Hulst (1997) p909: in promises including the word גוי 'the modifiers *gādôl*, *'āsûm* and *rab* clearly indicate the relationship of *gôy* to other peoples or groups. The people may be great in and of itself, but it is esp. great, mighty, numerous, in comparison with others'.

[207] For general discussion of גוי, and its contrast with עם, cf. Speiser (1960); Cody (1964); Clements (1975); Hulst (1997). We must of course bear in mind that '[s]ince the OT does not contain any ordered or consistent doctrine of nationhood, we find that there is no precise definition of what constitutes a *goy*' (Clements (1975) p428); nevertheless the word's approximate significance is clear.

[208] Vriezen (1973) p386n12.

[209] Cf. Westermann (1985) pp149-150.

established as a separate people.[210] Thus, in the final form of Genesis, Israel is situated as a גוי amidst other גוים (cf. ch10)[211] – an addition to their number, distinct in the manner of her origin, but in (at least many) other respects one of them. The divine plan involves not just many individuals, but a national unit which (as we shall see) can be an example to others of how they can live.

A גוי at least typically has its own land.[212] The theme of gaining a land is of course to be important in the Pentateuch, and v7 explicitly promises Canaan to Abraham's descendants (that the land is not promised to Abraham himself perhaps indicates the delay before fulfilment of this will begin[213]). V1 raises the issue, when Abraham is told to go to the land Yhwh will show him. Nothing is said about his gaining possession of this land; it could be merely another staging-place on his journey. However Abraham – and the reader – may suspect that the journey's destination will have special significance.[214] It would be natural to infer, when Abraham is told that he will become a גוי, that the גוי should have as its territory the place to which he is bidden to go. But until v7 it remains only an inference. The significance of the failure to make possession of the land an unambiguous part of the initial promise is unclear.[215] Divine promises of land elsewhere in Genesis are made only within the land, which is often denoted by some deictic expression (e.g. 12:7 הארץ הזות; 13:15 את־כל־הארץ אשר־אתה ראה).[216] However it is not obvious that a land-promise *could* only be given within the land; thus the absence of explicit reference to it in 12:2-3 still cannot easily be dismissed. Might the function be to prioritise the people over the land: possession of the land is not a goal in itself, but only insofar as it facilitates the fulfilment of the other promises?

Abraham is to become a nation; but Sarah is barren. Since attention has just been drawn to this (11:30 for emphasis even adds אין לה ולד to the statement ותהי שרי עקרה)

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[210] Cf. Ska (1997) p383.

[211] Hamilton (1990) p371; cf. also above p152.

[212] So e.g. Clements (1975) pp428-9.

[213] Schmidt (1977) p242.

[214] Cf. Turner (1990a) pp58-60.

[215] Wolff (1966) notes the surprising lack of prominence given to the land in 12:2-3.

[216] Berge (1990) p19.

the reader must surely notice the tension.[217]

> This inability of his wife to procreate does not negate the possibility of
> Abram's becoming a great nation. But in the absence of any indication to
> the contrary it demonstrates that the route to nationhood will not be through
> Sarai.[218]

Thus there is not here an implicit promise of a son for Abraham (perhaps since these promises look to the big picture and the long-term goal, the manner of their outworking in the present is not of immediate concern; again they are concerned as much with God's purposes for Israel as for Abraham as an individual). However, even though one could imagine various ways in which the promise might be fulfilled – an heir not born of Abraham (Lot?), an heir fathered by Abraham by another woman (as he attempted with Hagar), Sarah somehow managing to conceive – the promise is still much harder for Abraham to credit than if he had children, and perhaps even grandchildren, an obvious nucleus from whom the nation could spring. The existence of the promises does not of itself make obedience easy.

V2a thus instructs Abraham that many people will own him as their forefather, and preserve his significance into later ages. For the reader of Genesis it indicates that the nation of Israel has a part to play in the divine plan – whether the reader lives at a time when the nation seems successful, and the promise thus indicates that the success is divinely ordained, or whether it is reassurance that despite outward appearances Israel as an entity is still part of Yhwh's purpose.

6.3.5 'I shall bless you' (v2b)

God's blessing makes humans prosperous in any or every aspect of their lives.[219] Material success and the having of descendants often receive emphasis – since in the ancient Israelite worldview they were perhaps the two most important factors in prosperity – but blessing cannot be reduced to these. Thus the promise of blessing takes up and extends the promise of Abraham's becoming a great nation, stressing the element of increase,[220] and adding the idea of general prosperity. Abraham's becoming a great nation might seem a

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[217] Coats (1983) comments on v30 that '[t]his theme does not reflect simply the interests of a genealogy; it is the subject for narrative development'.

[218] Turner (2000a) p63.

[219] Cf. above ch5.

[220] Cf. esp. Westermann (1976) pp25-6 on the link between blessing and increase in the patriarchal promises.

consequence of being blessed, or a contributory part of it;[221] however, as argued above (ch6.2) the clauses should probably be seen as essentially parallel, the logical relationship between them being for the reader to infer, but not explicitly signalled. However the promise of v2b does not subsume that of v2a. For although increase is a regular consequence of blessing, becoming a גוי with all that entails is significantly more than blessing normally brings.

We must also consider how far the blessing extends, whether the promise is strictly for Abraham himself, or also includes Israel. The primary reference must be to Abraham: he is the 'you' to whom the promise is addressed; 24:1, 35 disclose that he experienced blessing in his lifetime, as well as in the number of his posterity. However the blessing would hardly be restricted to Abraham himself: having many descendants was not a great blessing unless they too prospered (especially since part of the boon of descendants was that they preserved one's memory, and one would not want to be associated with people eking out a pitiful existence);[222] a nation could not be great without experiencing some measure of blessing (both in the human fertility by which numerical strength is maintained, and in the material prosperity necessary to support such a large population). Further, a king might receive blessing as an embodiment and token of blessing for the whole people: cf. especially Ps 72.[223] If these promises are influenced by royal traditions (see further below pp181, 191), again Abraham's blessing would have implications for the whole people of whom he is to be the head. That v2b is a promise of blessing for the future, not an invocation of blessing in the present (i.e. Yhwh does not say ברוך אתה or the like), leaves entirely unclear when it will be fulfilled, and thus can only encourage the reader not to set limits on the length of its effects. This promise thus has great relevance to the future Israel, while being primarily addressed to Abraham himself.

6.3.6 'I shall make your name great' (v2c)

The content of v2c bears the same logical relation to that of v2b as does that of v2a (cf. above p161). However while the reader may infer this, the text draws no attention to it: indeed that vv2a and c are on different sides of v2b rather than together before or after it

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[221] Cf. e.g. Westermann (1985) p149.

[222] Cf. Ps 37:26 where the righteous are rewarded by their children receiving blessing (see above p132). See also below on Abraham's 'name'.

[223] On the relationship between the king and blessing, cf. Williamson (1998) p122-3; Mitchell (1987) pp72-5; also (with caution) Ruprecht (1979a) pp457-460.

surely distracts attention from their common relationship to it.[224] Of course the use of √גדל in both clauses connects them. However vv2b and d are equally linked by sharing √ברך. V2cd thus echoes v2ab in wording;[225] equally its content echoes v2ab, but marks an advance on it inasmuch as while v2ab contains promises of what Abraham/ Israel will be in themselves, v2cd contains promises of what others will notice.[226] Abraham will not just become a great nation, but will be known as great; he will not just be blessed, but a signal example of blessing.[227]

> The word שם can denote 'reputation' as well as 'name':
>
> *šēm* often alternates with terms like *tehillâ* 'fame, praise' (Deut 26:19; Jer 13:11; Zeph 3:19f...) and *tip'eret* 'splendor, distinction' (Deut 26:19; Jer 13:11...). The famed heroes of the primeval period (Gen 6:4), renowned prestigious persons (Num 16:2), and famous men (1 Chron 5:24; 12:31) are described as *'anšê (haš)šēm* or *'anšê šēmôt*; cf. also 1 Sam 18:30; 2 Sam 23:18, 22.... Cf. also *šēm* in the sense of a king's fame (1 Kgs 1:47; 5:11; Psa 72:17; 1 Chron 14:17), Israel's fame (Ezek 39:13), Jerusalem's reputation (Ezek 16:14), and Abraham's prestige (Gen 12:2).[228]

We should probably not seek to distinguish sharply between the senses, since while a person's reputation need not attach to their name (the Pope's reputation may not attach to the name John Paul, still less to Karol Wojtyla) at least typically it will do so. In Gen 11:1-9 the interconnection between the senses seems deliberately to be played upon: the people try to make a 'name', i.e. reputation, for themselves by their building, but end up creating only the less-than-flattering name Babel.[229] Further, in the Ancient Near East the name was seen

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[224] Contra e.g. Janzen (1993) p15 (whose description of the structure also depends partly on his belief that the imperative of v2d parallels that of v1b, on which see above ch6.2); Auffret (1982) p245 (who sees a shift between v2a-c in which Abraham receives blessing for himself and v2d-3 in which he supplies blessing to others).

[225] Cf. Auffret (1982) p246.

[226] I owe this point to Revd Dr R.W.L. Moberly.

[227] Thus one should agree with much of Ruprecht's judgement: '[d]as dritte Glied [of v2] „ich will deinen Namen groß machen", ist ebenfalls eine Wirkung des Segens, so daß das zweite Glied zwischen seinen beiden Entfaltungen steht. Diese liegen allerdings nicht auf derselben Ebene. Während die „große Zahl" etwas Reales ist, handelt es sich bei dem „großen Namen" um ein Urteil anderer Menschen, daß sich in Rühmen äußert. Dieses rühmende Urteil muß sich auf reale Gegebenheiten beziehen....' (Ruprecht (1979b) p180).

[228] van der Woude (1997) p1356; cf. also *BDB* p1028.

[229] Fokkelman (1975) p14.

as closely linked to the personality, and therefore, again at least typically, the reputation attached to it would be expected to mirror the reality. The importance of names can be overplayed – names clearly did not define the personality, since some were incomprehensible and others (e.g. כלב 'dog', חלדה 'mole') do not obviously capture the person's essential nature. Nevertheless the name represented the person.[230] If Yhwh makes Abraham's name great, the expectation would be that this will be by his becoming great, and hence in content this promise parallels that of v2a.

As previously, we must ask whether this promise is directed to Abraham and/ or to Israel. As noted in the last paragraph, it is often the greatness of the king's name that is celebrated. Explicit references to a 'great name' elsewhere in the Old Testament are restricted to Yhwh (Josh 7:9; 1Sam 12:22; Ps 99:3; Ezek 36:23 etc.) and to David (2Sam 7:9=1Chr 17:8) – the only other uses of verbal forms of √גדל with שם being of Yhwh in 2Sam 7:26=1Chr 17:24 and Ps 138:2; God's granting Abraham a great name contrasts with the attempt of the builders of the tower of Babel to make a name for themselves (Gen 11:4), making a name for oneself being a divine privilege (e.g. Isa 63:12, 14; Jer 32:20; Neh 9:10) which Yhwh imparted to David (2Sam 8:13; cf. 7:9). Mesopotamian, Akkadian and Egyptian texts also contain divine promises to kings that their names will be great.[231] But a king's reputation is – again at least typically – connected to his subjects' greatness: a great king can hardly rule over an insignificant people or achieve nothing for his people. However the king's greatness is not simply that of his people, since, for example, his personal wealth or military prowess may also be involved, and extension of his rule over others might well benefit him considerably more than his initial subjects. Similarly if Abraham is in part depicted on the model of a king, the promise to him of a great reputation cannot be reduced to a promise concerning Israel's success, but would most naturally imply such success. Further, a person's name was not significant only during his/ her life, but one would hope for it to be perpetuated by one's descendants (cf. e.g. Gen 48:16; Isa 66:22);[232] again what is primarily a promise to Abraham will secondarily benefit his posterity, since the more numerous and more prosperous they are the more his name will be known.

However it is unclear how significant the name 'Abraham' was – still less the name 'Abram' by which of course he was known at this point in his story. Genesis does not

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[230] van der Woude (1997) pp1350-1, 1356-7, contra e.g. Sarna (1989) p89.

[231] Ruprecht (1979a) pp452-4; cf. the further reference to these texts below.

[232] Cf. *BDB* p1028; van der Woude (1997) pp1356-7.

explicitly pick up the theme; while we might imagine that he was respected by those with whom he had dealings, and others in the immediate area, nothing particularly suggests that his fame spread extensively. The rest of the Old Testament would suggest that traditions about Abraham as the people's ancestor were widely known within Israel, but not at the forefront of most people's thinking (the name occurs only 42 times, but in a wide variety of locations – Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Kings, Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah; אברם occurs only at 1Chr 1:27 and Neh 9:7, in both cases alongside mentions of the better-known name). The name 'Abraham' was therefore not particularly great, and scarcely widely known outside Israel. Should we therefore suggest that it is rather, or additionally, ישראל that is to be great? Genesis stresses the significance of Jacob's receiving that name, beginning to refer to an entity 'Israel' and to 'Israelites' (בני-ישראל) almost as soon as the name is in existence (32:33; ?33:20;[233] 34:7 etc.). The name 'Israel' is much more frequent in the Old Testament than that of Abraham, occurring over 2500 times; as the name of a people it would clearly have been known by other nations (although during the divided monarchy this was the distinctive name of the northern state, much of the Old Testament regards Israel as an ideal entity more than simply a political unit[234]). Thus Gen 12:2 points to Israel's becoming renowned; while the considerations of the previous paragraph must prevent us from seeing the promise as referring only to Israel's name, equally we now have reason not to restrict the promise to Abraham's name.

Thus far I have discussed the concept of a 'great name' in general terms. However elsewhere when a king is said to have a great name, this is frequently connected to conquering enemies. Thus in 2Sam 7:9 the promise that David's name will be great follows a promise of his enemies' defeat:

ואכרתה את-כל-איביך מפניך ועשתי לך שם גדול

(cf. also 8:13 where David makes a name for himself by his military exploits). The same connection is made in other Ancient Near Eastern texts: for example,

> Adadnirari II. sagt im Jahre 911 vor Chr., es hätten „beim Aussprechen seines starken Namens die Könige der Vier (Weltteile) gebebt wie Rohr im (Süd?)sturm".[235]

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[233] Cf. Westermann (1985) p529: the phrase אל אלהי ישראל has no precise parallel, but elsewhere אלהי ישראל uniformly (191 times) means 'God of (the people) Israel'.

[234] On the usage of ישראל, cf. Zobel (1990), esp. pp401-4; in brief Gerlemann (1997).

[235] Ruprecht (1979a) pp452-3; he notes other texts, from Mesopotamia and Egypt, and the Old Testament examples on pp451-4. Further examples in Köckert (1988) pp283-7.

We might also wonder whether the idea of a great name invites comparison between it and the reputations of others: while the reputation of all may be high, often the difference between one person and others gives lustre to the former.[236] However nothing in the context of Gen 12:1-3 suggests connotations of power over others. Indeed, as we shall see, it is rather the case that Abraham's good fortune will benefit others than that they will be subdued as a result.[237] This of course is not to deny that the role attributed to Abraham/ Israel in these promises gives them special reward and status which will exalt their fame beyond that of most other people.

6.3.7 'You shall be a blessing' (v2d)

When others discover the prosperity enjoyed by Abraham/ Israel, they judge nothing preferable to enjoying equal prosperity. They thus regard Abraham/ Israel as exemplars of blessing, and when formulating benedictions they seek that their friends be blessed as Abraham. (On the sense of וְהְיֵה בְּרָכָה, see above ch6.2; our conclusions there are strengthened by the demonstration here that they admirably fit the sequence of thought in the promises.) V2d picks up and extends v2c: while v2c states only that Abraham's reputation will be high, v2d suggests that he will be known particularly as a paradigm of blessing.[238] As already noted, v2d therefore also picks up and extends v2b: the blessing promised in the latter is not just a moderate amount, but such that others will notice and envy. That v2d is formulated in the second person – unlike the surrounding clauses in the first person – suggests that the stress is on what Abraham receives, as opposed to the divine initiative in making him such (cf. p161 above). But if this is so, equally the promise would seem more concerned with Abraham/ Israel than with the others who might see the example of blessing. The promise is to Abraham that he will be signally blessed, not to others that God will provide a name for their invocations of blessing. This is not to say that the provision of an example of blessing may not be a significant part of the divine purpose: one might surmise that a blessing which invokes the name of Abraham is likely to be successful,

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[236] We might note the sequence of thought in Asarhaddon's inscription: '[a]ls der große Herr Assur... mein Königtum herrlicher gemacht hatte als das der übrigen Könige der vier Weltufer, den Ruf meines Namens groß gemacht hatte...' (cited by Ruprecht (1979a) p453).

[237] Cf. Scharbert (1973b) p10: 'Abraham erhält die Verheißung, daß er ein großes Volk werden, einen großen Namen erhalten und mit reichen Segensgütern überhäuft werden wird, nicht, damit er dann sich über andere Stämme und Völker erheben und selbst und sein Stamm ein ungestörtes Glück und eine schrankenlose Macht genießen kann, sondern damit andere Völker und Stämme an ihm und den Seinen erkennen, was es heißt, das Vertrauen und die Gemeinschaft des wahren Gottes zu besitzen'. Also Victor (1972) p107.

[238] Ps 72:17 equally implies that the result of the magnification of the king's name is that others use it in formulating blessings (Ska (1997) p384).

and thus Yhwh here provides a way by which people may procure his favour. But the text leaves unclear, at least for the moment, whether or not such further purposes are present. The primary concern of v2d is Yhwh's favour to Abraham.

We suggested above (p179) that the promise of blessing in v2b includes in its scope the coming Israel, while being in the first place a promise for Abraham himself, and likewise (pp181-182) that the promise of v2c embraces both Abraham and Israel. We might well, therefore, imagine that v2d includes both patriarch and people. Both will receive signal blessing: in Zech 8:13, where the word ברכה is applied to בית יהודה ובית ישראל. Hence my assumption thus far that that Abraham will not be a paradigm of blessing merely for his descendants: since Israel's role as ברכה must be for people beyond her borders, it is improbable that Abraham's role is confined to his own people.

6.3.8 'I will bless those who bless you, while the one who abuses you I will curse' (v3a)

If v2ab describes Abraham/ Israel in themselves and v2cd what others will observe, v3 indicates the implications for others of what Yhwh begins with Abraham. V3a states that how they treat Abraham/ Israel will determine how Yhwh treats them, v3b that every family of the earth can gain blessing. With our analysis we might compare that of Murtonen who also finds a progression in the promises, suggesting that they refer to ever-increasing circles of blessing:

> [f]irst, general blessing is promised to Abraham, then it leads Abraham to become an example and even an object of others' blessings, which again causes YHWH to bless even those that bless Abraham, from which it is only logical to conclude that in the end all the nations of the earth will receive benediction through Abraham.[239]

Our nuancing differs from that of Murtonen in three ways (in addition to our denying that ברכה describes an object of blessing). First, we give more weight to v2c in the speech's structure: it marks the transition from what Abraham is in himself to what others will observe, and hence should not be subsumed into a first unit describing 'general blessing' for Abraham; though preparing for the promise that Abraham will be an example in others' blessings (v2d) it does not quite say that. Shoe-horning everything into the category of blessing only obscures precisely what is said. Second, we have suggested that v2d, as v2c

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[239] Murtonen (1959) p160; cf. also Wehmeier (1974) pp3, 5. Westermann (1985) p149 considers that v2 refers to Abraham, v3a describes 'the effect of the blessing on those who accept him', v3b 'the effect of the blessing which accompanies him on all the families of the earth'; Turner (2000a) pp63-4 suggests that such a broadening circle of promise nicely balances the increasing specificity of the terms 'country... kin... אב בית' in v1b.

with which it is linked, is primarily a promise to Abraham, and shall be suggesting that v3a and 3b likewise are directed more to Abraham than to others. While v3a does clearly state that others can receive blessing by blessing Abraham, the primary progression in the speech is in the greatness of Abraham's blessing as measured by its effects – which may include curse as well as blessing (v3aβ) – not in the effect on others *per se*. Third, Murtonen's language suggests that v3 is merely the corollary of v2: Abraham's being blessed '*causes* Yhwh to bless... from which *it is logical to conclude* that...'. This surely underestimates the extent to which v3 is further evidence of the graciousness of Yhwh; v3b in particular is not implied by what has preceded, since there is no reason why Abraham should affect all the families of the earth not just his near-neighbours. While the sequence of thought is far from unnatural, each part of the promise adds to what has already been said.

V3a tells Abraham that Yhwh will reward those who favour him, while anyone seeking his harm will gain only divine displeasure. Hence he can enjoy his blessings in security, particularly when others learn that favouring him is in their own interests.[240] For the similar formulae in Gen 27:29b and Num 24:9b have this function (above ch2): in the former Jacob's good is Isaac's sole concern, while the latter is concerned more with Israel's security than how Yhwh's favour for Israel affects others. Further, in Gen 12:10-20 when Abraham and Sarah are forced by famine to go to Egypt, Yhwh afflicts Pharaoh and his household with plagues when Pharaoh takes Sarah into his harem, although Abraham has deceived Pharaoh about Sarah's status: Yhwh seems more concerned with protecting Abraham and Sarah than with relating to Pharaoh for his own sake.[241] (Various authors compare v3a with the treaty-formula in which one party promises to treat the other's friends as his friends, and enemies as his enemies.[242] Clearly the effect of Yhwh's promise is at least *prima facie* similar to such a commitment. However its wording hardly parallels the treaty-formulae. Further, in them the vassal promises to share the overlord's friends and enemies, while here Yhwh's relation to others is determined by their relationship to Abraham, the inferior party: the contextual dynamic of the two thus differs somewhat.[243]

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[240] Cf. Ruprecht (1979b) p176 ('eine Schutz verheißende Beistandzusage'), 181; Westermann (1985) p150; Berge (1990) p18 ('[e]ine implizite Beistandsverheißung'); Levin (1993) pp47 ('ein Schutzversprechen Jahwes'), 135 (echoes of an 'apotropäische Schutzformel'); Bailey Wells (2000) pp200-1.

[241] Hamilton (1990) p373 notes how 12:10-20 fulfils v3a.

[242] So e.g. Calvin (1965) Ip347; Gunkel (1997) p164 (though without explicit reference to treaties); Vriezen (1973) p387.

[243] Ruprecht (1979a) p455.

The parallels in Gen 27 and Num 24 suggest this is more probably an independent formula with its *Sitz im Leben* in blessings.[244])

However v3a differs significantly from the formulae of Gen 27:29 and Num 24:9. Firstly, Gen 12:3a is a first-person divine speech, while the other two are impersonal expressions of blessing and curse. In part this is an assimilation to the context in Gen 12, making clear that v3a continues the chain of divine promises begun in v2 (and also suggesting, as thus far assumed, that the impersonal formulation is traditio-historically primary; its greater parallelism also suggests it is more likely to be a set formula from which v3a deviates than *vice versa*). However the greater contextual appropriateness does not lessen the significance of the changes. Rather than an invocation of protection we have here a promise of protection in the future: as noted with respect to v2b (p179 above), this leaves the time of fulfilment entirely unclear, and thus can only encourage the reader not to restrict the length of its effects. The first-person formulation also stresses the continual divine involvement in effecting the promise.[245] Although in ancient Israel all blessing – even if invoked using an impersonal expression – was considered the result of divine activity (see above ch5, esp. pp116-118), nevertheless the phrasing here makes explicit the ongoing divine commitment to Abraham's protection. V3a, as all the promises, expresses the gracious will of Yhwh, rather than simply stating Abraham's future.

The second difference between v3a and Gen 27:29b/ Num 24:29b is that the latter have both active participles מברכיך and אורריך in the plural (and both qal passive participles in the singular), while Gen 12:3a has the plural מברכיך, but the parallel מקללך is singular. The point of this may well be that Yhwh looks to there being many who bless Abraham, fewer wishing him harm (see above p162). We might connect this to the variation in the verbal mood, אברכה being a cohortative, following the volitive forms of v2, while אאר is a simple imperfect, suggesting the cursing is not part of the fundamental divine intention.[246] Thus that the promise regarding blessing precedes that relating to cursing is doubtless intentional: the former has priority, the latter is an exception (if, as Abraham's story and

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[244] Cf. Wolff (1966) pp143-4, Wehmeier (1970) p202, both considering this a traditional formula from the cult.

[245] Cf. Wenham (1987) p276: '[r]etribution and justice are not left to the impersonal operation of fate. The LORD himself will actively intervene on Abram's side'.

[246] Miller (1984) p473. Cf. above ch6.2.

Israel's later history will prove, a very necessary exception).[247] It might be suggested that this shows Yhwh concerned whether others receive blessing or curse: his preference is to bless, though if necessary he will curse. Equally, however, were his concern entirely for Abraham he would perhaps rather others co-operated with his purposes of blessing Abraham than had continually to be prevented from doing him harm.

Thus far I have assumed that both uses of √ברך in v3aα mean 'bless', i.e. 'invoke/ bestow blessing'. However we must consider two alternative positions. The first is that a – or indeed the – central feature of blessing is the manifestation or creation of a favourable relationship between the blesser and the person blessed. Thus v3aα refers to one who

> seine Verbundenheit, seine Solidarität mit dem Gottesvolk bekennt und in der Tat kundtut,[248]

or perhaps the participle denotes

> persons or tribes who are on friendly terms with the patriarchs and their descendants, and who demonstrate a solidarity and appreciation for them by uttering the *barukh*-formula in their behalf or wishing them well.[249]

However, as argued above (ch5 p120), although the giving of a blessing will typically create or manifest a relationship, √ברך refers to the blessing, not the relationship. The second alternative is that מברכיך are people who treat Abraham well, who act as his benefactors;[250] as the above citation from Schreiner demonstrates, this position and the previous are not mutually incompatible. However in context it seems unlikely that מברכיך means simply 'treat well', given the other uses of √ברך denoting prosperity resulting from divine favour: while אברכך in v2b and אברכה in v3aα have a divine subject and thus do not refer to precisely the same activity as מברכיך with its (implicitly) human subjects, it is still more plausible that מברכיך denotes the invocation of divine favour than that its meaning should be further removed from that. Moreover, if ברכה in v2d includes the sense 'example cited in blessings' the clause immediately preceding v3aα has precisely raised the possibility of human invocations of blessing. Gen 27:29 and Num 24:9 both occur in narratives focusing

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[247] Cf. Ruprecht (1979b) p181. We suggest above (pp27 and 38) that the order of the clauses in Num 24:9b and Gen 27:29b equally is significant, though as these conclude oracles in them the element placed second receives greater emphasis.

[248] Schreiner (1968) p99.

[249] Scharbert (1975) p291.

[250] Cf. e.g. Brichto (1963) p157n92; Wehmeier (1970) pp158-160; Wehmeier (1974) p5.

on human invocation of blessing, and hence מברכיך there must refer at least centrally to such invocations. While one may doubtless assume that those who bless Abraham will also seek to maintain friendly relationships with him and to otherwise assist him, these implications must not overshadow the explicit reference to blessing.[251]

√קלל covers a range of meanings from 'disparage, treat as worthless' to 'curse' (above ch5.3). In context here we must take two factors into account in ascertaining which part of the range is operative. We must first note that מקללך is opposed to מברכיך, which, as just argued, refers primarily to the invocation of blessings. This would suggest a sense 'one who curses you' for מקללך. However, second, we may well ask why מקללך stands in the text, not אררך: the formulae of Gen 27 and Num 24 would suggest the latter (thus we have a third difference between these and v3a), as would the double use of √ברך in v3aα. Since √ארר is used at least predominantly for cursing in the full sense, while √קלל has a broader range of meaning, it seems likely that the latter is chosen here for the broader range: Yhwh will curse not just one who curses Abraham, but anyone disparaging or maltreating him.[252] The other comparable uses of the root in Genesis support this sense (8:21 and 16:4-5 do not refer to cursing in the full sense; 8:8, 11 of the water subsiding are hardly comparable).[253] Combining both these factors we might suggest that here the traditional formula is deliberately broadened, to insist that it is not just cursing in the full sense against which Yhwh will protect Abraham. However מקללך certainly includes cursing: the sense is perhaps 'one who curses or otherwise abuses you'.[254] Yhwh's response to such people is clear and decisive: √ארר is used for it to indicate that minor abuse of Abraham will provoke a reaction of cursing – not just mild divine displeasure which use of √קלל, the obvious

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[251] Scharbert's position, as cited above, is not dissimilar to this once it is clarified that √ברך in itself refers to the blessing not the relationship.

[252] Cf. e.g. Brichto (1963) p157n92 ('those who abuse you'); Wolff (1966) p144; Mitchell (1987) p129. Mitchell (1987) pp128-9 suggests that אררך in Gen 27 and Num 24 includes malefaction as well as malediction; however the sense of malediction seems clear from the narrative context of the latter, and probable in the former given the emphasis on benediction.

[253] Steck (1971) p530 compares the uses of √קלל in 8:21 and 12:3.

[254] The reader will have assessed the meaning of מברכיך before coming to מקללך: while in principle the interpretation of the latter might lead to a reassessment of the former, the sense we have ascribed to מקללך would probably not suggest the need to reinterpret מברכיך.

choice for parallelism, might have implied – to ensure that the abuse ends. Again we might think that this is well illustrated by events in Egypt later in the chapter (see above p185).[255]

> According to Bailey Wells, in v3a
>
> [t]he promise is an assurance of protection for the one to whom the blessing
> is spoken. Any benefit to others is a side-effect of God's primary
> commitment to bless Abram/ Israel.[256]

Our arguments show the first sentence of this to be certainly true. Abraham is given the promise to assure him of his security: Yhwh will not tolerate others threatening his plans for Abraham. However the reader of the text will also hear, as previously, a commitment to Israel. What is given to Abraham is not for him alone but also for others. Of course we should not seek to distinguish sharply between the benefits for Abraham and those for his descendants, since the descendants' prosperity adds lustre to the ancestor. Nevertheless it is still the case that the promises function on more than one level; the ultimate divine purpose the reader will discern is not limited to benefiting Abraham. This is particularly so when 12:1-3 is read against the context established by chs1-11, which in depicting the origins of the various nations of the world has made no mention of Israel, leaving the ancient audience curious about the place of its own people.[257] Since the choice of Abraham is otherwise unexplained, the audience might well wonder whether Yhwh's purpose is the formation of a nation which shall own that its existence depends on divine initiative, rather than just originating from the scattering of humanity consequent on the attempt to transgress humanity's proper creaturely limits (11:1-9). While Abraham is told essentially the benefits for him – and the element of sheer divine grace to Abraham must not be denied – this does not exhaust the divine purpose. Similarly we may ask whether the effect of what is promised on those outside Israel is necessarily merely a side-effect of a divine purpose to favour Abraham. Chs1-11 have suggested that Yhwh is committed to all of humanity; the giving of a special position to Abraham/ Israel hardly need imply a lessening of that concern for all. Thus that others can gain blessing may, in the ultimate divine purpose, be rather more than an incidental effect of a plan for Israel: Yhwh desires to bless them for their own sake.[258] (Hence Bailey Wells' reference to 'God's primary commitment to bless Abram/

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[255] Coats (1981) seeks to provide further examples of its operation in Abraham's lifetime, though these are at best less clear than 12:10-20.

[256] Bailey Wells (2000) pp200-1.

[257] On this and what follows, see above ch6.1.4.

[258] Cf. Goldingay (1980) p27.

Israel' seems misleading.) Of course a condition is imposed here on their gaining blessing, namely that they must first bless Abraham – and if they do the opposite they will instead receive curse (as indeed in chs1-11 whether or not divine favour is received is clearly not independent of appropriate behaviour). But divine blessing would be of little value to Abraham – or anyone else who might receive it – were attempts to thwart it not decisively rebuffed. Thus while v3a might in the abstract form part of a plan concerned only with the good of Abraham/ Israel, it does not preclude the existence of a wider plan. Chs1-11 of Genesis and, as we shall see, v3b with its explicit reference to all the families of the earth gaining blessing, suggest that the possible resonances with such a plan are not accidental.

6.3.9 'All the families of the earth shall be blessed through you' (v3b)

Debate about the meaning of v3b has often centred around the force of the niphal נברכו. Three primary kinds of arguments have been employed: comparison with the hithpael התברכו used apparently similarly at 22:18 and 26:4; grammatical arguments concerning the proper force of the niphal or possible senses it can bear; and arguments from context. We shall assess first the relevance of comparison with the hithpael, then shall discuss the three main proposals for the force of נברכו, taking into consideration both grammar and context.

The argument that the niphal of √ברך in v3b has the same meaning as the hithpaels in 22:18 and 26:4 has essentially two parts: the fact that hithpael and niphal of various roots often overlap in meaning (with which I fully concur; cf. above p54); and the similarities between the promises making it probable that their meaning is the same.[259] However one may ask why, if 22:18 and 26:4 are meant to echo 12:3 (and also 18:18?) with precisely the same meaning, a different form was chosen; is it not at least possible that the different form expresses something different? Given the complicated tradition history of Genesis it is entirely possible that the hithpaels should reflect a different hand's conception of the relationship between Israel and the nations,[260] not simply a desire for variety or a difference in linguistic usage. More importantly – if we are not to rely on anything as precarious as analysis of the provenance and dating of the promises in Genesis – other elements in 22:16-

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[259] So amongst many others e.g. Westermann (1985) p151: '[t]he parallels in Genesis are so alike (all are linked with the promise of increase) that once again one must agree with F. Delitzsch that the niph. and hithp. have the same meaning in this group of passages'.

[260] So e.g. Schreiner (1962) pp9-10; Wehmeier (1970) pp184-5; Wehmeier (1974) pp10-1; Skinner (1910) notes the possibility. Allis (1927) p269 notes in this connection that modern criticism of Genesis has generally assumed that differences between passages are to be stressed, not downplayed.

18 do not merely repeat the previous promises to Abraham, but introduce modifications to them (cf. below pp241-242); 26:4 deliberately echoes 22:18, and hence its hithpael may (at least in part) be part of the allusion (cf. further below p252). There is no reason, if other factors also suggest this, why we may not ascribe different meanings to the niphal and hithpael.[261]

Many consider that v3b refers to the use of Abraham's name in blessings.[262] The niphal is then normally seen as reflexive ('bless themselves'), though reciprocal ('bless each other') or speech action middle ('utter blessings')[263] would produce not dissimilar meanings. Support is often found for such interpretation in the force of the hithpael, to which some such sense is – rightly (cf. chs7-8 below) – ascribed; however, as we have just suggested, this argument is not compelling. The hithpael, it is true, is found in a royal tradition (Ps 72:17),[264] and as noted above (pp179, 181) such traditions probably formed a model for some of the promises to Abraham. However we can hardly assert that the existence of such royal traditions is decisive for the sense here unless both a) niphal and hithpael were used alike in formulating such traditions and (implausibly?) b) Israelite royal traditions knew the king as a signal example of blessing for other peoples, but never suggested that they might somehow acquire blessing because of him: the idea of a 'great name', we have suggested (pp182-183), may have been adopted from royal traditions, but with its sense somewhat modified.[265] We have also argued (ch3) that on purely grammatical grounds the niphal is more likely to be a passive than a reflexive, reciprocal, or speech action middle. Thus the positive case for reflexive/ reciprocal/ speech action sense is weak.

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[261] That niphal and hithpael differ in force is argued also by Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p274; Turner (1990a) p57; Frettlöh (1998) p296; Carroll R. (2000) pp23-4.

[262] Cf. e.g. Rashi (1972a) p49; Dillmann (1897) pp11-2; Ehrlich (1968) pp47-8; Gunkel (1997) pp165-6; Skinner (1910) pp244-5; Driver (1916) p145; Hempel (1968) p40; Scharbert (1958) p25; Albrektson (1967) pp78-81; Speiser (1969) p86; Scharbert (1973b) pp5-6; Vriezen (1973) p388; Blum (1984) pp350-2; Westermann (1985) pp151-2; Janzen (1993) p16. See also RSV; JB; NRSV footnote; JPSV; NEB/ REB 'pray/ wish to be blessed as you are blessed'.

[263] For this category, see esp. ch7.1.2 below.

[264] Cf. e.g. Westermann (1985) pp151-2; also above p179 on more general linkage of blessing with the function of the king.

[265] Berge (1990) pp259-270 notes the looseness of the connections between the promises of 12:2-3 and the specific Jerusalem kingship traditions preserved in the Old Testament, while granting that there may be a relationship to more general ANE conceptions of kingship (p267). Cf. also Steck (1971) pp551-3, esp. n30.

The context also favours a different sense. The problem is not that, on this interpretation, v3b is very similar to v2d, suggesting that others will judge Abraham a signal example of blessing. For v2d leaves the reach of his fame unclear, while v3b would expand the promise to one of worldwide renown: thus as v2b promises blessing, and v2d signal blessing, v3b would promise such signal blessing that no people can remain ignorant of it.[266] That כל משפחת האדמה are the subject, as in v2d a change from the divine first person subject of the rest of the promises, might suggest that the emphasis is at least as much on the subject as on the activity performed. Nor is the problem that v3b is less generous to the nations than v3a, v3a stating that those who bless Abraham will gain blessing, v3b saying only that others will desire blessings like Abraham's.[267] For one might well imagine that blessings uttered with invocation of Abraham's name will have the desired effect,[268] and that those acknowledging the divine favour Abraham enjoys will realise they must favour him if they hope to receive like blessing (v3a). Further, we must again not forget that this is a promise to Abraham, not to the nations: while in a promise addressed to all humanity we might expect the last item to be explicitly more generous to all than what precedes, a promise to Abraham clearly need not be thus constructed. However we should not restrict the benefits to Abraham to prosperity, nor his reputation to that evoked by envy at his good fortune. The effect he has on others is part of what may make him great, and hence of the benefit to him: that blessing should come through him to all the families of the earth would be highly desirable *for him*, not just for them. As suggested above (p184), v2ab makes promises to Abraham of what he will be in himself, and v2cd extends them by promising that this will create for him a great reputation; v3 then further broadens the picture by describing his effect on others' lives. The promise of protection (v3a) means that others must consider his good in shaping their behaviour, that they will have to take account of him in how they conduct themselves; this is not the conventional greatness, consisting in the (threat of) subjugation of any rejecting the supremacy of one people,[269] but a greatness whose sanction is in Yhwh (cf. above pp182-183). V3b then makes explicit that Abraham is

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[266] Cf. Ramban (Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980a) p431); Dillmann (1897) p12; Ruprecht (1979b) p183.

[267] So e.g. Mitchell (1987) p32.

[268] Westermann (1985) p152. Frettlöh (1998) pp284-6 suggests that as one blessed in Yhwh's name participates in his blessing, so one blessed in Abraham's participates in his: yet surely this is to ignore the differences between invoking Yhwh as bestower and Abraham as recipient/ example of blessing; and were the point specifically use of the *name*, would not בשמך rather than בך have been used?

[269] Or at least not just consisting in that: 22:17 contains a promise that Abraham's offspring will 'possess the gates of their enemies' (which, as we suggest below p242, may allude to one aspect of 12:3a).

– at least ideally (cf. below p202) – to bring blessing to all, that his greatness thus consists in the power to benefit others. This is best illustrated in Gen 18 (cf. ch4.2 above): Abraham's greatness consists in his intercession for the cities of the plain, seeking to aid them, not quietly acquiescing in their destruction; Yhwh tells him of the plan to destroy that he may seek to work good in the situation.

The second category of suggestion for the meaning of נברכו is that it is a 'middle', meaning 'gain/ receive/ find blessing' or the like.[270] However in the absence of any plausible parallel use of the niphal of any other root (cf. above p75) this option can safely be rejected on linguistic grounds. The meaning, in any case, would be similar to the passive: both state that all the families of the earth receive blessing. The main difference is that some of the suggested 'middle' nuances give the nations a more proactive role in acquiring the blessing than the passive most naturally implies: while one may acquire blessing without acting, or conversely labour so as to be blessed, the middle suggests at least the subject's co-operation or consent, while the passive is regularly employed to downplay the subject's responsibility. (The passive also implies the existence of an agent different from the subject; however since in the worldview of the original reader blessing had to be granted by God, the verb's semantics on a middle reading still imply divine responsibility for the bestowal of the blessing.)

Thus we come to the third suggestion, that the niphal has passive force and means 'be blessed'.[271] This has been the traditional Christian interpretation, and is the clear sense of the Vulgate. LXX has a future passive form, ἐνευλογηθήσονται (echoed in Acts 3:25 and Gal 3:8); while this probably has passive meaning, the possibility of middle force cannot be excluded since Hellenistic Greek did not always employ the distinctive future middle form to mark middle force.[272] (Sir 44:21 in echoing Gen 12:3 has the aorist passive

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[270] Cf. amongst others Procksch (1924) pp96-7 ('Segen finden'); Schreiner (1962) p7 ('[für] sich Segen erwerben, sich Segen verschaffen'); Wolff (1964) p79 'Segen gewinnen'; Müller (1968) pp559-561 (suggesting that middle and passive senses are not opposed); Wehmeier (1970) pp177-9 '[für sich] Segen gewinnen'; Wehmeier (1974) pp5-7 ('find blessing'); Schmidt (1975) p138 ('für sich Segen erwerben'; though cf. p148n20); Keller and Wehmeier (1997) ('to experience blessing, participate in blessing'); Zenger (1977) pp50-1 ('[für sich] Segen erlangen, am Segen teilhaben'); Vogels (1979) pp42-3 ('acquire for themselves'); Chew (1982) p10; Mitchell (1987) pp31-3 ('acquire blessing'); Wenham (1987) pp277-8 ('find blessing').

[271] So e.g. (amongst more recent writers) Allis (1927); Murtonen (1959) pp159-160; Cassuto (1964) p315; Brueggemann (1982a) pp119-120; Sarna (1989) p89; Hamilton (1990) p275; Turner (2000a) p64. See also RSV footnote; NIV; NRSV.

[272] Cf. Mitchell (1987) p31; also BDF §77-8.

infinitive ἐνευλογηθῆναι: again Hellenistic Greek sometimes used aorist passive forms for aorist middle meaning.) Further the LXX translator may be reading the Hebrew text according to his conception of what it ought to mean, finding eschatological/ messianic force not originally present.[273] That the hithpaels at 22:18 and 26:4 are translated the same as the niphals at 12:3, 18:18 and 28:14, while we have suggested that the two forms differ in meaning, again must preclude our assuming that LXX preserves the book's original meaning.

It has been objected that, were passive force intended, pual or qal passive participle would have been employed.[274] However the pual of √ברך is hardly common,[275] occurring only 13 times in the Old Testament; although one of its uses, at Num 22:6, *might* come from a similar level of tradition as Gen 12:3 (both are traditionally ascribed to J)[276] it seems over-confident to assert that the author of 12:3 would certainly have selected the pual to express passive force. Since forms can overlap in meaning (cf. above pp53-54), there need be no particular nuance in the niphal to explain its choice ahead of the pual, even allowing that the author of 12:3 on other occasions would/ did use the latter. (Moreover arguments that the niphal here or in general must express something different from the pual are liable also to imply that the niphal and hithpael must differ in force;[277] they thus may have wider ramifications than suggesting that the niphal is not a passive.) Had the qal passive participle been employed, וְהָיוּ would also have been necessary, to make clear that v3b is a promise of future blessing, not an invocation of blessing in the present (cf. Gen 27:33, where Isaac tells Esau that because the blessing has been invoked on Jacob ברוך יהיה[278]). However again we need not argue that the qal passive participle could not have been used to justify attributing passive sense to the niphal. Moreover if it is conceded that both pual and qal passive would express similar meaning, it further renders dubious suggestions that the niphal *must* somehow differ. Nor is use of a passive rather than a first person piel inexplicable, though

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[273] Cf. Schreiner (1962) p6.

[274] Schreiner (1962) pp6-7, Wenham (1987) p277 and Berge (1990) p49 mention both pual and qal passive participle; Dillmann (1897) p12, Skinner (1910) p244 and Wehmeier (1970) p178 mention only pual.

[275] Allis (1927) p289.

[276] Schreiner (1962) p7; Wehmeier (1970) p178.

[277] However one might, for example, argue that J expressed the passive by the pual, so would have done so in 12:3; however 22:18 and 26:4 reflect the usage of a later redactor.

[278] Schreiner (1962) p7.

we shall argue below (pp196-197) that the implied agent of ונברכו is Yhwh, and hence בך וברכתי would be not dissimilar in meaning. For as v2d throws the stress onto Abraham by making him the grammatical subject, so v3b by having כל משפחת האדמה as subject emphasises that it is all the earth's families, not some restricted group, who will gain blessing because of Abraham. Further Yhwh, by leaving implicit that the blessing is entirely and continuously dependent on his bestowal, stresses the significance of Abraham's role. The promise is concerned with Abraham and the effect he will have on the nations, more than with what Yhwh will do for them *per se*.

We have already discussed how passive sense would fit into the sequence of thought of vv2-3: the summit of the promises to Abraham is that he will be (in part) responsible for all the families of the earth gaining blessing. His greatness is not limited to his own or his descendants' prosperity, or to being acknowledged as prosperous, but includes impacting for good on others' lives. V3a establishes that indifference or hostility towards him are not in others' interests, but here their welfare is incidental to Abraham's; in v3b the promise still subordinates their interests to his, but gives them intrinsic value. (V3a also suggests that the nations' acquisition of blessing is not automatic: they must at least accept and seek to further Abraham's special position.) We have seen that, given the context of chs1-11, we might expect to find a divine concern for all people even as one person and one nation are privileged: Abraham is told of his great role, and of the prosperous life that he will enjoy in the ambiguous world something of whose origins and nature chs1-11 has described, but the reader will discern a broader purpose. That blessing begins with Abraham (v2), but can extend to others (v3aα), indeed all others (v3b), is perhaps part of the divine plan.

The preposition ב occurs with various senses in clauses containing √ברך.[279] It may introduce a person cited as a signal example of blessing (Gen 48:20; with the hithpael in Gen 22:18; 26:4; Ps 72:17), the deity invoked (with hithpael in Isa 65:16 and Jer 4:2; governing שם in Deut 10:8; 2Sam 6:18; Ps 129:8), the sphere in which the blessing will be experienced ('in everything', בכל, Gen 24:1; 39:5), the place where it will be experienced (באר׳ Deut 15:4; בעיר...בשדה Deut 28:3), the place of the blessing's utterance (בלבבו

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[279] Cf. Allis (1927) pp293-5. My examples aim to indicate the range of usage, not to provide a complete survey. I have not separated the different senses of √ברך: the examples relating to time of utterance, and that from Ps 26:12 (place) are instances of praise of God; the rest are blessings invoked by or given to humans.

Deut 29:18, with hithpael; בלבבם Job 1:5; במקהלים Ps 26:12), and the time of its utterance (בחיי Ps 63:5[4]; בכל־יום Ps 145:2). Thus readers probably must deduce from context the sense of ב on each occasion of its use with ברך√; as explicitly noted, three different senses occur with the hithpael. The sense found at Gen 48:20 seems intrinsically no more likely to be that in Gen 12:3 than any other possible sense of the preposition – even a sense not elsewhere instantiated in connection with ברך√.

A first guess might be that if נברכו is passive, ב introduces the agent. However ב at best rarely governs a passive agent.[280] The text of Num 36:2 seems doubtful since the construction is awkward,[281] but MT's ביהוה can only be agentive. In Eccl 7:26 (חוֹטֵא יִלָּכֶד בָּהּ) בה may be agentive, but the comparison between the woman and snares earlier in the verse may suggest she is regarded as more an instrument. In Hos 12:14[13] (ובנביא העלה יהוה את־ישראל ממצרים ובנביא נשמר) the second בנביא presumably has the same force as the first, and therefore denotes means not agent.[282] Isa 14:3 probably presents a passive of the idiom עבד ב 'do work with'. In Gen 9:6 (שפך דם האדם באדם דמו ישפך) three interpretations are possible: agentive ('by [a] man'), instrumental ('by means of [a] man' acting as the instrument of divine judgment), and beth pretii ('as the price of the man [who was killed]').[283] Deut 33:29 and Isa 45:17 both describe Israel as a people נושע ביהוה; agentive force seems most probable, though possibly 'the meaning is rather per (Germ. durch) "through"'.[284] In Hos 14:4[3] (בך ירחם יתום) the orphan probably is pitied by Yhwh, though (s)he might find compassion in Yhwh.[285] Thus ב occasionally introduces an agent; however even with a passive verb this is rare. Moreover agentive force seems inappropriate in Gen 12:3. Were Abraham the agent, he must invoke blessings on the

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[280] Cf. GKC §121f; JM §132e; also the detailed discussion of ב in Jenni (1992).

[281] Cf. BHS; Budd (1984) p388. Gray (1903) pp477-8 defends MT; cf. also Milgrom (1989) p331.

[282] Cf. also v11 ביד הנביאים אדמה (v14's repeated ב also echoes v13's repeated ב).

[283] Cf. LXX ἀντὶ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ. For a brief discussion with basic bibliography, cf. Hamilton (1990) p315 (though Hamilton coalesces agentive and instrumental forces of ב, and does not acknowledge the infrequency of agentive use).

[284] JM §132e. Cf. also Jenni (1992) p100 on beth causae: '[e]in Initiator des Vorgangs als Agens ist bei diesem Satztyp nicht vorgesehen, kann aber in manchen Fällen aus der Situation erschlossen werden'.

[285] Jenni (1992) p196 §2312 suggests the latter parallels חסה ב 'find refuge in', but the parallel is hardly close.

families of the earth, since that is how humans convey blessings to others. Yet Genesis hardly shows him doing this, nor elsewhere in the Old Testament does Israel obviously thus bless other nations. And while one doubtless might assume that Abraham's invocations of blessing would be successful, nevertheless we might expect the promises to climax with an explicit statement that the nations will actually gain blessing from Yhwh. The implicit agent of ונברכו must be Yhwh.[286]

The second possible explanation of בך is that it means 'in you',[287] and refers to the nations sharing Abraham's blessing: LXX's ἐν σοί may suggest it interprets thus. The nations could share the blessing either in the sense of experiencing like blessing (e.g. as a result of imitating his faithful and obedient response to Yhwh) or in the sense of participating in the same blessing (e.g. by becoming somehow incorporated into Abraham).[288] However this sense in Hebrew is not obviously any more natural than 'be blessed in you' is in English: while the latter certainly can be interpreted, only our familiarity with the phrase makes it seem reasonably straightforward (cf. 'you shall be prospered in him', which is equally interpretable but where the oddness is apparent). There is in fact no compelling parallel use of ב. For while ב can mean 'together with', this sense is restricted to physical accompaniment, being regularly found with explicit verbs of motion; it is also much more common with objects (107 times)/ animals (16 times) than persons (29 times).[289]

The most plausible explanation is thus that the ב is instrumental: the families of the earth will be blessed 'through' or 'by means of' Abraham.[290] ב only infrequently governs a person described as instrument, but there are a few clear examples, such as Hos 12:14[13]

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[286] Though, as noted above (p195), there may be point in the text's leaving his role implicit. (Diedrich (1979) p29n22 compares the 'divine passive' of prophetic and apocalyptic, though it seems unlikely that we have here any more than the common use of the passive to allow omission of the agent.)

[287] Turner (2000a) p64 adopts this translation; it is also regularly adopted when the niphal is ascribed 'middle' force (cf. e.g. Zenger (1977) pp50-1 for its possible implications then).

[288] These two options probably cannot be sharply distinguished.

[289] Cf. Jenni (1992) pp93-6 §14. Jenni also establishes a general category 'Teilmengen-Kontakt' (pp266-273 §264); however the sense required is not paralleled since Gen 12:3b speaks not simply of participation in Abraham, but of participation in blessing with Abraham.

[290] Cf. Wehmeier (1970) p179, Mitchell (1987) p32, though both take the niphal as a 'middle'.

(cited above p196) or 2Ki 5:1 where it is said of Naaman that בו נתן־יהוה תשועה לארם.[291]

It is not clear how active a role this gives Abraham (though the human instruments in Hos 12:14 and 2Ki 5:1 are certainly active, this is presumably not a necessary implication of the preposition).[292] His role could be to receive and model blessing – and perhaps too to model right relationship to Yhwh – and Yhwh will then extend the blessing to others, perhaps (at least in part) as they respond to the desirability of Abraham's life (cf. v3a?). Yhwh's instrument of blessing need not necessarily do anything. Alternatively Gen 18-19 might suggest that Abraham's role as instrument of blessing (18:18) includes at least intercession for others, being concerned with how they are treated.[293] We return below (p200) to the question of quite what is envisaged.

Thus far we have largely neglected the phrase כל משפחת האדמה. However we must ask why it is the 'families of the אדמה' – not, for example, the 'nations (גוים) of the ארץ' (cf. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4) – who are said to be blessed. The word משפחה[294] could denote various units, from the smaller (e.g. 2Sam 16:5, where it seems approximately coextensive with the בית־אב), through the large (e.g. in Judg 13:2 משפחת הדני denotes the tribe of Dan), to a whole nation (e.g. Jer 33:24; Amos 3:1-2); were it a technical term for a unit intermediate between tribe and בית־אב (e.g. Josh 7:14-18; 1Sam 10:19-21), this clearly did not exhaust its usage. If

> [t]he word *mišpahâ* does not denote a regional or political entity but rather
> an ethnic or restricted human community[295]

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[291] Jenni (1992) pp120-1 §§1712-4, giving 11 instances in total, including the first בנביא in Hos 12:14[13] and בו in 2Ki 5:1, under the overall category of *beth instrumenti*; p104 §1612 includes the second בנביא in Hos 12:14[13] under *beth causae*. Pp 164-5 §§1921-2, 1924 add a further ten instances, all relating to divine communication (e.g. Num 12:2 אך־במשה דבר יהוה; in 1Sam 28:6 בנביאם parallels בחלמות and באורים). Cf. also pp115-6 §§1672, 1682.

[292] Hempel (1954) pp252-3 and Schmidt (1975) *passim*, esp. 137-141, protest against the idea that Gen 12:3 imposes some kind of task on Israel to do something to further Yhwh's purposes. If the בכם in Ezek 36:23 (בהקדשי בכם לעיניהם) is instrumental the context stresses Yhwh's activity, not Israel's; however a sense 'in your midst, amongst you' (cf. Lev 22:32 ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל]; is conceivable (עשותי בה שפטים ונקדשתי בה]; Ezek 38:22 [בקרבי אקדש ועל־פני כל־העם אכבד] 10:3 conceivable. (This latter sense is obviously impossible in Gen 12:3b with the singular suffix referring to Abraham.)

[293] Schmidt (1975) (see n292) excludes Gen 18:23ff from his discussion of the Yahwist's theology, judging it a later addition.

[294] On which see Zobel (1998); Berge (1990) pp57-61.

[295] Zobel (1998) p80 (contra Speiser (1969) p86 who speaks of 'political communities'). In Gen 8:19 משפחת refers to the species of animals leaving the ark.

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unsurprisingly it, as the English 'family', can be applied in various ways. In the context of Genesis's final form, the reader of 12:3 will recall the word's use in ch10 (vv5, 18, 20, 31, 32) as part of the description of the world's population. There it clearly denotes large units; perhaps the nations in units defined by consanguinity.[296] Thus מִשְׁפָּחֹת in 12:3 hardly denies that it is the world of גּוֹיִם which will receive blessing: as suggested above (p177), v2a implies that Abraham's descendants will become a גּוֹי amongst גּוֹיִם.[297] However that is for Abraham's descendants: in Abraham's own day (as imagined in Genesis) humanity is not obviously neatly partitioned into גּוֹיִם. מִשְׁפָּחֹת may therefore be employed to make clear that the promise concerns other people however their communities are organised, and specifically so as not to deny its possible immediate relevance to Abraham's own career.[298]

Had אֶרֶץ stood in v3b, not אֲדָמָה, it would have been unclear whether the promise related to the families of the whole world, or whether Abraham's effect was to be limited to Canaan, denoted by אֶרֶץ in v1.[299] The different word, and that Abraham receives the promise outside Canaan,[300] show that the widest possible scope is in view. אֲדָמָה also brings resonances with chs1-11 where humans are created from the אֲדָמָה (2:7; note the word-play between אָדָם and אֲדָמָה) to till it (2:5; 3:23), but their relationship with it is problematised because of their actions (3:17; 4:11-2; 8:21).[301] Thus our earlier suggestion (p195) that v3b would be heard against a universal horizon receives further support; v3b continues the story of God's dealings with all of humanity, as he works good despite

[296] Cf. Wenham (1987) p291 on v5: "'in their countries each with his own language by their clans" specifies the three main constituents of nationhood, territory, language, and race' (referring to Clements (1975) pp426-7 for this conception of nationhood).

[297] Contra Zobel (1998) p85 who suggests that the use of 'clan terminology' in Gen 12:3, Ps 22:28, 96:7 and Zech 14:17 'should probably be interpreted as reflecting the idea of God as creator. The population of the world, once a great human community divided solely into clans, will once more become this harmonious community...'.

[298] Cf. Ruprecht (1979a) p462. Also Ruprecht (1979b) p183: '[w]enn der Jahwist nicht von „Völkern" spricht..., sondern eine Bezeichnung für den auf gemeinsamer Abstammung beruhenden Verwandtschaftsverband wählt, so mag er das zum einem in Hinblick auf die Völkertafel der Urgeschichte getan haben, wo die Völker ein Verwandtschaftssystem bilden, zum andern um einen weiteren Begriff zu wählen, der nicht allein auf den Bereich der großen Politik eingeengt ist, wo Völker als Subjekte agieren, sondern der zu der familiären Struktur der Abrahamzeit paßt'. (For our final form reading, it is of course unimportant which parts – if any – of ch10 can be ascribed to J.)

[299] Fokkelman (1975) pp60-1n35.

[300] Procksch (1924) p97.

[301] Cf. Zenger (1977) p49.

humans' destructive behaviour. V3b at the conclusion of the promises thus connects back to the story of all people which precedes, while v2a at their head clearly refers to the future Israel. By their form they therefore suggest that no sharp division can be made between the two[302] (cf. also ch6.1 above for other arguments that there is no such sharp division between 'primeval' and 'patriarchal' narratives), and hence, again, that the career of the patriarchs – and the Israel descended from them – will have relevance to all.

בך in v3b can in the first instance refer only to Abraham, not Israel: he, not the people, is being addressed. Use of משפחה, we have suggested, makes clear that the promise applies to Abraham's day. Yet Genesis hardly shows many משפחת being blessed because of Abraham during his lifetime. If he is to be the divine instrument of blessing, it must be because his influence will endure, presumably through the Israel to which the promises have already pointed. (We shall indeed be arguing shortly that it is as the promises of vv2-3a, including that of becoming a nation [v2a], are fulfilled that Abraham becomes an instrument of blessing for others.[303]) Thus v3b, as the previous promises, would be heard as a promise to Israel: she will be the instrument by which God's blessing extends to all.

The text of course may not specify how Abraham/ Israel act as instruments of blessing; what matters for their greatness is that they do so, not how. However we can at least ask what expectations are created, even if confirmation is lacking that these are in fact what is envisaged. Our first observation must be that the other promises of vv2-3 do not impose on Abraham/ Israel any particular task, but focus on what Yhwh will do for them. When Abraham attempts to help the promises' fulfilment by conceiving a son through Hagar from whom the great nation might descend, this succeeds only in complicating matters.[304] While the patriarchs are clearly not meant to be entirely passive – ch26 shows Isaac engaging in agriculture and digging wells, for example, not simply waiting for Yhwh to prosper him – 12:2-3 seems precisely a promise, not a commission. Yet v1 sets the promises in context, bidding Abraham respond to Yhwh in obedience/ trust, testing him, perhaps even setting a condition for their fulfilment. Hence there is a task incumbent on him, though not straightforwardly bringing about what is promised. Similarly in 18:18-19 the promises are connected to an obligation on Abraham and his descendants 'to keep the

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[302] Ruprecht (1979b) p184; Westermann (1985) p146.

[303] Cf. Berge (1990) p56.

[304] Cf. Schmidt (1975) p142.

way of Yhwh by doing וְמִשְׁפָּט צְדָקָה'; Abraham then manifests his concern for what is right by interceding for Sodom. Thus it is an implication of the general character required of Abraham that he sometimes act in a way that may benefit others. Minimally we may suspect that blessing will come to the nations only if Abraham acts rightly towards them when he does interact with them (12:10-20 perhaps illustrates what may happen when his treatment of others is less happy); yet equally it is unclear that he need do more for them than basic morality requires. Bringing blessing to the nations is not a task laid upon Abraham/ Israel, even if equally it is not independent of their conduct.[305]

Hence it is seemingly not primarily by doing anything for the nations that Abraham/ Israel are instruments of blessing. Rather their task is to be a model of Yhwh's intentions, modelling both human behaviour with respect to Yhwh, and the gracious favour he wishes to bestow on humanity; by acting as this model they allow others to gain blessing. Or, indeed, they might be somewhat more than a model for imitation, being rather the beginnings of a new way in which humanity and Yhwh may relate to one another, the pioneers making the path available for others to follow.[306] Genesis does not obviously indicate where precisely in the range between model and pioneer their role will lie. V3a implies that the nations' receipt of blessing is not automatic, but depends on appropriate response to what Yhwh does in Abraham – again blessing is not simply wrought for them by him.[307,308] However v3a does not exactly make Abraham an instrument of blessing: Yhwh's choosing to bless those who bless him, in order to ensure the preservation of Abraham's blessing, leaves his role in the extension of that blessing entirely incidental. While v3a raises the possibility of others gaining blessing, it seems unlikely that it describes the primary means by which it will happen. Nevertheless it does cohere well with our

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[305] Cf. Schmidt (1975) p138: in v3b 'es geht nicht um eine Aufgabe, die Abraham/ Israel mit seinem Tun auszuführen hätte, sondern um die Bedeutung, die das Handeln Jahwes an Abraham für die gesamte Menschheit bekommen soll'.

[306] Cf. Scharbert (1973b) p10 (cited above p183n237); Brueggemann (1982a) p120: '[m]ost likely the meaning of the phrase is not that Israel has a direct responsibility to do something for the others, but that the life of Israel under the promise will energize and model a way for the other nations also to receive a blessing from this God'.

[307] Though it is overstating the case to suggest that '[d]ie Verheißung ist ein Angebot. Die Völker müssen es annehmen und selbst nach ihm greifen' (Schreiner (1968) p99).

[308] 30:27 may be problematic here (cf. also Coats (1980b)): Laban is blessed because of Jacob, though hardly behaving generously towards Jacob. Perhaps Yhwh is not limited to favouring those whose actions are above reproach. Alternatively, Yhwh favours the household of which Jacob is part; as Jacob and Laban subsequently grow apart the quality of Laban's portion of the flock decreases (30:42), and the תְּרָפִים are transferred from father-in-law to son-in-law (31:34-5).

suggestion that others' receiving blessing is more a result of Abraham's becoming what v2 promises than of something essentially different. (V3aβ equally somewhat qualifies v3b: that כל משפחת האדמה will be blessed clearly does not exclude the possibility that some people will be cursed.[309] However we must not forget that v3b follows v3a: more important than the qualification the latter imposes on the former is that the former extends the latter in pointing to the potential of all being blessed, and perhaps to an ultimate future where all are blessed.[310])

V3b is the climax of the promises to Abraham, the supreme evidence of Yhwh's favour to him. It is not the goal of all that has preceded in the divine speech, as if the other promises are means to this end and not significant in themselves: Abraham's becoming a great nation, for example, is a boon in its own right, and not simply subsumed into a greater purpose. (Even more clearly v3b is not a summary of what has preceded,[311] since as we have seen it goes well beyond them.) However v3b does depend on the previous promises, inasmuch as it is only as their beneficiary that Abraham is the instrument of blessing (model and/ or pioneer) for others. Thus the context does not certainly resolve the syntactic ambiguity concerning whether v3b is parallel to the previous expressions of purpose or successive to them. In a context broader than that of the speech to Abraham, namely the overall divine purposes for the world, we have suggested that v3b may well inform the reader of a goal to which the earlier promises to Abraham contribute; yet this would not be expressed in the syntax of Yhwh's words to Abraham.

Whenever J was composed (if indeed we should ascribe the promises of 12:2-3 to the work of some J), v3b still required fulfilment: every reader would be clear that blessing had not yet come to all the families of the earth. Similarly on any account of the composition of the final form of Genesis its audience would be aware that fulfilment of v3b was yet to come. This does not, of course, mean that fulfilment would necessarily have seemed far off, or to require any particular change in Israel or decisive action on God's part to accomplish it – though often in Israel's history some such might have obviously been needed. Rather, even when Israel was prosperous, and the promises of v2 seemed to be

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[309] Wenham (1987) p278 suggests that '[n]ot every individual is promised blessing in Abram but every major group in the world will be blessed'.

[310] Zenger (1977) p47 surely exaggerates in using as an argument for the composite nature of the text) that 'Vers 3a und v3b stehen in einer gewissen Spannung...'.

[311] As in 26:3 the waw-consecutive perfect והקמתי may sum up the preceding clauses (see above p164n146).

having their effect (e.g. during Solomon's reign as traditionally depicted), it could at most be claimed that inclusion of the nations in blessing was just beginning. Even if Israel was ready to play its part as the instrument of blessing, Yhwh's use of that instrument was still awaited.[312] Hence we should not be surprised that Genesis offers few signs of Abraham's influence for good extending worldwide: not only are the promises of v2 still (largely) unfulfilled – and hence the role of modelling/ pioneering the blessing is only inchoate – but the reader would know that centuries later blessing for the nations was still to be achieved.[313] We might perhaps expect a few more earnests of the fulfilment to come, as we see the beginnings of the future nation in Isaac, Jacob and his sons and we find symbolic possession of the land in Abraham's purchase of the field at Machpelah. But Abraham's surpassing greatness and the ultimate divine plan are not swiftly to be achieved.

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[312] Cf. e.g. Wehmeier (1970) p203; Steck (1971) pp549-550, esp. n66; Zenger (1977) p53; Gunkel (1997) pp164-5 argues for reflexive translation of נברכו since this allows the promise to have already been fulfilled. Schmidt (1975) pp144-6 seems to confuse the preliminary conditions for fulfilment being right with the fulfilment itself: it may arguably be 'fraglich, ob [der Jahwist] ein neues Gotteshandeln erwartet hat, das das Bisherige weiterführt und überbietet' in the sense that he expected no dramatic change, but still the nations had not yet received blessing.

[313] Cf. also Clines (1997) pp99-102 on the theme of fulfilment and non-fulfilment generally in the Pentateuch.

Chapter 7

The Hithpael of √ברך

7.1 The hithpael in Hebrew

7.1.1 Introduction

Before assessing the meaning of the hithpael of √ברך in Gen 22:18 and 26:4 two preliminary steps must be taken. First, we must set out the possible meanings of the hithpael stem in Hebrew and assess whether these might be exemplified by the root in question. Second, we must examine usage of the hithpael of √ברך elsewhere, in case it suggests that התברך normally has some particular meaning, even if the grammar might allow (an)other meaning(s). Ch7.1 attempts primarily the first of these tasks; the second is attempted in ch7.2. Ch7.1 will consider only hithpaels proper; while other forms with prefixed *t*-, (hithpoel, hithpalel etc.) might well function similarly,[1] this could only be the conclusion of more detailed study than is necessary here, and certainly cannot be assumed at the outset.

The hithpael is standardly ascribed primarily reflexive function, especially with respect to the piel.[2] It may be a direct reflexive (the examples in the rest of this paragraph are indications of others' arguments, not necessarily ones I endorse): if קִדֵּשׁ with a direct object means 'sanctify (something)', הִתְקַדֵּשׁ (e.g. Ex 19:22) meaning 'sanctify oneself' would denote precisely the same activity, only with the Agent performing it upon him/herself. The hithpael may denote presenting oneself in a certain way: מתעשר (Prov 13:7) means 'presenting oneself as rich'. It may be used for a range of situations in which the subject has some further interest in the action of the verb: הצטידנו (Josh 9:12) might mean 'we took as provisions *for ourselves*', ויתפרקו (Ex 32:3) 'and they took off *from themselves*'.[3] It is occasionally reciprocal: in Gen 42:1, למה תתראו, Joseph's brothers look at each other (i.e. there is a group of subjects, each of whom is looking at another member of that group). It can rarely be passive: in Prov 31:30 the woman who fears the Lord 'is praised' (התהלל), rather than praising herself.

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[1] Cf. e.g. Creason (1995) p340.

[2] So e.g. *GKC* §54d-g; *JM* §53i; *W/O'C* pp529-531.

[3] *JM* §53i notes that this latter parallels the Greek middle.

However it has been recognised that not all hithpaels fit these categories. התהלך,
for example, can hardly mean 'walk about *for oneself*,[4] since the usage of the word hardly
suggests any particular nuance of self-interest. Rather the hithpael draws attention to the
continuing motion of 'walking about' (cf. Gen 3:8; 5:22; 13:17); the qal sometimes has this
nuance (cf. especially Ps 42:10[9] and 43:2, probably originally one psalm, where the same
phrase is exactly repeated except for variation between אלך and אתהלך) but sometimes is
concerned only with the movement's destination. This hithpael thus appears 'iterative';
other Semitic languages support this suggestion, especially Akkadian which forms an
iterative stem with an infixed *tan*. Less clear is whether התהלך is an isolated example, or
whether a few other hithpaels are best thus explained:[5] however this need not concern us
since the forms in question, other than those of √הלך, are few; the hithpael of √ברך is
unlikely to mean 'bless continually' or even 'bless repeatedly' (cf. esp. Deut 29:18; Isa
65:16); and even if such sense were ascribed to התברך in Genesis it would only somewhat
nuance the position for which we shall be arguing. Yet there are also other hithpaels which
equally do not fit the kinds of categories generally accepted for the hithpael. *W/O'C* notes
התודה 'confess' which 'does not readily display itself as a reflexive counterpart to a *Piel*
stem'.[6] Bean indeed suggests that the majority of hithpaels display 'simple' subject-verb
orientation, i.e. that frequently

> the Hithpa`el stem is used no differently from other active stems with
> regard to subject-verb orientation.[7]

Bean does not provide an extensive list of which hithpaels he includes in this category,
though he does note those from the roots ידה, אבל, אוה, נבא, הלך, פלל and בין (p159). Still
less does he provide a detailed methodology for determining whether the Hebrew has
reflexive force.[8] Mazars also argues that some hithpaels have force 'égal à un *qal*'; this
includes some from the roots הלל, פלל, הלך, יצב and בין.[9] However his method seems to

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[4] Contra *GKC* §54 f.

[5] Speiser (1955a) would add the roots אבל, אוה, אנף, נעש, נחל, עלל, עטף, שאה and שעה.
However some of these we shall explain differently below. And cf. the discussion of *W/O'C* pp526-9.

[6] *W/O'C* p426.

[7] Bean (1975) pp133-142; citation from p137.

[8] Cf. *W/O'C* p428. Bean does argue (p134) that התפלל has no reflexive force, since the prayer is not
necessarily for the subject's own benefit (cf. e.g. Gen 20:7, 17); *W/O'C* apparently overlooks this.

[9] Mazars (1968) pp358-362; citation from p362. As stated above (p1), since √בין occurs in the
hithpolel, not hithpael, it is best not used as evidence for the meaning of the latter.

be naïve description, and therefore his results are not compelling. Yet Bean and Mazars do at least demonstrate that the conventional analyses of many hithpaels are not self-evident. They may be plausible given the general account of the hithpael being employed (and of course that general account itself gains plausibility if it can explain even hithpaels which initially seem to have no reflexive, reciprocal or passive significance). But a different account of the hithpael in general might well lead to reassessment of the meaning of many individual instances.[10]

The relationship of the hithpael to the piel is itself questionable. Two issues are involved. First, a diachronic morphological issue. Were there originally *t*-prefixed forms of the basic stem (*tG* forms), which by the time of the Masoretes (and perhaps even at the time of the composition of the biblical writings) were assimilated to the *t*- forms of the doubled stem (*tD* forms)? The vocalisation of הִתְפָּקְדוּ (Judg 20:17 etc.) may be evidence for such *tG* forms; one may also appeal to semantic links between qal and hithpael (for example in the case of √נכב); other Semitic languages regularly have several *t*- forms.[11] Secondly, one can ask whether the meaning(s) of the hithpael is/ are bound in any way to the meaning(s) of the piel, even when the hithpael is (or was regarded by its users as) a *tD* form. We have suggested (above pp54-55) that the niphal shows no signs of being related specifically and only to the qal; thus *prima facie* we need not expect the hithpael to be related essentially to the piel. We have also argued (above p54) that niphal and hithpael are often used with indistinguishable meaning, noting especially √חבא at Gen 3:8, 10, √עטף at Lam 2:11-12, √טמא and √קדש. In at least these last cases we might question whether any particular piel nuance was perceived. Some of these forms may of course originally have been *tG*, as perhaps was התהלך (see above). But were such forms[12] perceived in the biblical period as distinctive from *tD* hithpaels, clearly the tradition culminating in MT has assimilated a large number of *tG* forms; Masoretic pointing would thus hardly provide significant presumptive evidence for taking any particular form as *tD* (even if assimilation of *tG* forms to *tD* forms would suggest that the latter were originally a larger group). Classification of each form would thus have to be argued entirely on semantic grounds; following the kind of analysis

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[10] We should note here the argument of Dombrowski (1962) that the *t*- stems in Semitic languages are '*not basically reflexive, but inversative*' (p222, citation referring specifically to Akkadian). This includes reflexive, passive and reciprocal senses, but can range more widely.

[11] Cf. e.g. Speiser (1955a).

[12] The five roots mentioned account for over 10% of the hithpaels in the OT, and the list is purely illustrative. For example if התמא is *tG*, is not התהר likely also to be so? In what way might התאבל relate to any nuance of the piel? These last two add a further c5% of the OT's hithpaels.

presented in what follows one could then suggest affinities to qal or piel (if indeed one can specify the semantics encoded by the piel). This might produce significant conclusions, if, for example, semantically reflexive hithpaels always – or, conversely, never – related to a piel sense (though demonstrating that certain hithpael classes related specifically to some other stem would not show whether the morphology originally differed, and if so at what stage coalescence took place). However this general assessment is unnecessary for our purposes: it is enough for us to show that any analysis plausible for the hithpael of √ברך is paralleled by another hithpael which seems to relate to the piel of its root.

7.1.2 The hithpael as a middle form

We argued above (p60) that the niphal of √חבא is a middle form. If the hithpael of this root coincides in meaning (above pp60, 206) it too must be a middle form. In this section I provide further examples of semantically middle hithpaels. My aim is not to establish a complete classification of all middle hithpaels, merely to illustrate the variety of hithpael usage. √חבא provides an example of a self-move middle.[13] At least some uses of the hithpael of √נשא offer a further example. In Num 23:24 (הן־עם כלביא יקום וכארי) יתנשא (יתנשא) parallels the qal יקום and thus means simply 'arise' (not e.g. 'rouse itself'). In Num 24:7 (וירם מאגג מלכו ותנשא מלכתו) not only is ותנשא parallel to the qal וירם, but its subject is inanimate, making semantic reflexivity unlikely; passive force, while not impossible, is also unlikely since the hithpael in general is rarely passive, as argued below (pp213-217). One might argue that ותנשא in Num 24:7 has no connotation of motion, and thus cannot be a 'self-move middle'; since we are dealing with metaphor, precise semantic analysis may be uncertain. However for our purposes most important is that this hithpael seems neither reflexive nor passive.[14] It must be admitted that elsewhere reflexive analysis for התנשא is more plausible: in Num 16:3 the people complain at Moses and Aaron's claiming for themselves a high position, where one certainly might gloss תתנשאו as 'exalt yourselves', even if 'move into an exalted position' is hardly excluded. Yet as there is no reason to assume that the hithpael of any particular root was always employed with the same force (cf. below p214 on √הלל) the alternative possibility in Num 16:3 does not challenge our earlier analyses.

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[13] For the terminology and arguments that such a category of meaning is semantically middle in this and other cases, see above ch3.2.

[14] Cf. further the discussion of the niphals of √נשא and √עלה above pp58-59.

Middles are also used for verbs of 'posture and bodily contortion'.[15] הִתְיַצֵּב meaning 'stand, take up position' fits into this category. An English translation of 'station oneself' (e.g. Hab 2:1 NRSV) or 'present oneself' (e.g. Ex 8:16 NRSV) is sometimes possible; however in every case one is simply moving into a position, not performing on oneself an action which one could equally perform on another, as would be necessary were the word semantically reflexive, not middle. (A further verb of bodily posture would seem to be הִשְׁתַּחֲוָה, 'bow down' and hence by semantic shift 'honour, worship', though as suggested above we must not assume that forms such as the hithpalel[16] share the hithpael's semantics.) Another middle domain relating to motion is that of verbs of gathering and assembling. The hithpael of √אסף at Deut 33:5 seems to mean 'assemble', as that of √קבץ in 1Sam 7:7 (cf. the niphal in v6).[17] One could also analyse the hithpael of √הפך 'turn' as a verb of nontranslational motion: in Gen 3:24 and Judg 7:13 it is clearly middle since the subjects are inanimate (respectively a sword and a loaf of bread) and there is no plausible candidate to be the implied agent of a passive.[18] However it is more probably a spontaneous process middle, since it seems precisely analogous to הִתְבַּקְּעוּ (of wineskins splitting through wear) at Josh 9:13.[19] The hithpael of √עטף 'faint' (as the niphal) seems to denote an intrinsically spontaneous natural process; one might compare Chocho (an Otomanguean [Uto-Aztecan] language) tûndá má 'faint', or Latin morior 'die' for this class of middles.[20] The hithpael of √געשׁ is also clearly middle in Ps 18:8[7] and 2Sam 22:8, since in both the subjects of the hithpael (respectively מוֹסְדֵי הָרִים and מוֹסְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם) are also the subject of יִרְגְּזוּ, and thus have the role of Actor; there is no reason to think that their role has changed when they are the subject of יִתְגָּעֲשׁוּ. Less clear is why the verb is middle-marked, since it

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[15] Kemmer (1993) p56 treats Rumanian *se ridica* 'arise' and Hungarian *emelked-* 'rise, get up' as examples of 'change in body posture actions'. I prefer to see הִתְנַשֵּׂא as denoting a more general significance of becoming higher. However as suggested with respect to the niphal (above p61), the reason why the same morphology is used for different classes is that sometimes they are adjacent if not overlapping.

[16] Still less, perhaps, the hištapel, if that is the stem here (so e.g. Stähli (1997a) p398).

[17] Boyd (1993) pp264-5 notes the example of √קבץ.

[18] In Gen 3:24, the sword appears independent of the cherubim; equally it seems unlikely that Yhwh continuously turns the sword. In Job 37:12 and 38:14, however, a case could be made for an implicit divine agent.

[19] Boyd (1993) pp252-4 suggests that the hithpael of √הפך has an iterative nuance. On הִתְבַּקְּעוּ, cf. Boyd (1993) p244.

[20] Cf. Kemmer (1993) pp142-4; Chocho example from Klaiman (1992) p126.

neither denotes a natural process, nor is there a transitive form of the verb to which the hithpael might relate as other spontaneous process middles seem to relate to a transitive counterpart.[21]

Our analysis of the niphal of נקם√ ascribed it middle force, denoting an activity always or typically performed for one's own benefit (above p55). The same would seem to apply to the hithpael (e.g. Jer 5:9). The hithpael of נחל√ 'take as inheritance' also falls into this category. (However there seems no obvious way התברך could refer to an action typically performed for one's own benefit without having the full direct reflexive force of 'bless oneself'.) A number of hithpaels seem to denote 'grooming actions'. The hithpael of גלה√ (Gen 9:21) refers to the taking off of clothes, those of כסה√ (e.g. 1Ki 11:29) and אזר√ (Ps 93:1; Isa 8:9) to putting them on. It must be admitted that the hithpaels of the last two roots could certainly be reflexives, since the piels are used of covering or equipping someone else.[22] Some uses could even be passives, e.g. Ps 93:1 (אזר√) or 1Kings 11:29 (כסה√). The case that they are middle depends not so much on analysis of these instances as on establishing that other hithpaels do fit into this interlinguistic group. גלה√, as noted above p57, for example, never takes a direct object of a person undressed, and hence at the least its hithpael is not relationally reflexive. פשט√, on the other hand, can take a direct object of the person undressed in both piel (1Sam 31:8=1Chr 10:8, of stripping the dead), and hiphil which regularly takes two direct objects, coding the person stripped and what is stripped from them (e.g. Gen 37:23). The hithpael (1Sam 18:4) thus could be a direct reflexive, of hiphil or piel,[23] even if middle force for a grooming action, or alternatively an action of which one is the beneficiary,[24] is equally plausible; the qal takes a direct object of the clothes taken off (e.g. 1Sam 19:24). The piel of גלח√ never takes a direct object of the person shaved (though the pual does have the person shaved as its subject); it is thus at least

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[21] However the pual at Job 34:20 might evidence the existence of a piel which happens not to be attested in the OT. Speiser (above p205n5) considers this hithpael iterative.

[22] Though animals are part of the subject in Jon 3:8, ויתכסו might still be reflexive (contra Allis (1927) p282). For uppermost in the author's mind is doubtless the humans who could 'cover themselves'; it might even be deliberate exaggeration to suggest that such is the repentance that even animals must actively manifest it. Prov 26:26 is clearly metaphorical.

[23] If the latter, it has secondarily acquired another direct object.

[24] For the latter option, cf. *GKC* §54f(c); *W/O'C* p430.

plausible that the hithpael at Lev 13:33 means 'shave', not 'shave oneself'.[25] In Job 9:30 occurs the one instance of the hithpael of √רחץ. Since the qal is regularly employed when a person washes him- or herself (e.g. Ex 2:5; 30:20; 2Sam 12:20; Isa 1:16) it is unclear why the hithpael should be used here – maybe, for example, for its sound in the poetic line rather than for any difference in sense.[26] It is also not impossible that, even if Hebrew has a class of hithpaels denoting grooming actions, this is a one-off reflexive formulation. However the overall evidence seems to me sufficiently strong to render plausible – perhaps just probable – the existence of such a class.

Middles are also used for verbs denoting emotions. This may explain the hithpaels of √אבל (cf. Hungarian *bánkód-* 'grieve, mourn'), √אוה (cf. classical Greek βούλεσθαι 'will, wish'; Djola *–ra:n-ɔ* 'desire, crave') and √אנף (cf. Mohave *mat iθa:v* 'be angry').[27] Also in this class may fall התנחם 'take comfort': in Gen 37:35 this refers to the desired result of another's action of comforting (√נחם piel), not to some action the subject might perform on himself (though analysis as a passive, 'be comforted' is equally possible). Verbs of emotion shade into emotive speech actions, and these into other speech actions. The hithpael of √ידה 'confess' seems to fall best into the category of speech actions (cf. Latin *fateor* 'acknowledge', *confiteor* 'confess'; Pangwa *-ilumba* 'admit one's guilt'[28]). The piel occurs at Lam 3:53 and Zech 2:4[1:21], but on both occasions it means 'throw', as does the qal at Jer 50:14 s.v.l.[29] The hiphil generally means 'give thanks, praise', but any connection to the sense of throwing is conjectural.[30] Likewise an original meaning 'acknowledge' is

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[25] Allis (1927) p282 suggests that here התגלח means 'have himself shaved', since the person would be unable to reach the top of his own head. However if so, presumably the piel יגלח means 'have [the itch] shaved'; cf. Judg 16:19 where Delilah summons a man and, presumably, has him shave (3fs piel jussive √גלח) Samson. Thus the idea of having something done may not be a particular nuance of the hithpael (it certainly is not a regular nuance of the piel); rather the subject ensures the bringing about of the situation depicted by the predicate, and that (s)he does not do so directly is ignored as unimportant.

[26] Cf. Mazars (1968) pp362-4 for the general point. Alternatively התרחצתי could be a poetic preservation of an archaic usage; or, as √רחץ was presumably a common word in everyday Hebrew, a form that occurs only once out of 72 uses of the root in the OT may have been well-known, though comparatively less frequent than the qal.

[27] Comparative material (except βούλεσθαι) from Kemmer (1993) p131.

[28] Kemmer (1993) p134.

[29] ירו is read by e.g. *BDB*; McKane (1996) pp1265-6.

[30] *BDB* p392 'perhaps from gestures accompanying the act... yet connexion uncertain'; Westermann (1997) p503 '[a] relationship to *ydh/ ydd* I "to throw, shoot"... can be discounted'.

implausible: 1Ki 8:33, 35 (= 2Chr 6:24, 26) provides little support for this suggestion, since the word on each occasion could mean 'praise'.[31] Thus it would be over-speculative to suggest an origin of the hithpael in a sense of 'acknowledge about oneself'. (In Ps 32:5 and Prov 28:13 the hiphil means 'confess'; but it is unclear how this relates to other hiphil usage.[32]) Even this, of course, would be a middle sense, not a semantic direct reflexive: that the hithpael does not mean 'acknowledge oneself (to be something)' is suggested both by its taking an object of the thing confessed in its earliest attestations (Lev 5:5; 16:21; 26:40; Num 5:7), occurring absolutely only later (Ezra 10:1; Neh 9:3; Dan 9:4), and also because the hiphil, if meaning 'acknowledge' at all, means 'acknowledge as significant' whereas the hithpael does not mean 'acknowledge oneself as significant'. In 2Chr 30:22 מתודים may mean 'giving thanks' (so e.g. RSV), which would suggest that the word was not seen as intrinsically referring to the subject's own state; however the sense 'confessing' is not difficult, and hence is probably preferable.[33]

Another hithpael perhaps a speech action middle is that of √דבר, found only in the participle מִדַּבֵּר at Num 7:89; Ezek 2:2; 43:6. Repointing to a piel מְדַבֵּר is of course possible, and indeed attractive given the ubiquity of the piel of √דבר (over 1000 times in the OT, including 39 participles); however the principle of *lectio difficilior* would surely support MT. One might suggest that this hithpael has some kind of reciprocal sense:[34] this would not be a true reciprocal 'talk with one another' since on each occasion the participle is singular and is followed אליו/אלי denoting the person addressed, but could be a middle denoting a typically reciprocal event (cf. classical Greek διαλέγεσθαι 'converse', Sanskrit *saṃvadate* 'speak together',[35] which Kemmer classes as naturally reciprocal events). Yet in both Ezekiel contexts the prophet says precisely nothing, and hence choice of a form indicating reciprocal nuance would seem odd; in Numbers, though Moses does speak as well as being spoken to, מִדַּבֵּר certainly need not mean more than 'speak'. The case for a speech action middle is thus certainly plausible. (We might contrast here the niphal of √דבר

[31] So JB; DeVries (1985) p114; Westermann (1997) pp507-8.

[32] Westermann (1997) pp507-8 finds in these uses of the root 'an independent group' compared to those meaning 'praise'.

[33] Cf. Japhet (1993) p954.

[34] Cf. *W/O'C* p431.

[35] Kemmer (1993) p104.

[above pp57, 65-66], occurring only in the plural [four times] with on each occasion plausibly reciprocal nuance.)

The hithpaels of √חנן and √פלל are often analysed as denoting actions one performs for oneself;[36] better would be to suggest that they are typically performed for oneself, since התפלל may denote praying for someone else (above p205n8). Latin *precor* 'pray', classical Greek εὔχεσθαι 'pray' and λίσσεσθαι 'beseech mercy' show that such words might attract middle marking. The hithpaels, according to Speiser, meant originally 'seek favour for oneself', 'seek mediation for oneself';[37] alternatively, according to Creason, 'make oneself gracious (to someone, in order to secure something)',[38] 'mediate for oneself'. Yet it seems plausible that at least a central reason for use of the hithpael is that התפלל and התחנן always denote speech actions. It is unclear that the Latin and Greek words cited should be classified amongst activities typically performed for one's own benefit rather than amongst speech acts[39] (though the etymology of the Greek γουνόεσθαι/ γουνάζεσθαι, indicating an original sense of 'clasp someone's knees', might suggest that the middle marking of this word is not due to its denoting a speech act); of course it might be suggested that the words fall into both categories, thus helping explain why the same grammatical marking can be applied to both (cf. n15). To anticipate later arguments (chs7.2, 8), the hithpael of √ברך would fit neatly into a category of speech action hithpaels, meaning 'utter a blessing': in all its occurrences outside Genesis at any rate it is at least clearly a verb of speaking.[40] Both √דבר and √חנן provide possible examples of hithpaels denoting speech actions and relating to the piel of the root.[41]

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[36] Cf. Speiser (1963); *W/O'C* p430.

[37] Speiser (1963).

[38] Creason (1995) p352.

[39] Kemmer (1993) p78 includes them in the former group. However on p269 'pray' features in a list of speech actions which might receive middle marking.

[40] Though of course if the word had reciprocal force ('bless each other') or reflexive ('bless oneself') speech would still be involved.

[41] Further roots that might yield speech action hithpaels include √אמר, √הלל and √שבח. Kemmer (1993) p134 lists Hungarian *dicseked-* 'boast' and Twi *ohyeyhé nèhõ* 'he boasts' amongst speech action middles; on the other hand, words for rejoicing could be 'emotion middles' (cf. Ayacucho Quechua *arwikuy* 'rejoice', Latin *delector* 'delight in' [Kemmer (1993) p131]).

Thus the hithpael can express various middle nuances. The above survey is not exhaustive: we have not, for example, considered הִתִּירַע, which plausibly fits into the same middle category as the niphal of the root and that of √ראה; or הטמא and הִתְקַדֵּשׁ which overlap with the niphals of their respective roots, themselves plausibly middle (cf. above ch3). With respect to the last, Josh 7:13 is particularly interesting: Joshua is told to sanctify the people (√קדשׁ piel), and to say to them הִתְקַדְּשׁוּ. While Joshua could sanctify the people by having them sanctify themselves (cf. p210n25) the sense is smoother if the hithpael is a middle meaning 'become holy', neither affirming nor denying the subject's responsibility for the process (cf. also Isa 30:29 where the subject of הִתְקַדֵּשׁ is the inanimate חג, though this hithpael could be passive;[42] and Ezek 44:25 where qal and hithpael of √טמא stand parallel). On the other hand, at 2Chr 29:5 the priests are instructed הִתְקַדְּשׁוּ וְקַדְּשׁוּ אֶת־בֵּית יהוה. In the second clause they are instructed to sanctify the temple; the obvious sense for the first is that they must perform a similar sanctification of which they themselves would be the Patient (cf. also 2Chr 29:15; and Neh 12:30 with √טהר). However despite our study's limitations we have established two important conclusions for analysis of √ברך. First, we have shown that many hithpaels conventionally labelled 'reflexive' are not semantically direct reflexives. And second, we have shown that analysis of certain hithpaels as taking middle marking because they denote speech actions is at least plausible.

7.1.3 Passive hithpaels

It is generally recognised that a few hithpaels have passive meaning.[43] Since the niphal apparently developed from being a middle stem into having passive functions, it should not surprise us that the hithpael can have both passive and middle functions. Other Semitic languages show *t*- stems having passive functions: in Aramaic, indeed, the *t*- stems are the standard ways of expressing the passive, and hence passive hithpaels in later biblical texts *may* be Aramaisms.[44] In these other languages the passive sense is not a late

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[42] So e.g. *W/O'C* p432.

[43] Hothpaal forms occur in Lev 13:55-6; Deut 24:4; Num 1:47; 2:33; 26:62; 1Ki 10:27; Isa 34:6. Their pointing suggests they are inner passives of the hithpael. However the examples from Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Isaiah are not obviously passive of any hithpael sense; the Deuteronomy and Isaiah examples, indeed, could easily not be passive at all (meaning respectively 'grow defiled' and 'become fat'); the examples from Numbers and 1Kings are from √פקד which has an irregular hithpael-like form (above p206). Possibly some or all of these are mispointed hithpaels, and possibly hithpaels elsewhere are mispointed hothpaals; but neither possibility seems likely to much affect our assessment of how many hithpaels are passive (contra Allis (1927) p280).

[44] Creason (1995) p353.

development,[45] as in Hebrew the use of the niphal instead of the internal passive of the qal is common at the earliest attested stages of the language.

Gesenius-Kautzsch offers two examples of passive hithpaels, תתהלל in Prov 31:30 and וישתכחו in Eccl 8:10. The former (אשה יראת־יהוה היא תתהלל) is unlikely to mean 'the woman, she is to glory in the fear of the Lord'[46] since when התהלל means 'glory in' the object is elsewhere governed by ב (e.g. Ps 105:3; Prov 25:14). The sense 'makes herself to be praised' is not impossible; yet since the context stresses what her wisdom gains the woman (cf. v31), the passive 'she is praised' seems preferable. In Eccl 8:10 וישתכחו describes what happens to the wicked after their death; 'they were forgotten' is thus a likelier sense than 'they made themselves to be forgotten'. However some manuscripts offer וישתבחו, which might underlie LXX's ἐπῃνέθησαν. While this too might well be a passive 'they were praised', a sense 'they made themselves praised' cannot be excluded.

However one of the clearest examples of a passive hithpael occurs in 2Sam 18:31: יתבשר אדני המלך כי־שפטך יהוה היום מיד כל־הקמים עליך. √בשר, found elsewhere only in the piel, denotes bearing tidings, especially good tidings: it is often used absolutely, but takes an object of the person informed in e.g. 1Sam 31:9, 2Sam 18:19 and Isa 61:1. Here the subject of the sentence, the king, is being informed. Reflexive or reciprocal senses are impossible, and no obvious middle sense is available; hence passive analysis seems compelling.[47] Commentators seem to agree on a sense 'receive tidings' – i.e. presumably a tolerative nuance of the passive – though without seeing the need to discuss the issue, or to remark that here we have a passive hithpael in prose which there is no reason at all to ascribe to later biblical Hebrew.[48]

Similarly in 1Sam 3:14: ולכן נשבעתי לבית עלי אם־יתכפר עון בית־עלי בזבח ובמנחה עד־עולם. The subject of יתכפר is clearly עון; the hithpael therefore cannot be a reflexive of any kind, as the iniquity hardly performs any kind of action. Nor can the

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[45] Cf. e.g. Huehnergard (1997) p424 on the *Dt* stem in Akkadian; Allis (1927) pp277-8 suggests that passive uses of the *t*- stems in Assyrian are evident as early as the Hammurabi period.

[46] Murphy (1998) p244 notes the option, without adopting it.

[47] So Lambert (1972) §670.

[48] Cf. *BDB* p142; Kirkpatrick (1880) p178; Smith (1899) p360; McCarter (1984) p398. Some translations offer 'Good tidings' (RSV, NRSV) or 'Good news' (JB, REB), leaving unclear exactly how they analyse the form.

hithpael be a spontaneous process middle: for these denote actions which can happen as natural processes (breaking, turning, opening etc.); and further the making explicit of how the expiation might have been brought about, by זבח or מנחה, shows that what is envisaged is not spontaneous. Might this hithpael be analogous to התקדש, if the latter means 'become holy' – התכפר being inchoative of a non-attested qal 'be pure through expiation', or formed from the piel?[49] It is unclear how close we should think the analogy (though Ex 29:36-7 and Lev 8:15 certainly suggest that the words belong in a similar semantic field). The passive, however, makes perfect sense: while the piel only rarely takes a direct object of the sin expiated (Ps 65:4; 78:38; ?Dan 9:24; all with God as subject), Prov 16:6 and Isa 6:7 show puals with the sin as subject. Translators and commentators assume that the hithpael here is passive;[50] but hardly give the issue much attention.

A further possible passive hithpael in prose is that of √רפא, found at 2Ki 8:29 (= 2Chr 22:6), 9:15.[51] Joram is presumably to be the recipient of healing from doctors and/ or nature, i.e. he is not going to heal himself; however, as we have seen (n25; cf. also p213 on Josh 7:13) the sense 'heal oneself' might extend to 'make oneself healed by another's agency'. Alternatively, 'become well, become healed' could be regarded as a middle denoting a process represented as or actually spontaneous (cf. Ayacucho Quechua *jampikuy* 'recover from illness';[52] also English 'heal', both transitive 'the rest healed me/ my wounds' and intransitive 'my wounds healed'); some niphals of √רפא occur in contexts where there is no clear Agent in the healing process (e.g. Lev 13:18). However the niphal in Jer 17:14 (רפאני יהוה וארפא) is presumably passive, since it presents a reformulation of a statement made with a transitive qal, simply transferring the stress from the Agent to the Patient. Thus a passive sense 'be healed' is not improbable for the hithpael. On the available evidence a firm decision is impossible.

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[49] We suggested above p63 that the niphals of √חלל and √נזר might function analogously to that of √קדש, though the roots have no qal.

[50] '[T]his stem is found here only, but there can be no doubt of the meaning' (Smith (1899) p29); 'LXX, rightly, ἐξιλασθήσεται' (Driver (1913) p44). Kirkpatrick (1880) p66 'lit. *shall not cover itself*; shall not make atonement for itself' states the issue, but is hardly helpful.

[51] *W/O'C* p432 notes the instance in 2Chr, ascribing it to 'later biblical literature' (presumably overlooking the parallel in 2Ki).

[52] Kemmer (1993) p143.

A similar range of options confronts us in analysing the hithpael of √טהר, occurring 12 times in Lev 14. This could be reflexive ('cleanse himself'), middle ('become clean') or passive ('be cleansed'); the sense 'have himself cleansed' could be a nuance of the first, or indeed of the last since the passive does not deny that the Patient may have desired the outcome or acted in such a way as to encourage it (cf. 'he was hit – he made sure the blow struck him, not his child'). V11 suggests that the priest performs the action of cleansing; the rest of the passage seems to confirm this, since the diseased person's role is very small:[53] the passage begins with the person's being brought to the priest (v2), stressing his passivity; only in vv8-10 is he said to do anything. Certainly nothing in the context militates against seeing the hithpael as passive.[54] However the hithpael is used elsewhere with different sense: in both Gen 35:2 and Neh 12:30 the subjects of the hithpael apparently become pure by their own actions, suggesting middle or reflexive sense, not passive. Of course this may simply be a different use of the hithpael. Yet where the context-specific evidence is inconclusive, evidence that a stem is elsewhere used with a particular force cannot be ignored, since one must assume that certain hithpael nuances were regularly associated with particular words. The case that הִטַּהֵר is a middle, neither affirming nor denying external agency, is thus plausible.

I have deliberately treated √רפא and √טהר at some length, to show the complexity involved in assessing the frequency of passive hithpaels. 2Sam 18:31 demonstrates that such meaning is not impossible: התבשר can serve as a passive to the piel in biblical prose narrative dating (on all but the most radical accounts of the formation of the OT) from no later than the exile. On the other hand √רפא and √טהר provide less clear evidence. And even accepting a maximising interpretation of this evidence, passive hithpaels are still very rare. Of course properly to establish the frequency of passive use of the hithpael would require detailed examination of all other hithpaels which conceivably have passive force, for which there is not space here. Allis lists 36 hithpaels which he considers probably passive;[55] while he does not claim his list is exhaustive, he is certainly trying to make the strongest case he can for a passive hithpael. Many of his examples I would argue to be middle (a

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[53] Cf. Allis (1927) p282n55.

[54] One might argue that vv8-9 show the person becoming clean (√טהר qal) through his own actions, and thus the hithpael participle at the start of v8 is not passive. However since the actions of vv8-9 are part of a longer process in which much is done for the person, and the rituals of vv10-20 presumably show that the cleansing is not complete at the end of v9, we can hardly press the precise contextual force of this instance.

[55] Allis (1927) pp281-3.

category he does not recognise), for example the hithpael of √נחם at Gen 37:35 and Ps 119:52, and that of √אנף at Deut 4:21 (cf. above p210).[56] Others may be reflexive: see below p222 on √מכר in Deut 28:68. Yet even granting all Allis's examples would still leave the passive hithpael rare. Bean considers 147 hithpaels certainly or probably passive;[57] but since he does not list them, and those judgements on meanings which are presented seem naïve,[58] this is hardly compelling evidence. However it may not be important to establish exactly how rare hithpael passives are (though were Bean correct well over 10% of hithpaels would have this force, and it would therefore not be rare). For since, as argued in ch7.2 below, the hithpael of √ברך outside Genesis is never passive, we would need strong evidence internal to Genesis to establish passive force for the hithpael there; such evidence would presumably be sufficiently strong also to overcome the inherent unlikelihood, given the infrequency of the construction, that any hithpael should be analysed as passive.

7.1.4 Reciprocal hithpaels

Here we must distinguish three categories: true semantic reciprocals, words denoting action which is typically reciprocal, and words expressing mutual action which is not reciprocal. For example, analysing the hithpael of √נכל (Gen 37:18; Ps 105:25) as 'act craftily together' would not make it a reciprocal, since the subjects are not performing an action of acting craftily with respect to each other. (I intend this only as a clear hypothetical example; a better analysis is probably 'show oneself crafty'.) In analysing the hithpael of √דבר (above p211) we suggested that this cannot be a true reciprocal: if the hithpael does not simply denote a 'speech action', the reason for the use of this stem is that the action is typically reciprocal.

True semantic reciprocals are at best rare. תתראו at Gen 42:1 seems a prima facie example:[59] Jacob complains that his sons are looking at one another (rather than doing something useful). Here each of the sons both is performing an act of looking and is the object of such an action performed by (an)other son(s). The hithpael of √ראה also occurs at

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[56] Allis (1927) p286n60 notes the possibility of the sense 'anger himself against'.

[57] Bean (1975) p140.

[58] E.g. on p136 he argues that התרפא in 2Chr 22:6 is passive by saying that 'the agent performing the healing is not expressed, but a reflexive sense would be inappropriate'.

[59] So *GKC* §54f(c); Lambdin (1973) p250; *W/O'C* p431; Boyd (1993) p258.

2Ki 14:8, 11 (= 2Chr 25:17, 21), modified by פנים, and having the sense 'face one another'. This at least raises the possibility that it is a technical term of hostile encounter: such words often receive middle marking even if the middle is not employed to express reciprocal force in the case of verbs not inherently or typically reciprocal.[60] A nuance of hostile encounter is not implausible in Gen 42:1: rather than exchanging guilty looks, the brothers could be exchanging hostile glances ('staring each other out', though a slight overtranslation, might capture something of the force), each expecting the other to do something. We thus do not here have clear evidence for the hithpael's general availability to express a reciprocal sense.[61] We might also note התגרה, which denotes striving against someone else; התערב likewise seem to denote typically reciprocal action.[62] A further possible reciprocal hithpael (with the hithpael apparently related to a piel) is that of √לחש 'whisper together' (Ps 41:8[7];[63] 2Sam 12:19); each person included in the subject of the verb is both whispering and being whispered to. However the person whispered to is semantically the Addressee of the verb, not a Patient; and there is no reason to think that the Addressee would be coded as the direct object of the verb. Hence again this is not clear evidence that a hithpael can form a reciprocal of a transitive verb.

For our purposes we do not need to reach firm conclusions here. For reciprocal analysis of the hithpael of √ברך is impossible at Deut 29:18 and Isa 65:16, since in each case the subject is singular; in all other uses other analyses are at least as plausible as reciprocal analysis. Whether the hithpael in general is never reciprocal or only rarely reciprocal, either option is enough to confirm that the non-reciprocal analysis should be preferred for התברך.

7.1.5 Hithpaels denoting presenting oneself in a certain way

This category of hithpaels does not require detailed consideration; their sense is tolerably clear, and התברך is unlikely to fall into the category. התנבא (28 times) means 'act

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[60] Cf. above pp56-57 on the niphal; also Kemmer (1993) pp104ff.

[61] Further, one might read תאחרו (LXX has ῥᾳθυμεῖτε), or derive תתראו from √ירא (cf. SP); for discussion see Hamilton (1995) pp514-5. Either of these would remove any possibility that the form is reciprocal; but they are not obviously preferable to seeing here a hithpael of √ראה.

[62] Interlinguistic parallels to the sense 'associate with' or 'deal with' might be Guugu Yimidhirr *minhdhaadhi* 'keep company with' and Bahasa Indonesian *bertukar tjintjin* 'exchange rings' (examples from Kemmer (1993) p107).

[63] Noted by *GKC* §54f(b).

as a prophet';[64] והתחל (2Sam 13:5) means 'act as one who is ill', 'pretend to be ill'. Some reflexive notion is often detected: התנבא, for example, could be glossed as 'conduct oneself as a prophet', 'present oneself as a prophet', 'show oneself a prophet', 'esteem oneself a prophet' or 'make oneself a prophet'.[65] However at least the first of these is not semantically directly reflexive: in conducting oneself in a certain manner one simply acts thus (though 'conduct oneself' perhaps adds a nuance of deliberateness), rather than performing on oneself an action which one might equally perform on another. Arguably the same is true of 'presenting oneself as', and perhaps 'showing oneself as', since in doing them one does not obviously perform an action of presenting or showing of which one is Patient as well as Agent. Classical Greek προσποιεῖσθαι 'pretend' suggests this might be a middle domain. Yet reflexive analysis cannot be ruled out, particularly if it explains why a form related to the piel is employed: making oneself to be in a state would correspond to the piel's factitive sense; esteeming oneself to be in a state would correspond to the piel's 'estimative-declarative' sense.[66] If one adopts either of these reflexive analyses, one must suggest that the sense shifted over time: for in pretending one does not judge oneself to be so or make oneself so, but simply acts in a certain way, and hence presumably particular reflexive nuance was lost from at least some of these uses of the hithpael before the sense of 'pretending' developed. We might also note that the subject of התנבא is sometimes not a person choosing to be a prophet, but one under the influence of a force beyond himself.[67] Thus, to summarise, not all hithpaels meaning 'act in a certain way' are reflexive; it is possible that some are, and that the whole category derives from an originally reflexive use, but such a hypothesis will be based more on views about the general meaning and development of the hithpael than on analysis of the nuance required in particular texts.

7.1.6 Reflexive hithpaels

We have already considered many hithpaels conventionally judged reflexive. Many we have suggested to be middle forms: some of these exhibit no semantic reflexivity (התיצב means 'take up position' [above p208]); others may well take middle marking because they

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[64] One could analyse some uses of התנבא as speech actions (cf. Latin vaticinor 'prophesy'). However other uses clearly relate more to 'prophetic frenzy' than to spoken prophecies; cf. especially 1Sam 18:10; 1Ki 18:29.

[65] All these options are mentioned for some root, though not necessarily √נבא, by GKC §54d3(a) or W/O'C pp428, 430-1.

[66] Cf. W/O'C pp429-431.

[67] In 1Sam 18:10 Saul would hardly have acted thus if he had any choice in the matter. In e.g. 1Sam 10:6, while the role of God's Spirit is stressed, the human actions may be voluntary.

express some further interest of the subject in the activity performed, but are not semantically direct reflexives (התנחל means perhaps 'take as inheritance for oneself' [above p209]). In several cases we have been unable to reach definite conclusions about whether or not forms were semantically reflexive (e.g. verbs of 'grooming' [above p209]). The use of the hithpael for what are clearly a variety of 'reflexive-like' situations might seem good evidence that it can encode semantic direct reflexivity. However classical Greek, Sanskrit and Fula, for example, have middle systems employed for 'reflexive-like' situations, but not direct reflexivity.[68] Only detailed examination of particular instances can establish that the hithpael may express a direct reflexive.

The hithpael in fact seems comparatively rarely directly reflexive. In Genesis, for example, once one has eliminated forms of התהלך and התפלל, clear middles (e.g. התחבא [3:8]; התעצב, denoting an emotion, [6:6]), reciprocals (התעשק [26:20], התראה [42:1], both plausibly middles denoting typically reflexive actions) and other forms which are certainly not reflexive (e.g. התשאה [24:21] cannot mean 'gaze at oneself') only a dozen, of 38 hithpaels, remain whose force could be reflexive.[69] Of these three are verbs of dressing or undressing (√גלה [9:21]; √כסה [24:65]; √עלף [38:14]). התידע (45:1) is probably a middle, though a sense 'make oneself known' is not impossible. Three are verbs found only in the hithpael (√חתן [34:9]; √אפק [43:31, 45:1]), making semantic analysis difficult: התאפק could denote 'strengthening oneself' or 'restraining oneself', but such glosses are not obviously superior to 'take strength' or 'be strong' (cf. also below on √חזק); התחנן might denote 'making oneself a daughter's husband' (cf. e.g. 1Sam 18:21) or more generally 'making oneself a relation by marriage' (e.g. Deut 7:3), but equally might denote a naturally reciprocal action of making an alliance by marriage.[70] In four instances (√ענה 16:9; √טהר

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[68] Cf. Klaiman (1992) pp68-9, 87-92, from which I take the term 'reflexive-like'.

[69] None of the hithpael-like forms in Genesis are direct reflexives. השתחוה (23 times) is a middle denoting body posture (cf. above p208); התגלל (43:18) a self-move middle (literally 'roll'); התמהמה (19:16; 43:10) is also a middle (cf. Latin *moror* 'delay'); התרצץ (25:22) denotes a reciprocal or typically reciprocal action; התבשש (2:25), if not meaning simply 'become ashamed' would have indirect reciprocal nuance 'be ashamed before each other'.

[70] Cf. English 'marry' intransitive; in English naturally or typically reciprocal events are often encoded by intransitive counterparts of verbs also used transitively, while ordinary reciprocals cannot be thus derived. Thus 'they kissed' means 'they kissed each other'; 'they fought' can mean 'they fought each other'; however 'they hit' cannot express 'they hit each other' (Kemmer (1993) p102). Cf. also the comparative material in p218n62 above.

35:2; צדק√ 44:16; חזק√ 48:2) analysis of the hithpael as reflexive of piel is possible.[71] However in all four cases the piel is a factitive which relates to an intransitive (except ענה√, clearly stative) qal. It is thus possible that they should be analysed as middles denoting entering into the state denoted by the qal; cf. the brief discussion of קדש√, above p213, where we noted that sometimes middle analysis seems indicated, though elsewhere reflexive analysis seems more likely. התחזק is used both where the subject clearly gains strength from a source external to himself (e.g. 2Chr 27:6; Dan 10:19) and where the subject is not so much being strengthened as increasing his own strength (1Ki 20:22; Dan 10:21); middle analysis would fit all uses of the word – including Gen 48:2 – and is particularly supported by the instances in Daniel where otherwise the word occurs with different senses (passive and reflexive) within two verses. At Genesis 44:16, Judah may be asking how the brothers can be restored to a good relationship with Joseph ('become righteous'), rather than how they can perform an action of establishing as righteous (whether in the sense of 'proving innocent' or 'restoring someone guilty to favour') of which they would be the grammatical objects. However even if we analyse any of these four hithpaels as reflexives, they would not provide precise parallels for reflexive use of the hithpael of ברך√, since ברך√ does not have an intransitive qal, as evidenced by its frequently-occurring qal passive participle.

Thus we must look beyond Genesis for a reflexive hithpael from a root with a transitive qal. One such is התמכר, found at Deut 28:68; 1Ki 21:20, 25; 2Ki 17:17. The first of these refers to sale as a slave; we shall return to this below. The other three contain an apparent idiom התמכר לעשות הרע בעיני יהוה 'sell oneself to do evil in the sight of Yhwh'. Clearly the sense of 'selling' here is metaphorical. The qal can have similar metaphorical sense, denoting the surrendering of one's rights over something and the giving of it entirely into another's power (e.g. Deut 32:30; 1Sam 12:9[72]). The hithpael in these instances is unlikely to be passive: in 2Ki 17:17 (ויעבירו את־בניהם ואת־בנותיהם באש ויקסמו קסמים וינחשו ויתמכרו לעשות הרע בעיני יהוה להכעיסו) the other verbs describe objectionable actions performed by the subjects; 1Ki 21 stresses Ahab's culpability (cf. v19) which would be reduced were his evildoing the result of his being handed over to evil by another. Nor is any plausible middle sense available. However were the hithpael a direct

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[71] צדק√ occurs more frequently in the hiphil (twelve times) than the piel (only five instances, and only in Job with the sense 'declare right', 'make right'). The hithpael could, however, equally be a reflexive of the hiphil: cf. Deut 25:1 for the sense 'establish (someone) as right'.

[72] This usage occurs only with Yhwh as subject, except at Nah 3:4 (where various alternative readings are possible; cf. e.g. Roberts (1991) pp69-70 and Spronk (1997) p122).

reflexive it would have precisely the meaning required: the subjects have given themselves up to evildoing. In Deut 28:68 the meaning is less clear. As part of the punishment for disobedience Israel will be returned to Egypt, and והתמכרתם שם לאיביך לעבדים ולשפחות ואין קנה. The issue is whether the people 'offer themselves for sale' or 'are offered for sale':[73] it is unclear whether they have been captured and so are being sold by their captors, or whether having been driven from the land they in desperation choose to return to Egypt, seeking to find some livelihood for themselves in becoming the slaves of others.[74] As noted in discussion of the niphal of √מכר (above p73) if we knew more about the institution of slavery in Israel it might be clearer whether those in difficulty did sell themselves, or whether sales into slavery were always forced. But however we analyse this text, we have three uses of the hithpael which are certainly direct reflexives. Unfortunately √מכר never occurs in the piel, and therefore cannot be a precise parallel to √ברך.

I cannot find a single example of a hithpael which is certainly the direct reflexive of a piel from a root whose qal is transitive. This does not prove that התברך could not have been used as a reflexive form. For while I have suggested that √קרש, for example, cannot be a perfect analogue for √ברך, it is equally not certain that the different Aktionsart in the qal would cause a difference in how the piels functioned; if התקרש were sometimes reflexive of piel (cf. above p213 on 2Chr 29:5), it would be difficult to argue that התברך could not be. Secondly, I have suggested that the hithpael of √כסה may well have middle force. However reflexive semantics cannot be excluded; and this would be a reflexive of a piel whose qal is transitive.[75] Thirdly, we have seen clear evidence in the case of התמכר that a t- prefixed form can be reflexive. One might explain this as a tG form, and thus maintain even more of a distinction from התברך than would be the case if they were both instances of the same stem, only with one formed on the basis of the qal, the other on the piel. Yet even so it would be difficult to deny that the tD could ever be reflexive. התברך, then, might be a reflexive. But this is not prima facie a likely analysis.

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[73] Which senses would obviously derive from respectively the reflexive 'sell themselves' and the passive 'be sold', the nuance added by the context which explicitly states that no-one buys.

[74] Mayes (1979) p358 and Tigay (1996) p273 favour the latter; Driver (1896) p319 suggests the allusion is to Phoenician slave-traders, but still refers to the people offering themselves for sale.

[75] As the qal of √כסה occurs only three times while the piel is frequent (over 130 instances) it seems overwhelmingly probable that the hithpael is related to the piel – or even if it was not in origin, that Hebrew speakers would regard it as thus related, and hence might use other roots analogously.

7.1.7 Conclusion

Ch7.1 has not given a complete account of the hithpael. It has sought to establish some approximate categories into which at least many hithpaels can be fitted, most importantly arguing that the hithpael, while it may sometimes have reflexive, reciprocal or passive semantics, very commonly is rather a middle form. Many questions remain unanswered. We have taken the hithpael forms of MT as a synchronic group, and have not attempted diachronic analysis (which might include analysing certain forms as originally *tG*). We have not considered other *t-* prefixed forms. We have not investigated whether the hithpael might have some particular nuance which explains why it is employed rather than some other stem apparently having similar meaning: do התנפל or התנעש, for example, have some nuance which their respective qals would not express?[76] If התברך is a speech action middle, would it express something different from the piel (used absolutely at Gen 48:20)? Our aim has been more limited: in the absence any previous convincing basic account of the hithpael, we have presented detailed arguments to establish an outline sketch of some of the meanings of the hithpael, in order to make possible discussion of the hithpael of √ברך. Our conclusion is that passive, reciprocal and reflexive semantics may all be possible; but the first two options are rarely instantiated and there is no certain parallel to the last. On the other hand the possibility of a speech action middle is at least worthy of investigation in discussing the texts.

7.2 The hithpael of √ברך outside Genesis

7.2.1 Introduction

The hithpael of √ברך occurs in four places outside Genesis, in Deut 29:18[19]; Psa 72:17; Isa 65:16; and Jer 4:2. We shall ask three questions of each (though the answer sometimes may be a brief and obvious negative). First we shall consider the force of the hithpael. Is it passive ('be blessed'), reciprocal ('bless each other'), reflexive ('bless oneself'), or speech action middle ('utter a blessing')? If the last, the context may suggest that the subject utters a blessing on him/ herself, or that multiple subjects utter blessings upon each other; we shall therefore need to ask not just whether the situation described is one of people blessing themselves or each other, but whether this is necessarily explicit in the verb. Second we shall ask whether the text illuminates other aspects of the promises in Genesis which use the word: for example, is the preposition ב employed? Is a relationship between Israel and other nations envisaged, and if so, of what kind? Thirdly we shall

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[76] As noted above (p205n5), Speiser regards the latter as an iterative.

consider whether the text suggests that its author intended to make allusion to, or at least knew for himself, the patriarchal promises in Genesis. This order of proceeding avoids the potential danger of circularity in attempting to elucidate Genesis using parallel texts read in the light of a perceived allusion to Genesis. As the texts' contexts offer enough indications of how they should be taken without appeal to allusion, we can safely leave that question to last.

7.2.2 Isaiah 65:16

המתברך בארץ יתברך באלהי אמן והנשבע בארץ ישבע באלהי אמן

Here many ascribe reflexive force to the hithpael of √ברך,[77] though NASB translates it as a passive. The latter seems unlikely, as יתברך parallels ישבע, 'will utter an oath'.[78] However this must also at least raise the possibility that the blessing, as presumably the oath, is directed to someone other than the subject. In the Old Testament blessings are normally pronounced on someone else;[79] the point of Isa 65:16 is that in blessings God's name will be used, suggesting that the reference is to the usual practice of blessing. A speech action hithpael thus seems indicated: the issue is the uttering of blessings, presumably on other people but the object of the blessing is of no significance in the context. (The singular subject excludes the possibility of reciprocal semantics.) Both NIV and NRSV translate 'invoke a blessing': I am uncertain how much support these offer my proposal since, for example, one might wonder whether the NRSV translators would analyse the form as a reflexive, yet due to the insignificance of the object in the context and their desire to eliminate gender-specific language render 'whoever invokes a blessing...' rather than 'whoever blesses himself...'. However these translations at least confirm the plausibility of my understanding of the sentence, if not of my analysis of the hithpael.

Does the text have a horizon beyond Israel? Vv9-10 might suggest not: God is bringing forth descendants *from Jacob*, and both places mentioned are within the promised land (Sharon and the Valley of Achor). Thus it would seem likely that in v16 בארץ should

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[77] So e.g. RSV, REB, JB, Westermann (1969), Whybray (1975).

[78] Cf. Wehmeier (1974) p9.

[79] Cf. Allis (1927) p290; Müller (1969) pp153-4. Deut 29:18[19] (see below) is an exception, but this is precisely a 'blessing' which denies the importance of God; so too in Ps 49:19[18] '[i]nstead of praising God, the giver of all blessings, the recipient has praise only for himself' (Anderson (1972) p380). In 1Ki 2:45 Solomon's invocation of blessing on himself attempts to avert Shimei's curse on David (2Sam 16:5ff): cf. Gray (1964) p110. In 1Chr 4:10 the self-blessing is required to avert the threat posed by Jabez's ill-omened name (Taylor (1992) pp141-2). Straightforward invocations of blessing on oneself are rare, but cf. 2Sam 7:29; Ps 28:9; 67.

be translated 'in the land', not 'in the earth'.[80] However in v17, אָרֶץ clearly means 'earth', since it is paired with שָׁמַיִם. Should this govern the interpretation of v16? Two considerations suggest there could be a shift in the force of the word between its two uses. First the pairing with שָׁמַיִם clearly signals the force in the second instance, and therefore the shift could occur without confusing the reader. Second, there is a good case for seeing a new unit beginning at v17 or v16b.[81] The main evidence for this is the string of lines beginning with either כִּי or לֹא in vv16b-25.[82] Of course, in the book of Isaiah as it now exists the two sections are adjacent, and should be read as such; whatever the redaction-history, interpretation cannot ignore their current position. However it does seem that a break is indicated between them, and thus the reader might well be prepared to find a word used in a slightly different (and equally common) way in the second section. Yet even in this second section the horizon has not completely changed: for though the prophet has a vision for renewal of the whole earth, the primary concern is still Jerusalem (v19), and Mount Zion (v25).

The blessing will be in God's name (we note the use of בְּ, as in Gen 12:3, though here governing a noun, not a suffix). This is despite the fact that the previous verse has spoken of God's enemies leaving *their* name as a curse, and contrasted that name with the new name he will give to his servants. The prophet presumably wants to stress the centrality of God to the future life he describes; on the other hand he certainly could have described people blessing 'by your [i.e. Yhwh's servants] new name'. We must also note that the word for 'curse' in v15 is שְׁבוּעָה: to use the name of God's enemies in an oath is obviously not incompatible with appealing to God in an oath (v16). Perhaps similarly a blessing could mention both God and an exemplar of his blessing. If so, the prophet has failed to take advantage of an opportunity to strengthen allusion to Genesis, if he intends such allusion. Yet the rest of the case for allusion is hardly compelling. The word אָרֶץ, as we have argued, refers in Isaiah to the 'land', not the whole 'world'; more important than the presence of אָרֶץ is surely the absence of the phrases כָּל־גּוֹיִם or כָּל־מִשְׁפְּחֹת. Isa 62:2 shows that the prophet could stress the importance of the people's name without obviously depending on patriarchal tradition, and we might wonder why, if the allusion is specifically

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[80] Wade (1929) p411 refers to '*the land*, the scene of the events described'.

[81] Westermann (1969) and Whybray (1975) p275 adopt the latter; RSV/ NRSV, NIV and REB indicate a new paragraph at v17.

[82] For our purposes the precise place of the division is unimportant: the כִּי in v16b might begin the new section, or be the 'hook' at the end of the previous section to which vv17ff were attached.

to Gen 12:2, the only use of the *name* in the patriarchal promises, Isaiah uses the hithpael of

√ברך not the niphal found in v3b. Though נשבע occurs in Gen 22:16 and 26:3, in close

proximity to √התברך, in both Genesis contexts it is God who swears; since נשבע is so

common (154 times in the Old Testament), used in all kinds of contexts and traditions

where people take oaths, it seems unlikely that readers should pick up from it allusion to the

patriarchs, or that the prophet was particularly conscious of them in formulating the verse.[83]

In sum, it is improbable that Isa 65:16 is dependent on Genesis, or that readers would

discern an allusion to the patriarchal promises.[84]

7.2.3 Psalm 72:17

יהי שמו לעולם לפני־שמש ינין שמו ויתברכו בו כל־גוים יאשרוהו

Here a passive translation of the hithpael is not uncommon.[85] However the context

seems clearly to favour some other sense: it is taken as reflexive by e.g. RSV, NASB,

Briggs and Briggs, Tate.[86] For the verse begins with a request that the king's name endure.

This would neatly introduce a statement that his fame will be such that other nations will

use it in their blessings. (Contra RSV, כל־גוים is probably subject of both יתברכו and

יאשרוהו, rather than יתברכו meaning generally 'people will bless'.) Gen 48:20 provides a

clear example of how a person's name might be thus used. More importantly, יתברכו is

parallel to יַאַשְׁרוּהוּ, 'call him happy'; this parallelism is close if the 'blessing' is an utterance

on the part of the nations.[87]

Thus the nations are 'blessing' rather than 'being blessed'. But precisely who

blesses whom? Are we to think of some action performed by the גוים as entities, perhaps by

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[83] Mitchell (1987) p125 suggests that the use of נשבע here was suggested by its role in opposition to ברך (blessing as invocation of God's favour; oath as invocation of God's disfavour if one plays false).

[84] Allusion is detected by e.g. Motyer (1993), Oswalt (1998). Wade (1929) and Westermann (1969) do not mention of the possibility. Whybray (1975) notes the similar form here and in Gen 22, and also the dissimilarity in that in Genesis the blessing is 'by your [i.e. Abraham's] offspring' whereas here it is 'by God'; it is unclear whether he believes Isaiah consciously modifies Genesis.

[85] E.g. LXX, NRSV, JB, NIV, Oesterley (1939); Dahood (1968).

[86] Briggs and Briggs (1907), Tate (1990).

[87] So Wehmeier (1974) p7; Weinfeld (1981) p426n8. Dahood (1968) p185 by contrast repoints יאשרוהו to a pual – interpreting the suffix as a dative of agency – to parallel the passive sense he assumes (without argument) for the hithpael: this seems hardly compelling, even if one has as little faith as Dahood in Masoretic vocalisation. Contra Scharbert (1975) p296, the point is the *uttering* of the blessing, not that the nations 'pride themselves in participating in the blessing of the king'.

their leaders on behalf of the people (cf. v11 where the גוים serving Israel's king is manifested by their rulers doing homage)? Or is it ordinary individuals within the nations who will utter blessings? If the former, are the nations blessing one another: for an international blessing we might note 2Sam 8:10, where King Toi of Hamath sends his son to bless (=congratulate?) David, though Psalm 72 hardly evinces much concern with how the nations relate to each other? Or is each nation blessing itself – its priests and/or kings uttering a blessing on the nation? Again this seems possible, though perhaps less likely since it is not clear that a leader blessing his nation would naturally be expressed as the nation blessing itself. However גוים certainly can refer not to the people united, or their official representatives, but to individuals within the nation (cf. e.g. Deut 12:30; 2Ki 6:18; Ps 43:1; 79:10).[88] The word still implies these individuals' status as part of a people (contrast בני נכר); the individuals are regarded as typical of their nation (we might think, perhaps, of something like national character).[89] Thus to speak of the nations blessing may be to refer to individuals within the nations blessing.[90] If that is so here, the individuals are more probably blessing other people than themselves. For in the Old Testament the normal practice is for people to bless others (cf. above p224n79); it is surely more likely that here we have described the use of the celebrated king's name in a common custom, rather than its employment in a rare practice (though the name might of course also be used in any self-blessings that did occur). Similarly the king might well be more flattered if many thousands of individuals often call him blessed (יאשרוהו) than if the nations make official pronouncements to this effect, even were each to do this with some regularity. If so, a speech action hithpael is entirely appropriate: for most significant is not precisely who is blessed, but rather that the king's name is used when foreign peoples utter blessings (whereas it is not clear that this could well be expressed as nations blessing *themselves* or *each other*). We might compare Deut 4:6 where the עמים, again presumably foreign individuals, acknowledge Israel's greatness and wisdom, manifested in her law. Of course, speech action force for the hithpael is equally possible if any of the other situations

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[88] Cf. also the usage of e.g. מצרים and ישראל as collective singulars: the former in e.g. Gen 50:3; Ex 32:12; the latter in Ex 15:22; Num 16:34; 1Sam 17:3.

[89] We are of course trying to make conceptual distinctions that doubtless were not a major concern of the authors or readers of the texts.

[90] I suspect this is the understanding of most commentators who accept reflexive translation of the hithpael (or niphal) of √ברך in any of its occurrences with גוים (or משפחה) as subject; certainly Rashi interprets the niphal in Gen 12:3 as stating that 'a man will say to his son, "Be like Abraham"' (Rashi (1972) p49a).

described above were taken as the text's primary or only concern; the use of the king's name would still be more important than precisely what occurs.

We note two parallels to the patriarchal promises. First, the preposition ב with a pronominal suffix is used. Here, as already implied, it denotes the use of a person's name as a formula of blessing. Second, the subject of יתברכו is other nations.[91] The Psalm envisages that nations will be ruled by the king (v8), but this is not to say that it expects them to become part of the people of God. For foreign people will *serve* him (v11). The verb עבד is rarely used of Israel's relation to its own king: Hushai employs it when offering personal allegiance to Absalom (2Sam 16:19); it is used of the whole people in 1Kings 12:4 (=2Chr 10:4), in the context of Rehoboam's accession. It occurs more commonly when a people offers submission to a foreign power: to Psalm 72:11 we could add, for example, Psalm 18:44[43]; 1Sam 4:9; 2Sam 10:19; 1Kings 5:1[4:21]. It therefore seems likely that the relationship envisaged is one of subordination that was not usually made explicit within Israel (a major issue in 1Ki 12 is Rehoboam's excessive demands on the people[92]). The noun עֶבֶד is frequently used of an individual's relationship to the king, but this is most commonly on a person's own lips as a term of politeness (correlate to addressing someone as אדני is calling oneself עבד) rather than a role-description as servant; significant is that the plural is very rare for the relationship of the people as a whole to the king (though it too is sometimes a mark of politeness, e.g. 1Sam 12:19 [the people to Samuel]; 25:8 [David's men to Nabal]; 2Ki 18:26 [Hezekiah's officials to the Rabshakeh]), exceptions being Samuel's threat in 1Sam 8:17, Goliath's taunt in 1Sam 17:8, and the elders' advice to Rehoboam in 1Ki 12:7, all contexts in which there is hardly a neutral description of the situation being given. Hence Psalm 72 probably envisages foreign peoples becoming tributary subjects to Israel (or Judah?). Their kings bring gifts and acknowledge the superiority and overlordship of the king of Israel/ Judah, but do not relinquish their thrones. This is not denied by vv12-14 stating that the reason for the nation's service is the king's concern for the needy. For the text is not suggesting that they submit in order to gain better government (though doubtless the king's reputation for such concern increases their readiness to serve[93]); rather

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[91] See below for discussion of LXX's πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς.

[92] To be sure, the word עבד occurs on the people's own lips; this suggests the terminology would not have been totally unacceptable, but one suspects that rather than offering glad service, they are stating the maximum they will give, hoping it will suffice.

[93] Cf. 1Ki 10:1ff where the Queen of Sheba brings gifts to Solomon in acknowledgement of his wisdom.

his behaviour wins him God's favour, and hence as reward *for him* the extension of his kingdom. The foreign peoples are not integrated into Israel (and thus Tate's suggestion that 'since [the king] serves God, by implication he brings the nations to Yahweh's service as well'[94] goes beyond the text). Moreover the Psalm offers little evidence of concern for the well-being of non-Israelites for their sake. In v4, the king defends the עניי־עם, not the downtrodden of every nation. The section on dominion over nations (vv8-11) highlights the subjugation of the king's foreign enemies (v9), and the tribute brought to him (v10); in these elements explicitly, and in the rest implicitly, the stress is on the glory brought to Israel, her king and her God, not on any positive effect for the foreigners. V17 thus emphasises not that God has established a way for foreigners to gain prosperity, but rather the greatness and renown he grants his anointed king. In this Psalm, foreigners are clearly subordinate to God's purposes for Israel.

Some commentators propose that Psalm 72:17 alludes to the patriarchal promises, the Psalmist suggesting that those promises are fulfilled in or through the Davidic monarch.[95] While this is hard to disprove, the Psalm seems perfectly comprehensible without seeing any allusion, and little else in the context suggests dependence on patriarchal traditions.[96] כל־גוים have also been mentioned earlier in the Psalm (v11), where this seems clearly just the normal way of referring to other nations. The reference to the king's name in v17 might echo the statement about Abraham's name in Genesis 12:2. But none of the other vocabulary is the same; one should hardly be surprised by the explicit use of 'name' in a context speaking of the use of a person's name in blessing; and the hithpael of √ברך is found not in Genesis 12 but in 22:18 and 26:4. However the situation is different if one accepts that LXX preserves the original text of the verse: for it renders v17b

καὶ εὐλογηθήσονται ἐν αὐτῷ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη μακαριοῦσιν αὐτόν.

Yet it is obscure why a copyist of the Hebrew text should omit כל־משפחת האדמה,[97] while it is quite possible that the translator or a Greek scribe would add a phrase to create an

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[94] Tate (1990) p224.

[95] E.g. Briggs and Briggs (1907), Weiser (1962), Eaton (1967), Anderson (1972), Kraus (1989).

[96] Though we have argued above (pp179, 181, 191) that the patriarchal narratives draw on royal traditions.

[97] 'Copyist's error' (Briggs and Briggs (1907) p137) describes the problem, but offers no solution. Oesterley assumes that LXX has misplaced the phrase in translating 'may all nations with him be prospered I and all the tribes of the earth call him blessed'. This may have metrical advantages (LXX suggests a very long first half of the stich, though v4 might be parallel were the Hebrew divided after

allusion to Genesis, or to strengthen an allusion he believed he perceived. Thus MT is preferable, and hence the case for allusion is weak.

7.2.4 Jeremiah 4:2

ונשבעת הי־יהוה באמת במשפט ובצדקה והתברכו בו גוים ובו יתהללו

The hithpael here is commonly judged a reflexive (NASB, NKJV, JB, RSV), though passive translation is not unknown (e.g. NIV, NRSV, Bright[98]). Yet once again passive force appears unlikely. For התברכו stands parallel to יתהללו, probably used passively in Proverbs 31:30 (above p214) but elsewhere regularly meaning 'glory', 'boast in': the context makes clear that the subject is doing the praising in e.g. Jer 49:4 (where it is linked to 'trusting in her treasures', הבטחה באצרתיה); Psalm 34:3[2] (where the Psalmist is praising God); Psalm 105:3 (bidding people give thanks, make known, sing and rejoice); Isa 41:16 (parallel to √גיל). Elsewhere it is more difficult conclusively to exclude passive sense, but non-passive sense seems more plausible (e.g. Jer 9:22-3; 1Kings 20:11; Psalm 52:3[1]). Hence it seems overwhelmingly likely that in Jer 4:2 the meaning of בו יתהללו is 'they will boast in him [i.e. by speaking in praise of him]',[99] and hence of והתברכו בו that 'they will bless by him [i.e. in his name]'. For once passive force has been excluded, the analysis will repeat that given to יתברכו in Ps 72:17 (pp226-228 above, which see for detailed arguments): the primary situation described is probably that of individuals uttering blessings on other individuals, which does not obviously fit either reflexive or reciprocal semantics; however the main point is not precisely who is blessed (or who blesses), but the use of God's name when blessings are uttered. Thus again we most plausibly have a speech action hithpael.

In Jer 4:2 again we have use of ב with suffix, and again other nations are subject. However here the suffixed preposition refers not to humans (as in Genesis and Psalm 72) but to God, as in Isa 65:16. Some would emend to בְּךָ,[100] referring the suffix to Israel. Yet

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לעם), but hypothesising both that LXX has rearranged the Hebrew and that a Hebrew copyist inexplicably omitted a phrase seems questionable when the extant Hebrew text is perfectly comprehensible.

[98] Bright (1965).

[99] Hithpolels of √הלל are found at Jer 25:16; 46:9; 50:38; 51:7. Other than 50:38 these clearly have a very different sense from the hithpael, but none is plausibly passive. Thus even if one both rejected the Masoretic pointing, judging these hithpaels, and related the sense of 'act madly' to that of 'boast', our conclusion would be strengthened rather than weakened.

[100] Cf. e.g. BHS apparatus; McKane (1986) p86.

neither Hebrew manuscripts nor ancient versions support this emendation. Nor is it grammatically necessary: 2:2-3 offers a parallel for a shift in divine speech from first person to third person;[101] and the unexceptionable חי־יהוה here may well have made the shift natural.[102] Further there seems no reason for a scribe to deliberately alter בך to בו, while since the word occurs twice accidental alteration seems implausible. There is thus every reason to uphold MT: the nations will utter blessings using God's name.

The context in Jeremiah is more generous to the nations than Psalm 72.[103] In 3:17 the prophet depicts the nations gathering in Yhwh's presence in Jerusalem, no longer following their evil ways. The text thus portrays a genuine turning to Yhwh; hence (4:2) the nations swear by him, not their former gods. It is not obvious what difference there would be thereafter between them and Israel. However the prophet is hardly much concerned for the nations, nor does he see their coming to Yhwh as the ultimate goal of the salvation he depicts. For the vast majority of the oracles refer explicitly and only to Israel and Judah. Of course this may be in part because they form his audience, and hence he wishes to speak relevantly for them (though chs46-51 shows prophecy concerning the nations was quite possible,[104] and cf. the programmatic 1:10). Yet the misbehaviour and punishment of the nations do not trouble Jeremiah as Israel's do; his personal concern is almost entirely for his own people. His stress in mentioning the nations at 3:17 is on the greatness of God evidenced by his universal sovereignty, and the freedom from trouble for his worshippers now there are no evildoers, not on the benefits for the nations. Similarly the reference to the nations in 4:2 reinforces to Israel the magnitude of her salvation, if she only returns to Yhwh: the consequences will be so great that all people will see and desire them. For the effect on others if Israel fails to respond seems of no importance; though Jeremiah reminds his people of what will happen to them if they remain stubborn, he does not mention what would then happen to foreign nations.

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[101] 4:4 illustrates the reverse shift: the divine speech here first refers to God in the third person, then switches to the first person.

[102] Cf. Holladay (1986) p129.

[103] Wehmeier (1974) pp8-9 denies this, but he is concerned with the context of a supposed original oracle 3:1-5 plus 3:19-4:4. Cf. also Schreiner (1962) p15.

[104] On which see e.g. Raabe (1995).

Does Jer 4:2 allude to Genesis (our third question)?[105] Other than the hithpael of

√ברך, there are two similarities: the word נוים, and a form of the Niphal נשבע (which occurs

at Gen 22:16 and 26:3).[106] However the former is too common a word for us to lay any

weight on its appearance here, particularly as both elements of the characteristic 'all... of

the earth' from Genesis are lacking. As for the second similarity, in both Genesis contexts it

is God who swears, while in Jeremiah Israel is subject of נשבעה; since נשבע is such a

common word[107] it seems unlikely that a reader would have picked up from it allusion to the

patriarchs, or that the prophet was particularly conscious of them when he formulated this

verse.[108]

7.2.5   Deuteronomy 29:18[19]

והיה בשמעו את־דברי האלה הזאת והתברך בלבבו לאמר שלום יהיה־לי

כי בשררות לבי אלך

Deut 29:18[19] is concerned with an Israelite who refuses to obey the law, who

knows his/ her conduct is 'stubborn' (√שרר) but believes this will not prevent a life of well-

being (שלום). This belief, expressed in the first person, is given as the content of the

blessing. The person is not in receipt of blessing from other people (still less, of course,

from God), nor is (s)he blessing someone else (the content of the blessing specifies לי, 'for

me');[109] rather the blessing is for him- or herself. Hence the hithpael here could be

reflexive, as is supposed by all translations and commentaries. However the specifically

reflexive force might be supplied by the context; the blessing's content and the fact that it is

spoken internally makes clear who was its recipient even if it is not explicit in the verb

form, for example were the verb to mean 'utter blessing'. Therefore we cannot be certain

precisely what the verb encodes. Perhaps the meaning here is more 'congratulate himself'

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[105] Positive answers to the question are given by Wehmeier (1970) p181, Holladay (1986), Mitchell (1987) p55, and Brueggemann (1988); Jones (1992) considers it probably an allusion; Bright (1965) thinks it perhaps an allusion.

[106] This latter is noted by Holladay (1986) p128.

[107] Cf. above p226. Twice in Jeremiah (of 13 uses) it does occur in an allusion to God's oath to the patriarchs (11:5; 32:22), but in both cases the allusion is explicit with God swearing to Israel's ancestors that they would possess the land. This hardly suggests that נשבע on its own would seem a reference to patriarchal traditions.

[108] Holladay (1986) p128 suggests that the verse combines Gen 22:18 and Ps 63:12[11] (which has יתהלל and נשבע). However the parallel to the Psalm seems little more compelling than that to Genesis; there seems no reason why Jer 4:2 should not be a free composition of the prophet.

[109] Reciprocal force is impossible, since the participle is singular.

(Driver[110]) or 'flatter himself' (NEB/ REB), than 'invoke a blessing on himself' (NIV): the person sees no need to request divine favour or to pay any heed to God; the words are a statement of personal policy not an invocation. However this is presented in opposition to the words of a curse,[111] and hence there is emphasis on the words formulated – and particularly on their lack of reference to divine activity – not just on the attitude of mind. Thus הִתְבָּרֵךְ means more than 'consider himself lucky'.[112]

The answer to our second question is therefore that the verse offers no comparable ideas to the patriarchal promises,[113] and hence to our third question that it contains no allusion to them.

7.2.6 Conclusion

In three of our four texts we have suggested that the hithpael most plausibly denotes simply an uttering of blessing. In Deut 29:18[19], while the situation described is clearly reflexive, הִתְבָּרֵךְ may not be intrinsically a reflexive form, and hence it is equally plausible to see there a hithpael denoting an uttering of blessing. In each instance passive force for the hithpael is very unlikely; reciprocal sense is impossible in Deuteronomy and Isaiah, and unlikely in Psalm 72 and Jeremiah; reflexive sense may perhaps be possible in Psalm 72 and Jeremiah but is highly implausible in Isaiah. Nowhere have we appealed to the intrinsic likelihood of the hithpael having particular force. However, as argued in ch7.1, passive hithpaels are rare, reciprocal at best exceedingly rare, and reflexive hithpaels certainly not as frequent as the standard grammars would suggest. Our conclusions from analysis of the texts thus have plausibility in this wider context: it would have been surprising if the hithpael of √בָּרַךְ had passive or reciprocal force, and use as a reflexive would also be notable. Its use for a speech action makes it less remarkable. (While I have referred throughout ch7.2 to 'speech action hithpaels' nothing said has provided specific evidence that the hithpael stem has some intrinsic link to speech actions; the arguments have been

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[110] Driver (1896) p325.

[111] Stressed by Keller and Wehmeier (1997) p274, though given our previous sentence to speak of 'a countermeasure against a threatening curse' is perhaps an exaggeration.

[112] One of the options suggested by Scharbert (1975) p296 (who, even less plausibly, ascribes similar meaning to Isa 65:16). Mitchell (1987) p124 suggests the person 'considers himself blessed', ignoring the curses and expecting to receive covenantal blessings merely through being an Israelite. However his words suggest he knows he is disobeying covenantal stipulations, and the previous verse suggests he is turning from Yhwh; it thus seems unlikely that he thinks the covenant of any importance whatsoever.

[113] The use of בּ in בִּלְבָבוֹ clearly differs from that in the patriarchal promises.

that the hithpael is not – or need not be – passive, reciprocal, or reflexive. In the light of ch7.1 I suggest that, if so, the reason for the use of the hithpael stem may be that one of the middle semantic domains associated with it is that of speech actions. However other analyses of the hithpael which ascribe to it some force other than passive, reciprocal or reflexive may be equally compatible with the evidence.)

On three occasions it is specified that the blessing uses the name of Israel's king (Psalm 72) or Israel's God (Jer 4; Isa 65); each of these employs the preposition בּ.

Two of the texts are concerned with non-Israelites blessing. However in neither is there concern for them in their own right. Rather Psalm 72 stresses the greatness of Israel's king, shown by the respect foreigners have for him; and in Jeremiah 4 the prophet's concern is the magnitude of Israel's salvation. (Moreover even if Isa 65 does refer to non-Israelites, the context there too is much more concerned with Israel.)

For none of the texts can a strong case be made for dependence on the patriarchal promises of Genesis, or for allusion to them. We have not proved, it must be stressed, that there is no link at all between them. It is quite *possible* that both the patriarchal promises and Psalm 72 depend on royal traditions, for example; or indeed that the author of Isa 65:15-16 is playing with themes he knew to be important in Genesis. Our conclusions are more limited. They are firstly that there are no obvious signals to the reader to encourage comparison with Genesis; and secondly that to take any of these texts as indicating how a later Hebrew writer interpreted Genesis is to make an assumption not supported by significant evidence, even if equally there is hardly evidence to disprove it.

Chapter 8

Parallels to Genesis 12:3b with the Hithpael

8.1 Introduction

The promises of Gen 22:18 and 26:4 are clearly related to that of 12:3b. Thus we must analyse them in order to defend and extend our analysis of 12:3.

8.2 Genesis 22:18

8.2.1 Narrative Context

22:1-18 contains the last direct interaction between Yhwh and Abraham in Genesis. The wording of the command to Abraham in v2 in two ways clearly connects it to the initial divine address to the patriarch in 12:1. First, the phrase לך־לך is found only in these two places in the Hebrew Bible. Second, on each occasion Abraham is told to go to a place not yet completely specified (22:2 אחד ההרים אשר אמר אליך 12:1; הארץ אשר אראך). There is also a thematic connection, in that both divine commands order Abraham to break with his established family life. In ch12 Abraham is told that the result of this will be blessing and will affect the nations (vv2-3); in ch22 this is not revealed to him at the outset, though it proves to be the case in the end (vv16-18).

For the purpose of the command in ch22 is to test Abraham (v1). Isaac is precious to his father. V2 describes him as בנך, יחידך, אשר אהבת את, יצחק, each phrase increasing the pathos: not just a son but an only son, not just an only son but one Abraham loves, not just a loved son but specifically Isaac.[1] (While 'suspicious' readers may ask what evidence there is that this is true,[2] it seems preferable to take God's words as reliable, at least in the absence of strong evidence to the contrary. Chapter 21 depicts little interaction between Abraham and Isaac, but Abraham gives a great feast to celebrate Isaac's weaning (v8), and his evident care for Ishmael hardly demonstrates that Isaac was less important. If Abraham is willing to kill Isaac it will not be because he dislikes his child, or because doing so intrinsically gives him pleasure.[3]) Isaac is also supposed to be the one through whom the divine promises are

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[1] Cf. *Gen Rab* 55.7, cited by Levenson (1993) p127.

[2] Cf. e.g. Trible (1991) p187.

[3] Contra the possibility raised by e.g. Setio (1993) p147. However some modern child abusers would at least claim to act as they do out of love for the child (Delaney (1998) p237).

to be fulfilled (cf. especially 21:12). Will Abraham give him up in obedience to the divine command?[4] For testing (נסה√) is in the Old Testament regularly linked to obedience, especially obedience to the law (e.g. Ex 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut 8:2; Judg 2:22; 3:4).[5] God can establish human character with certainty only by observing the human response to difficult situations: we might suggest that it is only in those situations that the character is definitively formed.[6] Only evidence that Abraham will give up what is most precious in response to God's call when there seems no advantage to him in so doing will establish that he has pure motives in his response to God. We might compare the book of Job, where it is tested whether Job's fear of God is based solely on narrow self-interest.[7]

The commendation of Abraham as a 'fearer of God', ירא אלהים, (v12) also confirms that he has passed a test of obedience. For fear of God in the Old Testament regularly relates to maintaining appropriate behaviour: general moral standards (e.g. Gen 20:11, Deut 25:17-18, where it is regarded as something which should characterise even non-Israelites), worship (Isa 29:13; Ps 22:26[25]),[8] and in particular obedience to the law (Deut 5:29, where fearing Yhwh and keeping his commandments are parallel; Ex 20:20 where both fear of God and also testing are linked to Israel's not sinning by obedience to the commandments).[9] We should not conclude that fear of God can be reduced to the behaviour; there is no reason why at least sometimes it could not refer to the attitude which is manifested in action, the attitude of obedience, of reverencing God in worship, of respecting the claims of morality. The concept is not closely linked to ideas of being afraid or of having numinous experience of God,[10] but however much it is bound to behaviour it

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[4] Contra e.g. Sarna (1989) p151, Japhet (1994) p166 and Gossai (1997) p6, נא (v2) does not change the command into a request: as perhaps the English 'please' it may add a nuance of politeness, but need not make it any less a command (cf. e.g. 13:14; 15:5; 24:2; Ex 4:6).

[5] Cf. also Helfmeyer (1998) p449. נסה√ with God as subject may always have this implication..

[6] Augustine *Sermo* II suggests that God tests *ut ipse homo se inveniat*, 'that the human may discover himself' (cited by Rouiller (1978) p345).

[7] For detailed comparisons, cf. Japhet (1994). Cf. also Moberly (2000) pp62, 66.

[8] Cf. Stähli (1997b) pp575-6.

[9] Other parallels to the concept of fear of Yhwh in Deut include אהב (10:12), דבק (e.g. 10:20), עבד (e.g. 6:13; this may have cultic resonances), הלך בדרכיו (8:6), הלך אחרי (13:5[4]) – Fuhs (1990) p296; Stähli (1997b) p575. On Ex 20:20, cf. especially Childs (1974) pp372-3: whatever the material's prehistory its present context links it to appropriate response to the Decalogue.

[10] Moberly (2000) pp88-91 assesses the legacy of Rudolph Otto on discussion of the concept. Certainly Abraham is not motivated in Gen 22 by fear of punishment should he disobey; contra Gunn and Fewell (1993) p99.

may yet point to something more;[11] the fear of God in Ex 20:20 is the cause of the people's not sinning, not identical to it. Abraham is not simply a person who will (at least generally) do what God says, but one whose relationship with God is such that obedience follows. (We might then suggest that Abraham's experience in Genesis 22 is not of abandonment by God, as von Rad proposes.[12] Rather the whole problem is God's insistent demand that Abraham act in this way.[13] God is not absent, but all too present.)

Thus Abraham's obedience is not blind, a matter merely of outward performance or of submission to arbitrary divine whims. It rather stems from his relationship with a God who does provide (v14) and remain faithful to his promises (vv16-18), who is working for good even when demanding something painful or puzzling – one might again compare the book of Job, which in its narrative frame and in 38:1-42:9 stresses God's wise governance of the world and his care for humanity although humans often cannot understand his purposes. Not that Abraham in Gen 22 expects Isaac to be spared: v10 states that he took the knife to kill his son, whom he can hardly imagine will return to life;[14] v12 that he did not withhold Isaac. His statement that God will provide a lamb (v8) does not express confidence that God will provide a substitute for Isaac, but rather refers the issue to God: if Isaac is sacrificed it will be because he is the victim God has chosen.[15] His telling the servants that he and Isaac will return (v5) is ambiguous, and need not evidence firm hope:

> white lie, prophecy, hope, even disobedience [i.e. the possibility of deciding
> to defy God's command], can surely coexist in the believer, especially in
> times of acute crisis. The enigmatic ambiguity of 'we shall return' perhaps
> gives an insight into the quite contrary ideas agitating Abraham's mind at
> this time.[16]

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[11] Cf. McEvenue (1984) pp320-2; Schmitt (1986) p93.

[12] von Rad (1972) p244.

[13] Cf. Setio (1993) pp150-1, and the subtitle of Crenshaw (1984), 'Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence' (though Crenshaw states [p29] that Abraham's journey is 'a trek into God-forsakenness').

[14] Nowhere in the Pentateuch is anyone restored to life; notably, Abel remains dead after his murder.

[15] Cf. Brueggemann (1982a) p188; White (1979) p15. Nowhere in the OT is a human explicitly called a שה. However since the image occurs in simile (Ps 119:176; Isa 53:7), is applied to Israel as a whole (Jer 50:17), and is used within the context of the metaphor of Israel as a flock (Ezek 34:17ff), use for a human sacrificial victim would seem natural.

[16] Wenham (1994) p108.

Why Abraham does not rely on the previous promises about Isaac is unclear: surely expecting God to uphold his own commitments is not unreasonable,[17] and those commitments were hardly opaque. Perhaps we must suggest that for the purposes of this story about a test of obedience the issue simply requires bracketing out. (I deliberately avoided invoking the word 'faith', since it has various possible nuances: acting faithfully, the attitude of loyalty that leads to such action, placing one's hope in God, or specific belief that certain words would prove true. Whether Abraham's faith is at issue in Genesis 22 may be a less interesting question than what sort of faith he might manifest.[18])

8.2.2 'Because you have done this'

Because of Abraham's obedience the divine promises to him are reaffirmed and extended. Coats suggests that

the patriarchal promise to Abraham [is] at stake should he fail the test.[19]

However it is not clear that so much is at stake, that God could have annulled his previous promises had Abraham failed here.[20] Perhaps the text does not address the issue: since Abraham passes there is no need to explain what the consequences of disobedience would have been.[21] This implies that the obedience has primarily a positive function in relation to the promise, opening up new possibilities, rather that being simply a requirement for the continuation of what was already expected. (It is of course significant that the one God has chosen can pass the supreme test of adherence to God; the previous promises could not happily have been maintained however Abraham had behaved.[22] Yet the main emphasis of this episode is slightly different.) Nevertheless the primary novelty in the promises is not what is said about the future. For although their content is extended from the similar

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[17] Contra von Rad (1972) p244, suggesting that were Abraham to insist on the promise he would be making a 'human demand', not accepting it as 'pure gift'.

[18] Von Rad classically asserts the importance of faith, though manifesting precisely this unclarity. Moster (1989), arguing that ch22 shows Abraham's 'strong faith in God's promise', demonstrates that Jews, not just Christians, might wish to read the story thus.

[19] Coats (1973) p393.

[20] Blumenthal (1998) p41n20 suggests the story shows a transition 'from promise to swearing, from grace to obligation'. Yet is God under no obligation to fulfil his promises?

[21] Fretheim (1995) p54 is rightly somewhat agnostic: '[t]he question for God is: Is Abraham the faithful one who can carry [his] purpose along? Or, does God need to take some other course of action, perhaps even look for another?'. Trible (1991) p171 even suggests that God is the kind of God who would remain faithful even in the face of human failure.

[22] Cf. Levenson (1993) p140: 'the aqedah demonstrates retroactively the rightness of God's ostensibly arbitrary singling out of Abram for the most exalted of destinies'.

promises previously given (below pp241-242), nothing of this extension is particularly surprising. What is completely new is the grounding of the promise in human behaviour, not just in the divine will: this is stressed by the content of God's oath beginning with כי יען

אשר עשית את־דבר הזה (v16), and ending with עקב אשר שמעת בקלי (v18). Human obedience does not enable something other than can come from God's promise; rather Abraham's actions become a further grounding for the promise alongside God's free decision.[23] Henceforth the promises will be fulfilled not just because they are God's promises, but also because Abraham was obedient.[24]

Two other texts in Genesis support this understanding of ch22. Ch15 links the making of the covenant to Abraham's response to God. There Abraham's trust in the promises precedes God's covenanting with him that his descendants will possess the land.[25] While the covenant is not grounded on Abraham's attitude, in the way that we have suggested the promises of ch22 to be grounded in his obedience, it is at least explicitly evoked by his behaviour in a way other promises are not. Secondly, and more significantly, 26:3-5 clearly echoes 22:16-18 (see below p252).[26] For present purposes, the importance of 26:3-5 is that it is specifically *Abraham's* obedience on which the promises depend. Isaac will benefit from all that God offers not because he has responded faithfully to God, but because Abraham did so. Gen 22 is not primarily linking the divine promises to appropriate human response, but depicting one person's obedience helping to establish divine favour for others: God's oath to Abraham contains no explicit exception should his descendants prove disobedient.[27] However 26:5 clearly applies to Abraham categories of obedience to the law

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[23] Cf. Moberly (1988b) pp320-1:

> [a] promise which previously was grounded solely in the will and purpose of Yahweh is transformed so that it is now grounded *both* in the will of Yahweh *and* in the obedience of Abraham. It is not that the divine promise has become contingent upon Abraham's obedience, but that Abraham's obedience has been incorporated into the divine promise. Henceforth Israel owes its existence not just to Yahweh but also to Abraham.

Calvin (1965) Ip572 suggests that God 'wishing to stimulate us to holy living, transfers to our works what properly belongs to his pure beneficence'.

[24] Fretheim (1995) p56 suggests that God's previous promises had been instrumental in developing Abraham's relationship with him; thus the promises help create the obedience which enables this extended promise.

[25] Cf. Moberly (1990), noting that v6 is paralleled in Ps 106:31 where the צדקה is not just a present right standing with God, but a lasting state, presumably the ברית כהנת עולם (Num 25:13) which Phinehas' actions during the plague won him.

[26] Cf. especially Wenham (1994) p190.

[27] Cf. Kreuzer (1986) p62.

(cf. e.g. Deut 11:1, 1Ki 2:3), and contains the only use of תורה in Genesis.[28] It thus surely presupposes an obligation on Israel to obey the divine mandates. Abraham's obedience is not seen as a substitute for obedience on the part of his descendants, but as a further safeguard; since the promise depends on more than their obedience, there may be hope that God can overcome disobedience on their part.

Similarly, with respect to ch22: we have noted (p236) that fear of God and testing are both elsewhere connected to obedience to the law. Gen 22 also contains resonances with Jerusalem traditions, again suggesting it presupposes Israel's ongoing life and worship as required by the law. For Jerusalem was the place of sacrifice (the only such place following the success of the Deuteronomists), and the הר יהוה (v14; Ps 24:3, Isa 2:3=Mic 4:2, Isa 30:29, Zech 8:3).[29] It was also one of the two places *par excellence* where God might be seen (v14; cf. 2Sam 24:15-17, Ps 48:6[5], 9[8] and Isa 6:1; the other place is Sinai, on which see n29).[30] ירא (v12) and יראה (v14) may hint at the first part of Jerusalem's name, as in ch14 Abraham's offering tithes to Melchizedek king of Salem alludes to the second half of Jerusalem's name while hinting at its later significance.[31] Moriah (v2) may point to the site of the temple (cf. 2Chr 3:1): while none of the versions transliterates המריה, equally their readings are so diverse[32] that cumulatively they hardly disallow the obvious interpretation of MT that this is a place name,[33] and in the light of the rest of the passage and 2Chr 3:1 that it refers to the area of Jerusalem. (Even explicit accounts of the building of temples from the Ancient Near East, including e.g. 1Kings and Judg 9:46, do not precisely specify their location[34] – the point is not laboured even when there is no compelling reason to be allusive.) Further, as in Gen 22 the words עלה, איל and

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[28] Perhaps a singular תורה would have been too explicit in context, since Abraham did not know the Mosaic legislation.

[29] Cf. Moberly (1988b) p307; Levenson (1993) p115. In Num 10:33 the phrase denotes Sinai; however Sinai is more than a few days' journey from Beer-sheba (cf. Gen 21:33-4 and 22:4, where 'on the third day' is probably idiomatic for 'a few days later'; so e.g. Hamilton (1995) p107 noting 34:25, 40:20, 42:18, Ex 19:11[?]).

[30] Moberly (1988b) p307.

[31] Cf. Levenson (1993) pp120-1 on Jerusalem's name.

[32] SP offers המוראה; Symmachus τῆς ὀπτασίας and Vulgate *terram Visionis* (reading המראה, or interpreting המריה?); LXX τὴν γῆν τὴν ὑψηλήν; Syriac 'the land of the Amorites' (reading האמרי?).

[33] Cf. Moberly (2000) p111n61 on proper nouns taking the article.

[34] Kalimi (1990) pp345-6.

נראה occur together in Lev 16:2-5, regulations for the Day of Atonement,[35] v5 specifying איל אחד which many Hebrew manuscripts and the versions read at Gen 22:13.[36] Yet the ram is hardly central in Lev 16, being not even mentioned after v5. Thus while Gen 22 has resonances with Israelite sacrificial practice, it does not read as a narrative about the nature of sacrifice, in which we might expect wider correspondences.[37] (Equally it does not explain the replacement of human sacrifice by animal sacrifice: there is no suggestion that human sacrifice might have been a regular occurrence, since Abraham considers sacrificing Isaac only because of a specific divine command;[38] the appropriate point for the offering of first-born sons, were it a general practice, is shortly after birth, yet while Genesis 22 hardly makes Isaac's age clear, he is sufficiently old to carry wood [v6] and ask questions [v7].[39])

8.2.3 The promises

22:16-18 is the only promise to Abraham explicitly containing a divine oath.[40] Elsewhere in the Pentateuch God swears to give the land to Israel;[41] the only divine oaths to include promises other than that of the land are 22:16-18, its echoes in 26:3[42] and Ex 32:13, Deut 7:12, 13:18[17], and 28:9. The phrase בי נשבעתי occurs only here in the Pentateuch (Ex 32:13 has בך ...נשבעת); נאם־יהוה only at Num 14:28, though it is frequent (over 250 times) in the prophets. Thus the introduction to the promises could hardly be more emphatic. What follows is equally emphatic, with the use of infinitive absolutes to strengthen the finite אברכך and ארבה. The infinitive absolute of √ברך is not found elsewhere in the patriarchal narratives;[43] that of √רבה strengthens a finite form of that verb

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[35] Also at Lev 9:3-4, where the ram is said to be for a שלם, not a עלה; and Isa 1:11-12 where the worshipper, not God, is the subject of נראה

[36] Cf. Walters (1987) pp.306, 309-10.

[37] On Gen 22 as rationale for sacrifice, see further Wenham (1995); Moberly (2000) pp117-8.

[38] Cf. Davis (1991) p31; Delaney (1998) pp71-4, 100.

[39] Cf. Moberly (1988b) p306.

[40] With this paragraph, cf. Moberly (1988b) pp315-7.

[41] Gen 24:7 (implying that God had sworn to Abraham to give him the land, though this has not previously been depicted in the text); 50:24; Ex 13:5, 11; 32:13; 33:1; Num 11:12; 14:16, 23; 32:11; and commonly in Deuteronomy (1:8, 35 etc.).

[42] Contra Moberly (1988b) p315, the other parallels to 22:16-18 in 26:3-5 imply that the oath is that of the earlier passage rather than it referring simply to the land, though cf. further below p252.

[43] It is used of divine blessing in Deut 15:4.

only at 16:10, where a promise is made to Hagar about her descendants. Apart from the use

of במאד מאד with √רבה at 17:2, 6, 20 to emphasise a promise of increase (the latter

referring to Ishmael) the wording of the promises elsewhere is not reinforced in any way.[44]

The promise that Abraham's offspring will be as numerous as the stars is found at 15:5 and

26:4 (and also Ex 32:13); comparison with the sand of the shore is found at 32:13[12]. The

double comparison in 22:17 is unique. Also unique is the promise that Abraham's

descendants shall possess the gates of their enemies, though the idea is found when

Rebekah's family bless her (24:60). While this might refer obliquely to the promise of the

land,[45] it seems more a promise of security parallel to 12:3a: any trying to oppose Israel will

find their efforts rebounding on their own heads.[46] Thus every element of v17 has

something unusual about it, forcing the reader to ascribe it full weight. In Moberly's words:

> [t]he remarkable obedience of Abraham in xxii 1-14 has been met with a
> divine promise of remarkable emphasis.[47]

The promises focus on Abraham's seed. This is explicit in all except the first,

which speaks of God's blessing Abraham. Since part of blessing is precisely the having of

descendants (cf. ch5p111 above) we should regard this as an all-encompassing phrase, one

element of which is then highlighted:[48] God's blessing of Abraham does not solely consist

in his descendants (cf. 24:1, 35-6), though stressed here are those aspects of the blessing

which do relate to his posterity. The reason for this is doubtless the willingness Abraham

has just shown to sacrifice Isaac, should that be God's bidding. The person who did not let

his desire for descendants stand in the way of obedience to God is worthy to have God do

great things in his descendants[49] – descendants whose very existence depends on God, since

Isaac's birth and preservation are entirely due to him.[50] For we must not forget that the

promises relating to the descendants all stand under the heading of blessing to Abraham.

They are not so much boons for the offspring as for Abraham himself in his offspring.

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[44] Contra Moberly (1988b) p316nn43, 45: 24:35 is not a promise of blessing; 26:4, 28:3 and 49:4 do not contain מאד.

[45] So e.g. Levenson (1993) p138; Clines (1997) p37. Ehrlich (1968) p98 suggests that both here and in 24:60 the idea is that the numerous descendants will need more land to inhabit.

[46] Cf. Moberly (1988b) p317, though not adverting to 12:3.

[47] Moberly (1988b) p318.

[48] Cf. Westermann (1976) p25.

[49] Cf. e.g. Abarbanel, as summarised in Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980a) p811.

[50] Cf. Levenson (1993) pp140-2; Kunin (1994).

Abraham's obedience has consequences not for a chance group of other people, but for those intimately related to him.

8.2.4 Genesis 22:18

The tradition of taking the hithpael in Genesis 22:18 as a passive is ancient, going back at least as far as LXX's ἐνευλογηθήσονται.[51] It is also found, doubtless at least in part due to Septuagintal influence, in Sir 44:21 and the Vulgate, and also in Targum Onkelos; it is assumed by the church fathers, and by Christian exegetes until the nineteenth century;[52] it still is accepted by e.g. NIV, NASB, the German Lutherbibel of 1985, Allis, Hamilton.[53] (However Rashi heads a long line of Jewish commentators who have ascribed reflexive force to the verb.[54]) Yet it may be that the translators, ancient and modern, are finding their own theology in the text: that they see a 'messianic' promise in which the nations gain blessing may reveal as much about them as about the text's original meaning.[55] The versions indicate an ancient way of understanding Genesis, but we cannot assume their answers to the interpretative questions raised.

Many commentators judge the hithpael in 22:18 to have the same force as the niphal in 12:3 (and 18:18 and 28:14). However we argued above (pp190-191) that although hithpael and niphal often do overlap in meaning, one might equally wonder whether the use of different stems in what are clearly related promises signals a difference in meaning. Since 22:16-18 is very distinctive amongst the patriarchal promises (above pp241-242) there is no reason to assume that the clause linking the nations and blessing should have precisely the same meaning as that of 12:3b. In particular, 12:3a while pointing out the dangers of seeking to oppose Abraham/ Israel (מקללך אאר) equally makes explicit that Yhwh will bless those who bless his people; thus it would seem entirely natural for v3b to state that through Abraham/ Israel all the families of the earth will be blessed. On the other hand, 22:17b has precisely the same implication for Israel as 12:3a – namely, that she is safe, since her enemies will be overthrown – but says nothing about what might happen to nations who accept Israel's position. Obviously it is not denied that such nations might gain God's

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[51] Though cf. above p193 on the possibility that this is a middle form.

[52] E.g. Calvin (1965) Ipp348-9; KJV.

[53] Allis (1927); Hamilton (1995) p99 (cf. Hamilton (1990) p375).

[54] Cf. Rashi (1972a) p117; Scherman and Zlotowitz (1980) p811.

[55] Cf. Schreiner (1962) p6; Vriezen (1973) pp388-9.

favour, but something else is in focus. We might well then wonder whether the same could be true in v18a: rather than an explicit promise of blessing for the nations, we might rather have a promise focussing entirely on Israel's position (cf. further below pp246-247). Moreover we have argued (above ch7) that the hithpael in Hebrew is rarely passive, and that none of the four uses of the hithpael of √ברך outside Genesis has such sense while each plausibly is a 'speech action middle'. Thus it is a reasonable hypothesis that this could be the sense here. Our argument is not that passive meaning is impossible. 2Sam 18:31 and (probably) 1Sam 3:14 provide examples of passive hithpaels in classical Hebrew prose. In the context of Gen 22:18 it might well be suggested that Abraham's obedience helps ground the existence of Israel, through which God's blessing will be extended to all nations – as in ch12 the call of Abraham is presented as the start of God's plan to bless all nations following their scattering after Babel. Our argument is rather that 'speech action' sense may be more plausible. (In passing we must rule out the suggestion that the meaning of the hithpael is 'find blessing'.[56] For there is no plausible parallel in Hebrew for this sense: though the hithpael is regularly employed to mark various middle senses, no-one has proposed analogous sense for any other hithpael.[57])

It does not greatly affect the interpretation of 22:18 whether the hithpael is interpreted as a reflexive ('bless themselves'), reciprocal ('bless each other') or speech action ('utter blessing').[58] For these all have in common the idea that the nations will employ the name of Abraham's offspring in blessing; a similar use of ב + suffix with √ברך (in the piel) is found at Gen 48:20. However we have suggested that reflexive and reciprocal hithpaels are very rare. Further, when the hithpael of √ברך occurs outside Genesis speech action sense seems required (Isa 65:16), indicated (Ps 72:17; Jer 4:2) or at least highly plausible (Deut 29:18[19]): it is quite possible that the original readers of Genesis would see here a form whose meaning they knew, and, we might add, whose meaning they knew differed from the passive sense they had attributed to the niphal.[59] Indeed some of our arguments concerning Ps 72:17 (above pp226-228) also apply here: the

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[56] Contra e.g. Wolff (1966) p137n31 and Wenham (1994) p112; also NRSV.

[57] Cf. above p75 on the niphal.

[58] The same would apply if one translated 'seek blessing', claiming this analogous to a sense 'seek mediation' for התפלל and 'seek favour' for התחנן.

[59] The other passages employing the hithpael of √ברך probably do not allude to the patriarchal promises (above ch7.2), and thus seem independent evidence for general usage of the stem. Further, if the language of the patriarchal promises derives from royal traditions (cf. above pp179, 181, 191) Ps 72:17 might be very good evidence for the force of the hithpael in Genesis.

situation depicted is more probably that of people within the nations uttering blessings on each other than that of the nations as entities blessing;[60] and this seems best described as 'the nations will utter blessing' rather than 'will bless themselves' or 'will bless each other'. The precise recipient of the blessing is less important than the use of the name of Abraham's offspring as a model of the prosperity sought. (The hithpael here would thus seem to have very similar force to the piel at 48:20,[61] though it is possible that one or other might imply some subtle nuance whose presence might be difficult to establish with confidence, such as repeated action or a formal declaration.[62])

What difference does it make interpreting התברכו in Genesis 22:18 as a speech action hithpael, hence differing in sense from the niphal in 12:3? Speiser, discussing whether the niphal should be judged passive or reflexive (interpreting the reflexive as describing a prayer for blessing and thus analogous to a speech action hithpael) suggests that

> [t]he distinction may be slight on the surface, yet it is of great consequence theologically.[63]

For Allis (again discussing primarily 12:3), reflexive translation

> can empty this passage of its rich evangelical contents.[64]

On the other hand, for Westermann

> [t]here is... no opposition in content between the passive and reflexive translation

since it is assumed that blessings uttered using Abraham's name will produce the desired effect.[65] However, even if it is true that passive and reflexive, or speech action, senses are

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[60] Rashi interprets both niphal and hithpael of √ברך as reflexives, referring to the blessings fathers might give to their sons, as illustrated in 48:20 (cf. Rashi (1972a) pp49, 96). He thus considers it is people within the nations blessing others within those nations that is described, and perhaps would not restrict it to just fathers blessing sons.

[61] Where Skinner (1910) p506 suggests that '[t]he most natural form would be Hithpa. יתברך'. LXX and Syriac translate as a passive, perhaps reading a pual or a niphal, but this seems to make less good sense; Berge (1990) pp49-50 reads a niphal, judging it unimportant whether this manifests reflexive reciprocal or 'middle' sense.

[62] Not that either of these nuances is probable (the latter indeed would not fit with the hithpael at Deut 29:18[19]); they merely illustrate the kind of nuance whose presence might be hard to establish either way.

[63] Speiser (1969) p86.

[64] Allis (1927) p267.

[65] Westermann (1985) p152, commenting on 12:3.

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not opposed (see below pp247-248), we might still ask whether they express something different. Gen 22 has alluded to 12:1 (above p235), and the promises of v17 have connected back to those of 12:2-3 as well as more generally to the promise theme in Genesis.[66] The reader can thus be expected to remark on the variation between 22:18a and 12:3b.

The promises of 22:16-18 state that Abraham's obedience is foundational for Israel's life, and are uniquely emphatic in their wording. That v18a follows an occasion when Abraham has been conspicuously successful in responding to God (reaffirmed in v18b), and the emphasis obvious in vv16-17, make it unlikely that the reader of Genesis should see a deliberate reduction in the original promise of blessing for the nations: while at other points in the narrative God might reasonably have concluded that no longer could/ would he use Abraham and/ or his descendants to bring blessing to those outside Israel, here that would seem completely out of context. (Further, the promise formulated with the niphal reappears at 28:14; it seems unlikely that anything between 22:18 and 28:14 would be of sufficient importance to make God change his mind again.[67]) More probably the narrator refers explicitly to the nations uttering blessings making mention of Abraham's descendants, rather than to their receiving blessing, simply to emphasise Israel's prosperity: Israel will be so numerous and so secure that other people can imagine no example of greater felicity.[68] As already noted (above p243), the last clause of v17 is a promise of Israel's security, as 12:3a, though unlike the latter it does not state that the nations who favour Israel will be blessed. These promises climax with a statement of Israel's blessing, making explicit that this is for Abraham's descendants and that it will be evident to other peoples (cf. 21:22 and 23:6[69]); whether it has further implications for those other peoples is not an issue here. We must recall that even at 12:3 Abraham was told about the nations gaining blessing through him primarily because of its significance for his own greatness. (The implications of v18a, that there still exist other nations who may reasonably wish to be as Israel must prevent us reading too much into v17b: its vision is of Israel triumphing

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[66] Westermann (1976) p112 stresses that the promises of Genesis must be interpreted in the light of one another.

[67] Chew (1982) suggests that the promises formulated with the niphal occur early in a patriarch's career and are 'probationary', while those formulated with the hithpael occur towards the end of the career and are 'reaffirmatory'. However he gives no reason why the niphal and hithpael should be thus used; nor is 18:18 obviously early in Abraham's career, or 26:4 late in Isaac's.

[68] Contra Chew (1982) p93 who sees 22:18 re-establishing a universalistic horizon at the end of a particularistic story.

[69] Cf. above pp86-87 for the suggestion that גוים rather than משפחת are mentioned in the promises when the context is dealing with nations.

against any who choose to attack her, not of a general expansionist programme.[70])
Deuteronomy 4:5-8 and 28:7-14 promise Israel that the nations will admire her greatness –
the latter making explicit that this greatness is blessing consequent to her obeying the law –
without being concerned with how, or if, the nations might come to share such divine
favour;[71] this would seem to parallel Gen 22:18.

The nations wish to be like Abraham's numerous and secure descendants. However
there is no particular reason to think that this is *only* a wish:[72] while the success of the
nations' invocations of blessing is not stated, their failure is neither explicit nor obviously
implicit.[73] Moreover the context has stressed that it is obedience in general, and implicitly
obedience to Torah in particular, that leads to Israel's blessing (above pp240-241).
Abraham's obedience is foundational for Israel's existence and may give her some hope if
she fails, but does not replace the need for ongoing faithfulness to God's requirements.
V18b probably reiterates the reason for all the promises of vv17-18, not specifically for that
of v18a, and again makes explicit *Abraham's* obedience, not that of his descendants; but the
collocation of the two clauses of v18 certainly makes clear the link between obedience and
the promise of foreigners using Abraham's descendants in their blessings. It seems unlikely
that the nations are imagined to be unaware that Israel's felicity is the gift of Yhwh and
connected to her obedience to the law. Similarly the זרע whose name the nations use in
blessing is represented in the narrative by Isaac, surrendered to God yet allowed to live by
him.[74] If the nations wish to share Israel's blessedness, could they hope to do so without
sharing at least some elements of her response to Yhwh?[75] If they do thus respond
appropriately to Yhwh, are they not sure to gain blessing from him? The reader of Genesis
already knows from 12:3 (and 18:18) that the nations will be blessed because of what Yhwh

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[70] Contra Westermann (1985) p364 who abdicates from the responsibility of trying to read the text in
suggesting that '[i]t is an open question how one is to understand the juxtaposition of v. 17b (victory
over the nations) and v. 18a (blessing for the nations)'.

[71] Cf. above p85.

[72] Contra Wehmeier (1974) p11.

[73] For Westermann (1985) p152 (cf. above p245) it is 'the obvious presupposition' that if the nations
use Abraham's name in blessing the blessing will be received. Cf. also p192n268 on Frettlöh (1998).

[74] Cf. von Rad (1972) pp244-5: in reading this story Israel 'could only see itself represented by Isaac,
i.e., laid on Yahweh's altar, given back to him, then given life again by him alone'.

[75] Arguably some parts of the Torah could be Israel-specific: Gen 22 is hardly concerned to specify
precisely what appropriate response is for the nations.

does in and through Abraham.[76] As we suggested in ch6, this is part of the greatness God offers to Israel, and hence it is important to Israel that it should be fulfilled. Thus the emphasis on Israel's own blessing in 22:18 does not imply diminution of the promise of 12:3b; rather it implicitly supports it.

8.2.5 Conclusion

It is possible that התברכו in 22:18 should be interpreted as a passive, and this clearly does not challenge our conclusions with respect to 12:3. However it should more probably be interpreted as a 'speech action hithpael', meaning 'utter blessing'. (Reflexive or reciprocal senses are less plausible, though they would make very little difference to the meaning of the promise.) This is entirely compatible with understanding the niphal at 12:3 as a passive. 22:18 does not deny that the nations will gain blessing: by implication it affirms it. But its main thrust is to stress Israel's own prosperity. This prosperity, it suggests, is grounded in three things: the divine promise, Abraham's faithful obedience, and Israel's own ongoing commitment to Yhwh – maintaining his law, worshipping at Jerusalem, and acknowledging herself entirely dependent on him for her life.

8.3 Genesis 26:4

8.3.1 The promises

The divine promises of 26:3-5 set out many of the key themes of ch26 as a whole:[77] this is perhaps unsurprising, since the promises – their meaning and the route to their fulfilment – are a major concern of the patriarchal narratives, though it is unusual to have as many aspects of the promises at issue as is the case in this chapter. Thus the promises provide a key for the rest of the chapter, just as it in turn adds further content and nuance to them.

Ch26 depicts Isaac following in his father's footsteps. The name אברהם occurs eight times: the chapter begins by noting the similarity between a situation facing Isaac and one which earlier faced his father (v1); Yhwh four times indicates how the promises are linked to Abraham (vv3, 5, 24 [twice]); v15 notes that Isaac is in an area where his father had travelled, and v18 (where also אברהם occurs twice) that he renewed some of his

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[76] Similarly, as noted above (p243), v17b does not deny the promise of 12:3a that those who bless Abraham will be blessed; it simply stresses something different.

[77] So Gunkel (1997) pp293-4, and especially Nicol (1987) pp17-31.

father's work. Even where Abraham is not explicitly mentioned Isaac's life strongly parallels his father's, notably in the wife/ sister episode and in the treaty at Beer-Sheba.[78]

> The compact rehearsal of Isaac's life in this chapter shows his vocation to
> be largely one of consolidating the trail Abraham has blazed by retracing
> many of its episodes. In so doing, however, he has not merely imitated
> them but has reenacted them with fresh nuance.[79]

Thus the promises both restate and in some respects enhance those made to Abraham.

Yhwh's first promise is to be with Isaac. In 21:22 Abimelek had said to Abraham that 'God is with you', but this is the first time Yhwh himself explicitly promises to be with one of the patriarchs. The promise is, however, thrice repeated to Jacob (28:15; 31:3; 46:4).[80] Thus Isaac begins something new in the life of Israel. I say 'in the life of Israel' since the promise is not just repeated to the following generation, but more importantly is linked in Ex 3 with Yhwh's very name, and thus his essential character as known by Israel;[81] it also is a motif employed elsewhere in application to Israel as a whole (e.g. Deut 20:4; Ps 46:8[7]; Amos 5:14). Its force is very practical: it refers not to some kind of spiritual communion, but rather to protection and success in one's undertakings.[82] Hence it – or, rather, its effect – is observable (v28; 21:22); Joseph prospered because Yhwh was with him (39:2); Yhwh's absence leads to defeat in battle (Num 14:42-3), as his presence brings victory (Deut 20:1); assurance of his presence is an antidote to fear (26:24[83]). It is thus an entirely appropriate reassurance for someone who has just been instructed to live as a גר, i.e. without full citizen-rights.[84] As ch26 proceeds we find Isaac experiencing such protection and success. He does not lose Rebekah, despite denying she is his wife; while this could be

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[78] Though, contra Wenham (1994) p187, the chapter's structure hardly parallels that of 12:10-14:24.

[79] Janzen (1993) p103.

[80] Only in 31:3 is the wording אהיה עמך; 28:15 has הנה אנכי עמך; 46:4 ארד עמך. However the variation in or lack of verb seems not to much affect the force of the 'with you'. Cf. also the use of את in 26:24, and Preuß (1974) p449 for the general point.

[81] Cf. e.g. Kupp (1992) pp127-9.

[82] See especially Kupp (1992) pp150-173 (with discussion of earlier writers), e.g. p170: 'God's presence is not "divine phenomena", "theophanic" or pure religious experience, but his people's retrospective interpretation or prospective anticipation of divine favour within their historical reality'.

[83] Cf. also Deut 20:1; 31:6, 8; 1Chr 28:20; 2Chr 20:17; Isa 41:10; 43:1-2, 5; Jer 1:8; 42:11; 46:28.

[84] Sarna (1989) p183. Preuß (1974) rightly notes the connection of the 'being with' motif with travel, but overemphasizes the significance of this for the use of the formula in general (Kupp (1992) pp164-5).

fortuitous, the chapter in general does not labour the point that his success is providential. By v28 Isaac has obtained wealth, water and land, and has suffered no harm from the Gerarites, despite their envy and the disputes over wells. Abimelek then affirms that he has seen the effect of Yhwh's being with Isaac (and cf. v24 where Yhwh reaffirms the promise, in a nominal clause אנכי אתך which assures of presence at least in the immediate future, if not in the present).

Some commentators regard the promises of being with and of blessing as closely related.[85] Both certainly imply the possession of success and prosperity. However they are not completely coincident. Language of blessing, unlike that of being with, is not generally employed in the face of military threat (above p112). However blessing does regularly include the gaining of progeny – personal fertility, as well as that of one's animals and crops also included in prosperity (cf. above p111). This is not particularly an implication of Yhwh's being with a person.[86] That said, questions relating to Isaac's progeny do not seem a major issue in Genesis 26.[87] If we accept P's chronology, Jacob and Esau have already been born (cf. 25:7, 26): Isaac has two children of his own, and hence the first step to his gaining a multitude of descendants has been taken. (Even if we suppose that ch26 relates events prior to the twins' birth[88] – hence, for example, their not being mentioned – that the reader has just been told of that birth lessens the tension: while vv7-11 raises the possibility of Rebekah's being taken from Isaac, the reader can be sure that, should this happen, she will be restored.) At stake is perhaps preservation of the family in a time of famine and when at the mercy of the Gerarites – though since it is uncertain whether Jacob and Esau are with Isaac or dwelling elsewhere, it is equally unclear whether a threat to Isaac endangers the whole family. Blessing plays an important part in this preservation of Isaac, and hence perhaps of the whole line. Vv12-13 explicitly state that it is because of Yhwh's blessing that Isaac's farming prospers; his continual discovery of new water sources should probably

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[85] Cf. e.g. Wehmeier (1970) p204: √ברך 'kann... im Sprachgebrauch des Jahwisten auch durch "sein mit" (Gn 26,28; 31,3; 26,3 brk vorangestellt)... ersetzt werden'; Vetter (1997) p920; Nicol (1987) p123 suggests that the promises of blessing and being with are 'entirely complementary', and two statements of one promise. However Preuß (1968) p149n37 notes that explicit connection of God's being with to his blessing is rare.

[86] Contra Kupp (1992) p164, who cites in argument only the juxtaposition of the two promises in Gen 26:3-4.

[87] Contra e.g. Nicol (1987) p30.

[88] Cf. e.g. Nicol (1996).

also be ascribed to Yhwh's blessing.[89] By v29 the effect of the blessing is obvious to Abimelek: since the other two uses of the qal passive participle of √ברך in the construct followed by יהוה (24:31 and Isa 65:23 [plural]) both describe people as blessed rather than invoking blessing upon them, this seems the most likely understanding here.[90]

After the promise of blessing in v3 comes the promise of land. This extends the previous promises to Abraham (12:7; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8) inasmuch as ארצות (plural) are promised here, making explicit for the first time that the land of the Philistines is included in the territory which Isaac's descendants are to possess.[91] (However Gerar and its environs may not be part of the land proper, since they are not thus regarded elsewhere in the Old Testament, and Isaac's receiving a theophany at Beer-Sheba, often considered the southern edge of the land,[92] might seem an appropriate mark of his re-entering it.) Further, while it has previously been promised that through Isaac Abraham's descendants would be reckoned (21:12), and hence that the promise of land to Abraham's offspring would apply to him and his descendants, the promise is here made to Isaac himself for the first time. Yet the promise occurs in the context of a threat to possession of the land, namely famine, which forces Isaac to take refuge with a people he does not believe entirely trustworthy in a place outside the territory previously promised and even subsequently not part of the land proper. Isaac first has to live as a גר;[93] far from possessing the land, he does not even have full citizen rights. He is then expelled from the city, and subsequently twice surrenders possession of wells following complaints from others. Only after reaching Rehoboth does possession of even a small piece of land seem possible. However by v33 his tenure of territory at Beer-Sheba seems secure; for he even has a mutual non-aggression treaty with the Philistines (though the stress is on their desire to secure themselves against him, more than on what he might fear from them). Noth grasps the importance of the land to the chapter, though underestimating the significance of its other themes:

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[89] Taylor (1992) p63. Thiel (1993) pp259-260 notes the unusualness of such continual discovery of wells. Westermann (1985) p430 notes that '[t]he digging of the wells and the constantly recurring dispute about them is not a matter of greatness but of brute existence'.

[90] Cf. Schottroff (1969) p164n4. In Gen 26, with the stress on blessing throughout, and immediately following Abimelek's acknowledgement of Yhwh's presence with Isaac, this is hardly primarily 'a form of welcome... which cancels the expulsion decree of vs. 16' (Speiser (1969) p202, following Ehrlich (1968) p126). Moreover it is unclear whether Isaac receives permission to return to Gerarite territory, should he so choose (Westermann (1985) p429).

[91] Cf. e.g. Gunkel (1997) p294.

[92] Cf. the phrase 'from Dan to Beer-Sheba' in e.g. Judg 20:1; so e.g. Nicol (1987) p40.

[93] Coats (1983) p189, e.g., notes the word-play with 'Gerar'.

[t]he single theme of all the Isaac stories is the possession of arable land and the dispute with the older inhabitants of the land, especially over the most valued element of the arable land, the water.[94]

Yhwh's next promise is to fulfil the oath he made to Abraham. Only two places in the Abraham narrative refer to such oaths: 22:16-18, and 24:7 where Abraham speaks of an oath to give the land to his descendants (which cannot be the same as that of 22:16, since the latter does not mention the land[95]). Vv4-5 echo (some of) the contents of 22:16-18: descendants as many as the stars, nations to use Israel's name in blessing (hithpael of ברך√), all a result of Abraham's obedience, with the last two of these elements found only in these two passages. Thus vv4-5 expand the content of the oath of v3, as indeed they repeat from v3 the promise of the land. However 22:16-18 contains no promise of land, including instead the promise of possessing the gates of the people's enemies, which is not primarily a promise of land, but rather a promise of security (cf. above p242). We might wonder whether here the text wants to include the tradition of land being guaranteed by oath, as in 24:7, so draws out this implication of the phrasing of 22:17, not its primary force; it thus includes the promise of land in the clear list of what was sworn to, rather than leaving the relationship between land and oath implicit as in v3 (where והקמתי את־השבעה may sum up what precedes, or may be a separate item in the list[96]). We have already seen that the promises to Isaac do not just recapitulate those made to Abraham; however here it is stressed that much of what God will do for him and his descendants he is already obliged to do because of commitments made to Abraham. Moreover Abraham's obedience is a further reason why Yhwh will do these things for Isaac (cf. above pp239-240). While Isaac is called to obedience of his own, both explicitly in the command to remain in Gerar, rather than going to Egypt, and also inasmuch as v5 applies language of Torah-obedience to Abraham and thus presupposes ongoing requirements of behaviour on the part of his descendants, that obedience will be only a part of the reason for the eventual fulfilment of the promises.

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[94] Noth (1972) p106.

[95] Contra Blumenthal (1998) p39.

[96] Cf. the discussion of p164n146 above.

8.3.2 Verse 4b

The final promise is, if we consider the hithpael of √ברך to denote a 'speech action',[97] that all the nations of the earth will utter blessings citing Isaac's descendants as examples of the greatest felicity God can grant. Isaac's descendants will thus not only be numerous and possess the land, as v4a has stated; they will not simply enjoy Yhwh's presence and blessing (v3); but this will happen to such a degree that the nations notice. This is precisely what happens in the rest of the chapter, at least with respect to one particular גוי, the Philistines: cf. especially vv12-16 and 29. Admittedly the Philistines do not invoke blessings including Isaac's name: while they see his prosperity, and the divine favour which is its source, they unsurprisingly do not really trust him following the discovery of his initial deception concerning Rebekah, with its potential dangers for them, and hence he fails to be fully paradigmatic for them. However were we to translate the hithpael of √ברך as 'be blessed' (or as 'find blessing') we would find less coherence between what is promised and what follows: the Philistines gain a few wells from their association with Isaac (though vv15 and 18 might suggest that their desire for wells in that area was not great); they make a peace treaty with Isaac (the word שלום occurs in both vv29 and 31, and is of course a rich word in Hebrew, though this treaty seems a mutual non-aggression pact rather than a promise of mutual benefit[98]); but it is far from clear that they really gain blessing.[99] This of course does not prove the suggested translations wrong: it *could* be because of Isaac's initial behaviour that he does not become – or seem likely to become – a source of blessing to the Philistines. Moreover the promise is explicitly about Isaac's descendants, not about the patriarch himself. However it is surely more likely that the promise made to Isaac about his descendants is in some way dependent on or continuous with what happens to him rather than completely unrelated. Nor does the story explain how he would have brought blessing to the Philistines had they not sought to keep driving him further from them: there is no sign in vv12-13, for example, of them prospering along with him.[100] Thus the content of the narrative that follows would form a (partial) explication of the promise, if it relates to the patriarchal family becoming exemplars of blessing, while it

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[97] As previously, we should note that interpreting as a 'reflexive' or 'reciprocal' would not much alter the overall interpretation.

[98] Westermann (1985) p429.

[99] So e.g. Mitchell (1987) p70; contra e.g. Wolff (1966) p149; Nicol (1987) p129; Biddle (1990) p610.

[100] Cf. Clines (1990) p82.

does not obviously illustrate how blessing might come to others because of them. Thus the former is more probably the meaning of the promise.

8.3.3 Conclusion

There are thus two reasons for use of the hithpael of √ברך, rather than the niphal, in 26:4. The first is that the hithpael is part of the allusion to 22:16-18. The second is that the story illustrates the dynamic of blessing we have suggested to be implied by the hithpael, with its 'speech action' force – Israel will be signally blessed, and the nations will notice. (It is doubtless significant that ch26 concerns the Philistines, a people with whom Israel's subsequent relations were often to be far from happy:[101] even they are to notice Israel's felicity.) While it is not denied that somewhere in the process the nations themselves might gain blessing – what would have happened to the Philistines had they allowed Isaac to remain? will not blessings in which God is asked to make someone like Israel be effective? – the story is more concerned with depicting Yhwh's action for Isaac, and his response, than with showing what he might do for others. The promise presupposes a basic level of obedience in Isaac and his descendants, though it is explicitly grounded in Abraham's response to Yhwh.

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[101] Wolff (1966) p149 suggests that from the description of Abimelek as 'king of the Philistines' in v1, Isaac is dealing with 'Israel's old archenemy'.

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Chapter 9

Conclusion

Before summarising our conclusions concerning Gen 12:3 itself, we must briefly note some other significant results from this study.

Firstly, we have suggested that the niphal in Hebrew functions to express passive and also a wide range of 'middle' senses: at least almost all its usage can be explained thus; in particular it is very rarely reflexive. The hithpael predominantly expresses a variety of middle nuances, though occasionally is a passive (and very occasionally reciprocal or reflexive). This picture of the stems differs greatly from that presented in the standard grammars. Four further kinds of investigation seem called for: more precise categorisation of the various middle nuances; analysis of every niphal and hithpael to confirm that the picture is adequate; analysis of other morphologically related stems in Hebrew (e.g. the hithpalel); and study of parallel stems in other Semitic languages to see whether they function similarly.

Secondly, we have argued that blessing in Hebrew is intrinsically god-related, referring to divine bestowal of prosperity (primarily, though not exclusively, envisaged in material terms). However, humans may play a role in its transmission, both requesting blessing and, at least in some circumstances, effectively declaring God's blessing. Forms of √ברך also may be used to express greeting, thanking or praising: when God is 'blessed' the sense is always that of thanking or praising.

Thirdly, we have produced final form readings of the texts we have considered. We have both, for example, read Gen 18:18 within the context of the final form of chs18-19 and related Gen 12:3 and 22:18. The text is not without inconcinnities, such as the description of Haran in 12:1 as the place of Abraham's מולדת (above ch6.3.2), but these have not prevented readings of the wholes. Our small sample of texts, most not discussed in great detail, hardly proves the applicability of final form reading to all of Genesis, let alone to other parts of the Old Testament; but it at least encourages attempts to extend the method.

Our conclusions concerning Gen 12:3 are that in v3a Yhwh offers Abraham – and implicitly his descendants – an assurance of security: others will find that seeking to further his good benefits them, while any attempt to lessen his prosperity will lead to Yhwh's disfavour. In v3b Yhwh promises that the families of the earth will be blessed because of

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Abraham: while this promise does result from Yhwh's concern for all humanity, in context its primary force is to stress Abraham's greatness as the one through whom this momentous divine purpose will be achieved. His role is more probably that of modelling or pioneering the way of Yhwh's blessing than that of more directly effecting it for others. We have suggested that in 18:18 and 28:14 Yhwh likewise affirms that through Israel others will be blessed. 22:18 and 26:4 are different, since Yhwh there promises that Israel's own blessing will be such that others will use her name as a byword of blessing; however in context it is more probably implicitly affirmed than denied that others will actually gain blessing because of Israel.

Brief comparison with those studies noted in ch1.1 in setting out the rationale for this study will further bring out the significance of our discussion. Firstly, we begin from the position that, on grammatical grounds, the niphal of √ברך is almost certainly passive, while on grounds of grammar and usage outside Genesis the hithpael is most probably a speech action middle. While we have also argued that contextually passive force seems most appropriate for the niphal – and that variation in 22:18 and 26:4 makes good sense – our linguistic arguments in themselves have great weight. Von Rad, while adopting a passive translation of the niphal, allows that a reflexive is equally possible as far as grammar is concerned; Wolff argues that both niphal and hithpael bear the sense 'gain blessing'; Moberly that the hithpael is reflexive and this resolves the potential ambiguity of the niphal (which *prima facie* might also be passive).[1]

Secondly, we have set 12:1-3 in its context following chs1-11. The latter, we have suggested, depicts a God who continually acts to enable humans to enjoy the best life possible in the world which their wrongdoing keeps spoiling. While the reader does not reach ch12 asking 'what about the nations?' (*contra* von Rad) – the most significant question in the reader's mind after chs1-11 is 'what about Israel?' – nevertheless a continued care for all humanity is to be expected even as one individual and nation is singled out; the indications are that the story continues with Abraham rather than that the ultimate divine goals change radically. Both Wolff and von Rad stress that (the J portions of) chs1-11 evidence concern for all in support of their understanding that Gen 12:3b promises blessing to the nations (our concern with the final form of the text enables us to add that in 9:1-7, after the flood, God renews the blessing given to all humanity at creation). Moberly, on the other hand, suggests that

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[1] von Rad (1972) p160; Wolff (1966) p137n31; Moberly (2000) p123.

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within Genesis, the nations form the backdrop against which the promise is made for the benefit of Abraham and his descendants. In the context of a hostile or indifferent world, that is, despite the nations, Abraham is promised that his walk with God will not lead to oblivion...[2]

This is not obviously the context established by chs1-11: equally 12:3a, though granting that some will abuse Abraham, suggests that more will wish to favour him.

Thirdly we have examined all of vv1-3 in detail, its syntax and content.[3] Against Wolff and von Rad, we have argued that v2d does not make Abraham a source of blessing to others, but rather promises that he will be signally blessed (so Moberly p124); v3a is an offer of security to Abraham more than of blessing to the nations. For the divine speech is a promise to Abraham, not a promise to the nations: Yhwh asserts that Abraham will be blessed (vv2a-b), indeed signally blessed such that others will notice (vv2c-d), in fact so blessed that this will impact upon others' lives (v3). The promises also clearly embrace the future Israel in their scope. Moreover they are precisely promises, not a commission laid upon Abraham/ Israel (contra Wolff). Not that they are entirely independent of how the patriarch/ people behave, since v1 bids Abraham respond to Yhwh in obedience and trust and it is implied that fulfilment of the promises will result from this (we have in general noted that Genesis insists on the importance of both divine grace and human behaviour).

Thus, fourthly, the nations are blessed through Abraham not so much because Abraham acts to bless them as because he models or pioneers the way of blessing. (However we have seen that 18:18 does link this promise with Abraham's protesting against injustice affecting the righteous amongst the nations.) In this we are close to Moberly, though we suggest that it is primarily for the sake of the nations that Abraham is made an exemplar of blessing, while he holds that concern for the nations is not an issue, though it is not incompatible with what is said:

> Israel's call to be Israel in spite of the nations is in no way incompatible
> with a call to be Israel for the sake of the nations, for both may be true
> simultaneously.[4]

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[2] Moberly (2000) p125.

[3] One cannot reasonably fault a work for not including detailed discussion of everything potentially relevant, otherwise it would soon reach unmanageable proportions. That we have been able to argue our case in some detail to that extent gives us an advantage over the studies with which we are here dialoguing, but is no criticism of them.

[4] Moberly (2000) p126, with regard to possible rereadings of the text in a wider biblical or theological context.

We might thus suggest, with respect to our second point above, that we hold that Israel's vocation to live as God's people and hence bring blessing to others may need to be worked out in the face of some opposition (v3aβ), while Moberly rather argues that Israel's call to be Israel in the face of opposition from the nations may yet become the way through which God blesses those nations.

Thus, in sum, we take seriously both the immediate context with its concern for Abraham (with Moberly), and the wider context with its concern for all (with von Rad and Wolff).

At this point, brief reference to Frettlöh's recent study of blessing is appropriate.[5] She offers a lengthy discussion of Gen 12:3 (pp273-302) as she seeks to establish how gentile Christians may participate in the blessings promised to Israel: she wishes both to respect the particularity of Israel's blessing and to establish its potential universality. Israel's role is not simply to mediate blessing to others (implying no interest in Israel for Israel's own sake, pp278-9); but equally to see Israel as just an exemplary beneficiary of blessing is theologically too restrictive (p284), and may in itself be anti-Semitic in suggesting that Israel was concerned only for herself (p282n39). Thus she seeks to demonstrate that the models of mediator and paradigm of blessing are complementary (pp283-8): through being a paradigm of blessing – not an active role (p296) – Abraham/ Israel enable others to participate in that blessing which Yhwh graciously grants them as their privilege. Thus her overall position is similar to ours, even though we disagree on significant details of exegesis[6] – and even though she allows a greater role to theological considerations in her argumentation than we have in our study.

This study could profitably be extended in various ways. Investigation of how 12:3 might relate to the rest of Gen 12-50 would be desirable (we have examined in detail only those few texts which clearly echo it[7]): does the rest of the book bear out our suggestion that Abraham and his descendants are to make possible blessing for the nations? Does it enable us to nuance how that is to happen? We could also consider how our understanding of Gen 12:3 relates to themes found elsewhere in the Old Testament: similar ideas found elsewhere (the concern for the nations in deutero-Isaiah and Jonah?) might confirm the plausibility of

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[5] Frettlöh (1998).

[6] Cf. above p192n268; further, e.g., she ascribes to the niphal a tolerative sense 'sich segnen lassen' (p296).

[7] Though cf. e.g. our brief comments on 12:10-20, above pp185 and 201, and 30:27, above p201n308.

our reading, and perhaps help to nuance it; different ideas[8] would help set it in the context of the range of views current in ancient Israel and canonised in the Old Testament. If we are interested in the Christian Bible, we might relate the text to themes found in the New Testament, such as Israel's privilege (e.g. Mark 7:24-30; Rom 9-11), the church's privilege (e.g. Matt 16:17-19; 2Thess 1:5-12) and mission to the Gentiles (e.g. Matt 28:18-20; Acts 9-28); in particular we might wish to consider Acts 3:25 and Gal 3:8, asking how these interpret Genesis and whether they are good readings of the texts. Finally we may wish to ask of the text questions of truth, or to ask what meaning it might have in *our* context (cf. our brief reference to dialogue, above pp14-15): if we regard the text as part of our scripture, whether we are Jewish or Christian, we are surely committed to this, and our understanding of related themes in the rest of our scripture will doubtless again be important. Is it only of historical significance that in Genesis God promises to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham?

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[8] Deut 4:5-8 parallels the idea that Israel's blessing, given to her for her own sake, might be admired by others (Moberly (2000) p126; cf. also above pp85, 247).

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See also the list of abbreviations, pp7-9 above

Abbreviations for journals and monograph series follow the list in <u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u> **117** (1998) pp567-579.

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